MORMONISM—
SHADOW or REALITY?

By Jerald and Sandra Tanner
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Preface

This book was first published in mimeographed form in 1963. Although a large publishing company predicted that there would only be “250 to 300 people in the U.S. who would be sufficiently interested in a work of this kind to buy it,” it was an immediate success and thousands of copies were sold. Finally, in 1980 Moody Press brought out a condensed version of Mormonism—Shadow or Reality? under the title of The Changing World of Mormonism. As we prepare this Preface for the fifth edition, we are pleased to announce that about 65,000 copies of these publications have been distributed throughout the world. In the Introduction to The Changing World of Mormonism, Wesley P. Walters, Contributing Editor for the Journal of Pastoral Practice, wrote the following:

“Oh, this stuff is dynamite!” exclaimed a prestigious director of a Mormon Institute of Religion. “Tell you, though you may not believe it, I have seen people get utterly crushed, almost devastated with some of the material that the Tanners have reproduced.”

“I will tell you,” he continues, “there was an Institute teacher here, not long ago . . . who lost his testimony and went out of the church on the basis of this stuff.”

That description of the effects of Jerald and Sandra Tanner’s publishing efforts to unmask Mormonism is hardly an overstatement.

Their major work, Mormonism—Shadow or Reality?, has sold more than thirty thousand copies without any advertising campaign, simply because it is the most definitive work in print on the fallacies of Mormonism. This condensed version of that earlier work, though still of necessity lengthy, sets forth the heart of their extensive research.

Since Mormonism—Shadow or Reality? is critical of the Mormon Church, one would expect that it would have a very limited circulation among the Mormon people. We are happy to report, however, that a rather large percentage of the copies have been sold directly to Mormons. Many of the books, in fact, have been sold in Salt Lake City, Utah, which is the center of Mormonism. The response by the Mormon people has been very encouraging. Leroy Searle made this comment:

This reviewer was reared a devout Mormon, for many years was a firm believer, and was the president of an LDS Seminary at Granger High School. . . .

The appearance of the Tanner’s book is certain to arouse considerable renewed controversy, . . . I am certain that this book will become a standard in scholarly work dealing with the history of Utah and Mormonism. . . . The overall result is a publication of tremendous interest for both Mormon and non-Mormon, and a valuable collection of selected quotations from rare early literature of Mormonism. . . .

As a discussion of doctrinal history, the work is a real achievement in scholarship . . . a search for truth, no matter of what world, will continue. The Tanners are to be commended whether freely or reluctantly, for having had the courage to assist in that search. (Nova, A Newspaper of Opinion, Logan, Utah, January 11, 1965, p. 5)

Another member of the Mormon Church made this comment in a letter:

Perhaps by way of interest, I might mention that I had studied deeply into our history and doctrine before coming upon your materials. . . . It’s my opinion that your book, Mormonism—Shadow or Reality, if widely read by Mormon and Non-Mormon alike, would do more harm to the church than any other volume published in the last 50 to 75 years. It could almost tear the Church apart. Your approach is novel; you’ve used our own history and doctrine, and your quotations are accurate (Letter from Arizona, dated July 28, 1965).

In 1965 we received a visit from Wallace Turner, a correspondent for the New York Times. He made these comments concerning our work in his book, The Mormon Establishment:

Dr. Thomas F. O’Dea, . . . insists that the church is in the midst of a crisis. . . . But in keeping with Dr. O’Dea’s theory of the sleeping crisis, one of the most influential apostates of the 1960s has been a young machinist, who with his wife, left the church and now makes a living printing books and documents which contradict official Mormon pronouncements.

His name is Jerald Tanner. His wife, Sandra, is a great-great-granddaughter of Brigham Young . . . They lived in the summer of 1965 in an old house at 1350 S. West Temple Street . . . He and Nathan Eldon Tanner, the high LDS official, are both descended, he thought, from John Tanner, the man who helped Joseph Smith in the 1830s. Both the young man and his wife grew up in the LDS church. He drifted away first and she followed . . . the three of us sat in the high-ceilinged living room of the old house and discussed the general question of how one feels on leaving the company of the Saints.

“It was a long time before I could admit I didn’t believe the Book of Mormon,” said Sandra Tanner, dandling Brigham Young’s great-great-granddaughter on her knee. “It was weeks after that before I could say it out loud.”

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The Tanners operate as the Modern Microfilm Company. They specialize in copying books and documents that are out of print, or have been suppressed in one way or another, but that bear on the history and doctrine of the LDS church. When I talked with them, they had thirty-one titles for sale. The best seller was Mormonism—Shadow or Reality? prepared by them jointly . . . Near the end of their book attacking the LDS church and denouncing its doctrines the Tanners have signed individual statements setting out their religious experience. Jerald Tanner wrote that he was born and reared in the Mormon church, but that he was nineteen years old before he heard the Word of Christ preached . . . He considers himself a Protestant, a believer in Christ and in the doctrines of eternal salvation preached by Protestants. However, he now refuses to accept any of the doctrine that belongs exclusively to the LDS church. . . .

Sandra Tanner’s statement shows that she had doubts about her religion, but was generally able to contain them—until “I met Jerald and we began studying the Bible and Mormonism together. As we studied I began to see the contradictions between the Bible and the teachings of the Mormon church.”

As a child she had been taught to admire her ancestor, Brigham Young. This was the point at which Jerald Tanner
made his attack on her faith. He did it in Brigham Young’s own words. “Then Jerald had me read some of Brigham Young’s sermons in the Journal of Discourses on Blood Atonement,” Mrs. Tanner wrote. “I was shocked! I knew what Brigham Young was saying was wrong but I couldn’t reconcile these sermons with the things I had always been taught concerning him. I knew these were not the words of a Prophet of God.

“As I studied I not only found errors in Mormonism, I also began to comprehend there was something wrong in my own life. As I studied God’s word I realized I was a sinful hypocrite.”

That day as she talked in the living room of the old house across from the ballpark in Salt Lake City, she remembered her first meeting with Jerald Tanner. She was visiting her grandmother.

“I fell in love with him,” she said quite simply and without embarrassment. Then she used a typical Mormon analogy to explain what she thinks their present life purpose to be. “What we do is more of a mission, you might say.” . . .

There also is the demonstration by the Tanners that an apostate from the Mormon church generally takes with him their techniques of indefatigable research and argument that he was taught while in the church’s embrace. The Tanners’ masterwork, Mormonism—Shadow or Reality? is an intricate weaving of arguments from many sources against the fundamental precept of the Saints’ doctrine—that Joseph Smith, Jr., was a prophet of God . . .

With the Tanners the church today finds itself faced by its own techniques of argument and its own words turned back against it to create doubts and uneasiness among some members. The campaign is effective, too, and of this there is no doubt. (The Mormon Establishment, by Wallace Turner, Boston, 1966, pp. 153-162)

In between the time Mormonism—Shadow or Reality? was first published and the revised edition appeared in 1972 many important things happened. By far the most significant was the rediscovery of the papyri from which Joseph Smith “translated” the Book of Abraham, for this papyri proves that the Book of Abraham is the work of Joseph Smith’s own imagination. Another important discovery was that the Mormon Church had been suppressing important accounts of Joseph Smith’s First Vision which differ from the account printed in the Pearl of Great Price.

Wesley P. Walters made a number of significant contributions to Mormon history. His most important being the discovery of an original document which proves beyond all doubt that Joseph Smith was a “glass looker” and that he was arrested, tried and found guilty by a justice of the peace in Bainbridge, New York, in 1826. Mr. Walters also discovered that there was no revival in Palmyra, New York, in 1820 as the Mormon Church has always maintained. This discovery certainly casts a shadow of doubt upon Joseph Smith’s story of the First Vision.

Many other important discoveries were also made since we first printed Mormonism—Shadow or Reality? In 1967 we began publishing our work The Case Against Mormonism. This was a three-volume study which dealt with many of the latest discoveries. Dr. Kenneth Kantzer, who was Dean of Trinity Evangelical Divinity School and now serves as Editor of Christianity Today, made these statements in a review of the first two volumes of this work:

These books represent no ordinary polemic against Mormonism. This is the definitive, fully-documented, utterly devastating case against the divine authority and truthfulness of the foundational documents upon which the Mormon religion is based. Every evangelical pastor should have these books in his library and every intelligent lay Christian should know about them and refer to them. . . . It is difficult to see how the Mormon church can survive the devastating destruction of its foundations as presented in these volumes. Certainly for any Christian, disturbed by Mormon claims, these works are utterly convincing. (Evangelical Beacon, Minneapolis, Minn., vol. 42, no. 1, October 8, 1968, p. 7)

At the time we were writing The Case Against Mormonism, we also completed a two-volume work entitled, The Mormon Kingdom. Besides these volumes we printed a number of other books on Mormonism. The 1972 edition of Mormonism—Shadow or Reality? was actually a condensation of the best material from all of our books.

Since 1972 there have been a number of significant developments. For instance, before June, 1978, the Mormon Church firmly maintained that blacks were to be “denied the priesthood” and that they were “not equal with other races where the receipt of certain spiritual blessings are concerned . . .” (Mormon Doctrine, 1966, p. 527). On June 9, 1978, however, the Mormon newspaper, Deseret News, announced that the President of the Church had a revelation that the curse had been removed and that blacks could hold the priesthood. We deal with this matter in the updated material for Chapter 21 of this book.

On May 3, 1980, the church’s Deseret News revealed that a paper had been discovered which contained the characters Joseph Smith copied directly from the gold plates of the Book of Mormon. This find was reported to have been made by Mark Hofmann. Less than a year after this startling announcement was made, the church’s newspaper reported that the same man had discovered a blessing in which Joseph Smith designated his son, Joseph Smith III, as his successor. In 1983 we learned that Mark Hofmann had a letter by Martin Harris which became known as the White Salamander letter. We soon became suspicious of the authenticity of the letter. After bombs killed two people in Salt Lake City in 1985, an investigation disclosed that Hofmann’s documents were forgeries. Since the Mormon leaders bought many of the forgeries, the claim of inspired leadership appears to be seriously shaken. The reader will find information on this in the updated material for Chapters 6 and 13.

In 1974 we were finally able to obtain a copy of Joseph Smith’s suppressed 1831 polygamy revelation. This revelation commanded the Mormons to marry the Indians so that “their posterity may become white, delightsome and just, . . .” (see the updated material for Chapter 16). In 1976 we were allowed to examine a microfilm copy of Joseph Smith’s diaries. These diaries, which had been suppressed for about 130 years, have provided some very important evidence concerning the falsification of the published History of the Church (see updated material for Chapter 7).

Since the question of women in the Mormon Church has received so much attention since 1980, we included some helpful information concerning their place in Mormon theology in the 1982 edition of this book (see updated material for Chapter 9, p. 172-A). Another interesting question that we explore is the possibility of a Mormon-CIA connection. We became interested in this matter when we learned that the Mullen Company, which handled public relations for the Mormon Church, was used as a cover for the CIA and that a CIA agent helped with the publication of a book which was favorable to the church. The cover arrangement for the Mullen Company was revealed after it was discovered that some of the planning for the Watergate break-in took place in its offices (see updated material for Chapter 27).

The case against Mormonism grows stronger every year, but the size of this book precludes adding much new material. Our newsletter, The Salt Lake City Messenger, is sent free to all those who wish to keep up to date. Our address is found on the title page of this book. On October 7, 1972, Dr. Jennings G. Olson, of the Department of Philosophy at Weber College, made these comments about Mormonism—Shadow or Reality?:

. . . there is now in existence a book which every Mormon and interested non-Mormon should study and ponder. The book is by Jerald and Sandra Tanner, and it is called Mormonism: Shadow or Reality? . . . it is tightly packed with
serious, responsible research which no one can deny is the most comprehensive and thorough analysis and evaluation of Mormonism ever produced in the history of the Church.

Any Mormon of Elemental identification who wants to “answer” the Tanners will have his hands full for a long time to come because the Tanners have the microfilm sources from the early Mormon Church which no one before has had in such abundance. . . . I seriously doubt Dr. Nibley will take this new revised book on, because he is quoted often enough in it to be identifiable as one of the major contributors to Mormonism’s obfuscation of issues; and he has actually contributed (unknowingly perhaps) to the growing painful dilemmas now facing the Elemental Mormonism I have previously identified . . . if Dr. Nibley or anyone else decides to “answer” the Tanner’s book point for point I certainly promise to study that book carefully and review it in public. In the mean time I will state publically [sic] this book of the Tanner’s is a major contribution in the search for integrity and truth about Mormonism, and I shall quote it a number of times. (“The Uniqueness of Mormonism: An Evaluation,” by Jennings G. Olson, October 7, 1972, pp. 22-23)

It has now been fourteen years since Dr. Jennings Olson issued his challenge, yet the Mormon Church has remained officially silent concerning Mormonism—Shadow or Reality? Robert L. Brown and his wife Rosemary privately published a book entitled They Lie in Wait to Deceive. This book claims to answer some of the charges we made against the Book of Abraham, but Mr. Brown acknowledged he was “not a spokesman for the LDS church, nor was I ‘commissioned’ by them to do this work.” In any case, we answered the Browns’ misrepresentations in our book Can The Browns Save Joseph Smith? Some information concerning their book is also found in Chapter 22 of this book.

Ian Barber is another individual who attempted a rebuttal. In the Preface to his booklet, What Mormonism Isn’t: A Response to the Research of Jerald and Sandra Tanner, Mr. Barber emphasized that he was “not in any way attempting to speak officially for the Mormon Church, and neither have I been commissioned or involved with any group or organization in the research, planning and writing of this material.” In the Introduction to the same booklet, Mr. Barber acknowledges that “The Church has not officially responded to the claims of the Tanners.” Mr. Barber apparently felt that something had to be done because of the impact of our material in New Zealand:

In recent months in Auckland some attention has been focused on the publications and writings of former Mormons, Gerald and Sandra Tanner, . . . The recent attentions, however, have been precipitated by the actions of two former L.D.S. Church members in Auckland.

While involved with the L.D.S. Church, Ron and Roberta Rees had built a very successful book-distribution business stocking titles by the actions of two former L.D.S. Church members in Auckland. During 1980 the Rees’ acquired material originating from the Tanners’ research, and apparently became convinced as to the validity of the fundamental thesis underlying such efforts. They voluntarily withdrew themselves from formal affiliation with the L.D.S. Church as a result, and have now converted their business, “Beehive Books,” into a distribution point for material from the Modern Microfilm Company. (What Mormonism Isn’t, Introduction)

On June 12, 1981, Mr. and Mrs. Rees reported to us in a letter that “nearly 70 Mormons” had come out of the church:

On May 17th we sent to every Mormon Church leader and every Mormon on our mailing list in New Zealand a copy of our mailer . . .

The response has been amazing . . . The most wonderful thing is that we have been able to assist nearly 70 Mormons out of Mormonism and many of them to the real Lord Jesus Christ. We have a Mormon Bishop, 5 returned missionaries and two stake high councilmen now on our mailing list. Every day some one approaches us and we are able to show them that Mormon claims are false . . . It really touches us when a returned missionary who has just been shown all the evidence in your books that we have in our shop says with tears in his eyes “The Church is not true and I have wasted two years of my life and all that money for nothing.” Two days later he accepted the Lord and is being baptised at the end of this month. He is helping his mother and aunt out of the church. The aunt rang us earlier this week and we sent her a library copy of “Mormonism Shadow or Reality?” She phoned us back yesterday to say she had read it (must be a speed reader) and she now knows that the church is not true. She is a third generation Mormon!

Some people declare to us after seeing the truth and coming to know that Mormonism is not true . . . “it’s like getting out of a prison.” One young man who said those exact words has now accepted Christ and was baptised earlier this week.

A later report from another couple involved in the work in New Zealand said that “117 persons have left the church” (Letter dated July 23, 1981).

In any case, Ian Barber has to concede so much in his rebuttal that it can hardly be considered a threat to our work. For more comments on Mr. Barber’s booklet see Chapter 22 of this book.

Although the church may eventually be forced into bringing out a rebuttal to Mormonism—Shadow or Reality? and The Changing World of Mormonism, the fact that it would allow 65,000 copies to be published without an official response seems to show that there are no real answers to the questions we have raised. While some would argue that the church does not like to engage in controversy, its attack on the advocates of the Spalding theory demonstrates that this is simply not true (see Deseret News, Church Section, August 20, 1977). The truth of the matter is that the church leaders do not mind controversy if they feel they can come out ahead. We believe, however, that the church has too many secrets to hide to come out in open opposition to Mormonism—Shadow or Reality? A man who talked to one of the church’s apostles claimed that he “told me to quit studying materials put out by the Tanner’s . . . I told him ‘surely some day there will be an answer to these questions.’ He told me there never would be an answer and I should stop my inquiries. This was too much for me to handle” (Letter dated August 13, 1978). The continual silence of church leaders to the charges contained in our book has tended to arouse suspicion in the minds of many people that there are no answers. An article written by David Merrill indicated that church leaders have tried to restrain their scholars from dealing with our publications: “The official attitude of the Mormon hierarchy towards the Tanners has been one of silence and apparent unconcern. They have, however, actively discouraged LDS scholars and intellectuals from jousting with the Tanners or any of the other professional critics of the church” (Utah Holiday, February 1978, p. 7).

While the church has refused to openly come to grips with Mormonism—Shadow or Reality? an anonymous rebuttal was printed in 1977 which we have traced to the Church Office Building in Salt Lake City. This booklet was entitled, Jerald and Sandra Tanner’s Distorted View of Mormonism: A Response to Mormonism—Shadow or Reality? In the book Answering Dr. Clandestine: A Response to the Anonymous LDS Historian we gave the following information concerning this sneaky attack:

If the reader will look carefully at the front of Jerald and Sandra Tanner’s Distorted View of Mormonism, he will find that more than the name of the author is missing. A careful examination shows that no publisher is given . . . when we try to trace the source of the pamphlet we find a cover-up that
reminds us of the Watergate episode. (The reader will remember that a great deal of literature was printed anonymously by some of Nixon’s supporters. . . . In the Senate investigation of Watergate and the subsequent investigation of the CIA, the public became aware of the methods used by undercover agents. We learned of clandestine meetings where material or money changed hands, of agents working under assumed names and of post office boxes being rented to carry on ultra-secret operations. Some of those involved in this work talked of “deniability”—i.e., the idea that the “enemy” must not be able to trace back the true source of an operation directed against him.)

When we tried to trace the source of Jerald and Sandra Tanner’s Distorted View of Mormonism, we found that the whole matter had all the earmarks of an intelligence operation mounted by the CIA or the KGB. “Deniability” seemed to be the name of the game.

It was obvious that Zion Bookstore was the distributor of the booklet. The name of the store might suggest that it is owned by the Church, but it is actually owned by Sam Weller . . . when we asked Mr. Weller where he was getting copies of Jerald and Sandra Tanner’s Distorted View of Mormonism, he replied that he did not know! He said that it was all a very secret operation. He claimed that he had received a letter giving details of how he could handle the pamphlet, but that the writer was not identified. . . . Mr. Weller indicated that he had received 1,800 free copies of the pamphlet. We reasoned that this must represent a large amount of money. . . .

So far we have been unable to trace exactly how Zion Bookstore received the pamphlets. According to one report, the books were first mailed anonymously to a post office box. From there they were transported to a publishing company near Redwood Road and were subsequently picked up by an employee from Zion Bookstore. We talked with Wilfrid Clark, who works for Sam Weller. Mr. Clark maintained that he did not know anything about a publishing company picking up the books from a post office box. He said that he all he knew about the matter was that Zion Bookstore received an anonymous letter containing a key to a room in a self storage company on Redwood Road. He claimed that he personally went to the company and picked up the booklets. . . .

As we followed the tracks of this conspiracy to destroy our work, we found that they led right into the Mormon Church Office Building in Salt Lake City. Actually, it was more than a year ago when we first heard that something was afoot. We had a visit with a young Mormon singer who had some questions regarding church history. He told us he had an appointment with a woman at the Church Office Building who claimed she had been part of a committee which was organized to evaluate our research. The committee worked on our material until they received an order from the Prophet—i.e., the President of the Church—that they were to desist from the project. We were unable to learn anything more about this purported committee, but one of the top Mormon historians did tell us in a telephone conversation in Dec. 1976 that a manuscript had been prepared to refute the allegations contained in our work. He was not sure if the church would actually publish it, but the writing had been done.

One of the major clues which led to the discovery of the source of the pamphlet Jerald and Sandra Tanner’s Distorted View of Mormonism was an unpublished thesis by Richard Stephen Marshall. . . . We cite the following from Mr. Marshall’s paper:

Recent years have seen the emergence of a new kind of anti-Mormon literature which uses Mormon historical records (history has long been used to attack the Church) to try to show that the Church was more human than divine. This new kind of literature is best typified by Jerald and Sandra Tanner and their Modern Microfilm Publishing Company located in Salt Lake City. They have been prolific since 1961 and have at present, a world-wide reputation. The writer encountered materials published by them while living in Australia several years ago. . . .

A recent leaflet printed by the Tanners entitled 20,000 Books Met With Silence notes the lack of official response from the Church to Mormonism—Shadow or Reality?

Many prominent Mormons have expressed a high regard for the work the Tanners have done. . . . T. Edgar Lyon, a Mormon historian and long-time teacher at the Institute of Religion at the University of Utah told this writer he thought the Church should subsidize the Tanners, although he said it tongue-in-cheek.

Reed Durham using virtually the same words as Lyon said that he thought the Church should subsidize the Tanners because of all the historical research they do for it. He teaches a class at the Institute of Religion at the University of Utah on the problems of Mormon history called “Special Studies in Mormon History.” He uses the Tanner’s book, Mormonism—Shadow or Reality? as the text for the class. . . .

Durham said he would like to write a book answering the accusations of the Tanners point by point. To do so, however, would require certain admissions that Mormon history is not exactly as the Church has taught it was, that there were things taught and practiced in the nin[e]teenth century of which the general Church membership is unaware. He said that the Church is not ready to admit that yet. He also said that due to the large number of letters the Church Historian’s Office is receiving asking for answers to the things the Tanners have published, a certain scholar (name deliberately withheld) was appointed to write a general answer to the Tanners including advice on how to read anti-Mormon literature. This unnamed person solicited the help of Reed Durham on the project. The work is finished but its publication is delayed, according to what Leonard Arrington told Durham, because they can not decide how or where to publish it. Because the article is an open and honest approach to the problem, although it by no means answers all of the questions raised by the Tanners, it will probably be published anonymously, to avoid difficulties which could result were such an article connected with an official Church agency.” (“The New Mormon History,” by Richard Stephen Marshall, A Senior Honors Project Summary, University of Utah, May 1, 1977, pp. 57, 61, 62) (Answering Dr. Clandestine: A Response to the Anonymous LDS Historian, 1978, pp. 1-3)

The pamphlet Jerald and Sandra Tanner’s Distorted View of Mormonism appeared just seven months after Mr. Marshall revealed that the Church Historical Department was preparing a response which “will probably be published anonymously.” The reader will notice that Church Historian Leonard Arrington was identified with this project. Dr. Arrington denied any knowledge of this matter on three different occasions, but his entire defense was shattered when a man who had lost faith in the church turned over to us a letter written by Arrington which made it plain that he had distributed photocopies of the typed manuscript three months before it was published. We have printed a photograph of Dr. Arrington’s letter in our book Answering Dr. Clandestine, page 24. This book also contains a refutation of the claims put forth in Jerald and Sandra Tanner’s Distorted View of Mormonism.

Two years after we uncovered this secret plan to discredit our work, we discovered that an employee at the Church Office Building had been spying on us under an assumed name. This spying operation began almost four years earlier. On October 11, 1976, this man, who was at the time “employed by the FBI in a clerical capacity,” assumed the alias “Stan Fields” in a letter he wrote to us from California:

Dear Friends in Christ: I am a feellow [sic] Ex-Mormon for Jesus, and would like to be added to your mailing
list, . . . What is it like being “Apostates” in the capitol of the “Saints”? It really fascinates me how anyone could survive as long as you have.

Thank you in advance for answering my questions . . . God’s blessings on you as you do His work, Sincerely in Christ

This man not only assumed an alias, but he opened up a post office box in Pleasant Hill, California (P.O. Box 23114) for the purpose of deception. (It is common practice, of course, for those who are engaged in spying operations to cover their tracks by assuming an alias and renting a post office box.) In any case, Mr. “Fields,” who professed to be our Christian brother, spied on our operation for about four years and also penetrated a number of groups of Ex-Mormons for Jesus. By dishonest means he obtained the names of many Mormons who have questions about their religion. He diligently worked to obtain photographs of critics of the Mormon Church and gathered large files of information.

In his zeal to provide a good cover for himself, Mr. “Fields” went so far as to claim that his own church was “Satan inspired” (Letter dated July 22, 1978), and even pretended to pass out material critical of the church around Temple Square. His nefarious career, however, came to a sudden end in July, 1980, when we discovered his true identity. We also found that he was employed at the Mormon Church Office Building in the Genealogical Department. When we directly confronted him in the Church Office Building with the evidence of his spying activities, he made no attempt to deny the basic charges. Although he claimed that he “was not spying for the church,” he acknowledged he had used church equipment to carry out his duplicity. (For a complete account of this matter see our publication Unmasking a Mormon Spy: The Story of Stan Fields.)

A few things concerning the new and enlarged edition of Mormonism—Shadow or Reality? that we first published in 1982 should be explained to the reader. To begin with, although we made some changes throughout the book, the largest portion remained the same as in the 1972 edition. Only two of the thirty-eight chapters were retypeset. At the end of a number of the chapters we added updated material. Since we wanted to keep the page numbers as close to the 1972 edition as possible, we assigned a letter to each additional page. For instance, Chapter 1 ends on page 4. We added updated material to this chapter, but instead of assigning the number 5 to the next page, we called it 4-A. By this method we were able to start Chapter 2 on page 5 as it appears in the 1972 edition. With the exception of changes made in the updated material in Chapters 6 and 13, the 1986 edition is exactly the same as that published in 1982.

When we originally published Mormonism—Shadow or Reality? in 1972, we did not have a typesetting machine. An IBM typewriter with “proportional spacing” was used and the copy reduced in size for printing by the photo-offset method. Since we did not have italicized type for book titles and emphasis, we had to use underlining in its place. In the Preface to the 1972 edition we wrote: “Capitalization and underlining are used for emphasis throughout this book.” Since 1972 we were able to obtain typesetting equipment. Now we are able to use three different styles of type for the updated material—i.e., regular type, bold type and italics for book titles.

In the 1972 edition of this book we had a chapter entitled “Appendix B,” which contained “New Information.” This was material which we became aware of after we had written the largest portion of the book. In this edition we have eliminated Appendix B and incorporated the most important part of this material into the chapters where it properly belongs. Although we mention some of our own religious beliefs in this volume, those who are interested in knowing more should see our book, A Look at Christianity.

The Mormon people have greatly assisted in the writing of this book. Some of them have allowed us access to their own research, others have helped in various ways. Others who are not members of the church have provided help. Both members and non-members of the Mormon Church have given books, pamphlets and photographs to us.

The University of Utah Library and the Utah State Historical Society have greatly assisted by allowing photographs to be made of many of their rare books. The Yale University Library, the Mormon Church Genealogical Library, the Brigham Young University Library and the Salt Lake Public Library have also provided help. James Wardle, who owns one of the largest private libraries on the subject of Mormonism, has given us a great deal of help and material. He has given us books, pamphlets, photocopies of rare documents, microfilms and typed material. Mr. Wardle is to be commended for his helpfulness to those who wish to do research. LaMar Petersen, who is considered to be one of the best informed scholars on Mormon history, has given us a great deal of help and encouragement. He has constantly provided us with new material and has permitted us to go through his note cards, which contain many important references. Much of the material used in this book was actually found by Mr. Petersen. Wesley P. Walters has also given us a great deal of help and material. He has also made some of the most important discoveries concerning Mormonism and has been very free with his material. He has sent us a continual stream of photocopies and microfilms of rare documents. We will have more to say about his work in the chapters which follow. We would also like to thank H. Michael Marquardt, one of the most knowledgeable scholars on Mormon history, for freely sharing the fruits of his research with us. Grant Heward has furnished a great deal of valuable material and help on the Egyptian language and Joseph Smith’s Egyptian Papyri, and Jerry Urban has provided encouragement and support when we really needed it.

The Apostle Paul admonishes us as follows:

Prove all things; hold fast that which is good.
(1 Thessalonians 5:21)

Keeping the Apostle Paul’s statement in mind we wish to present this study of Mormon history and doctrine.

Jerald and Sandra Tanner
Utah Lighthouse Ministry
March 4, 1987
4. Joseph Smith and Money-Digging

In this chapter we will discuss the evidence showing that Joseph Smith was involved in money-digging and how this relates to the Book of Mormon.

Joseph Smith’s 1826 Trial

In the *Salt Lake City Messenger* for August, 1971, we announced one of the most important discoveries since Joseph Smith founded the Mormon Church in 1830. This is the discovery by Wesley P. Walters of an original document which is more than 140 years old, found in Norwich, New York. This document proves that Joseph Smith was a “glass looker” and that he was arrested, tried and found guilty by a justice of the peace in Bainbridge, New York, in 1826. (The reader will find a photograph of this document on the next page.) The importance of this discovery cannot be overstated, for it establishes the historicity of the account of the trial which was first published in *Fraser’s Magazine* in 1873. We quote the following from that publication:

**STATE OF NEW YORK v. JOSEPH SMITH**

Warrant issued upon written complaint upon oath of Peter G. Bridgeman, who informed that one Joseph Smith of Bainbridge was a disorderly person and an impostor.

Prisoner brought before Court March 20, 1826. Prisoner examined: says that he came from the town of Palmyra, and had been at the house of Josiah Stowel in Bainbridge most of time since; had small part of time been employed by said Stowel on his farm, and going to school. That he had a certain stone which he had occasionally looked at to determine where hidden treasures in the bowels of the earth were; that he professed to tell in this manner where gold mines were a distance under ground, and had looked for Mr. Stowel several times, and had informed him where he could find these treasures, and Mr. Stowel had been engaged in digging for them. That at Palmyra he pretended to tell by looking at this stone where coined money was buried in Pennsylvania, and while at Palmyra had frequently ascertained in that way where lost property was of various kinds; that he had occasionally been in the habit of looking through this stone to find lost property for three years, but of late had pretty much given it up on account of its injuring his health, especially his eyes, making them sore; that he did not solicit business of this kind, and had always rather declined having anything to do with this business.

Josiah Stowel sworn: says that prisoner had been at his house something like five months; had been employed by him to work on farm part of time; that he pretended to have skill of telling where hidden treasures in the earth were by means of looking through a certain stone; that prisoner had looked for him sometimes; once to tell him about money buried in Bend Mountain in Pennsylvania, once for gold on Monument Hill, and once for a salt spring; and that he positively knew that the prisoner could tell, and did possess the art of seeing those valuable treasures through the medium of said stone; that he found the (word illegible) at Bend and Monument Hill as prisoner represented it; that prisoner had looked through said stone for Deacon Atleton for a mine, did not exactly find it, but got a p—— (word unfinished) of ore which resembled gold, he thinks; that prisoner had told by means of this stone where a Mr. Bacon had buried money; that he and prisoner had been in search of it; that prisoner had said it was in a certain root of a stump five feet from surface of the earth, and with it would be found a tail feather; that said Stowel and prisoner thereupon commenced digging, found a tail feather, but money was gone; that he supposed the money moved down. That prisoner did offer his services; that he never deceived him; that prisoner looked through stone and described Josiah Stowel’s house and outhouses, while at Palmyra at Simpson Stowel’s, correctly; that he had told about a painted tree, with a man’s head painted upon it, by means of said stone. That he had been in company with prisoner digging for gold, and had the most implicit faith in prisoner’s skill.

Arad Stowel sworn: says that he went to see whether prisoner could convince him that he possessed the skill he professed to have, upon which prisoner laid a book upon a white cloth, and proposed looking through another stone which was white and transparent, hold the stone to the candle, turn his head to book, and read. The deception appeared so palpable that witness went off disgusted.

McMaster sworn: says he went with Arad Stowel, and likewise came away disgusted. Prisoner pretended to him that he could discover objects at a distance by holding this white stone to the sun or candle; that prisoner rather declined looking into a hat at his dark coloured stone, as he said that it hurt his eyes.

Jonathan Thompson says that prisoner was requested to look for chest of money; did look, and pretended to know where it was; and prisoner, Thompson, and Yeomans went in search of it; that Smith arrived at spot first; was at night; that Smith looked in hat while there, and when very dark, and told how the chest was situated. After digging several feet, struck upon something sounding like a board or plank. Prisoner would not look again, pretending that he was alarmed on account of the circumstances relating to the trunk being buried, [which], came all fresh to his mind. That the last time he looked he discovered distinctly the two Indians who buried the trunk, that a quarrel ensued between them, and that one of said Indians was killed by the other, and thrown into the hole beside the trunk, to guard it, as he supposed. Thompson says that he believes in the prisoner’s professed skill; that the board which he struck his spade upon was probably the chest, but on account of an enchantment the trunk kept settling away from under them when digging; that notwithstanding they continued constantly removing the dirt, yet the trunk kept about the same distance from them. Says prisoner said that it appeared to him that salt might be found at Bainbridge, and that he is certain that prisoner can divine things by means of said stone. That as evidence of the fact prisoner looked into his hat to tell him about some money witness lost sixteen years ago, and that he described the man that witness supposed had taken it, and the disposition of the money:

And therefore the Court find the Defendant guilty. Costs: Warrant, 19c. Complaint upon oath, 25 1/2 c. Seven witnesses, 87 1/2 c. Recognisances, 25c. Mitimus, 19c. Recognisances of witnesses, 75c. Subpoena, 18c.—$2.68. ([*Fraser’s Magazine*, Feb. 1873, pp. 229-230])
Above is a photograph of Justice Albert Neely’s bill showing the costs involved in several trials in 1826. The fifth item from the top mentions the trial of “Joseph Smith The Glass looker.” When the letter “s” was repeated in documents of Joseph Smith’s time, as in the word “glass,” the two letters appeared as a “p” (see the word “assault” in items 1, 4, 7 and 9). To the left we have typed out the portion of the bill which mentions Joseph Smith. This bill proves that the published court record is authentic.
Although the Bainbridge court record was printed a few times it did not become too well known until Fawn Brodie printed it in her book *No Man Knows My History*. Immediately after her book appeared the Mormon leaders declared that the record was a forgery. The following appeared in the “Church Section” of the *Deseret News*:

... the alleged find is no discovery at all, for the purported record has been included in other books... after all her puffing and promise the author produces no court record at all, though persistently calling it such. ... This alleged record is obviously spurious ... The really vital things which a true record must contain are not there, though there is a lot of surplus verbiage set out in an impossible order which the court was not required to keep.

This record could not possibly have been made at the time as the case proceeded. It is patently a fabrication of unknown authorship and never in the court records at all. (*Deseret News, Church Section, May 11, 1946, as quoted in A New Witness For Christ in America, vol. 2, 1959, pp. 430-431*)

The Mormon Apostle John A. Widtsoe stated:

This alleged court record... seems to be a literary attempt of an enemy to ridicule Joseph Smith by bringing together all the current gossip of that day and making him appear to confess to it. ... There is no existing proof that such a trial was ever held. (*Joseph Smith—Seeker After Truth, Salt Lake City, 1951, p. 78*)

The Mormon scholar Francis W. Kirkham claimed that he did a great deal of research with regard to this matter and came to the conclusion that the court record was spurious:

A careful study of all facts regarding this alleged confession of Joseph Smith in a court of law that he had used a seer stone to find hidden treasure for purposes of fraud, must come to the conclusion that no such record was ever made, and therefore, is not in existence. ... There is no evidence to prove one was ever made in which he confessed in a justice of the peace court that he had used a seer stone to find hidden treasures for purposes of fraud and deception. (*A New Witness For Christ in America, vol. 1, pp. 385, 386, 391*)

The document which Wesley P. Walters found is Justice Albert Neely’s bill showing the costs involved in several trials in 1826. The fifth item from the top mentions the trial of “Joseph Smith The Glass looker.” Below is a photograph of this portion of the document (see complete document on page 33 of this book).

The fact that the document says that Joseph Smith was a “Glass looker” fits very well with the published version of the trial. In fact, this statement alone seems to show that the published account of the trial is authentic. Besides this, however, Neely’s bill provides additional evidence. It states that the trial took place on “March 20, 1826,” and this is precisely the date found in the published account of the trial: “Punisher brought before Court March 20, 1826” (*Fraser’s Magazine, February 1873, p. 229*). In Albert Neely’s bill the fee for this trial is listed as “2.68,” and this is the exact figure found in the printed record: “Costs: ... $2.68.”

In the face of this evidence it is impossible to continue to deny the authenticity of the court record.

In the book *Joseph Smith and Money Digging* we devoted over 15 pages to a study of this court trial. On page 38 we concluded: “Although the evidence supporting the authenticity of the ‘court record’ seems to be rather convincing, more research needs to be done.” We did show, however, that the court record was brought to Salt Lake City by Emily Pearsall, the niece of Albert Neely. When Charles Marshall published the record in *Fraser’s Magazine*, he stated:

During my stay in Salt Lake permission was courteously accorded me to copy out of a set of such judicial proceedings not hitherto published. I cannot doubt their genuineness. The original papers were lent me by a lady of well-known position, in whose family they had been preserved since the date of the transactions. (*Fraser’s Magazine, Feb. 1873, vol. VII, p. 229*)

In her attack on Fawn Brodie’s book, F. L. Stewart cast doubt upon the statement that Albert Neely was a justice of the peace in Bainbridge in 1826:

But was Albert Neely a justice of the peace in Bainbridge in 1826? He lost an election as justice for the year 1828. The election was held in November, 1827, and he received the fewest votes of all the candidates. He was later a justice of the peace in Manlius, New York, in 1838. No known records indicate that he was a justice in Bainbridge in 1826. (*Exploding the Myth About Joseph Smith, The Mormon Prophet, New York, 1967, pp. 69-70*)

During the past few years Wesley P. Walters has been doing a great deal of research concerning the court record. He has made several trips to New York in search of evidence. By June 23, 1971, he was able to give this encouraging report in a letter to a friend:

As I am sure you are aware, the document was printed three times—once in England (with a reprinting of this in N.Y.), once by Tuttle in the *Schaff-Herzog Ency.*, and once by the Methodists. The first and last of these printings give the court costs. This summer I spent a few days at Norwich and among the county records I found some bills from the town of Bainbridge. Bills for the years 1826 and 1827 were missing, presumably among the water-damaged items the court house threw out some while back. However, the bills from 1825 and 1828 were there and give an example of what the J.P. charges were at that time. A subpoena was 6¢ each, so that a charge of 18¢ in the document must represent 3 subpoenas; Recognisance charge was 25¢, so that the document’s charge of 25¢ is in perfect agreement and the charge of 75¢ for “recognisance of witnesses” must represent three such witnesses. ... To my mind there is enough agreement here to make the possibility of the document being a forgery out of the realm of possibility.

Finally, the other surrounding circumstances all are in proper place. ... Miss F. L. Stewart in *Exploding the Myth* casts doubt on the court record because there was no evidence that Albert Neeley was a J.P. in 1826. Well, I found his official appointment papers signed by the 3 circuit judges and the 15 county supervisors and the date of his appointment was November 16, 1825. If the bills for 1826 had been available still, I am sure there would have been an itemized account of all the warrants he issued, and cost involved for the town and county, as there are in the other justices bills for 1825 and 1828. In fact, the itemized bills were totaled and at the annual meeting of the Board of Supervisors the total amounts were “audited and allowed.” In their Supervisor’s record book for 1826 Albert Neely’s name appears under the town of Bainbridge as being paid $6.34 by the town and $15.44 by the county. So as far as I am concerned, there is no question in my mind that Albert Neely was a J.P. in 1826 and that Smith was tried before him, and that the published record is really a genuine account of what happened.

There are other little details that fit into place as well... from every angle the whole matter has the ring of genuineness about it. (Letter written by Wesley P. Walters, dated June 23, 1971)
Chapter 4. Joseph Smith and Money-Digging

On October 28, 1971, Wesley P. Walters made an affidavit concerning the discovery of these documents:

REVEREND WESLEY P. WALTERS, being first duly sworn upon his oath, deposes and states:

On Saturday, May 22, 1971, while in Norwich, New York, I, Wesley P. Walters, of Marissa, Illinois, was shown by the County Historian, Mrs. Mae Smith, where Chenango County kept their dead storage, which was in a back, poorly-lit room in the basement of the County Jail. While looking through this material in company with Mrs. Smith, we came across the county bills from the early eighteen hundreds. These bills were arranged in bundles by townships, and the townships bound together by years. There were bills from all the town officials, including an itemized listing of cases tried by each of the local Justices of the Peace, and an itemized listing of costs by the Constables who served warrants and made arrests. I realized that if the bills for 1826 and 1830 for the Town of Bainbridge could be located, there would doubtless be references to the two trials of Joseph Smith, the founder of the Mormon Church. I was successful in locating the bills for 1824, 1825, 1828, and 1829, but could not find those for 1826 and 1830. There was still much material to look through, and my schedule required that I leave without finishing my search.

On July 28, 1971, I was able to return to Norwich and in the late afternoon I went back to the County Jail accompanied by Mr. Fred Poffarl of Philadelphia. After looking through some of the remaining material for a short while, Mr. Poffarl discovered two cardboard boxes in the darkest area of the room, containing more bundles of bills, all mixed up as to date, and some badly water-soaked and mildewed from being shoved against a leaky wall. I looked in one box while Fred looked in the other. It was in Mr. Poffarl’s box that the 1826 bills were soon found, followed by the 1830 ones. When I opened the 1826 bundle and got part way through the pile of Bainbridge bills, all of which were very damp and mildewed, I came upon, first, the J.P. bill of Albert Neely and then upon the Constable’s bill of Philip M. DeZeng. On Mr. Neely’s bill was the item of the trial of “Joseph Smith The Glass Looker” on March 20, 1826, and a cost to the county from Mr. Neely of $2.68. On the bill of Mr. DeZeng were the charges for arresting and keeping Joseph Smith, notifying two justices, subpoenaing 12 witnesses, as well as a mittimus charge for 10 miles travel “to take him,” with no specification as to where he was taken on the Mittimus. Likewise, in the 1830 bundles I found both the Constable’s and Justice’s bills that mentioned the arrest and trial of Joseph Smith as a disorderly person July 1, 1830. I photographed as well as made Xerox copies of all these items, as well as some typical examples of other 1825, 1826, and 1828 bills.

In my opinion, the bills are authentic, of the same paper quality and ink quality as the other 1826 and 1830 bills and appeared to me to have remained tied up and untouched since the day they were bound up and placed away in storage by the Board of Supervisors of Chenango County, New York. The historical importance of these bills was drawn to the attention of the County and they, at last report, were making arrangements to house these items in a safer and more suitable place. (Affidavit by Wesley P. Walters, dated October 28, 1971)

Importance of Discovery

Now that Wesley P. Walters has proven beyond all doubt that the Bainbridge court record is authentic, it will be very interesting to see how the Mormon leaders will react. As we have shown, their position in the past has been that the court record is “spurious.” The Mormon scholar Francis W. Kirkham has stated that if the court record could be proven authentic, it would show that Mormonism itself is untrue:

A careful study of all facts regarding this alleged confession of Joseph Smith in a court of law that he had used a seer stone to find hidden treasure for purposes of fraud, must come to the conclusion that no such record was ever made, and therefore, is not in existence… If any evidence had been in existence that Joseph Smith had used a seer stone for fraud and deception, and especially had he made this confession in a court of law as early as 1826, or four years before the Book of Mormon was printed, and this confession was in a court record, it would have been impossible for him to have organized the restored Church. (A New Witness For Christ In America, vol. 1, pp. 385-387)

If a court record could be identified, and if it contained a confession by Joseph Smith which revealed him to be a poor, ignorant, deluded, and superstitious person—unable himself to write a book of the consequences of his church’s non-autonomy because it attracted only similar persons of low mentality—if such a court record confession could be identified and proved, then it follows...
that his believers must deny his claimed divine guidance which led them to follow him. . . . How could he be a prophet of God, the leader of the Restored Church to these tens of thousands, if he had been the superstitious fraud which “the pages from a book” declared he confessed to be? (Ibid., pp. 486-487)

In his book The Myth Makers, Dr. Hugh Nibley has written almost 20 pages in an attempt to discredit the “Bainbridge court record.” On page 142 of Dr. Nibley’s book we find this statement: “. . . if this court record is authentic it is the most damaging evidence in existence against Joseph Smith.” Dr. Nibley’s book also states that if the authenticity of the court record could be established it would be “the most devastating blow to Joseph Smith ever delivered. . . .” (Ibid.).

In his History of the Church, Joseph Smith admitted that he worked for Josiah Stowell, but did not acknowledge the fact that he was arrested or that he used a “seer stone” to find treasures:

In the month of October, 1825, I hired with an old gentleman by the name of Josiah Stool, who lived in Chenango county, state of New York. He had heard something of a silver mine having been opened by the Spaniards in Harmony, Susquehanna county, state of Pennsylvania; and had, previous to my hiring to him, been digging, in order, if possible, to discover the mine. After I went to live with him, he took me, with the rest of his hands, to dig for the silver mine, at which I continued to work for nearly a month, without success in our undertaking, and finally I prevailed with the old gentleman to cease digging after it. Hence arose the very prevalent story of my having been a money-digger.

“During the time that I was thus employed, I was put to board with a Mr. Isaac Hale, of that place; it was there I first saw my wife (his daughter), Emma Hale. On the 18th of January, 1827, we were married. . . . at the house of Squire Tarbell, in South Bainbridge, Chenango county, New York.” (History of the Church, vol. 1, p. 17)

Joseph Smith’s mother did not mention the trial but admitted that Josiah Stowell came to seek Joseph Smith’s help in locating hidden treasures:

A short time before the house was completed, a man, by the name of Josiah Stool, came from Chenango county, New York, with the view of getting Joseph to assist him in digging for a silver mine. He came for Joseph on account of having heard that he possessed certain keys, by which he could discern things invisible to the natural eye.

Joseph endeavoured to divert him from his vain pursuit, but he was inflexible in his purpose, and offered high wages to those who would dig for him, in search of said mine, and still insisted upon having Joseph to work for him. Accordingly, Joseph and several others, returned with him and commenced digging. (Biographical Sketches of Joseph Smith the Prophet, London, 1853, pp. 91-92)

The Mormon historian B. H. Roberts states that Stowell came to Joseph Smith because he had “heard of Joseph Smith’s gift of seership”:

. . . in October, 1825, to be exact. Joseph engaged to work for an elderly gentleman, Josiah Stool, of Bainbridge, . . . Near Bainbridge was an extensive cave, . . . a local legend had it that it was an old mine formerly worked by Spaniards; and that they had concealed within it much of the treasure they had discovered, . . .

Mr. Stool believed this legend and had employed men to explore the cave for the treasure. Having heard of Joseph Smith’s gift of seership, he came to the Smith residence to employ him in this undertaking. Joseph hired out to Mr. Stool and went with him and the rest of his men to Harmony, Pennsylvania, where for something like a month they vainly sought to find the “hidden treasure.” . . . Although Mr. Stool gave up the search for the “Spanish treasure,” Joseph continued for some time in his employment. (Comprehensive History of the Church, vol. 1, pp. 81-82)

The Mormon writer Hyrum L. Andrus made these interesting comments concerning this matter:

According to Mother Smith, he wanted the Prophet to work for him because he had heard that Joseph “possessed certain means by which he could discern things invisible to the natural eye.” She does not say what Joseph had in his possession. But Stowel was acquainted with Joseph Knight, Sr., and may have heard from him of the Urim and Thummim which were with the gold plates. Joseph could also have had the seer stone at this time. . . . Having worked for Josiah Stool, he was marked in the popular mind as a money digger; and in the opinion of those with whom he had worked, he was subject to the code of the money diggers which required him to share what he found. Martin Harris stated that the money diggers claimed “they had as much right to the plates as Joseph had, as they were in company together.” In taking this position, they asserted “that Joseph had been traitor, and had appropriated to himself that which belonged to them.” That these men were actively opposed to the Prophet is attested to by David Whitmer. While in Palmyra in 1828, he conversed with some men who assured him “that Joseph Smith certainly had golden plates, and that before he had attained them he had promised to share with them, but had not done so and they were very much insensed with him.” (God, Man and the Universe, Salt Lake City, 1968, pp. 70, 71, 74, 75)

At any rate, since Joseph Smith did not mention the 1826 trial in his History, and since the court record was not printed until many years after his death, Mormon scholars concluded that the record must be “spurious.” Fawn Brodie reprinted it from the New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge. Since this was not printed until 1883, there was a wide gap between the date of the trial and the published version. Because Mormon writers contested the authenticity of the trial, scholars began to search for more documentation. Helen L. Fairbanks, of Guernsey Memorial Library, Norwich, N.Y., made a very interesting discovery. She found that W. D. Purple, who had lived at Bainbridge and claimed to be an eyewitness to the trial had written concerning it in The Chenango Union, May 3, 1877. Wesley P. Walters has confirmed the fact that W. D. Purple was in Bainbridge in 1826. In a letter dated July 30, 1971, he stated: “. . . William D. Purple in May 1826 entered a complaint against someone whom he thought had stolen his coat, so he is there in 1826. This is mentioned in Tarble’s bill.” We have printed W. D. Purple’s account in its entirety in the book Joseph Smith and Money Digging, but we feel that it is so important that we shall include a portion of it in this book:

More than fifty years since, at the commencement of his professional career, the writer spent a year in the present village of Afon, in this County. It was then called South Bainbridge, . . . In the year 1825 we often saw in that quiet hamlet, Joseph Smith, Jr. . . . He was an inmate of the family of Deacon Isaiah Stowell, . . . Mr. Stowel . . . took upon himself a monomanical impression to see for hidden treasures which he believed were buried in the earth. He hired help and repaired to Northern Pennsylvania, in the vicinity of Lanesboro, to prosecute his search for untold wealth which he believed to be buried there.

There had lived a few years previous to this date, in the vicinity of Great Bend, a poor man named Joseph Smith . . . Mr. Stowell, while at Lanesboro, heard of the fame of one of his sons, named Joseph, who, by the aid of a magic stone had become a famous seer of lost or hidden treasures. . . . He, with the magic stone, was at once transferred from his humble abode to the more pretentious mansion of Deacon Stowell. Here, in the estimation of the Deacon, he confirmed his conceded powers as a seer, by means of the stone which he placed in his hat, and by excluding the light from all other terrestrial things, could see whatever he wished, even in the depths of the earth. . . .

In February, 1826, the sons of Mr. Stowell, who lived with their father, were greatly incensed against Smith, as they plainly saw their father squandering his property in...
the fruitless search for hidden treasures, and saw that the youthful seer had unlimited control over the illusions of their sire. . . . They caused the arrest of Smith as a vagrant, without visible means of livelihood. The trial came on in the above mentioned month, before Albert Neeley, Esq., the father of Bishop Neeley of the State of Maine. I was an intimate friend of the Justice, and was invited to take notes of the trial, which I did. There was a large collection of persons in attendance, and the proceedings attracted much attention.

The affidavits of the sons were read, and Mr. Smith was fully examined by the Court. . . .

On the request of the Court, he exhibited the stone. It was about the size of a small hen’s egg, in the shape of a high-instepped shoe. It was composed of layers of different colors passing diagonally through it. It was very hard and smooth, perhaps by being carried in the pocket.

Joseph Smith, Sr., was present, and sworn as a witness . . .

The next witness called was Deacon Isaiah Stowell. He confirmed all that is said above in relation to himself, and delineated many other circumstances not necessary to record. He swore that the prisoner possessed all the power he claimed, and declared he could see things fifty feet below the surface of the earth, as plain as the witness could see what was on the Justice’s table, and described very many circumstances to confirm his words. Justice Neeley soberly looked at the witness and in a solemn, dignified voice, said, “Deacon Stowell, do I understand you as swearing before God, under the solemn oath you have taken, that you believe the prisoner can see by the aid of the stone fifty feet below the surface of the earth, as plainly as you can see what is on my table?” “Do I believe it?” says Deacon Stowell, “do I believe it? No, it is not a matter of belief. I positively know it to be true.”

Mr. Thompson, an employee of Mr. Stowell, was the next witness . . . The following scene was described by this witness, and carefully noted: Smith had told the Deacon that many years before a band of robbers had buried on his flat a box of treasure, and as it was very valuable they had by a sacrifice placed a charm over it to protect it, so that it could not be obtained except by faith, accompanied by certain talismanic influences. So, after arming themselves with fasting and prayer, they sallied forth to the spot designated by Smith. Digging was commenced with fear and trembling, in the presence of this imaginary charm. In a few feet from the surface the box of treasure was struck by the shovel, on which they reddoubled their energies, but it gradually receded from their grasp. One of the men placed his hand upon the box, but it gradually sunk from his reach. . . . Mr. Stowell went to his flock and selected a fine vigorous lamb, and resolved to sacrifice it to the demon spirit who guarded the coveted treasure. Shortly after the venerable Deacon might be seen on his knees at prayer near the pit, while Smith, with a lantern in one hand to dispel the midnight darkness might be seen making a circuit around the spot, sprinkling the flowing blood from the lamb upon the ground, as a propitiation to the spirit that thwarted them. They then descended the excavation, but the treasure still receded from their grasp, and it was never obtained. . . . These scenes occurred some four years before Smith, by the aid of his luminous stone, found the Golden Bible, or the Book of Mormon. (The Chenango Union, Norwich, N.Y., May 3, 1877, as reprinted in A New Witness For Christ In America, vol. 1, pp. 362-367)

For a complete reprint and study of Dr. Purple’s account see our book Joseph Smith and Money Digging, pages 23-29. While Mormon writers were willing to concede that Purple mentioned the trial in 1877, they felt confident that no earlier mention of the trial would be discovered. Dr. Francis W. Kirkham made this statement:

No account of the life of Joseph Smith . . . prior to Purple in 1877, and Tuttle in 1883, assert that Joseph Smith confessed in a court of law that he had used a seer stone for any purpose, and especially that the record of such confession was in existence. (A New Witness For Christ In America, vol. 1, pp. 386-387)

Further research, however, led to the discovery that the court record had been printed in Fraser’s Magazine ten years prior to the time when it was printed by Tuttle. In a “Supplement” to his book, Dr. Kirkham conceded that it had been printed in 1873.

Finally, Dale L. Morgan, a noted historian, discovered that the trial was actually mentioned as early as 1831 in a letter published in the Evangelical Magazine and Gospel Advocate, printed in Utica, N.Y. The letter is “signed A.W.B., and Mr. Morgan identifies him from subsequent articles as A. W. Benton” (No Man Knows My History, p. 418A). Since Mr. Benton lived in Bainbridge, his account is very important. Wesley P. Walters has furnished us with a photograph of Benton’s account as it appears in the Evangelical Magazine and Gospel Advocate. We cite the following from that publication:

Messrs. Editors—. . . thinking that a fuller history of their founder, Joseph Smith, jr., might be interesting . . . I will take the trouble to make a few remarks . . . For several years preceding the appearance of his book, he was about the country in the character of a glasslooker: pretending, by means of a certain stone, or glass, which he put in a hat, to be able to discover lost goods, hidden treasures, mines of gold and silver, &c. . . . In this town, a wealthy farmer, named Josiah Stowell, together with others, spent large sums of money in digging for hidden money, which this Smith pretended he could see, and told them where to dig; but they never found their treasure. At length the public, becoming wearied with the base imposition which he was palming upon the credulity of the ignorant, for the purpose of sponging his living from their earnings, had him arrested as a disorderly person, tried and condemned before a court of justice. But considering his youth, (he then being a minor,) and thinking he might reform his conduct, he was designedly allowed to escape. This was four or five years ago. (Evangelical Magazine and Gospel Advocate, April 9, 1831, p. 120)

In the book Joseph Smith and Money Digging we have graphically reproduced A. W. Benton’s entire letter. From what we quoted above, however, the reader will notice that Benton claimed that Joseph Smith was “arrested as a disorderly person.” This agrees well with the court record, for it states that Joseph Smith was “a disorderly person and an impostor.” Benton also agrees with the court record in stating that Joseph Smith was found guilty. Benton said that Joseph Smith was a “glass-looker,” and the reader will remember that Justice Neely’s bill refers to “Joseph Smith The Glass looker.” The court record states that the trial took place on March 20, 1826. This would have been five years prior to the time Benton wrote his letter in 1831. Mr. Benton states that the trial took place “four or five years ago.” Dr. Hugh Nibley tried to dismiss Benton’s letter as “fiction.” In his book, The Myth Makers, page 157, we find this statement: . . . we are inclined to regard A.W.B.’s story of the 1826 trial as fiction . . . without the reality of the peep-stones, the whole legend of the 1826 trial collapses . . . the 1826 trial, unattested in any source but his for fifty years, was a product of A.W.B.’s own wishful thinking.

Actually, there was some good evidence from a Mormon source to show that Joseph Smith had some trouble with the law at the time he was working for Josiah Stowell. In 1835 Oliver Cowdery, one of the three witnesses to the Book of Mormon, wrote the following:

Soon after this visit to Cumorah, a gentleman from the south part of the State, . . . employed our brother . . . This gentleman, whose name is Stowell, resided in the town of Bainbridge, . . . Some forty miles south, . . . is said to be a cave . . . where a company of Spaniards, . . . coined a large quantity of money; . . . our brother was required to spend a few months with some others in excavating the earth, in pursuit of this treasure . . .

On the private character of our brother I need add...
nothing further, at present, previous to his obtaining the records of
the Nephites, only that while in that country, some very officious
person complained of him as a disorderly person, and brought
him before the authorities of the county; but there being no cause
of action he was honorably acquitted. (Latter Day Saints' Messenger
and Advocate, Oct. 1835, vol. 2, pp. 200-201)

While Oliver Cowdery disagrees with the court record when he
states that Joseph Smith was acquitted, he is in agreement with the
court record and with A. W. Benton’s letter in stating that Joseph
Smith was charged with being “a disorderly person.”

The Mormon writer F. L. Stewart tried to make it appear that
the statement by Cowdery referred to another incident altogether,
but Richard L. Anderson, who rejected the authenticity of the court
record, had to admit that she was in error:

... Stewart attempts to equate this early trial with one mentioned
by Lucy Smith in Wayne County in 1829. But this conclusion violates
Cowdery’s description both in location and chronology; the trial he
mentions took place “previous to his obtaining the records of the
Nephites.” (Brigham Young University Studies, Winter 1968, p. 232)

Now that the authenticity of the court record has been
established, the Mormon Church leaders are faced with a dilemma.
The court record plainly shows that Joseph Smith was deeply
involved in magic practices at the very time he was supposed to be
preparing himself to receive the plates for the Book of Mormon.
The court record shows that Joseph Smith was searching for buried
treasure in 1826, and according to his own story, the plates for
the Book of Mormon were taken from the Hill Cumorah the following
year. Joseph Smith claimed, however, that he had known that the
plates were buried in the Hill Cumorah since 1823. He made this
statement concerning the discovery of the plates:

Convenient to the village of Manchester, ... stands a hill ... 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, ... I

made an attempt to take them out, but was forbidden by the
messenger, and was again informed that the time for bringing them
forth had not yet arrived, neither would it, until four years from that
time; ... (Pearl of Great Price, Joseph Smith 2:51-53)

Now, it is interesting to note that in the court record Joseph
Smith confessed that “for three years” prior to 1826 he had used a
stone placed in his hat to find treasures or lost property. According
to Joseph Smith’s own statement, then, he began his money-
digging activities in about 1823. The reader will remember that the
messenger was supposed to have informed Joseph Smith of the
gold plates on September 21, 1823. From this it would appear
that Joseph Smith became deeply involved in money-digging at the
very time the messenger told him of the gold plates and that he was
still involved in these practices for at least three of the four years
when God was supposed to be preparing him to receive the gold
plates for the Book of Mormon. These facts seem to undermine
the whole foundation of Mormonism.

A Common Practice

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, p. 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
manuscript by LaMar Petersen)

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.
Chapter 4. Joseph Smith and Money-Digging

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. . . . 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 . . . told me by Porter. . . . 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. . . . I could relate many very singular circumstances. . . . I believe I will take the liberty to tell you of another circumstance that will be as marvelous as anything can be. . . . 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, . . . 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, pp. 36-39)

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

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; . . . this fortune-teller, . . . was a man of profound learning.

He had put himself in possession of all the learning in the States,— . . . 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 of Brigham Young, July 19, 1857, Journal of Discourses, vol. 5, p. 55)

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. . . . 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, pp. 180-181)

In 1831 The Palmyra Reflector suggested that there was a relationship between the “fortune-teller” and Joseph Smith:

It is well known that Jo Smith never pretended to have any communion with angels, until a long period after the pretended finding of his book, and that the juggling of himself or father, went no further than the pretended faculty of seeing wonders in a “peep stone,” and the occasional interview with the spirit, supposed to have the custody of hidden treasures; and it is also equally well known, that a vagabond fortune-teller by the name of Walters, . . . was the constant companion [sic] and bosom friend of these money digging impostors.

There remains but little doubt, in the minds of those at all acquainted with these transactions, that Walters, who was sometimes called the conjurer, and was paid three dollars per day for his services by the money diggers in this neighborhood, first suggested to Smith the idea of finding a book. Walters, . . . had procured an old copy of Cicero’s Orations, in the Latin language, out of which he read long and loud to his credulous hearers, uttering at the same time an unintelligible jargon, which he would afterwards pretend to interpret, and explain, as a record of the former inhabitants of America, and a particular account of the numerous situations where they had deposited their treasures previous to their final extirpation. (The Palmyra Reflector, February 28, 1831, as quoted in A New Witness For Christ in America, vol. 2, p. 73)

However this may be, 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, 1965, pp. 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 up or 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 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, Dec. 27, 1825, p. 2)

Joseph Smith's "seer stone" was apparently found while he was helping to dig a well. 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 later 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; . . . 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. . . . The next morning he came to me, and wished to obtain the stone, alleging 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 such disturbance among the credulous part of community, that I ordered the stone to be returned to me again. . . . some time in 1825, Hiram Smith . . . came to me, and wished to borrow the same 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; . . .

In the fall of 1826, a friend called upon me and wished to see that stone, . . . But to my surprise, 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, alledging that he could see in it; but I did not wish to part with it. He then observed that if it had not been for that stone, he would not have obtained the book . . .

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 Unvailed, Painesville, Ohio, 1834, pp. 240, 241, 242, 246 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 Comprehensive History of the Church, vol. 1, p. 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 engraved 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, 1952, p. 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, 1958, p. 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 had 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.
End of sample pages.
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