

THE SALAMANDER LETTER

Strange Letter Attributed to Mormon Witness

In the March issue of the *Salt Lake City Messenger* we announced the discovery of a very important letter which was supposed to have been written by Book of Mormon witness Martin Harris. The existence of this letter was confirmed on March 7, 1984, when a Mormon bishop by the name of Steven Christensen issued a "press release" in which he stated:

It is true that I am owner of a letter written by Martin Harris to William W. Phelps, dated October 23, 1830. . . . Before I will release transcripts or photographs of the document to the public, I wish to first determine the document's historicity as much as possible.

The original plan was for the letter to be published in *Sunstone*. Later, however, Christensen announced that he had three researchers working on a book and that the public would have to wait until it was finished. Unfortunately, one of the researchers (the only one working full time on the project) was released from Christensen's employment, and some people began to fear that the letter would not be published. In our publication, *The Money-Digging Letters*, we indicated that we would print the letter in the *Messenger* if there was an attempt by the Church to suppress it. The latest report is that it may be published in a forthcoming issue of *Brigham Young University Studies*.

A Summary

While we will not print the letter in this issue of the *Messenger*, we have a typed copy on display at the Utah Lighthouse Bookstore, 1350 South West Temple, and we are including a summary of its contents in this article. To begin with, Martin Harris stated that Joseph Smith first came "to my notice" in 1824. Harris was amazed that Joseph was able to do a great amount of work in a short period of time. When he asked about this, Joseph said he had special "assistance." Harris asked Joseph Smith's father about the matter and was told that "Joseph often sees Spirits here with great kettles of coin money." Harris then told of a dream which he himself had in which he conversed with spirits and they "let me count



Martin Harris in his old age

their money." He awoke with a dollar in his hand, and when he consulted Joseph Smith, Smith told him that the spirits were "grieved" because he kept the dollar. Harris, therefore, threw the dollar back. Harris then told about Joseph Smith relating how "the old spirit come to me 3 times in the same dream & says dig up the gold [i.e., the gold plates of the Book of Mormon] but when I take it up the next morning the spirit transfigured himself from a white salamander in the bottom of the hole & struck me 3 times . . ." The spirit then took the plates away from him because he had disobeyed his orders. Later the spirit said that he must bring his brother Alvin. Smith informed the spirit that "he is dead shall I bring what remains . . ." Joseph tried again to obtain the plates, but the spirit would not let him have them because he did not bring his brother (his body?). The spirit told Joseph to look to the seer stone, but he was unable to see who to bring. The spirit mockingly said, "I tricked you again." Joseph finally saw his wife in the "stone" and obtained the "gold bible."

Harris gave Joseph "fifty dollars" so he could move to Pennsylvania. Later Joseph gave Harris a copy of the hieroglyphics which appeared on the gold plates to take to Professor Anthon. Anthon confirmed that they were "shorthand Egyptian" and wanted the "old book" so he could translate it. Harris then told how Joseph Smith translated the Book of Mormon by putting the "giant silver spectacles" in an "old hat" and reading the words which appeared in the darkness. Harris concluded his relation of the facts concerning the coming forth of the Book of

Mormon by saying the Joseph showed him the gold plates and that he (Harris) had the Book of Mormon printed with “my own money.”

The letter attributed to Martin Harris is now referred to as the “Salamander letter” or the “White Salamander letter.” Although we do not have a photocopy of it at the present time, the typed copy we have has been compared with a photocopy and is supposed to be rather accurate. No claims are made, however, for the spelling or punctuation. Typed copies of a slightly different version of the Salamander letter were mailed anonymously to different scholars from New York City. We obtained a copy of this version and found that the salutation on the letter presented a problem. In *The Money-Digging Letters*, we wrote:

If this copy is accurate, we may have another problem. One would expect the salutation to read, “Dear Mr. Phelps.” Instead, the letter is addressed to, “Dear Bro. Phelps.” If Phelps had been a member of the Church, one would expect such a greeting. . . . While the Salamander letter is dated October 23, 1830, Phelps did not join the church until June of 1831.

A comparison with a photocopy of the original resolved this problem; the words, “Dear Bro. Phelps” are inaccurate. The salutation actually reads, “Dear Sir.”

Making Tests

We are happy to report that Steven Christensen has submitted the Salamander letter to some of the best experts in the country to determine its authenticity. Recently we received a tip from someone in the East which led to the discovery that the tests on the Salamander letter are being performed by Kenneth Rendell Incorporated of Newton, Massachusetts. This company is in the process of a rigorous examination of the document. The signature on the letter was compared with four other signatures attributed to Martin Harris. Although we do not know whether a final verdict has been reached, the information which we have been able to obtain suggested that the verdict will probably be favorable to the document’s authenticity. Bill Kruger, the man who made the tests on the paper, told us that he could detect no evidence of forgery. We talked to Leslie Kress of Kenneth Rendell Incorporated about the test being conducted on the letter. Although she acknowledged the work was being done, she was not able to reveal to us the results of the various tests. We have heard from another source, however, that the sealing wax used on the letter has been tested. It is also possible that tests will be performed on the postmark.

One test which had apparently not been completed at the time we talked to Leslie Kress was that on the ink. Some people, however, are now claiming that the Salamander letter has passed all the tests. Since Steven Christensen has not issued any statement about the matter, we do not know whether the report is true. In any case, at least one of the researchers is very optimistic that the results of the tests will be positive.

The Handwriting

On pages 15 and 19 of *The Money-Digging Letters*, we pointed out the following problem:

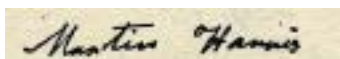
Handwriting experts are going to be confronted with a real problem with regard to this letter. As far as we know, there are no samples of Martin Harris’s handwriting except for his signature on a few documents. The *Deseret News* for September 1, 1984, claimed that “Christensen said that as far as is known know [now?] this is the only letter in Harris’ handwriting that has surfaced.” Steve Eaton wrote the following in the *Salt Lake Tribune* on September 2: “Because the only known samples of Harris’ handwriting are his signatures, researchers will be ‘handicapped’ as they attempt to authenticate the handwriting, Mr. Walker said.”

There are very few alphabetical characters represented in Martin Harris’s signature. We find the letter *r* three times. The letters *a* and *i* both appear twice, but the letters *h*, *m*, *n*, *s*, and *t* only appear once. In our alphabet there are 52 different written forms—26 small letters and 2 capital letters. Thus we only have about 15% of the different forms represented. We understand that while a signature is very useful to compare against another signature, the form of the letters used may differ somewhat from one’s normal writing because a signature is done almost automatically.

One of the researchers is now claiming that an early Book of Mormon bearing a short inscription by Martin Harris has been located. An inscription of this nature could throw some light on the issue. Scholars, however, should be careful about this matter. A forgery in a book would be much easier to perpetrate than a postmarked letter, and there is always a possibility that a second forgery would be created to provide support for the first. If the book was known to have had this writing in it for a number of years prior to the discovery of the Salamander letter, it could be very important in determining the authenticity of the letter.

One interesting thing that has been called to our attention by H. Michael Marquardt is that the signature which we always believed was the genuine Martin Harris

signature was probably not written by Harris at all. This is the signature which appears under the printed testimony of the Three Witnesses to the Book of Mormon in *A Comprehensive History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*. When this signature is compared with a signature appearing on the Book of Mormon contract with E. B. Grandin, dated August 17, 1829, we find that there is no resemblance. The signatures which appear on other documents seem to agree with the one found on the contract. If we assume that these documents are authentic, then we have to conclude that the one which has been published by the Mormon Church for at least 50 years is not Martin Harris's signature. The following is a photograph of the signature which appears in *A Comprehensive History*, vol. 1, page 139. Below this is the signature which appears on the Book of Mormon contract with E. B. Grandin. This was published by the Mormon Church in *The Ensign*, December 1983, page 41.

Why a false signature was used by the Church is not known, but it is possible that no good example of Harris's signature was readily available when the *Comprehensive History* was first published. Someone has suggested that it may really be the signature of Harris's son, Martin Harris, Jr.

Caution Urged

When we first published extracts from the Salamander letter in the *Messenger* (March 1984), we made these comments about the importance of determining the authenticity of the letter:

At the outset we should state that we have some reservations concerning the authenticity of the letter, and at the present time we are not prepared to say that it was actually penned by Martin Harris. The serious implications of this whole matter, however, cry out for discussion. If the letter is authentic, it is one of the greatest evidences against the divine origin of the Book of Mormon. If, on the other hand, it is a forgery, it needs to be exposed as such so that millions of people will not be misled. . . .

Since Martin Harris was one of the three special witnesses to the gold plates of the Book of Mormon (see his testimony in the front of the book), he is held in high esteem by the Mormon people. Mormon writers have commended him for his honesty. Although many Mormon critics may disagree with this view, everyone agrees that Harris played such an important role in early Mormonism that anything coming from his pen is of great significance.

Because of some problems in the text of the Salamander letter we have been exceptionally cautious about endorsing it as authentic. The reader will find more information about these problems in *The Money-Digging Letters* and in the article "Dilemma of a Mormon Critic" which is published in this issue of the *Messenger*.

Suit Drags On

It has been a year and eight months since Andrew Ehat brought a lawsuit against us for publishing the book, *Clayton's Secret Writings Uncovered*. Although Mr. Ehat was able to convince a Mormon judge that we were guilty of "unfair competition," he was unable to prove the claim of copyright violation and was unsuccessful in this attempt to suppress the publication of the revealing extracts from Joseph Smith's secretary's diaries. We are still selling *Clayton's Secret Writings Uncovered* for \$3.00 a copy.

We have appealed the decision on "unfair competition" to the Tenth Circuit Court of Appeals where we hope to get an unbiased examination of the case. Our appeal was delayed by Ehat's lawyer, Gordon A. Madsen, when he tried to reinstate an unsuccessful injunction against our continued publication of *Clayton's Secret Writings Uncovered*. Our lawyer completed a "Brief of Appellants" on October 9, 1984, but Mr. Madsen did not respond. On November 5, the Court sent him a letter in which the following appeared:

Our file in the captioned appeal indicates that you have failed to timely file an appellee's brief . . . That brief was due to be filed on: November 1, 1984. . . . your failure to file an appellee's brief precludes your being "heard at oral argument except by permission of the court." Accordingly, unless you file an appellee's brief within ten (10) days . . . this case will be considered at issue and ripe for consideration and disposition by the court.

On November 9, Mr. Madsen responded that he "was under the impression he had until November 9, 1984, in which to file the same." He went on to request "an extension of time be granted allowing him until December 10, 1984, in which to file . . ." On December 6, however, Mr. Madsen asked that another "extension of time be granted allowing him until January 10, 1985, in which to file his brief."

Although we have no idea when this case will finally be resolved, we are confident that the ruling of Judge Christensen will be overturned by the panel of three judges who will examine his decision.

DILEMMA OF A MORMON CRITIC

By Jerald Tanner

As we have indicated in the lead article, the evidence derived from physical testing seems to be pointed to the conclusion that the Salamander letter, attributed to Book of Mormon witness Martin Harris, is genuine. Since I have spent years proving that early Mormonism is linked to magic and money-digging, this news should have brought me a great deal of satisfaction. Instead, however, I find myself facing a real dilemma. While the tests and the opinions of noted Mormon scholars seem to indicate that I should relax and enjoy the victory, I still have serious reservations about the document's authenticity. In fact, I find it very hard to believe that the Martin Harris I have learned about from numerous historical sources could have written the letter.

In the beginning I had full confidence in the validity of the letter. Everything seemed to be checking out, and when I was writing the story for the March issue of the messenger, I was very excited that we were going to be the ones who would break the story to the world. Unfortunately, however, I made a discovery that really disturbed me. Although there was a temptation to just forget what I had seen, I decided that it would be dishonest to not report the discovery. Consequently, the fourth page of the March issue of the Messenger contains this statement:

Since we . . . have written a book entitled, *Mormonism, Magic and Masonry*, we were delighted to get the report that Martin Harris had written a letter relating to the subject. As we learned of the contents, we felt that it would provide additional evidence to support our thesis. Some time later, we were told of another letter, written by W. W. Phelps, which seemed to prove the authenticity of the letter attributed to Harris. This letter is printed in Howe's book, pages 273-274. In the letter, Phelps tells of Martin Harris' statements concerning the Book of Mormon. There are some remarkable parallels between the two letters. Both letters refer to the Urim and Thummim as "silver spectacles." Both accounts tell of Martin Harris taking a copy of the Book of Mormon characters to "Utica, Albany and New York," and both talk of the Book of Mormon language as "shorthand Egyptian." Since Phelps' letter is dated Jan. 15, 1831 (less than three months after the letter which was reported to have been written by Harris), it seemed safe to conclude that Phelps used the Harris letter in preparing his own. In all fairness, however, we made another discovery which we felt we must report. Just two pages after Phelps letter, we found a statement written by E. D. Howe which is strangely similar to the "Harris" letter. The reader will

remember that the letter said, "the spirit transfigured himself from a white salamander in the bottom of the hole." E. D. Howe's statements read as follows: ". . . looked into the hole, where he saw a toad, which immediately transformed itself into a spirit, . . ." Notice that both accounts use the words "the hole" as well as "spirit," and the words "transfigured himself" resemble "transformed itself." Howe's statement appears to be his own summary of the Willard Chase affidavit which we have already cited: "He saw in the box something like a toad, which soon assumed the appearance of a man, . . ."

That Howe's statement (*Mormonism Unveiled*, page 276) is so much like the one in the "Harris" letter is a little disturbing. Even more disconcerting, however, is the fact that it appears just two pages from a letter by W. W. Phelps which also bears remarkable parallels. This, of course, might all be a coincidence, and if it can be established that the letter was actually penned before Howe's book was published in 1834, it will probably be accepted as a genuine letter.

About five months after we broke the story about the Salamander letter and printed extracts from it, the *Los Angeles Times* printed a story on the subject. In this article John Dart commented:

However, unusual caution about the letter's genuineness has been expressed by Jerald and Sandra Tanner, longtime evangelical critics of the Mormon church. The Tanners wrote in their *Salt Lake City Messenger* newsletter last march that the purported Harris letter contains too many similarities to statements published in an 1834 book by E. D. Howe.

After the *Los Angeles Times* ran its story, the *Deseret News* printed an article which contained the following:

. . . outspoken Mormon Church critics Jerald and Sandra Tanner suspect the document is a forgery, they told the *Deseret News*.

Jerald Tanner has not seen the actual letter but says similarities between it and other documents make its veracity doubtful.

Tanner said he studied a typescript of the document and wanted to believe it. But when he compared it to the 1834 book "Mormonism Unveiled" by E. D. Howe, he found highly similar stories about Smith viewing a toad that turned itself into a man or a spirit. . . . Tanner feels the document is an extremely important find. "It deserves a lot of attention," he said. "If it's authentic, its extremely important in linking Mormonism to the occult. If it's a forgery, then it's important because there's a document forger out there." (*Deseret News*, September 1, 1984)

In his article in the *Los Angeles Times*, John Dart commented: “The Tanners’ suggestion of forgery has surprised some Mormons, who note that the parallels in wording also could be taken as evidence for authenticity.” While I agree with the statement that parallels “could be taken as evidence” for the authenticity of the Salamander letter, it is the close proximity of important parallels in Howe’s book that causes concern. It is, in fact, very disconcerting to find only two pages in the Howe book separating highly significant parallels. In addition to these parallels, I find many other things in the Howe book that could have provided structural material for the Salamander letter. It is interesting to note that a manuscript written by Joseph Knight also has some remarkable similarities. This manuscript, which is stored in the Church Archives, was first published by Dean Jessee in the Autumn 1976 issue of *Brigham Young University Studies*. One thing I noticed in the Knight account that could have had an influence on

the Salamander letter is the use of the words “says he” and “says I.” On page 37, as published in *BYU Studies*, we find the following: “Says he, . . . Says he, . . . Says I, . . . Says I, . . . Says he.” In the “Harris” letter we read: “. . . says he . . . says he . . . says I . . . Says I . . .”

The following is a comparison of portions of the Salamander letter with quotations from three different publications which are well known to students of Mormon history. The first source used is E. D. Howe’s book *Mormonism Unveiled* (abbreviated as “Howe”). The second is Francis Kirkham’s *A New Witness For Christ in America (NWFC)*. Kirkham cites an article from the Rochester Gem, September 5, 1829. The third is the Joseph Knight account which appears in *Brigham Young University Studies (BYUS)*, Autumn 1976. Parallel No. 9 is from *BYU Studies* article, but it is a footnote Dean Jessee had taken from Lucy Smith’s book.

THE SALAMANDER LETTER	POSSIBLE SOURCES
1. Joseph can <u>see anything he wishes</u> by looking at a <u>stone</u> Joseph often sees <u>Spirits</u>	1. This light of the <u>stone</u> , he pretended, enabled him to <u>see any thing he wished</u> . Accordingly he discovered ghosts, infernal <u>spirits</u> (<i>Howe</i> , 259)
2. <u>kettles</u> of coin money	2. <u>kettles</u> filled with gold and silver (<i>Howe</i> , 237)
3. the elder Smith . . . says . . . it was Spirits who brought up <u>rock</u>	3. Joseph, Sen. told me . . . the large stones . . . we call them <u>rocks</u> , . . . are, in fact, most of them chests of money raised by the heat of the sun (<i>Howe</i> , 233)
4. <u>the enchantment</u>	4. <u>the enchantment</u> (<i>Howe</i> , 267)
5. the old <u>spirit</u> come to me <u>3</u> times in <u>the same dream</u> & says dig up the gold	5. after a <u>third</u> visit from <u>the same spirit</u> in a <u>dream</u> he proceeded to the spot (<i>NWFC</i> , vol. 1, page 151)
6. but when I <u>take</u> it up the next morning the <u>spirit</u> <u>transfigured himself</u> from a white salamander in the bottom of <u>the hole</u>	6. after the plates were <u>taken</u> from their hiding place by Jo, he, . . . looked into <u>the hole</u> , where he saw a toad, which immediately <u>transformed itself</u> into a <u>spirit</u> (<i>Howe</i> , 275-76)
7. <u>& struck</u> me <u>3</u> times	7. <u>and struck</u> him . . . the spirit struck him again, and knocked him <u>three</u> or four rods (<i>Howe</i> , 242)
8. to <u>cover over</u> the hole	8. that he would <u>cover</u> the place <u>over</u> (<i>BYUS</i> , 31)
9. the spirit said do <u>not lay it down</u>	9. he had been commanded <u>not to lay</u> the plates <u>down</u> (<i>BYUS</i> , 31, footnote 5)
10. <u>Joseph says</u> when can I have it	10. <u>Joseph says</u> , “when can I have it?” (<i>BYUS</i> , 31)
11. the spirit says <u>1 year from today</u> if you will <u>obey</u> me	11. you have not <u>obeyed</u> your orders . . . come <u>one year from this day</u> (<i>Howe</i> , 242)
12. <u>bring your brother</u>	12. <u>bring</u> with you <u>your</u> oldest <u>brother</u> (<i>Howe</i> , 242)

13. Joseph says he is dead

13. he said that he was dead (Howe, 243)

14. Joseph goes to get the gold Bible but the spirit says . . . you cannot have it

14. he went to the place and the personage appeared and told him he could not have it now (BYUS, 31)

15. the spirit says . . . look to the stone Joseph looks but cannot see who to bring the spirit says . . . look to the stone

15. Lawrence . . . asked him to look in his stone, . . . he looked, and said there was nothing; he told him to look again (Howe, 243)

16. Joseph looks & sees his wife

16. he looked in his glass and found it was Emma (BYUS, 31)

17. I give Joseph fifty dollars to move him down to Pa

17. He obtained fifty Dollars in money and hired a man to move him and his wife to Pensylvany (BYUS, 34)

18. I take them to Utica Albany & New York in the last place Dr. Mitchell give me an introduction to Professor Anthon says he they are shorthand Egyptian the same what was used in ancient times

18. taken by Mr. Harris to Utica, Albany and New York; at New York, they were shown to Dr. Mitchell and he referred to professor Anthon who . . . declared them to be ancient shorthand Egyptian (Howe, 273)

19. Joseph found some giant silver spectacles with the plates

19. Joseph Smith, through a pair of silver spectacles, found with the plates (Howe, 273)

20. he puts them in an old hat & in the darkness reads the words & in this way it's all translated

20. he put the urim and thummim into his hat and Darkened his Eyes then he would take a sentence and it would appear . . . Thus was the hol [whole] translated (BYUS, 35)

It is possible that Peter Ingersoll's affidavit could have had an influence on the story about Joseph Smith telling Harris the "spirits are grieved" because Harris kept a "coin" which belonged to them. In Ingersoll's story, however, it is Joseph Smith who tricked a "gate tender" into handing him some money that did not rightfully belong to him (see *Mormonism Unveiled*, page 235).

The *Palmyra Reflector* printed a series of articles which Francis W. Kirkham included in *A New Witness For Christ in America*, vol. 1. On page 290 of this book, we read as follows:

"This rogue of a spirit who had baffled all the united efforts of the money-diggers, . . . intended it would seem to play our prophet a similar trick . . . the father . . . probably fearing some trick of the spirit, having known him for many years: . . ." This could have suggested the following statement in the Salamander letter: ". . . the spirit says I tricked you again . . ." On page 289 of the same book, the following is cited from the *Palmyra Reflector*: ". . . the elder Smith declared that his son Joe had seen the spirit, . . ." This reminds me of the following statement in the Salamander letter: ". . . the elder Smith . . . says Joseph . . . sees Spirits . . ." The words "the elder Smith" seem to be a little too formal for Martin Harris. In an interview published in *Tiffany's Monthly*, Harris never used this

term. He referred to "old Mr. Stowel," "Old Mr. Beman" and "old Mr. Smith's."

The series of *Palmyra Reflector* articles cited in *A New Witness For Christ in America* present the idea that Joseph Smith's story evolved from the visitation of a spirit connected with the money-diggers to communion with angels. We find this statement on page 291:

It is well known that Joe 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: . . .

This exact thesis is presented in the Salamander letter. The word "angel" is not found once in the entire letter, whereas the words "spirit" or "spirits" appear twelve times. Furthermore, these spirits are clearly revealed as guardians of the treasures. While I feel that there may be something to the idea that "the spirit" evolved into an "angel," I find it hard to believe that Martin Harris would still be telling the older version of the story in 1830. The early newspapers certainly do not support such a conclusion.

The Salamander

After reading the letter attributed to Martin Harris, I became very interested in the reason why it was a “salamander” that was transformed into a “spirit.” I found that salamanders are connected to magic and money-digging. The word *salamander* is defined in one dictionary as “a spirit supposed to live in fire; an elemental spirit in Paracelsus’ theory of elementals.” (For more information on this subject see *The Money-Digging Letters*, page 13.) I spent a great deal of time trying to find the word *salamander* in literature connected with Mormonism. I was not successful, however, until I examined an unpublished manuscript by A. C. Lambert which is found in the Western Americana Department of the University of Utah Library. In this work of over 400 pages, Dr. Lambert claimed that people in Joseph Smith’s time were aware of the four elemental spirits. He then stated that “*salamanders* were to be placated and made helpful or were to be defeated and put under control” (page 76). If this statement had appeared in some other work, I might have considered it as evidence for the Salamander letter. As it is, however, it makes me even more suspicious of the letter’s authenticity. This manuscript happen to be written concerning Martin Harris and is entitled, “A Study that Gives Some Special Attention to Martin Harris.” It is the very type of manuscript that someone making up a letter concerning Harris would want to read for background material. Although this is an unpublished manuscript, Sharon Pugsley made its existence known to scholars the very year it was written (see *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*, vol. 8, no. 2, 1973, page 100).

Something Missing

When we published the March 1984 *Messenger*, I had only seen extracts from the Salamander letter. Later I obtained a typescript of the text of the letter, and this only increased my concern about its validity. On August 22, 1984, I printed my preliminary report on the letter under the title *The Money-Digging Letters*. The following appeared on page 7 of this report:

We have already mentioned the interview with Martin Harris which is published in *Tiffany’s Monthly*, . . . This article is used by both Mormon and anti-Mormon writers. In this interview, Harris says that Smith “found them [the gold plates] by looking in the stone” (page 169). The Salamander letter quotes Smith as saying, “I found it 4 years ago with my stone.” While there are a

few other parallels with this interview, the dissimilarities seem to be much more significant. For example, the Salamander letter has very little to say about the gold plates of the Book of Mormon, whereas in the interview in *Tiffany’s Monthly*, Harris goes into great detail about the plates. He speaks of their size, thickness, weight and how they were buried. He gives a similar description of the Urim and Thummim. The Salamander letter give no description of these “silver spectacles.”

The interview in *Tiffany’s Monthly* also raises a very serious question about the lack of religious material in the Salamander letter. In the interview, Harris quoted at least five portions of the Bible. He used the words *revelation*, *Moses*, *Scripture* and *Christ* at least once. He used the word *prayed* twice, and mentioned the *devil* four times. The word *angel* or *angels* appears five times. *God* is mentioned seven times, and the word *Lord* appears ten times. In the Salamander letter all of these words are absent. In fact, there is nothing we can find concerning religion. *Spirits* are mentioned many times in the letter, but they are never linked to money-digging. They are the guardians of the treasures.

This total lack of religious material seems to be out of character for Martin Harris. A person might try to maintain that Harris was more interested in religion in 1859, but the evidence shows that he was always that way. E. D. Howe described him as follows:

He was naturally of a very visionary turn of mind on the subject of religion, . . . He frequently declares that he has conversed with Jesus Christ, Angel and the Devil. . . .

Martin is an exceedingly fast talker. He frequently gathers a crowd around him in bar-rooms and in the streets.—Here he appears to be in his element, answering and explaining all manner of dark and abstruse theological questions, from Genesis to Revelations; declaring that every thing has been revealed to him by the “power of God.” During these flights of fancy, he frequently prophecies of the coming of Christ, the destruction of the world, and the damnation of certain individuals. (*Mormonism Unveiled*, 1834, pages 13-15)

The article we have cited which was published in the *Gem* in 1829 claimed that Harris mentioned the “Almighty” in relationship to the coming forth of the Book of Mormon. An article which appeared in the *Pain[e]ville Telegraph* in 1831 contained this information: “Martin Harris . . . told all about the gold plates, Angels, Spirits, and Jo Smith.—He had seen and handled them all, by the power of God . . . Every idea that he advanced, he knew to be absolutely true, as he said, by the spirit and power of God” (*Pain[e]ville Telegraph*, March 15, 1831, as cited in *A New Witness for Christ in America*, vol. 2, page 97).

Since printing this statement in *The Money-Digging Letters*, I have examined a number of other historical sources relating to Martin Harris. These references, from early newspapers up until the time of his death, point to the unmistakable conclusion that Harris could hardly open his mouth without talking about religion. That he could write a letter of over 600 words without mentioning the subject seems highly unlikely. This is especially true since the Salamander letter deals with the coming forth of the Book of Mormon and gives ample opportunities to bring up the subject. While it is true that Martin Harris believed in money-digging and the superstitions connected with it, it seems very hard to believe that he would write a perspective convert like Phelps and leave out all the divine elements of the Book of Mormon.

It is claimed that the Salamander letter is the only letter in existence which is written in Martin Harris's own hand. (There is a letter which bears his signature, but the handwriting resembles that of his son. We will have more to say about this later.) There are two other letters attributed to Harris which were published in the *Latter-Day Saints' Millennial Star* on January 1, 1877. One of the letters claims to have been dictated by Martin Harris, but the other one might have been written in his own hand. The original copies of these letters have not been

located, but there seems to be no reason to question their authenticity. While there could have been some editorial tampering, the letters undoubtedly came from Harris. They were published over a hundred years ago and bear internal evidence of having originated from the mind of Martin Harris. For instance, they conform very well with Howe's early assessment of Harris: "Here he appears to be in his element, answering and explaining all manner of dark and abstruse theological questions, from Genesis to Revelations; declaring that everything has been revealed to him by the 'power of God.'" In the first letter, Harris boasted: "I defy any man to show me any passage of Scripture that I am not posted on or familiar with." The second letter is filled with quotations from the scriptures. We have previously quoted the March 15, 1831, issue of the *Painesville Telegraph* as saying: "Every idea that he advanced, he knew to be absolutely true, as he said, by the spirit and power of God." In the second letter which appears in the *Millennial Star*, Martin Harris stated: "The Lord has shown me these things by his spirit . . ." Harris went on to claim that, "The Lord showed me there was no true Church upon the face of the earth, . . ."

The reader will find a photograph of these letters below. Notice that they are filled with Scriptures and material dealing with religion.

Smithfield, Utah, Nov. 23, 1870.

Mr. Emerson, Sir: I received your favor. In reply I will say concerning the plates, I do say that the angel did show to me the plates containing the Book of Mormon. Further, the translation that I married to Prof. Anthon was copied from these same plates; also, that the Professor did testify to it being a correct translation. I do firmly believe and do know that Joseph Smith was a Prophet of God; for without I know he could not had that gift; neither could he have translated the same. I can give if you require it, one hundred witnesses to the proof of the Book of Mormon. I defy any man to show me any passage of Scripture that I am not posted on or familiar with. I will answer any question you feel like asking to the best of my knowledge, if you can rely on my testimony of the same. In conclusion I can say that I arrived in Utah safe, in good health and spirits, considering the long journey. I am quite well at present, and have been, generally speaking, since I arrived.

With many respects I remain your humble friend,

MARTIN HARRIS.

Smithfield, Cache County, U. T.,
January, 1871.

To H. Emerson,—Dear Sir:—Your second letter, dated December, 1870, came duly to hand. I am truly glad to see a spirit of inquiry manifested therein. I reply by a borrowed hand, as my sight has failed me too much to write myself. Your questions: Question 1, "Did you go to England to lecture against "Mormonism?"

Answer. I answer emphatically, No, I did not;—No man ever heard me in any way deny the truth of the Book of Mormon, the administration of the angel that showed me the plates; nor the organization of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, under the administration of Joseph Smith, Jun., the Prophet whom the Lord raised up for that purpose, in these latter days, that he may show forth his power and glory. The Lord has shown me these things by his spirit—by the administration of holy

angels—and confirmed the same with signs following, step by step, as the work has progressed, for the space of fifty-three years.

The Lord showed me there was no true Church upon the face of the earth, none built upon the foundation, designated by the Savior, "The rock of revelation," as declared to Peter, See Matt. xvi, 18, 17, 18 verses. He also showed me that an angel should come and restore the Holy Priesthood again to the earth, and commission his servants again with the Holy Gospel to preach to them that dwell on the earth: See Rev. xiv, 6, 7 verses. He further showed me that the time was nigh when he would "set his hand again the second time to restore the kingdom of Israel," "when he would gather the outcasts of Israel and the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth," "when he would bring the record of Joseph which was in the hand of Ephraim, and join with the record of Judah, when the two records should become one in the hand of the Lord to accomplish his great work of the last days." See Ex. 38th and 37th chap.; also Isaiah 29th chap.; also from the 58th chap. to the end of the book; also Psalms 50.

Question 2. What became of the plates from which the Book of Mormon was translated?

Answer. They were returned to the angel, Moroni, from whom they were received, to be brought forth again in the due time of the Lord; for they contain many things pertaining to the gathering of Israel, which gathering will take place in this generation, and shall be testified of among all nations, according to the old Prophets; as the Lord will set his ensign to the people, and gather the outcasts of Israel:—See Isaiah, 11th chap.

Now, dear sir, examine these Scriptures carefully; and should there still be any ambiguity relative to this great work of the last days, write again and we will endeavor to enlighten you on any point relative to this doctrine.

I am, very respectfully,

MARTIN HARRIS, Sen.

—Ogden Junction.

I find it very difficult to believe that the two letters published in the *Millennial Star* came from the same mind that produced the Salamander letter.

There is another letter attributed to Martin Harris (apparently not in his own hand) which is in the Church Archives. It was sent to Brigham Young along with a printed proclamation purporting to be a revelation from Moses, Elias, Elijah and John. In this letter we find the following:

Respected Friend Brigham Young
enclosed I Send you a Proclamation as you will discover by reading it given by Moses, Elias, Elijah, and John — You no doubt will recollect of a favor asked of me — of the lone of Some money upon the ground of relationship and in the name of God. I now make an appeal to you in the name of god and Command you in the name of god = to Publish = the Revelation I send you in = your deseret news . . . that the = world and Commandment of the Proclamation may go to all the world this done you will Serve the cause of god . . . (Letter attributed to Martin Harris, August 13, 1855, Brigham Young Collection, MSD, BX 39, fd 17, handwritten copy)

While there is no way to know for certain that this letter was written by Martin Harris, the attempt to command Brigham Young “in the name of God” seems consistent with what is known about Harris’s character. In any case, the reader will notice that the letter uses the word “God” four times and mentions Biblical names.

With the exception of the Salamander letter, historical sources (both Mormon and anti-Mormon) reveal that Martin Harris could not keep silent on the subject of religion. Besides the early newspapers which mention Harris’s zealous attempt to tie Mormonism to God and the bible, we have a number of people who spoke with him throughout the years he was associated with Mormonism. They all tell the same story. One of the most interesting accounts was given by an Episcopalian minister by the name of John A. Clark. In a book published in 1842, he claimed that he had an important conversation with Martin Harris in 1827—three years before the Salamander letter was supposed to have been written. Clark believed that the Smith family “were principally known as money-diggers = and that Joseph Smith claimed “second sight, a power to look into depths of the earth, and discover where its precious treasures were hid,” but he did not seem to remember Harris telling anything about a spirit which “transfigured himself from a white salamander.” Instead, he claimed that Harris told him it was an angel of God who directed Joseph Smith to the plates:

It was early in the autumn of 1827 that Martin Harris called at my house in Palmyra, one morning about sunrise. His whole appearance indicated mor than usual excitement, . . .

According to Martin Harris, . . . Jo, while he lay upon his bed, had a remarkable dream. An angel of God seemed to approach him, clad in celestial splendor. This divine messenger assured him, that he, Joseph Smith, was chosen of the Lord to be a prophet of the Most High God, and to bring to light hidden things, . . . (*Gleanings By The Way*, pages 222 and 225)

Mark Hofmann, who sold the Salamander letter to Steven Christensen, suggested that the lack of religious material in the letter may stem from Phelps being involved in money-digging. This would account for Harris emphasizing this aspect of the story and suppressing the divine element. While it is possible that Harris would stress the things that were appealing to a money-digger, it still seems somewhat strange that he would leave out all mention of God or angels. Phelps’s own letter, written less than three months after the one attributed to Harris, seems to show that he was receptive to religious material. It mentioned “God,” “the Holy Ghost,” “the millennium” and “divine things.” The Phelps letter, in fact, says that, “Mr. Harris, . . . declares upon his soul’s salvation that the book is true, and was interpreted . . . through a pair of silver spectacles, . . .” While the words “silver spectacles” appear in the Salamander letter, nothing about Harris’s “soul’s salvation” is found there.

The 1873 Letter

It is disturbing to note that the Salamander letter, which seems to remove all religious elements out of the Book of Mormon story, comes right on the heels of the discovery of another letter reported to have been written by Martin Harris in 1873. This letter is supposed to be in the handwriting of Martin Harris’s son, although it appears to bear the signature of Harris himself. It is a strong affirmation of the testimony concerning the angel appearing to show the gold plates:

. . . as I was praying unto the Lord that I might behold the ancient record, lo there appeared to view a holy Angel, . . . the angel did take up the plates and turn them over so as we could plainly see the engravings thereon, and lo there came a voice from heaven saying “I am the Lord,” and that the plates were translated by God and not by men, and also that we should bear record of it to all the world. . . . (*The Ensign*, December 1983, pages 44-45)

The Salamander letter almost appears to be a rebuttal to the powerful testimony in the 1873 letter. When it comes to Harris’s view of the gold plates it merely states: “. . . Joseph takes me together with Oliver Cowdery & David Whitmer to have a view of the plates our names are appended to the book of Mormon . . .”

I have made a comparison of the religious content of the two letters and found the following: the 1873 letter uses the word *Lord* three times. The words *Angel* and *holy* appear twice, and the words *God*, *Christ*, *heaven*, *vision*, *Gospel* and *praying* all appear once. In the Salamander letter all of these words are missing, and since it is almost three times as long as the 1873 letter the discrepancy becomes even more important.

In *The Money-Digging Letters*, page 19, I wrote:

The style of the Salamander letter seems to differ from that of the 1873 letter. Although Harris was in his late forties at the time the Salamander letter was supposed to have been written, it appears to have been penned by someone who did not have a very good education. The 1873 letter, on the other hand, is very well written. One very obvious difference is that it used the word *and* three times as often as the Salamander letter.

After sorting the words in the two letters alphabetically on our computer, I found that the figure should be 2.6 instead of 3. The Salamander letter uses *and* 2.9 times per hundred words, whereas it appears 7.5 times per hundred words in the 1873 letter. I also made this observation in *The Money-Digging Letters*: “The Salamander letter is composed mostly of short sentences (an average of 12 words in each sentence), whereas the 1873 letter has an average of 73 words per sentence.” If the original punctuation of the 1873 letter is not followed, it is possible to divide it into more sentences. While this would reduce the number of words per sentence, the new sentences would all have to start with the word *and*. The other letters attributed to Harris which I have examined do not seem to use the word *and* to start sentences. It is also interesting to note that the sentences in these letter are about twice as long as those in the Salamander letter. I really do not profess to know how significant the length of sentences and the number of times *and* is used are for determining authorship. It would seem that both could be affected by the contents of the letter. I do feel, however, that the two letters bear little resemblance to each other. The differences have led me to question whether both could be genuine. Although the 1873 letter seems to fit more comfortable with the picture I have obtained of Martin Harris from many other sources, I must admit that I am not absolutely convinced that it is authentic.

If I accept the statement that Martin Harris was a man “of small literary acquirements” when he was over forty years of age, then I find it very hard to believe that he would have improved his style to the point where he could have written the 1873 letter. One explanation for this, however, might be that Martin Harris’s son imposed

his own style into the letter. For that matter, he could have composed the entire letter, and as long as his father signed it, it would be considered the work of Martin Harris, Sen. The most important thing, then, is the signature. In *The Money-Digging Letters* I observed:

One signature that is rather remarkable is the one found on the 1873 letter. Although Martin Harris was supposed to have been “eighty-nine years old” when he wrote it (*The Ensign*, November 1982, page 97), it looks almost the same as the one on the 1829 contract with Grandin (see *The Ensign*, December 1983, pages 41 and 45). It is certainly not what one would expect from a man who was just four month from is ninetieth birthday.

I would expect Harris’s signature to be somewhat shaky by the time he was supposed to have signed the 1873 letter. I have been told by a scholar who has seen the original that it does show evidence of an unsteady hand. If this is the case, the photograph published in *The Ensign* does not seem to reveal it. In any case, after I published *The Money-Digging Letters*, I received a photocopy of an application for a U.S. Military pension which Martin Harris signed on April 21, 1871. Since it was signed 21 months before the 1873 letter was supposed to have been written, I would expect it to be as good as or even better than the one appearing on the letter. Instead, it seems to bear evidence of deterioration. Below is a comparison of Harris’s signatures as they appeared in 1829, 1871 and 1873.

1829 Martin Harris
1871 Martin Harris
1873 Martin Harris

While the 1871 signature does raise some questions about the signature on the 1873 letter, caution must be used. It could be that when Harris signed the document in 1871 he was having an exceptionally bad day. Although I am suspicious of the signature on the 1873 letter, I cannot say for certain that it did not come from Martin Harris’s pen. It is interesting to note, however, that in the letter dated January 1871, which was published in the *Millennial Star*, Harris commented: “I reply by a borrowed hand, as my sight has failed me too much to write myself.” If Harris was having such a severe problem when he was 87, I would think that it would even be worse by the time

he was 89. This could not only affect the appearance of the signature but also its orientation to the writing which had already been dictated. A close examination of the photograph in *The Ensign* shows that the signature is placed perfectly between the lines on the paper and that it is parallel to the other writing.

I do not know whether any physical tests have been made on this letter. The Church's press release dated October 5, 1982, only told that, "Preliminary studies, comparing the handwritings in the letter with known examples of handwritings of both Martin Harris and his son, substantiate the letter's authenticity."

As to the pedigree of the letter, the Church's press release said that Brent F. Ashworth "declined to identify the collectors from whom" he obtained it. We have since learned that it passed through the hands of Mark Hofmann—Hofmann, of course, is the same man who sold the Salamander letter to Steven Christensen. Martin Harris's 1873 letter was addressed to Walter Conrad. Mr. Ashworth was apparently unsuccessful in tracing the letter back to the Conrad family. In the press release, we read as follows:

He said the Martin Harris letter was previously owned by at least three collectors. The first of these, he said, kept the letter in a collection of postmarked covers from early Utah and apparently didn't realize its import.

It would appear, then, that the first person known to have had the letter was a collector. This, of course, provides no real evidences for the document's authenticity. (It could be of some value, of course, if the collector furnished evidence that it was in his collection for a number of years.) In my opinion, the fact that a document has been in the hands of a collector does not really give it a pedigree. A forged document could be funneled through an unsuspecting collector to help convince someone else of its authenticity. The important thing, then, is where the document was before it arrived in the hands of the collector. Although many authentic documents have no pedigree, I would still feel better about the 1873 letter if it could be traced back beyond a collector.

The 1873 letter is worth a great deal of money because it fills a real vacuum for believers in the Book of Mormon. While Harris often claimed that an angel showed him the gold plates of the Book of Mormon (see his two letters published in the *Millennial Star*), he seems to have had little to say about the details of the vision. According to a number of sources, when Harris was questioned about the matter, he said he "never saw the plates with his natural eyes only in vision . . ." (see *Mormonism—Shadow or Reality?* page 96-C; *Gleanings By The Way*, pages 256-257). In the *A Comprehensive History of the*

Church, vol. 1, page 142, Mormon historian B. H. Roberts concluded that "So far as any direct personal statement is concerned, Martin Harris is silent as to the manner in which the plates were shown to him, . . ."

The following appeared in the Church's press release which announced the discovery of the 1873 letter: "Through the years several interviews with Martin Harris have been published, reaffirming his testimony . . . But this letter is the first statement to be discovered since then that carries his signature."

Mormon officials were elated with this remarkable discovery. The managing director of the church Historical Department called it "one of the most significant discoveries regarding [the] coming forth of the Book of Mormon, . . ." (*Deseret News*, Church Section, October 9, 1982). The rejoicing was short-lived, however. Scarcely a year had elapsed when rumors began to surface that another letter by Martin Harris had been discovered. Instead of confirming the divine origin of the Book of Mormon, the Salamander letter turned out to provide devastating evidence against it by linking it to money-digging and the occult.

At any rate, the 1873 letter contains some interesting parallels with two documents printed in the *A Comprehensive History of the Church*, vol. 1, pages 142-143. The first is a statement by Edward Stevenson in which he claimed that Martin Harris gave important details concerning the vision of the gold plates at his (Stevenson's) home. B. H. Roberts' source for Stevenson's statement is listed as *Millennial Star*, vol. 48, pages 367-389. When this reference was checked, it became evident that it was only a reminiscence. It was not published until June 21, 1886—eleven years after Martin Harris's death. Furthermore, Stevenson seemed to have been relying at least to some extent on James T. Wood's memory: ". . . Brother James T. Woods, who is now present while I am writing this article, reminds me that himself and G. D. Keaton were present on that occasion, and asked him [Harris] to explain the manner in which the plates containing the characters of the Book of Mormon were exhibited to the witnesses." Since a number of similar statements by Book of Mormon witness David Whitmer had already been published, it is possible that some of Whitmer's ideas were unconsciously attributed to Harris. However this may be, Stevenson said that Harris related that "the angel stood on the opposite side of the table . . ." The 1873 letter told of "a holy Angel, and before him a table, . . ." Stevenson's account said "the angel . . . took the plates in his hand and turned them over." The Harris letter also claimed that "the Angel did take up the plates and turn them over . . ." Both accounts use the words *to all the world*. Stevenson went on to say that Harris claimed "he lied not." In the 1873 letter Harris said that "I lie not . . ."

While there are a number of interesting parallels between the two accounts, there is one significant difference. Stevenson claimed that Harris spoke of the “angel” who declared that the Book of Mormon was translated correctly, whereas the 1873 letter said it was “the Lord.” This is interesting because the other document used by Roberts in the *A Comprehensive History*, page 143, agrees with the 1873 letter in this matter. This is a report of an interview with David Whitmer which appears on the same page Stevenson’s account ends. In this report we find Whitmer (who seems to be borrowing heavily from the printed “Testimony of the Three Witnesses”) quoted as saying: “. . . I heard the voice of the Lord, . . . declaring that the records of the plates . . . were translated by the gift and power of God.” In the letter attributed to Harris, we read that, “there came a voice . . . saying ‘I am the Lord,’ and that the plated were translated by God . . .”

These parallels, of course, do not prove that the 1873 letter was created from the accounts used by B. H. Roberts. They only show that there was a source available which was printed after Harris’s death which someone could have used to write the letter.

Unscientific?

As I pointed out at the beginning of this article, some of the tests which the experts have completed on the Salamander letter seem to indicate that it is genuine. My study of the text, however, has led me to have serious doubts about its authenticity. In view of the tests, I have to ask myself whether I am being unscientific. Can the case I have built against the document possibly outweigh the findings of the experts? Everyone would probably agree that if the letter mentioned Joseph Smith watching television before he was visited by the spirit, it could not be accepted as authentic no matter what the scientific tests revealed. The evidence furnished by the text of the letter would override all physical tests. With the Salamander letter, however, I must admit that I do not have anything which is that convincing. My doubts are based solely on circumstantial evidence. As I investigated the matter, the evidence seemed to grow, and I found it increasingly difficult to believe in the document’s authenticity. I originally entered into the research with a strong desire to prove that the letter came from the pen of Martin Harris. Unfortunately, however, the inconsistencies seemed to swallow up all my enthusiasm. Some of the evidence against the letter seemed to be similar to that which led me to the conclusion that a large portion of the History of the Church was not actually authored by Joseph Smith as the Church had always claimed. Mormon scholars later admitted that my conclusions about the

matter were correct. Over 60% of the history had been compiled from many sources after Joseph Smith’s death, and references were changed from the third person to the first person to make it appear that Smith was the author (see *Mormonism—Shadow or Reality?* pages 127-135).

At any rate, I now find myself wondering how much I can rely on the scientific tests which are available. I am convinced that the average person could not come up with a forgery that would stand up against these tests. On the other hand, I wonder how difficult it would be for someone who is seriously involved with old documents to create a forgery that would pass the tests. In *The Money-Digging Letters*, I questioned whether handwriting analysis is an exact science and pointed out important cases where the experts have differed. In the same pamphlet I pointed out that we had talked with Bill Kruger, the man who had tested the paper the Salamander letter was written on. Mr. Kruger stated that there was nothing in the chemical composition of the paper which would preclude its having been manufactured around 1830. Mr. Kruger informed us, however, that it is possible for a very clever forger to manufacture paper at the present time which will pass through his tests without detection.

We also talked with Dr. Antonio Kantu, one of the world’s greatest experts on the detection of forgery by testing ink. Dr. Kantu had been approached about making tests on the Salamander letter, but due to a mix up in communications someone else ended up doing the work. In our conversation with Kantu, he said that he could examine the ink to determine if its chemical properties were like those of ink used at this early period, but he would not be able to say for certain that this was actually ink in use in 1830 or if it was added to the paper at that date. He indicated that by merely applying heat to a document, a forger could give the appearance of great age. He knew of no ink test that could be made on the Salamander letter that would be absolutely conclusive.

If I were certain that the tests could not be thwarted by an expert forger, I would feel compelled to accept the document as authentic. As it is, however, the circumstantial evidence makes it very difficult for me to accept the letter as having come from the pen of Martin Harris.

After I published my views concerning the letter, a few scholars began to have questions about its authenticity. I understand that one professor has put forth the idea that the letter was really written by Harris’s wife, Lucy. Since she was known to be an enemy of the Book of Mormon, it is proposed she wrote the letter in an effort to discredit Mormonism. This theory would allow one to accept the results of all the tests except the handwriting analysis and still maintain that the letter is fraudulent. I personally find this idea to be rather hard

to accept. While one could conceivably maintain that Phelps received it as genuine and used quotations from it in the letter published by Howe, it does not explain the other parallels to *Mormonism Unveiled*. If the letter was really written by Lucy Harris in 1830, Phelps probably would have learned that it was a fraud when he talked to Joseph Smith and others connected with the work. These conversations occurred prior to his response to Howe's letter on January 15, 1831. I am of the opinion that if the Salamander letter was actually written in 1830, it probably came from Martin Harris's own pen. If Steven Christensen's researchers can convince me that the letter was in existence before Howe wrote his book, I will have to accept it as a genuine letter.

In *The Money-Digging Letters*, pages 8 and 9, I wrote the following:

We feel that one of the most important tests of the letter's authenticity is its history since it was written. If Mr. Hofmann will tell historians where he obtained the letter, then it may be possible to trace it back to its original source. If, for instance, it had been in the Phelps family for many years, this would add a great deal to a case for its authenticity. We would feel much better about the matter if it could even be traced back prior to 1976 when Knight's account of the finding of the Book of Mormon plates was first published. Mr. Hofmann is usually very cautious about this information, claiming that it will hinder his work as a document collector if people know his sources. . . .

While we sympathize with Hofmann's desire not to reveal the source of his discoveries, we feel that it is very important that historians know the source of these finds. Some kind of compromise need to be worked out.

On August 23, 1984, Sandra Tanner talked to Mark Hofmann concerning the authenticity of the Salamander letter. With regard to the question about revealing the source of the letter, Mr. Hofmann said that he had told the buyer (Steven Christensen) where he obtained it, but could not reveal this information to anyone else. According to Hofmann, we will have to wait until Christensen decides to release this information. I thought that this information might appear in the forthcoming article in *BYU Studies*. Unfortunately, however, I have been told that two other collectors involved in the transaction want to keep a low profile so they can acquire other documents, and therefore information concerning the document's pedigree might not be given. I hope that this is an inaccurate report, but even if these collectors want to keep their identity secret, they could at least tell where the letter originally came from. If no information about the pedigree appears in *BYU Studies*, I will have to assume that it cannot be traced back beyond the hands of collectors. I do hope that

scholars will not side-step this important issue. Too many of the documents which have recently come forth appear to be like Melchisedec, "Without father, without mother, without descent, . . ." (Hebrews 7:3).

In *The Money-Digging Letters*, I reported that Hofmann tried to sell the Salamander letter to the Mormon Church for a large amount of money. In the past Mr. Hofmann acted under the theory that the Church will buy up embarrassing documents to suppress them. This is very clear from his own account of how he handled the discovery of the Joseph Smith III Blessing. In a paper given at the Mormon History Association, Mr. Hofmann stated that he did not want "to come across like I was trying to blackmail the Church," but he acknowledged that if the Church had wanted him to, he would have been "willing to promise not to breathe a word of its existence to anyone . . ." (*Sunstone Review*, August 1982, page 1). That the Salamander letter was offered to the Church before it was sold to Christensen was confirmed by Church spokesman Jerry Cahill (see *Salt Lake Tribune*, September 2, 1984).

The 1873 letter which was attributed to Harris was obviously worth a great deal of money to collectors who were interested in proving Mormonism. The Salamander letter, on the other hand, could have been sold to liberal Mormons, anti-Mormons or even to those who would want to buy it to keep it out of the hands of critics. It has been suggested that a letter written by Joseph Smith's mother sold for \$30,000 (see *Sunstone Review*, September 1982, page 16). I would think that the Salamander letter would bring at least that amount of money.

In conclusion I would like to say that my mind is still open concerning the Salamander letter. If anyone has any information about the letter (either pro or con) I would really like to hear about it. Those who want to know more about the matter should read my preliminary report, *The Money-Digging Letters*. This report sells for only \$1.00 a copy. It includes the interview Martin Harris had with *Tiffany's Monthly* in 1859. This interview alone is worth the price of the pamphlet.

"Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; all things are become new."
(2 Corinthians 5:17)

UTAH LIGHTHOUSE & WORLD NEEDS

When we originally set up Utah Lighthouse Ministry, we indicated that we were going to provide some assistance to Rescue Missions. These organization preach the Gospel and help the poor and afflicted. Since beginning our operations we have been able to give about fifteen hours a week to this ministry. In addition, we purchased a computer for one mission and have furnished another mission with \$100 a month to help pay a chaplain.

Recently the Lord has been moving on our hearts to expand this work into the area of world relief. Although most people are now familiar with the desperate needs in Ethiopia, this is only one of a number of countries where many people are dying of starvation. In 1 John 3:17 we read:

But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?

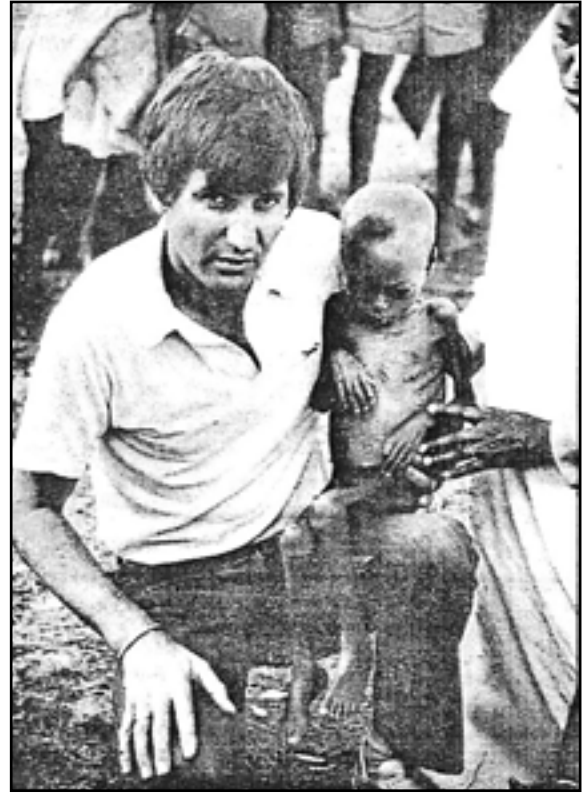
We have been praying about what part the Lord would have Utah Lighthouse Ministry play in the area of world relief, and how we should go about it. Recently our prayers were answered when \$1,000 was designated for relief in Africa—i.e. providing food, medical relief, shelter and a demonstration of true Christian love. Since the Lord has been so gracious in opening this door, we have decided to step out in faith and provide monthly support for five children under the World Vision Childcare Partner plan. We would really like to provide support for hundreds of people, and if the lord provides the means, we will expand this ministry. In the meantime we have our regular expenses. It is necessary that we meet these obligations so that we can continue an effective work among the Mormon people. We do hope, however, that our friends will pray earnestly about Utah Lighthouse Ministry and world relief. We really want the Lord's will in this matter. It seems very obvious from Matthew 25:34-40, that He would have all his children helping to alleviate suffering throughout the world:

Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world:

For I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in:

Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me.

Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, and fed thee? or thirsty, and gave thee drink?



When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and clothed thee?

Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee?

And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.

Psalms 82:3 tells us that we should “Defend the poor and fatherless do justice to the afflicted and needy.” In James 1:27 we read:

Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world.

Those who are interested in helping out with this important ministry can send their tax-deductible contributions to Utah Lighthouse Ministry, P. O. Box 1884, Salt Lake City, Utah 84110.

Important Find?

On November 27, 1967, the *Deseret News* announced the rediscovery of some of the Joseph Smith Papyri. In the *Salt Lake City Messenger* for March 1968, we demonstrated that the piece of papyrus from which Joseph Smith was supposed to have translated the Book of Abraham was among the papyri which had been located at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. When this fragment was translated by Egyptologists it was discovered that it was nothing but an Egyptian funerary document known as the "Book of Breathings." This pagan document had absolutely nothing to do with Abraham or his religion. The original of Fac. No. 1 for the Book of Abraham was also found among the papyri. In the May 1971 issue of the *Messenger*, we quoted from a letter which related that Dr. Hugh Nibley had told someone that "there was more papyri found and that it was discovered in Texas. . . . Mention was made by Nibley that Facsimile No. 2 was among the papyri." Another individual was supposed to have said that Nibley claimed the papyri were in a small town safe which was owned by an antique dealer. Research by Michael Marquardt and Wesley P. Walters led us to believe that the papyri might be in the possession of a Mr. Markham, the owner of Markham's Trading Post in Cleveland, Texas. Mr. Markham apparently died or left the area a number of years ago, and we did not take the time to search for his descendants.

In any case, it has recently been reported that Mark Hofmann has obtained the original Egyptian Papyrus which Joseph Smith used as Fac. No. 2 in the Book of Abraham. It is also claimed that Hofmann plans to secretly sell the document to the Church so that it can remain hidden from the eyes of the public. A prominent Mormon scholar, however, told us that although he had heard the Church was buying the document, he was not aware of any plans for a cover-up. Mr. Hofmann has acknowledged that the original of Fac. No. 2 is in existence and that paste up work has been done on it. Another individual, who has seen the original, claims that there are pencil and ink drawings on the paper it is pasted to which fill in missing portions.

In *Mormonism—Shadow or Reality?* pages 335-343, we maintained that strong circumstantial evidence showed that the original of Fac. No. 2 was badly damaged when Joseph Smith obtained it and that he made false restorations from other pieces of papyrus to fill in missing portions. Some of the Egyptian writing was even inserted upside down! We believe that if Mr. Hofmann or the Church will release the original, it will prove our charges of fraudulent reconstruction. The false restorations and the erroneous translation of the Egyptian writing show beyond all doubt that the Book of Abraham is a work of Joseph Smith's own imagination. ■

Videos Available

On February 16, 1984, the Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in Deerfield, Illinois, established the "Tanner Annual Lectureship on Cults." At that time Sandra delivered two very important lectures, "Is One God Enough: Monotheism to Polytheism" and "Learning the LDS Language: Terminology Differences Between Mormon and Christians." While we were back in the Midwest, Sandra was also interviewed by a television station in Milwaukee. We are now happy to announce that we are having video cassettes (VHS) made of both the lectures and the interview. The first cassette includes both the lectures given at the First Annual Tanner Lecture and sell for \$30. The second cassette contains the interview on the television station in Milwaukee. It is an excellent presentation and is highly recommended. The price is \$20. Please include an additional 10% for handling and shipping. ■

Mormon Archaeology

In an article published in *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*, Summer 1969, Dee Green, who had been deeply involved in archaeological work at the Church's Brigham Young University declared:

The first myth we need to eliminate is that Book of Mormon archaeology exists. . . . no Book of Mormon location is known with reference to modern typography. Biblical archaeology can be studied because we do know where Jerusalem and Jericho were and are, but we do not know where Zarahemla and Bountiful (nor any location for that matter) were or are.

Although some people have been misled into believing the situation has changed since Dee Green made his comments, it is clear that Mormon archaeologists are still in the same predicament. This was pointed out at the Sunstone Symposium held on August 25, 1984. After a non-Mormon scholar made some critical comments concerning the relationship of the Book of Mormon to archaeology, two Mormon anthropologists responded to the challenge. Their comments were anything but encouraging to believers in the Book of Mormon. Ray T. Matheny, Professor of Anthropology at BYU, admitted that what had been found so far is disappointing:

No evidence has been found in the New World for a ferrous metallurgical industry dating to pre-Columbian times. And so this is a king-size kind of problem, it seems to me, for so-called Book of Mormon archaeology. . . . I really have difficulty in finding issue

or quarrel with those opening chapters of the Book of Mormon. But thereafter it doesn't seem like a translation to me. It seems more like a transliteration. And the terminologies and the language used and the methods of explaining and putting things down are 19th century literary concepts and cultural experiences one would expect Joseph Smith and his colleagues would experience. And for that reason I call it a transliteration, and I'd rather not call it a translation after that 7th chapter. And I have real difficulty in trying to relate these cultural concepts as I've briefly discussed here with archaeological findings that I'm aware of. . . .

If I were doing this cold like John Carlson is here, I would say in evaluating the Book of Mormon that it had no place in the New World whatsoever. I would have to look for the place of the Book of Mormon events to have taken place in the Old World. It just doesn't fit anything that he has been taught in his discipline, nor I in my discipline in anthropology, history; there seems to be no place for it. It seems misplaced. . . . I think there's a great difficulty here for we Mormons in understanding what this book is all about. ("Book of Mormon Archaeology," Response by Professor Ray T. Matheny, typed copy transcribed from a tape-recording, pages 21, 30 and 31)

Bruce Warren, who is also a Professor of Anthropology at BYU, said that he hoped that the situation would change in the next 25 years, but he admitted that "today there really is not Book of Mormon archaeology" (*Ibid.*, page 42).

For those who are interested in learning more about the Book of Mormon and archaeology we recommend our book *Mormonism—Shadow or Reality?* ■

NEW BOOKS

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