

THE RELIABILITY OF THE EARLY HISTORY OF LUCY AND JOSEPH SMITH

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Richard L. Anderson is one of the most versatile scholars in the Church. Holder of an L.L.B. from Harvard, and Ph.D. in Ancient History from Berkeley, Professor Anderson now teaches Religion and History at Brigham Young University. In this article, which was delivered at the fourth annual DIALOGUE Board of Editors Dinner, he sheds light on the question of evidence for the early period of Church history, which was raised in the Spring, 1969, issue of DIALOGUE, by Rev. Wesley Walters, and demonstrates to both Mormon and non-Mormon historians the importance and consistency of the most primary of sources, the testimonies of Joseph and Lucy Smith. He has been studying the witnesses of the Book of Mormon for many years and will soon publish a new book on this subject.

The second half of the twentieth century is an exciting time both to live and to pursue research. The field of history as a whole has been characterized by change and revision in past decades. New points of view are responsible for much rewriting of history. But if that is the major source of modification, historical composition, like current theology, will be characterized by impermanent (and perhaps impertinent) fashions. Any historian with the deep love of his discipline hopes for something better.

The study of the past is now characterized by the greater availability of information. Rare publications and inaccessible manuscripts can now be duplicated and placed in the private files of researchers. Indexes and other methods of information retrieval are constantly more available. There is no shortage of records in any historical field — only an acute deficiency of time on the part of the historian. Mormon history is a part of this magnificent proliferation of data and research techniques. Its own archives are in the

midst of classification by professionally competent standards. There is hope for a new era, in which Mormon and non-Mormon may meet on the common ground of objective fact.

Since history attempts to reconstruct complex lives and movements by means of often meager documentation, it would be naïve to believe that research will neatly settle all questions of Mormon history. What can be realistically envisioned, however, is *the better identification of the chief sources from which responsible historians must draw their inferences*. Since history is a discipline whose accuracy is entirely dependent upon the testimony of eyewitnesses of events, a better study of the lives of the early Latter-day Saints will give the perspective from which to evaluate their contemporary publications, diaries, and recollections. Basically, the study of Mormon origins resolves itself into the credibility of the earliest Mormons. Once this question is stated, the difficulty of answering it lies in the terribly conflicting opinions about Joseph Smith from the beginning. But one seasoned in human experience is hardly shocked to find vigorous reformers at the heart of controversy. In terms of probabilities, one ought not to take the angry reaction of some of Joseph Smith's neighbors at face value. One striking at the establishment will stand squarely before a vigorous backlash. The majority of the Smith family left personal recollections of their Palmyra-Manchester life. Yet non-Mormon historiography has virtually canonized antagonistic neighborhood affidavits. Since L.D.S. writing is even now very poorly publicized and distributed, the libraries of this country have typically ignored the main publishers of Salt Lake City and have ordered from trade lists containing interpretations of the Smiths based on hostile sources. Consequently, textbooks and studies are produced in ignorance that Mormon sources are relatively detailed on Mormon origins and present a picture of the Smiths quite opposite the malicious exposures. It is appalling to visit the smaller libraries and theological schools of the United States and see how consistently the typical Mormon collection simply does not make available the Smiths' own recollections of their early lives. Such one-sided selectivity, whether accidental or not, cannot promote authentic history.

In the time of shoddy television and stereotyped movies, one might even doubt that such a thing as authentic history is wanted. Perhaps the age that preferred the Victorian image of oppressed Mormon females to factual sociology is succeeded by our own that prefers historical novels to history itself. What is commonly labeled as the leading biography of Joseph Smith was immediately characterized by Vardis Fisher as "almost more a novel than a biography," on the ground that the author "rarely hesitates to give the content of a mind or to explain motives which at best can only be surmised."¹ The ground of that criticism is the point of responsible history — speculations make fascinating reading, but do not qualify as factual until documented. Good history possesses a toughness of fiber that cannot be achieved by mere

¹Vardis Fisher, "Mormonism and Its Yankee Prophet," *New York Times Book Review Section*, November 25, 1945.

name dropping. That is to say, numerous footnotes are not the proof of history. That is historical which carefully follows the precise course laid out by sources invariably in a position to know — and which confesses ignorance where there is no such course. In the book just mentioned, there is only a partial compliance with source-oriented history.

No Man Knows My History builds its picture of young Joseph Smith as a religious deceiver mainly from "the detailed affidavits of his neighbors."² The story of obtaining these statements must leave an impression of crumbling foundations of any study erected upon these. One Philastus Hurlbut was excommunicated from the L.D.S. Church for sexual immorality and duplicity in his professions of repentance.³ With a clear motive of retaliation, he sought to expose Mormonism and its founder. His hatred against Joseph Smith is fairly measured by a court decree thereafter placing Hurlbut under bond "to keep the peace," based on the finding that the Mormon Prophet "had ground to fear . . . Doctor P. Hurlbut would wound, beat, or kill him, or destroy his property. . . ."⁴ Hurlbut had a thesis to prove, since his work of collecting evidence was promoted and subsidized by an anti-Mormon citizens' committee, who publicly indicated their goals to establish Solomon Spaulding as the real author of the Book of Mormon and to "completely divest Joseph Smith of all claims to the character of an honest man, and place him at an immeasurable distance from the high station which he pretends to occupy."⁵ Nor is it clear that the personal statements gathered by Hurlbut present only the problem of vindictive bias. His documents were shortly published by the editor E. D. Howe, who in later life held the opinion that "Hurlbut was always an unreliable fellow. . . ."⁶

The first scene of activity for this affidavit prospector was Conneaut, Ohio, the former home of the amateur historical novelist, Solomon Spaulding. Taking formal statements from relatives and friends who could equate the names and historical portions of Spaulding's fiction with the Book of Mormon plot and personalities, Hurlbut produced eight different statements that prove the point too well. Mrs. Brodie observes:

It can clearly be seen that the affidavits were written by Hurlbut, since the style is the same throughout. It may be noted also

²Fawn M. Brodie, *No Man Knows My History* (New York, 1946), pp. 23-4.

³*Times and Seasons*, Vol. 6 (1845), pp. 784-5. Also cit. Joseph Smith, *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, (Salt Lake City, 1946), Vol. 1, pp. 352-355. See also Benjamin Winchester, *The Origin of the Spaulding Story* (Philadelphia, 1840), pp. 1-11. Although L.D.S. records spell the surname Hurlbut, it is preferable to follow D. P. Hurlbut's own preference as indicated by his will at the Sandusky County courthouse, Fremont, Ohio, which agrees with the early signature on the certificate discovered with Spaulding's manuscript.

⁴*Journal of the Court of Common Pleas*, Geauga County, Ohio, Book M, p. 193, April 9, 1834. Also cit. *History of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints* (Independence, Missouri, 1951), Vol. 1, pp. 444-446.

⁵*Painesville Telegraph*, January 31, 1834. Changes in the text of quotations are limited to spelling and punctuation.

⁶Ellen E. Dickinson, *New Light on Mormonism* (New York, 1885), p. 73.

that although five out of the eight had heard Spaulding's story only once, there was a surprising uniformity in the details they remembered after twenty-two years. . . . The very tightness with which Hurlbut here was implementing his theory rouses an immediate suspicion that he did a little judicious prompting.⁷

The foregoing statements were taken in Ohio and Pennsylvania in August and September, 1833. After a month, the persistent Hurlbut spent about six weeks in western New York gathering signatures, now on the supposed bad character of the Smiths. About a dozen individual affidavits were taken, but the bulk of the signatures were appended to two collective statements, one of which listed Palmyra residents who agreed that Joseph Smith, Jr. and Sr. were "entirely destitute of *moral character, and addicted to vicious habit.*"⁸ In this case the Prophet publicly repudiated such charges, admitting youthful vitality and human imperfections, but bluntly denying serious wrongdoing.⁹ Faced with Hurlbut and fifty-one signatures on the one hand, and the straightforward avowal of Joseph Smith on the other, Mrs. Brodie finds no difficulty in ruling out "viciousness" and asserts, "his apology can be accepted at full value."¹⁰

Since it is fairly demonstrable that Hurlbut heavily contaminated the Spaulding affidavits with his own theories and language, the question is why the Palmyra-Manchester affidavits should be treated as infallible sources. The non-Mormon historian of revivals, Whitney Cross, is blunt:

Every circumstance seems to invalidate the obviously prejudiced testimonials of unsympathetic neighbors (collected by one hostile individual whose style of composition stereotypes the language of numerous witnesses) that the Smiths were either squatters or shiftless 'frontier drifters.'¹¹

If the negative testimonials are this unreliable on their essential charges, one may wonder why Mrs. Brodie relies upon them in outlining a detailed picture of supposed moneydigging on the part of the Smiths. This is completely open to question as an after-the-fact distortion of the same dimension as the discredited Spaulding story, falsely enshrined in Hurlbut's other affidavits. If Mrs. Brodie finds Joseph Smith more credible in a simple statement than fifty-one neighbors swearing on the same issue, it is time for all Mormon historians to seriously examine the detailed histories of Joseph Smith and his mother as potentially the most reliable sources for Mormon foundations because they are essentially the only ones who wrote about the period from consistent first-hand knowledge.

⁷Brodie, *op. cit.*, pp. 423-4.

⁸E. D. Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled* (Painesville, Ohio, 1834), pp. 261-2.

⁹*L.D.S. Messenger and Advocate*, Volume 1 (December, 1834), p. 40. Howe's preface to *Mormonism Unveiled* was written in October, 1834, and the initial advertisement for the book appeared in the *Painesville Telegraph*, November 28, 1834.

¹⁰Brodie, *op. cit.*, p. 18.

¹¹Whitney R. Cross, *The Burned-Over District* (Ithaca, 1950, 1965), pp. 141-2. Although Cross accepts the treasure hunting thesis of the affidavits, it is open to the identical objections that he raises against the testimonials to laziness.

MORMONISM UNVAILED :

OR,

A FAITHFUL ACCOUNT OF THAT SINGULAR IMPOSITION AND
DELUSION,

FROM ITS RISE TO THE PRESENT TIME.

WITH SKETCHES OF THE CHARACTERS OF ITS
PROPAGATORS,

AND A FULL DETAIL OF THE MANNER IN WHICH THE FAMOUS

GOLDEN BIBLE

WAS BROUGHT BEFORE THE WORLD.

TO WHICH ARE ADDED,

INQUIRIES INTO THE PROBABILITY THAT THE HISTORICAL PART

OF THE SAID BIBLE WAS WRITTEN BY ONE

SOLOMON SPALDING,

MORE THAN TWENTY YEARS AGO, AND BY HIM INTENDED TO HAVE

BEEN PUBLISHED AS A ROMANCE.

.....

BY E. D. HOWE.

.....

PAINESVILLE :

PRINTED AND PUBLISHED BY THE AUTHOR.

1834.

hearts of the disciples with it; they rejoiced in the anticipation of it, and they glorified God that he had ever purposed, in the divine mind, to bring in such a day of glory and rejoicing, as the glorious day of redemption, when they should receive their bodies glorified like the glorious body of the Savior, and obtain the end of their faith, even the salvation of their souls.

The Millenium is that order of things which will follow the second advent of the Savior into the world, when he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and admired of all them that believe. But previous to the time of the Millenium, there must great changes take place in the world, both political and religious—great revolutions will take place among men to prepare the way of the Son of man; and such revolutions, and changes, as never took place since the world began: changes which will effect the whole inhabitants of the world, to the remotest bounds of the universe—no corner so sequestered as not to feel their influence—no cave too deep to hear the sound thereof, and to feel the influence of the unparalleled events which will precede the Millenium.—The way of this day of wonders will be prepared by a general commotion of all nature: even eternity itself shall feel it: the lightnings shall flash, the thunders shall roar, and earthquakes bellow, until the lower creation trembles: angels shall fly to and fro through the midst of heaven, crying to the inhabitants of the earth, and proclaiming the judgments of God against them: Gentile sectarianism shall fall like a torturing fabric, the foundation of which has given way. Such will be the terrors which will precede the Millenium that all faces will gather blackness, and nation will lash against nation, kingdom against kingdom, empire against empire, country against country, and people against people.—The saints of God, which are scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth, shall be gathered together, both men and heavenly messengers will be employed in gathering them until not one shall be left of all the saints of the Most High, but they shall all be gathered together, and shall be taught and instructed until they are prepared for the reception of their King, and then he will unvail the heavens, and all nations, tongues, kindreds, and languages, shall

see him, and at his presence the wicked, which remain, shall perish, and the righteous only be left. And then comes the Millenium, which will last for one thousand years.

BROTHER O. COWDERY:

Having learned from the first No. of the Messenger and Advocate, that you were, not only about to "give a history of the rise and progress of the church of the Latter Day Saints;" but, that said "history would necessarily embrace my life and character," I have been induced to give you the time and place of my birth; as I have learned that many of the opposers of those principles which I have held forth to the world, profess a personal acquaintance with me, though when in my presence, represent me to be another person in age, education, and stature, from what I am.

I was born, (according to the record of the same, kept by my parents,) in the town of Sharon, Windsor Co. Vt. on the 23rd of December, 1805.

At the age of ten my father's family removed to Palmyra, N. Y. where, and in the vicinity of which, I lived, or, made it my place of residence, until I was twenty one—the latter part, in the town of Manchester.

During this time, as is common to most, or all youths, I fell into many vices and follies; but as my accusers are, and have been forward to accuse me of being guilty of gross and outrageous violations of the peace and good order of the community, I take the occasion to remark, that, though, as I have said above, "as is common to most, or all youths, I fell into many vices and follies," I have not, neither can it be sustained, in truth, been guilty of wronging or injuring any man or society of men; and those imperfections to which I allude, and for which I have often had occasion to lament, were a light, and too often, vain mind, exhibiting a foolish and trifling conversation.

This being all, and the worst, that my accusers can substantiate against my moral character, I wish to add, that it is not without a deep feeling of regret that I am thus called upon, in answer to my own conscience, to fulfill a duty I owe to myself, as well as to the cause of truth, in making this public confession of my former uncircumspect walk, and unchaste conversation: and more particularly, as I often acted in violation of those holy precepts which I now came from God. But as the "Articles and Covenants" of this church are plain upon this particular point, I do not deem it important to proceed further. I only add, that I do not, nor never have, pretended to be any other than a man "subject to passion," and liable, without the assisting grace of the Savior, to deviate from that perfect path in which all men are commanded to walk!

By giving the above a place in your valuable paper, you will confer a lasting favor upon myself, as an individual, and, as I humbly hope, subserve the cause of righteousness.

I am, with feelings of esteem, your fellow laborer in the gospel of our Lord.

JOSEPH SMITH jr.

The Palmyra-Manchester residents who knew the Smith family did not uniformly consider them disreputable. If a dozen individual statements were made against the early Mormons at the instigation of an enterprising apostate, two dozen individuals from the same area joined the new religion and sacrificed because of their faith in Joseph Smith's story.¹² A total of sixty-two names were printed in two blanket condemnations of the Smiths as "destitute of moral character" or "a lazy, indolent set of men."¹³ But Lucy Smith describes an illuminating incident that can now be definitely dated in 1825 that speaks to the contrary. Like many another impoverished pioneer family, the Smith family deferred payments on their land contract. Mother Smith reports that a new land agent was falsely informed that the family was unreliable and unable to meet their final payment, which was counteracted by Hyrum's immediate visit to their family friend, Dr. Robinson. Indignant, he responded as follows:

[T]he old gentleman sat down, and wrote at some considerable length the character of the family — our industry, and faithful exertions to secure a home, with many commendations calculated to beget confidence in us with respect to business transactions. And, keeping this writing in his own hands, he went through the village, and in an hour procured sixty subscribers.¹⁴

Sixty-two negative signatures are obviously balanced by the some sixty favorable signatures plus Dr. Robinson's that Hyrum took to the Canandaigua land agent. On closer examination of the negative signatures, the question is how well most of the individuals knew the Smiths. Lucy Smith indicates that the family physician was Dr. McIntire, whose name is notably absent in the 1833 condemnations.¹⁵ No one in Palmyra was more responsible than the son-in-law of Dr. Robinson, Alexander McIntire. He was repeatedly president of the county medical association and a community leader. Mother Smith describes two occasions when he went out of his way to defend the Smiths against persecutions in the community.¹⁶ The major financial transaction that Joseph Smith ever had in Palmyra was the printing of the Book of Mormon, and the practical businessman who negotiated with him and performed the job, Egbert B. Grandin, is also notably absent from the negative affidavits. The support of Dr. Gain Robinson in procuring a testimonial for the Smiths is impressive; his obituary in 1831 stated that he was "deeply lamented by a large circle of relatives, and this whole community."¹⁷

¹²Pomeroy Tucker furnishes the names of this many converts in the vicinity of Palmyra and Manchester. *Origin, Rise, and Progress of Mormonism* (New York, 1867), pp. 38-9. Cf. the printed letter from Palmyra, March 12, 1831: "Their numbers may be twenty in this vicinity . . ."; *Painesville Telegraph*, March 22, 1831.

¹³Howe, *op. cit.*, pp. 261-2.

¹⁴Lucy Smith, *Biographical Sketches of Joseph Smith* (Liverpool, 1853), p. 95. This incident occurred no later than December 20, 1825, the date at which the title to the Smith farm was transferred to Lemuel Durfee, as discussed below.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, p. 87.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, p. 113, p. 141.

¹⁷*Wayne Sentinel*, June 26, 1831. Lucy Smith mentions another half-dozen individuals who befriended the family in various difficulties and can be presumed to have a favorable opinion of them.

Several Mormon converts investigated the Smiths' community reputation before Hurlbut, and they were not dissuaded from accepting the reliability of the Prophet's family. John Corrill, who had known Sidney Rigdon in Ohio prior to his conversion, wrote the following words after he had left the L.D.S. Church and no doubt is accurate on Rigdon's general experience in the Palmyra area:

[A]fter Rigdon had joined the Church in Kirtland, he was afraid that he had been deceived, so he and Edward Partridge went to the State of New York to inquire further into it. Rigdon said he went to the enemies of the Church to find out their feelings and objections, and then went to its friends and heard their story, and became satisfied that it was true. . . .¹⁸

Lucy Smith remembered the arrival of the two men at their temporary home in Waterloo, N.Y., and Partridge's report of their visit to the Smiths' former neighborhood of Manchester:

[H]e had made some inquiry of our neighbors concerning our characters, which they stated had been unimpeachable, until Joseph deceived us relative to the Book of Mormon. . . . Having heard that our veracity was not questioned upon any other point than that of our religion, he believed our testimony. . . .

What Hurlbut sought to prove is obvious from examining the most redundant themes of his affidavits. In this study, there is only space for evaluating his main and most important contention. Almost every Palmyra-Manchester statement contains a reiteration of the theme of no occupation but moneydigging:

The general employment of the family was digging for money.

A great part of their time was devoted to digging for money. . . .

At that time [1820], they were engaged in the money digging business, which they followed until the latter part of the season of 1827.

It is well known, that the general employment of the Smith family was money digging and fortune-telling. . . . It was a mystery to their neighbors how they got their living.

They were a family that labored very little — the chief they did, was dig for money.

Their great object appeared to be, to live without work. While they were digging for money, they were daily harrassed by the demands of their creditors, which they never were able to pay.²⁰

A simple study of the economics of the Smith family in this period can determine the accuracy of this main contention of the affidavits. After a short period of merchandising upon arrival in the Palmyra area about 1816, the next identifiable livelihood for the men is operating the Manchester farm. Lucy's account reads:

¹⁸John Corrill, *A Brief History of the Church of Christ of Latter Day Saints* (St. Louis, 1839), p. 17.

¹⁹Lucy Smith, *op. cit.*, p. 170.

²⁰Howe, *op. cit.*, pp. 232, 237, 240, 249, 251, 260.

My husband and his sons, Alvin and Hyrum, set themselves to work to pay for one hundred acres of land, which Mr. Smith contracted for with a land agent. In a year we made nearly all of the first payment, erected a log house, and commenced clearing. I believe something like thirty acres of land were got ready for cultivation the first year.²¹

Anyone familiar with the patterns of settlement of western New York will recognize the above description as accurately reflecting the physical and economic realities of the period. All land in this region was purchased on contract, often from land agents representing large interests. The forest had to be cleared, which was done in stages, with the building of the inevitable log house in the beginning. Orsamus Turner, the respected historian of western New York, was in 1819 a hard-working printer's apprentice in his late teens, and of the Smiths and their farm he later wrote: "Here the author remembers to have first seen the family, in winter of '19, '20, in a rude log house, with but a small spot underbrushed around it."²² One may test Lucy's recollection of purchasing a hundred acres. Title to this land was never recorded in the Smith name, as will shortly be discussed. However, Lemuel Durfee, who purchased the land while they resided on it and permitted their continued tenure, alluded both to the Smiths and this property in his will, referring to "the Everton lot, situate in the northwest corner of the Town of Manchester . . . on which Joseph Smith now lives, containing about one hundred acres of land."²³ Lucy's memory on this point is precise.

All of the Smith recollections of this early period mention the hard work of the whole family for survival. William, for instance, consistently attributed stories of family laziness to community resentment after Joseph had told of his religious experiences. A typical statement follows, in direct answer to mention of the charge that the family was "lazy and indolent":

We never heard of such a thing until after Joseph told his vision, and not then, by our friends. . . . We cleared sixty acres of the heaviest timber I ever saw. We had a good place, but it required a great deal of labor to make it a good place. We also had on it from twelve to fifteen hundred sugar trees, and to gather the sap and make sugar and molasses from that number of trees was no lazy job.²⁴

Lucy Smith indicates that wheat became the staple crop of the farm,²⁵ which was generally true for the region, but there were other major sources of income. She describes the "cooper's shop" across the road from the cabin and relates brief employment of Joseph Smith, Sr. at this trade in Canan-

²¹Lucy Smith, *op. cit.*, p. 70.

²²Orsamus Turner, *History of the Pioneer Settlement of Phelps and Gorham's Purchase, and Morris' Reserve* (Rochester, 1852), p. 213.

²³Will of Lemuel Durfee, Surrogate's Court, Wayne County Courthouse, Lyons, New York.

²⁴Interview of J. W. Peterson with William Smith, *Zion's Ensign*, Vol. 5 (1894), No. 3, p. 6, also cit. (with minor inaccuracies) *Deseret Evening News*, Jan. 20, 1894. Tucker, *op. cit.*, p. 14 also refers to the Smiths' "making of maple sugar and molasses in the season for that work . . ." Lucy Smith, *op. cit.*, p. 95 also refers to their "sugar orchard."

²⁵Lucy Smith, *op. cit.*, p. 92.

daigua.²⁶ Pomeroy Tucker refers to the "manufacture and sale of black-ash baskets and birch brooms" on the Smith farm, handicrafts utilizing coopering skills.²⁷ This type of activity is specifically confirmed by the 1820 census, which listed professions in three categories: agriculture, commerce, and manufactures. Of the three male adults listed in the Smith family, two are placed in "agriculture" and one is placed under "manufactures."²⁸ This probably means that Joseph Smith, Sr. plied his trade of coopering and similar production, whereas Alvin and Hyrum, then twenty-one and twenty, were engaged mainly in the heavy work of farming. The instructions to the census takers on this point in 1820 read as follows:

[I]n the column of manufactures will be included not only all the persons employed in what the act more specifically denominates manufacturing *establishments*, but all those artificers, handicrafts men, and mechanics, whose labor is preeminently of the hand, and not upon the field.²⁹

The two young adolescent sons, Samuel and Joseph, were not listed with their family on the 1820 census. This tends to confirm another Smith recollection. William said:

Whenever the neighbors wanted a good day's work done they knew where they could get a good hand, and they were not particular to take any of the other boys before Joseph either.³⁰

Joseph recalled the realities of the general period about 1823 in like terms:

[W]e were under the necessity of laboring with our hands, hiring by days works and otherwise as we could get opportunity; sometimes we were at home and sometimes abroad, and by continued labor were enabled to get a comfortable maintainance.³¹

The 1820 enumeration was held by law during August and September, and the twelve-year-old Samuel and the fourteen-year-old Joseph were likely boarded temporarily at another farm for some type of harvest labor. Another instruction to the enumerators seems to apply to them:

It follows . . . that any person who, at the time of taking the number of any family, has his usual abode in it, is nevertheless, not to be included in the return of that family, if his usual place of abode was, on the first Monday of August, in another family.³²

A survey of the Smiths' sources of income must include the "distinct" recollections of Orsamus Turner about the teenage Joseph: "He used to come into the village of Palmyra with little jags of wood. . . ."³³ Pomeroy Tucker stated that the Smith family retailed cord-wood, as well as small crops and

²⁶*Ibid.*, pp. 108-9, p. 165

²⁷Tucker, *op. cit.*, p. 14.

²⁸US Census, Ontario County, New York, Farmington Township, Family 524.

²⁹"Instructions to Marshals — Census of 1820," cit. Carroll D. Wright, *History and Growth of the United States Census* (Washington, D. C., 1900), p. 135.

³⁰Interview of Peterson with William Smith, *op. cit.*

³¹*Times and Seasons*, Vol. 3 (1842), pp. 771-2, also cit. Joseph Smith, *op. cit.*, p. 16-17.

³²"Instructions to Marshals — Census of 1820," *op. cit.*, pp. 135-6.

³³Turner, *op. cit.*, p. 213.

vegetables, and he also claimed that on holidays the Smiths, particularly Joseph, did not rest, since they sold "cake and beer in the village on days of public doings."⁸⁴ Lucy Smith also indicates that she supplemented the family income by painting oil cloth and selling it.⁸⁵ All in all, the number of activities of the Smiths is a devastating refutation to the group affidavit claiming them to be "lazy" and "indolent." One of the most glaring inconsistencies in Mormon historiography is the repeated insistence of Pomeroy Tucker that the Smiths lacked "habits of profitable industry" right after describing five different farming, manufacturing, and trading activities. His community-imposed theory evidently did not fit his own recollections. The Prophet's younger brother William is far more believable when he insists that his family was so intent on economic survival that they worked continually and did not have the unoccupied time alleged in the Hurlbut depositions.⁸⁶

It must weigh heavily in the balance of history that Oliver Cowdery, later a discriminating and astute lawyer, lived a school term in the Smith home in Manchester in 1828-9 and defended the Prophet and his family as "industrious, honest, virtuous, and liberal to all."⁸⁷ As far as opportunity to observe, this single opinion based on day-by-day experience at close quarters should count for more than all of the Hurlbut-Howe affidavits, which caricature their subjects instead of measure them as the able people that their later careers show them to be. Cowdery said in direct reference to the Palmyra-Manchester statements that he personally had "the testimony of responsible persons" to contradict the character assassination of the affidavits.⁸⁸ Although the historian would like to have the depositions of New York neighbors who respected the Smiths, perhaps it says something for the confidence of Joseph Smith in his own position that he declined to fire a return salvo of testimonials to his good character. But at least one person is known who fits Cowdery's description (and Rigdon's and Partridge's) of non-Mormon neighbors who respected the honor and industry of the Smiths.

When the chief compositor for the Book of Mormon, John H. Gilbert, was approached in 1879 regarding available recollections of the Smiths, he wrote:

Mr. Orlin Sanders, who lives about two miles south of the village, was well acquainted with the Smith family, and probably recollects many things I know nothing about.⁸⁹

⁸⁴Tucker, *op. cit.*, p. 14.

⁸⁵Lucy Smith, *op. cit.*, pp. 70, 107.

⁸⁶See, e.g., Sermon of William B. Smith at Deloit, Iowa, June 8, 1884, cit. *Saints' Herald*, Vol. 31 (1884), p. 643: "After my father's family moved to New York State, in about five years they cleared sixty acres of land, and fenced it. The timber on this land was very heavy. . . . We built a frame dwelling house and out buildings. My brothers Joseph and Hyrum had to work. Joseph did not have time to make gold plates."

⁸⁷*L.D.S. Messenger and Advocate*, Vol. 2 (1835), p. 200.

⁸⁸*Ibid.*

⁸⁹Letter of J. H. Gilbert to Mr. Cobb, Feb. 10, 1879, Palmyra, New York. A microfilm of this ms. was kindly loaned to me by Larry C. Porter. Palmyra sources and interviewers are divided on the spelling of the surname. Saunders must be correct, since that is the spelling in the will and estate papers at the Wayne County courthouse, Lyons, N.Y.

Whether Gilbert followed a local practice of shortening the full name of Orlando Saunders or was inexact in his recollection is not clear. However, his recommendation of Saunders as in a firsthand position to know about the Smiths squares with Orlando's birth to a pioneer Palmyra family in 1803, the Saunders' residence in the immediate neighborhood of the Smith farm, and the intriguing fact that Orlando's sister Melissa married Willard Chase, whose name appears on a Hurlbut affidavit.⁴⁰ Saunders was interviewed by the able Kelley brothers, RLDS leaders of legal and documentary orientation, and he volunteered no lore about money digging, but instead made pointed remarks about the practical charity of the Smiths and Joseph Smith's consistency in attributing the Book of Mormon to the coming of an angel. On the specific issue of industry, he said:

[T]hey have all worked for me many a day; they were very good people. Young Joe (as we called him then) has worked for me, and he was a good worker; they all were. I did not consider them good managers about business, but they were poor people; the old man had a large family.⁴¹

The proof that Saunders is accurately reported here is the independent interview about a year earlier of Frederic G. Mather, a non-Mormon professional writer, whose paraphrase of Saunders' words fits precisely the key ideas recorded by the Kelleys:

Orlando Sanders . . . tells us that the Smith family worked for his father and for himself. He gives them the credit of being good workers, but declares that they could save no money.⁴²

If the Hurlbut-Howe affidavits are unreliable in their basic claim about the life of the Smiths in New York, can the historian trust the only remaining sources, the histories of Joseph and Lucy Smith? Their consistency in subtle interrelations of independent recollection must be impressive, but one may relate each to non-L.D.S. public records that verify certain details of the Smith stories. It has been shown above that Lemuel Durfee's will proves the Smith occupancy of a farm of about one hundred acres, in precise agreement with the later recollection of Lucy Smith — and that the 1820 census fits in detail the recollections of Lucy, Joseph, and William of the family economics of that time. The Manchester location of the family in that census also fits the chronology of Lucy and Joseph regarding the move to that farm before the time of the First Vision, a fact independently verified by a road survey of

⁴⁰See Thomas L. Cook, *Palmyra and Vicinity* (Palmyra, New York, 1930), pp. 235-7.

⁴¹*Saints' Herald*, Vol. 28 (1881), p. 165. Since Cook indicates that "Orlando came into possession of the homestead" at his father's death in 1825, several years exist when he might have employed the Smiths himself. The brief obituary notice of Enoch, the father, appeared in the *Wayne Sentinel*, October 18, 1825.

⁴²Frederic G. Mather, "The Early Days of Mormonism," *Lippincott's Magazine*, Vol. 36 (1880), p. 198. An interview is confirmed by another quotation from Orlando Saunders, p. 205. For Mather's biography, see *National Cyclopaedia of American Biography*, Vol. 20 (New York, 1929), pp. 492-3.

June 13, 1820, in the Palmyra Township records, indicating that "Joseph Smith's dwelling house" was already standing at that time.⁴³

The chronology of the family history is further supported by the existing gravestone of Alvin, which reads: "In memory of Alvin, son of Joseph and Lucy Smith, who died November 19, 1823, in the 25th year of his age." By this time, according to Joseph and his mother, the young Prophet had received the visit of the angel, in which Alvin devoutly believed. And there are other verifications of the accuracy of the Smith history of this early period that necessitate outlining some events of the years 1825 and 1826 rather fully.

The first incident that Joseph relates after Alvin's death is working for Josiah Stool, who paid for excavation of a supposed Spanish silver mine in Harmony Township, Pennsylvania. Joseph evidently discouraged the project at the outset and toward the end "prevailed with the old gentleman to cease digging. . . ."⁴⁵ A set of statements about this period exists from Joseph Smith's in-laws and their Pennsylvania friends. Although appearing in the same publication with E. D. Howe's first publication of the Hurlbut affidavits, they were apparently procured by Howe's direct correspondence independent of Hurlbut.⁴⁶ Prejudiced and even vitriolic against Joseph (who had among other crimes stolen Emma from them), the statements from the Hale circle allege superstitious mineral witching on the part of Joseph and also claim that he confessed that there was no merit in such practices. Since it is doubtful that the Hales had firsthand knowledge of Joseph engaging in such practices, it is only fair to accept his explanation that he did not take the project seriously, a point which when stated to the Hales may have been wrongly interpreted as a confession of former involvement.⁴⁷ For all of their

⁴³Palmyra Town Record, Book 1, p. 221.

⁴⁴Photographs of the inscription are in the L.D.S. Historian's Office. The notice of Joseph Smith, Sr., published the following September 29, 1824, in the *Wayne Sentinel*, verifies the 1823 death date.

⁴⁵*Times and Seasons*, Vol. 3 (1842), p. 772, also cit. Joseph Smith, *op. cit.*, p. 17. Cf. Lucy Smith, *op. cit.*, p. 92: "Joseph endeavored to divert him from his vain pursuit, but he was inflexible in his purpose and offered high wages. . . ."

⁴⁶Letter of E. D. Howe to Isaac Hale, February 4, 1834, Painesville, Ohio, cit. *Susquehanna Register*, May 1, 1834, cit. *New York Baptist Register*, Vol. 11 (1834). Howe's letter discloses that Hale had written to Hurlbut but that Howe wished verification and sought an attested statement "to lay open the imposition to the world." A battery of sworn statements were made in the Harmony, Pennsylvania area by Hale and his neighbors, published first in the newspaper at the county seat of Susquehanna County, and then reproduced in slightly abbreviated form by Howe.

⁴⁷The Smith histories and the Hale affidavit all agree that the contact of the Hales with Joseph was through the latter boarding at Isaac's home. Since Isaac Hale told Joseph that he "followed a business that I could not approve," one must assume that Hale never participated in the digging operations at the "Spanish Mine" and therefore relied on hearsay for Joseph Smith's supposed "peeking" activities in locating treasure. What the Hales knew personally was that Joseph Smith associated with a questionable operation (a point of view shared by Joseph Smith), but these statements really do not prove that the young Prophet was mystically locating treasure unless the Hales were themselves involved. In relation to what Isaac and Alva remember Joseph saying to them, what is assumed to be ridiculous is likely to be distorted in that direction in the telling.

prejudice, the affidavits from the Hale circle are far closer to the known claims of Joseph Smith regarding the Book of Mormon than Hurlbut's Palmyra-Manchester productions. Mather interviewed Harmony residents about 1880 who remembered Joseph Smith as "a good and kind neighbor," which shows that the Pennsylvania affidavits also tell less than the full story about the young Prophet.⁴⁸

Joseph dates his first Pennsylvania stay as October, 1825, and Isaac Hale's statement identifies the month of November for the Spanish mine project, with termination "about November 17, 1825," a close approximation of the Prophet's chronology. Lucy tells the dramatic story of the loss of their partially paid-up property immediately after Joseph came back from Pennsylvania to his parent's home in New York:

Soon after his return, we received intelligence of the arrival of a new agent for the Everson land, of which our farm was a portion. This reminded us of the last payment, which was still due; and which must be made before we obtain a deed of the place.⁴⁹

Lucy gives the due date of this final payment, perhaps already an extension, as December 25, 1825. ⁵⁰Joseph Sr. and Jr. had set out again for the Susquehanna area to collect money from their wheat crop. As discussed earlier, certain parties falsified the Smiths' reliability and purchased their farm from the new land agent. Lucy indicates that this agent was incensed at the misrepresentations, and in a complicated series of negotiations the Smiths finally interested an older Mr. Durfee in purchasing the property and permitting their continued occupancy, with the deed recalled and cancelled from the misrepresenting parties. The documentary evidence that Lucy is correct here has been given in part. Lemuel Durfee's will identified the Manchester property as that of the Smiths' and referred to its extent of "about one hundred acres." Since it was made on June 12, 1826, a half year after the above incidents, and refers to "the Everton lot . . . on which Joseph Smith now lives," it also proves the tenancy of the Smiths after Durfee took title.⁵¹ The names and date on the actual deed harmonize precisely with Lucy Smith's history. This instrument of record is dated December 20, 1825, in which Eliza Evertson and David B. Ogden, executors under the will of Nicholas Evertson, convey ninety-nine and one-half acres in Manchester to Lemuel Durfee of Palmyra.⁵²

In narrating the loss of the farm, Lucy Smith is somewhat inexact in only one respect. She indicates that Joseph had gone to Pennsylvania to bring Emma home as his wife at the close of 1825, when the Smiths' land title failed to mature. She also recalls that Hyrum had been recently married at

⁴⁸Mather, *op. cit.*, pp. 200-1.

⁴⁹Lucy Smith, *op. cit.*, p. 92.

⁵⁰*Ibid.*

⁵¹See n. 23 *supra*.

⁵²Book 44, pp. 232-234, Ontario County, New York. The deed no doubt contains the correct spelling of Evertson, and the "Everson" of Lucy Smith and the "Everton" of the Durfee will are approximations.

this time. Both events are in correct sequence, at the right season of the year, but are evidently placed a year too early as Lucy recalled them two decades later. Hyrum's marriage (November 2, 1826) was given in the correct year in the genealogical section of Lucy's memoirs, perhaps from written records.⁵³ This dating is authenticated by its report in the *Wayne Sentinel*, November 24, 1826.⁵⁴ Joseph gives his marriage date as January 18, 1827,⁵⁵ and Lucy perhaps confused the business trip to Pennsylvania about a year earlier with the marriage trip to Pennsylvania. It would be easy for Mother Smith to associate the *marriages* with the events of late 1825, when in reality the *romances* were taking place then. But it is remarkable that when Lucy Smith's dictated history is inaccurate in chronology, the deviation is confined to narrow limits.⁵⁶

To restate the question posed at the outset, which are the authentic sources of early Mormon history? The chief actors, the Smith family, produced two narrative histories of the early period from the vantage point of eyewitnesses. At literally scores of critical points it can be demonstrated that the framework of external events related by Joseph and Lucy is historically reliable. This paper has merely surveyed those verifications from the move to Manchester about 1818 up to 1827, when the Book of Mormon drama began in earnest.⁵⁷ The counter-sources, the Manchester-Palmyra affidavits, are clearly not factual in their main allegation, the supposed indolence of the Smiths. In summary, the histories of Joseph and Lucy Smith in this period prove to be basically accurate in every case where there is some vital or legal record that permits verification of the story. The Smith histories are correct on the move to Manchester prior to 1820, the status of the father as a craftsman and the younger sons' boarding out at that date, as also the erection of the first Smith house in Manchester by then. Alvin's gravestone establishes his death in 1823, as the Lucy-Joseph chronology requires. The loss of the farm follows in 1825, the precise time stated by Lucy's narrative, which correctly furnishes the number of acres and the grantor Evertson and the grantee Durfee, and the will of the latter proves the tenancy of the Smiths upon this land after title was lost. The marriage of Hyrum the following year is also factual, fitting approximately into Lucy's reconstruction from memory. This independent verification of about a dozen facts in the most remote period of the Smith histories is an impressive record. The question raised is obvious: if Joseph and Lucy Smith have written authentic history on a practical level, can they not also be trusted in reporting the revelations that motivated their lives?

⁵³Lucy Smith, *op. cit.*, p. 40.

⁵⁴The notice reads: MARRIED — In Manchester . . . Mr. Hiram Smith, to Miss Jerusha Barden."

⁵⁵Citation at n. 31, *supra*.

⁵⁶See examples in Richard Lloyd Anderson, "Circumstantial Confirmation of the First Vision Through Reminiscences," *Brigham Young University Studies*, Vol. 9 (1969), pp. 390-1.

⁵⁷See *ibid.* for several striking confirmations of Lucy Smith's basic accuracy from Palmyra sources around 1830.

Like a law case, the point of history is to allow the participants to tell their own story. The historian of Mormonism really disqualifies himself if he cannot empathize with the spiritual experience at the heart of this new religion. If this is preposterous, then perhaps he should write about other phases of Mormonism where his naturalistic bias does not so limit him. History may be poorly equipped to affirm or deny the truth of Joseph Smith's visions, but it can nevertheless assess the credibility of the historical tradition that asserts those visions. Credit ratings are compiled by instances of reliability. Whereas one can document the lack of such reliability in Hurlbut's Palmyra-Manchester affidavits, the factual content of the histories of Joseph and Lucy Smith is demonstrably high. The logical conclusion from these realities is that the narratives of the Prophet and his mother must stand as the essential sources for Mormon origins.