FARMS Paper

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Joseph Smith’s Translation of the Book of Mormon
Stephen D. Ricks

The Translation of the Book of Mormon: Basic Historical Information
John W. Welch and Tim Rathbone

Joseph Knight’s Recollection of Early Mormon History
Dean Jessee

Summary:
In the first two papers Stephen Ricks, John Welch, and Tim Rathbone discuss what Joseph Smith and his companions said about translating the Book of Mormon. They document the intense period of activity from April to June 1829, during which nearly all the translation took place. In the third paper, Dean Jessee presents and supplements Joseph Knight’s firsthand account of early church history events involving Joseph Smith and others.
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"The Translation of the Book of Mormon: Preliminary Report on the Basic Historical Information" reflects substantial research but is not ready for final publication. It is made available to be critiqued and improved and to stimulate further research.

"Joseph Knight's Recollection of Early Mormon History" is reprinted by permission from BYU Studies (autumn 1976): 32–39. Reproduction of this paper is prohibited.
Joseph then went to Mr Stowels [Stowell], where he had lived sometime before. But Mr Stowell could not pay him money for his work very well and he came to me perhaps in November and worked for me until about the time that he was Married, which I think was in February. And I paid him the money and I furnished him with a horse and Cutter to go and see his girl Down to Mr. Hails. And soon after this he was Married and Mr Stowell moved him and his wife to his fathers in Palmyra Ontario County.

Nothing material took place until toad fall the forepart of September. I went to Rochester on Business and returned By Palmyra to be there about the 22nt of September. I was there several Days. I will say there was a man near By By the name Samuel Lawrance. He was a Sear [Seer] and he had Bin to the hill and knew about the things in the hill and he was trying to obtain them. He [Joseph Smith] had talked with me and told me the Conversation he had with the personage which told him if he would Do right according to the will of God he mitre obtain the plates the 22nt Day of September next and if not he never would have them. Now Joseph was some afraid of him [Samuel Lawrance] that he mitre be a trouble to him. He therefore sith his father up to Sams as he Called

Josiah Stowell, born in Winchester, New Hampshire, 22 March 1770, had extensive property holdings on the Susquehanna River near South Bainbridge, New York. The Stowells moved to the area from southeastern Vermont where, because of their service during the Revolutionary War, they had been deprived of their property and forced to leave the state.

The spelling of Stowell's name follows a 7 February 1843 Josiah Stowell letter written by a son to John S. Fullmer. The letter is in the Church Archives.

Joseph Smith married Emma Hale on 18 January 1827 at South Bainbridge, New York.

Joseph Smith records that at the time of his marriage he was employed by Josiah Stowell, H.C. 1:17.

Lucy Smith records this incident as follows: "My husband soon learned that ten or twelve men were clubbed together, with one Willard Chase, a methodist class leader, at their head, and what was sill more ridiculous, they had sent sixty or seventy miles for a certain conjuror, to come and divine the place where the plates were stopped.

"We supposed that Joseph had taken the plates, and hid them somewhere, and we were apprehensive that our enemies might discover their place of deposit. Accordingly, the next morning, after hearing of their plans, my husband concluded to go among the neighbours to see what he could learn with regard to the plans of the adverse party. The first house he came to, he found the conjuror and Willard Chase, together with the rest of the clan. Making an errand, he went in and sat down near the door, leaving it a little ajar, in order to overhear their conversation. They stood in the yard near the door, and were devising plans to find ‘Joe Smith’s gold bible,’ as they expressed themselves. The conjuror seemed much animated, although he had travelled sixty miles the day and night previous.

"Presently, the woman of the house, becoming uneasy at the exposures they were making, stepped through a back door into the yard, and called to her husband, in a suppressed tone, but loud enough by Mr. Smith, ‘Sam, you are cutting your own throat.’ At this the conjuror bawled out at the top of his voice, ‘I am not afraid of any body—we will have them plates in spite of Joe Smith or all the devils in hell!’"

"When the woman came in again, Mr. Smith laid aside a newspaper which he had been holding in his hand, and remarked, ‘I believe I have not time to finish reading the paper now.’ He then left the house, and returned home."

"Joseph Smith, on returning home, asked Emma, if she knew whether Joseph had him near night to see if there was any signs of his going away that night. He told his father to stay till near Dark and if he saw any signs of his going you tell him if I find him there I will thrash the stumps with him. So the old man came a way and saw no thing like it. This is to shoe [show] the troubles he had from time to time to obtain the plates."

"So that night we all went to Bed in the morning I got up and my Horse and Carriage was gone. But after a while he came home and he turned out the Horse. All Come into the house to Brackfirst [breakfast]. But no thing said about where they had Bin. After Brackfirst Joseph Cald me into the other Room and he set his foot on the Bed and leaned his head on his hand and says, ‘I am Disappointed’. ‘Well,’ says I, ‘I am sorry.’ ‘Well,’ says he, ‘I am grateley Dissopointed, it is ten times Better then I expected.’ Then he went on to tell the length and width and thickness of the plates, and said he, ‘they appear to be Gold.’ But he seemed to think more of the glasses or the urim and thummim then [than] he Did of the Plates, for, says he, ‘I can see any thing; they are Marvelous. Now they are written in Caracters and I want them translated.’"

Now he was Commanded not to let no [any] one see those things. But a few for witness at a givin time. Now it soon got about that Joseph Smith had found the plates and peopel Come in to see them But he told them that they Could not for he must not show [show] them. But many insisted and ofered money and Property to see them. But, for keeping them from the Peopel they persecuted and abused them [him] and they [the Smiths] were obliged to hide them [the plates], and they hid them under a Brick harch in the west Room. About this time Came this Samuel Lawrance and one Beeman of a grate Rodsmen and wanted to talk with him."

"Joseph Smith, Biographical Sketches, pp. 102-103.

On the trouble that attended his obtaining of the plates, Joseph Smith recorded, "I soon found out the reason why I had received such strict charges to keep them safe, and why it was that the messenger had said that when I had done what was required at his hand, he would call for them. For no sooner was it known that I had them, than the most strenuous exertions were used to get them from me. Every stratagem that could be invented was resorted to for that purpose. The persecution became more bitter and severe than before, and multitudes were on the alert continually to get them from me if possible." Joseph Smith, H.C. 1:18.

"Knight may have been confused on this point. According to Lucy Smith, Alva Beaman helped Joseph Smith conceal the plates, Biographical Sketches, p. 108. This work spells the name "Braman . . . of Livonia;" however, the manuscript at p. 115 reads "Beaman . . . of Livonia.""

"Brigham Young probably had the rodsman in mind when he said: ‘I well knew a man who, to get the plates, rode over sixty miles as many times the same season they were obtained by Joseph Smith. About the time of their being delivered to Joseph Smith by the angel, the friends of this man sent for him, and informed him that they were going to lose that treasure, though they did not know what it was. The man I refer to was a fortuneteller, a necromancer, an astrologer, a soothsayer, and possessed as much talent as any man that walked on the American soil, and was one of the wickedest men I ever saw. The last time he went to obtain the treasure he knew where it was, and told where it was, but did not know its value. Allow me to tell you that a Baptist deacon and others of Joseph's neighbors were the very men who sent for this necromancer the last time he went for the treasure. I never heard"
But I was not in easy Circumstances and I did not know what it mite amount to and my wife and famely all against me about helping him. But I let him have some little provisions and some things out of the Store a pair of shoes and three Dollars in money to help him a little. In January his father and Samuel [Smith] came from Manchester to my house when I was busy a Drawing Lumber, I told him they had traveled far enough. I would go with my sly and take them down to morrow. I went Down and found them well and they were glad to see us. We conversed much. In the morning I gave the old man a half a Dollar and Joseph a little money to Buoy paper to translate, I having But little with me. The old gentleman told me to come and see him once in a while as I could I went home followed teaming till the last of March the sleighing [sleighing] Being good. I told my wife I must go Down[n] and see Joseph again. "Why do you go so soon, for," said she. Says I, "Come go and see," And so we went with me. Next morning we went Down and found them well and were glad to see us. Joseph talked with us about his translating and some revelations he had received and from that time my wife began to believe and continued a full believer till she died and that was the 7 Day of August 1831.

In the spring of 1829 Oliver Cowdry a young man from Palmyra went to see old Mr Smith about the Book that Joseph had found. And he told him about it and advised him to go Down to Pennyslvy and see for himself and to write for Joseph. He went Down and received a Revelation Concerning the work and he was Convinced of the truth of the work and he agreed to write for him till it was done. Now Joseph and Oliver came up to see me if I could help him to some provisons. They having no way to Buy any. But I was at Catskill. But when I came home my folks told me what Joseph wanted. But I had engaged to go to Catskill again in the next Day and I went again and bought a Baral of Mackrel and some lined paper for writing. And when I came home I bought some nine or ten Bushels of grain and five or six Bushels taters [potatoes] and a pound of tea, and I went Down to see him and they were in want. Joseph and Oliver were gone to see if they could find a place to work for provisions. But found none. They returned home and found me there with provisions, and they were glad for they were out. Their family consisted of four, Joseph and wife, Oliver and his [Joseph's] Brother Samuel. Then they went to work and had provisions enough to last till the translation was done. Then he agreed with Martin Harris to print. They therefore agreed with E Gran- grin to Print five thousand Copies which was printed and bound at Palmyra in the Spring of 1830.

Now in the spring of 1830 I went with my Team and took Joseph out to Manchester to his Father. When we was on our way he told me that there must be a Church formed But did not tell when. Now when we got near to his fathers we saw a man some Eighty Rods before us cross the street with a Bundle in his hand. "There," says Joseph. "there is Martin going a Cross the road with some thing in his hand." Says I, "How Could you know him so far?" Says he, "I believe it is him," and when we came up it was Martin with a Bunch of Mormon Books. He came to us and after compliments he says, "The Books will not sell for no Body wants them. Joseph says, "I think they will sell well." Says he, "I want a Commandment." "Why," says Joseph, "fulfill what you have got." "But," says he, "I must have a Commandment." Joseph put him off. But he insisted three or four times he must have a Commandment.

We went home to his fathers and Martin with us. Martin stayed at his Fathers and slept in a Bed on the Floor with me. Martin awoke me in the nite and asked me if I felt any thing on the Bed. I told him no. Says I, "Did you?" "Yes, I felt some thing as Big as a grait Dog Sprang upon my Brest." Says I, "Was you not misteken." "No," says he. "It was so," I sprang up and felt, But I could see nor feel nothing. In the morning he got up and said he must have a Commandment to Joseph and went home. And along in the after part of the Day Joseph and Oliver received a Commandment which is in Book of Covenants page 174. I stayed a few Days waiting for some Books to be Bound. Joseph said there must be a Church Biiltup. I had been there several Days. Old Mr Smith and Martin Harris come forord [forward] to be Babbised[d] for the first. They found a place in a lot a small Stream ran throu and they were Babbised in the Evening. Because of persecution. They went forward and was Babbised Being the first I saw Babbised in the new and everlasting Covenant. I had some thots to go forord, But I had not [a]d the Book of Mormon and I wanted to oxeman [examine] a little more 1 Being a Restorationer and had not oxamin ed so much as I wanted to. But I should a felt Better if I had a gone forward. But I went home and was Babbised in June with my wife and famely.

There was one thing I will mention that evening that old Brother Smith and Martin Harris was Babbised. Joseph was field with the Spirit to a grate Degree to see his Father and Mr Harris that he had Bin with so much he Bast [burst?] out with great and joy and seamed as tho the world could not hold him. He went out into the Lot and appeared want to get out of site of every Body and would sob and Crie and seamed to be so full that he could not live. Oliver and I went after him and came to him and after a while he came in. But he was the most wrot upon that I ever saw any man. But his joy seemed to Be full. I think he saw the grate work he had Begun and was Despris to Carry it out. On the sixth Day of April 1830 he Begun the Church with six members and received the following Revelation Book of Covenants page 177. They all kneel down and prayed and Joseph gave them instructions how to build up the Church and exhorted them to Be faithful in all things for this is the work of God.

Now after he had set things in order and got a number of Mormon Books we returned home. Then in June as I Before said I and my famely and a number more were Babbised, Joseph being present and Confirmed them. And through that season there were many Babbised in many places.

*Joseph Smith's History records the death of Polly Knight and the Prophet's attendance at the funeral. "On the 7th, I attended the funeral of Sister Polly Knight, the wife of Joseph Knight, Sen. This was the first death in the Church in this land, [Missouri] and I can say, a worthy member sleeps in Jesus till the resurrection." *HC, 1:199.

**Doctrine and Covenants 19.**

**Doctrine and Covenants 21.**