

New Documents and Mormon Beginnings

Dean C. Jessee

Proclaiming that the preparatory work for the second coming of Christ was about to commence and that the gospel in its fulness was to be preached to all nations to prepare a people for the millennial reign, the Prophet Joseph Smith and his associates recorded that significant events took place in western New York in the 1820s to inaugurate this new era—events in which divine messengers communicated with men on earth as in biblical times.¹ With their religion rooted in these historical realities, Latter-day Saints have shown more than casual interest in their past—particularly those formative years of the 1820s. Every scrap of information dealing with that early period is read with care.

For those who study the beginnings of Mormonism, contemporary sources are few. Most of what is known of the seminal events prior to 1830 has come from recollections and secondhand reports. Few documents written at the time pertain to the First Vision, the coming forth of the Book of Mormon, and the restoration of the priesthood. This is due largely to the fact that the record-keeping enterprise of Mormonism did not begin until the organization of the Church in 1830.

The work of retrieving and preserving the sources of early Mormon history effectively commenced in 1832 when Joseph Smith's scribe, Frederick G. Williams, began copying letters and documents into a record book. However, only four items in this early volume are dated prior to the Church's organization. Until a few years ago, available original sources pertaining to the pre-1830 decade included little more than two manuscripts of the Book of Mormon; an 1829 deed by which Joseph Smith obtained a plot of ground from his father-in-law in Harmony, Pennsylvania; a reproduction of "caractors" evidently copied from the Book of Mormon plates in 1828; and an agreement between Martin Harris and Joseph Smith, Sr., for selling copies of the Book of Mormon. Within the last five

years, several other early manuscripts have surfaced. These include an 1828 transcript of characters believed to have been copied from the Book of Mormon plates and carried by Martin Harris to eastern linguists; an 1829 letter of Lucy Mack Smith showing the involvement of the Smith family with the Book of Mormon more than a year before the book was published; an 1829 agreement signed by Joseph Smith, Martin Harris, and E. B. Grandin for publication of the Book of Mormon; and two documents deeding Martin Harris land to Thomas Lakey. More recently, two additional manuscripts have been found that pertain to the early period of Mormonism: an 1825 letter claimed to have been by Joseph Smith to Josiah Stowell and an 1830 letter purportedly written by Martin Harris to William W. Phelps. These documents have evoked considerable interest primarily because they deal with phenomena foreign to our present experience, and heretofore only obliquely mentioned in Mormon history.

As often occurs with new information which may not fit comfortably into one's world view, these documents have raised challenging questions—questions in this case about Joseph Smith's involvement in occult or mystical activities and its impact upon traditional understanding. But before we consider content, the starting point for discussion must begin with the sources themselves. The primary purpose of this article is to examine these new documents as a foundation upon which investigation can intelligently proceed.

JOSEPH SMITH'S 1825 LETTER TO JOSIAH STOWELL

In 1825, Josiah Stowell, a well-to-do southern New York farmer, living near South Bainbridge in Chenango County, organized a group of men to locate an old Spanish mine believed to be in the area of Harmony, Pennsylvania, and believed to contain coined money and bars or ingots of gold or silver. Having heard of Joseph Smith as a "famous seer of lost or hidden treasure," Josiah Stowell hired the young man from Palmyra, New York, to assist in the location of the mine.² Isaac Hale, who later became Joseph Smith's father-in-law, recalled that he first met Joseph in November 1825. Isaac wrote that Joseph Smith was employed by a group of "money diggers," that Joseph could locate treasure by looking in a stone placed in his hat, and that Joseph, his father, and several others boarded at the Hale residence in Harmony while they were employed looking for the mine.³ In the 1838 History of the Church, Joseph confirmed that he had worked for Josiah Stowell, adding that after a

short time he had persuaded Stowell to discontinue his search.⁴ Beyond this, little is said in the History about the incident, or about Joseph's involvement in locating lost objects or treasure.

As early as 1983, copies of an 18 June 1825 letter purportedly written by Joseph Smith from Canandaigua, New York, to Josiah Stowell at Harmony, Pennsylvania, began circulating in the Mormon community. According to one account, the letter was obtained in the East by Salt Lake City collector Mark Hofmann, authenticated by the noted New York manuscript dealer Charles Hamilton, and sold to the LDS church.⁵ Focusing upon Stowell's search for the Pennsylvania mine, the letter indicates previous contact between him and the Smith family and reveals Joseph Smith's expertise in locating hidden treasure, suggesting a reason why Stowell went so far from the site of his digging to get Joseph's help.

Canandagua June 18th 1825

Dear Sir

My Father has shown me your letter informing him and me of your Success in locating the mine as you Supposs but we are of the oppinion that since you cannot dig more untill you first discover if any valluables remain you know the treasure must be guarded by some clever spirit and if such is discovered so also is the treasure so do this take a hasel stick one yard long being new Cut and cleave it Just in the middle and lay it asunder on the mine so that both inner parts of the stick may look one right against the other one inch distant and if there is treasure after a while you shall see them draw and Join together again of themselves let me know how it is Since you were here I have almost deccided to accept your offer and if you can make it convenient to come this way I shall be ready to accompany you if nothing happens more than I know of I am very respectfully

Joseph Smith Jr

Mr Josiah Stowell

Harmony Pa

The letter is written on a single sheet of unlined paper that measures 8 1/4" x 11 1/4". The address side of the letter contains the circular, red, Canandaigua handstamp in use at the time, and the handwritten number 12 1/2 is the designated amount for sending a single page letter between 80 and 150 miles in 1825, which would include the distance between Canandaigua, New York, and Harmony, Pennsylvania (see photo reproduction on p. 417).⁶

Written in Joseph Smith's nineteenth year, this letter, if authentic, is the earliest known holograph produced by him and shows writing skill on a par with anything he later wrote. The handwriting, spelling, grammar, and punctuation compare favorably with other Joseph Smith writings. The even flow of the letter and the common understanding that Joseph was incapable of writing very coherently due to a lack of education raise the question as to whether the wording of the letter is that of Joseph, Jr., or his father, who, as a schoolteacher, may have been more articulate than his son. A comparison of prose of the two men and a study of the autograph writings known to be the Prophet's suggest that the document could well have been produced by the younger Joseph. The personal pronouns used in the letter and the use of certain connectives—typical of young Joseph's style—bear this out.

Although late in her life Emma Smith said that Joseph "could neither write nor dictate a coherent and well-worded letter,"⁷ her statement was made in response to a question about the authorship of the Book of Mormon and in that context is more clearly a rhetorical defense of its divine origin than a precise statement of Joseph's writing ability. His personal writings do not portray the illiterate frontiersman some have perceived. A significant aspect of the letter is that at this early age Joseph appears to be widely known and respected for his ability as a seer and has a confident command of the situation presented to him.

MARTIN HARRIS'S 23 OCTOBER 1830 LETTER TO WILLIAM W. PHELPS

The second item for consideration here is the Martin Harris letter to William W. Phelps, dated 23 October 1830. The letter is dated six months after the organization of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and seven months after the publication of the Book of Mormon, in which Harris's signature appears as a witness.

In 1830, Martin Harris was forty-seven years old and had lived in Palmyra, New York, thirty-eight of those years. During that time he had served in positions of civic trust and had, by his hard work and industry, become a man of substance. He had been several years an overseer of highways and was a veteran of the War of 1812. But his association with Joseph Smith had battered his reputation in the community and impaired his domestic relationship with his wife. In 1829 he guaranteed payment for the publication of the Book of Mormon and eventually was forced to sell 151 acres of his land when

proceeds from other sources did not materialize to pay the printing debt. When Harris left Palmyra, it became a source of bewilderment to his prejudiced townsmen that he would abandon one of the best farms in the area to follow what they perceived as a deception and hoax. Furthermore, when the Book of Mormon was published in 1830, Martin Harris's name appeared with two other witnesses testifying that an angel had showed them the plates which contained the record, that they had seen the engravings thereon, and that they heard the voice of God declare it was true—an experience they described as “marvellous.” However, when the Latter-day Saints left Ohio in 1838, Martin Harris remained behind. He did not rejoin the Saints for more than thirty years, arriving in Utah in 1870 at the age of eighty-seven, where he spent his last five years.⁸

At first, Harris approached the Book of Mormon through the eyes of a skeptic and sought in several ways to verify Joseph Smith's claims. But following his experience as a witness, his reaction to the book was one of absolute assurance, even though his attachment for the Saints was less than consistent. Repeatedly throughout his life, Martin Harris testified of his experience as a witness to the Book of Mormon, and several times he related his understanding of its origin. John A. Clark, a resident of Palmyra in the late 1820s, wrote in a later recollection that Martin Harris came to his house in the fall of 1827 and told him he believed “an important epoch had arrived—that a great flood of light was about to burst upon the world, and that the scene of divine manifestation was to be immediately around us.” By way of explanation, according to Clark, Harris said that “a Golden Bible had recently been dug from the earth”; that “an angel of God” had appeared to Joseph Smith in a dream and showed him “where it had been deposited for thousands of years . . . [;] that there had been a revelation made to [Joseph Smith] by which he had discovered this sacred deposit, and two transparent stones, through which, as a sort of spectacles, he could read the Bible”; and that it contained information which “would settle all religious controversies and speedily bring on the glorious millennium.”⁹

In 1829, while seeking a printer for the Book of Mormon, Martin Harris, in what is probably the earliest account of the circumstances in which the Book of Mormon originated, told a Rochester, New York, editor that Joseph Smith had been visited “by the spirit of the almighty in a dream, and informed that in a certain hill in that town was deposited a Golden Bible, containing an ancient record of

divine origin.” According to the report, Harris added that “after a third visit from the same spirit in a dream, [Joseph] proceeded to the spot, removed the earth, and there found the bible, together with a large pair of spectacles.”¹⁰

Orsamus Turner, another Palmyra resident, in his 1851 *History* recalled Martin Harris as “an honest worthy citizen” but given to “religious enthusiasm.” According to Turner, several local citizens remembered Harris’s version of the discovery of the Book of Mormon that “the Prophet Joseph, was directed by an angel where to find, by excavation . . . the gold plates; and was compelled by the angel, much against his will, to be the interpreter of the sacred record.”¹¹

Finally, in an 1859 interview Martin Harris said that upon hearing the rumors circulating about the gold plates he questioned members of the Smith family separately to see if their stories agreed and found that they did. He finally met Joseph Smith, took him aside, and asked about the plates. Joseph told Harris that “an angel had appeared to him, and told him it was God’s work” and that “the plates must be translated, printed and sent before the world.” But Martin Harris remained skeptical, unless “the Lord will show me that it is his work.” Later that day, after praying to God “to show me concerning these things,” his petition was answered. God “then showed me that it was his work, and that it was designed to bring in the fullness of his gospel to the gentiles to fulfill his word. . . . He showed this to me by the still small voice spoken in the soul. Then I was satisfied that it was the Lord’s work.” Martin Harris noted further that opposition soon threatened Joseph with mob violence, whereupon he gave Joseph money to pay his debts and move to his father-in-law’s place in Pennsylvania.¹²

In light of statements in which Martin Harris related events connected with the coming forth of the Book of Mormon in the more traditional framework familiar to Latter-day Saints, some readers of the 1830 Harris letter have wondered how authentic it could be, considering how it seems to differ from what he said elsewhere, both before and after 1830. Others have speculated as to how much of the account is based upon conversations with Joseph Smith, Jr., how much on statements of Joseph Smith, Sr., and how much was influenced by neighborhood rumor or folk culture. Let us first consider the document itself:

Palmyra Oct 23d 1830

Dear Sir

Your letter of yesterday is received & I hasten to answer as fully as I can – Joseph Smith Jr first come to my notice in the year 1824 in the summer of that year I contracted with his father to build a fence on my property in the corse of that work I aproach Joseph & ask how it is in a half day you put up what requires your father & 2 brothers a full day working together he says I have not been with out assistance but can not say more only you better find out the next day I take the older Smith by the arm & he says Joseph can see any thing he wishes by looking at a stone Joseph often sees Spirits here with great kettles of coin money it was Spirits who brought up rock because Joseph made no attempt on their money I latter dream I converse with spirits which let me count their money when I wake I have in my hand a dollar coin which I take for a sign Joseph discribes what I seen in every particlar says he the spirits are greived so I through back the dollar In the fall of the year 1827 I hear Joseph found a gold bible I take Joseph aside & he says it is true I found it 4 years ago with my stone but only just got it because of the enchantment the old spirit come to me 3 times in the same dream & says dig up the gold 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 & held the treasure & would not let me have it because I lay it down to cover over the hole when the spirit says do not lay it down Joseph says when can I have it the spirit says one year from to day if you obay me look to the stone after a few days he looks the spirit says bring your brother Alvin Joseph says he is dead shall I bring what remains but the spirit is gone Joseph goes to get the gold bible but the spirit says you did not bring your brother you can not have it look to the stone Joseph looks but can not see who to bring the spirit says I tricked you again look to the stone Joseph looks & sees his wife on the 22d day of Sept 1827 they get the gold bible I give Joseph \$50 to move him [p. 1] down to Pa Joseph says when you visit me I will give you a sign he gives me some hiroglyphics I take them to Utica Albany & New York in the last place Dr Mitchel gives me a introduction to Professor Anthon says he they are short hand Egyptian the same what was used in ancent times bring me the old book & I will translate says I it is made of precious gold & is sealed from from view says he I can not read a sealed book— Joseph found some giant silver specticles with the plates he puts them in a old hat & in the darkness reads the words & in this way it is all translated & written down – about the middle of June 1829 Joseph takes me together with Oliver Cowdrey & David Whitmer to have a view of the plates our names are appended to the book of Mormon which I had printed with my own money – space & time both prevent me from writing more at presant if there is any thing further you wish to inquire I shall attend to it

W W Phelps Esq

Yours Respectfully
Martin Harris

The letter was addressed to William W. Phelps, the thirty-eight-year-old printer and editor of the Ontario *Phoenix* at Canandaigua, New York. The circumstances that called forth the Harris letter are not known, except that it was written in response to an inquiry by Phelps. The Harris letter apparently appealed to Phelps—less than three months after receiving it, he wrote to a prominent friend stating that he was acquainted with several persons connected with the Book of Mormon, including Martin Harris; that Harris had declared to him “upon his soul’s salvation that the book is true”; and that he, Phelps, had read and investigated the book and found it to be authentic.¹³

While traveling to Palmyra on 30 April 1831 to further investigate the Book of Mormon, Phelps was arrested and imprisoned at Lyons, New York, ostensibly for a small debt but actually “for the purpose, as I was informed, of ‘keeping me from joining the Mormons.’ ” Although Phelps was unable to join the infant church until 10 June 1831, he wrote that his heart was with the new movement from the time he first became acquainted with the Book of Mormon. After his baptism, W. W. Phelps served as editor and publisher of the Church’s newspaper, *The Evening and the Morning Star*, wrote several hymns still sung today, was an ardent missionary, and was an active Latter-day Saint at the time of his death in Utah in 1872.¹⁴

The Harris letter was obtained in 1983 by Lyn Jacobs, a Salt Lake City manuscript collector. Prior to that the letter had been in the possession of Elwyn Doubleday, a dealer in rare postal memorabilia, at Alton Bay, New Hampshire. According to Doubleday, the Harris letter was very probably a part of a large collection of New York handstamped letters he obtained in 1982. In January 1984 the letter was purchased by Salt Lake City businessman Steven Christensen and in April 1985 was given by him to the LDS church.

The unusual content of the letter, and the prospect of its being the most extensive Martin Harris holograph known to the time of its discovery, convinced Christensen to have it carefully examined by competent authorities to determine its authenticity. To accomplish this he sent the letter to Kenneth W. Rendell, a Newton, Massachusetts, autograph collector. During the course of investigation, the letter was submitted to specialists for tests of specific physical properties such as paper and ink. Noted forensic specialist Albert Lyter, after testing the ink, stated, “There is no evidence to suggest that the examined document was prepared at other than during the stated

time period." And Rendell concluded, "There is no indication that this letter is a forgery."¹⁵ (The text of these reports on the tests conducted in 1985 is reproduced on pp. 422–24.) In connection with these tests, and other observations, the following information is relevant:

1. The letter, which measures 8 13/16" x 11 9/16", is written on both sides of a single sheet of machine-lined paper and, if authentic, would be among the earliest samples of machine-lined paper. Tests show the paper to be consistent with other samples of the time period. According to Rendell, there is a possibility it was manufactured at the Nathaniel Rochester paper mill, built in 1810 at Dansville, New York, near Palmyra. (See photo reproductions on pp. 418–20.)

2. The type of ink used to write the letter was determined by chemical testing. Minute samples of the ink were removed from the letter and observed by microscope under the effect of chemical reagents. The ink was determined to be of the iron-gall type in wide use at the date appearing on the letter.

3. Before envelopes came into common use about 1845, letters were sent by folding the written sheet into a small size, secured with a wax seal, then addressed and stamped with a handstamp on the outside surface. Opening a letter would often leave a small hole or tear (caused by the breaking of the seal) and creases made by the original folds. The wax seal which produced the hole in the paper when the Harris letter was opened and the missing paper that had adhered to the wax match perfectly.

4. The double line oval Palmyra handstamped postmark on the Harris letter matches in size, color, and wording the postmark on letters mailed at Palmyra, New York, between 1829 and 1834.

5. The number 6 on the address panel, designating the six-cent cost for sending the letter, agrees with the zone rate in effect in 1830 for sending a single sheet a distance of not more than thirty miles. The 6 is written in a different color ink than the rest of the letter (see photo reproduction on p. 421).

While the foregoing observations show the Harris letter to be consistent with other writings of the time period, and illustrate a number of technical requirements necessary if one were to try to duplicate a letter written in 1830, they do not prove Harris's authorship. The question of authorship ultimately rests upon an analysis of the handwriting.

A search of Harris papers produces three manuscripts bearing his name, each written and signed in a different hand. These are the 1830

letter being considered here, a 4 September 1846 power of attorney written at Kirtland, Ohio,¹⁶ and a 13 August 1855 letter to Brigham Young, also dated at Kirtland.¹⁷ A comparison of these writings with fourteen known Harris signatures, spanning the years from 1829, when he was forty-six years old, to 1873, when he was in his ninetieth year, point to the 1830 Harris letter as the authentic Martin Harris (see signatures on p. 425). Nine of the signatures come from the period of his life prior to 1860, after which date his writing shows deterioration possibly due to illness or age.

Because similarities can be found in all handwriting of the same language and time period, it is the unique, habitual differences that provide the identifiers of a person's writing. For conclusive results, a substantial amount of known handwriting is desirable as a standard by which to measure a questioned document. However, unique peculiarities in limited samples are informative. In the case of Martin Harris, only eight letters of the alphabet are represented in his signature, but his writing of them reveals peculiar characteristics also found in the text of the 1830 letter to Phelps—characteristics that are not found in the other two manuscripts. One of these is his lowercase *r*, which he frequently wrote almost like a *v*.¹⁸

A handwriting comparison of the Harris letter is not limited to the samples of his signature alone. Accompanying one of his autographs are the additional words "Palmyra County of Wayne."¹⁹ If these few additional words were written by Harris, they reveal further similarities to the text of the 1830 letter and indicate that Harris signed his name in the same style as his normally written prose.

Beyond this, additional writing appearing to be that of Martin Harris has recently come to light in an 1829 *Book of Common Prayer* that once belonged to his father Nathan Harris. Besides the signature of Nathan Harris and the date 1833 in the front of the book, a blank page contains the lines, "If this book should wander and you this book should find please to kindly remember that what you hold is mine."²⁰ Although the entry is unsigned, this writing is in the same hand as the 1830 Martin Harris letter. Significantly, the origin of the prayer book can be traced to the Harris family. The volume was purchased, along with an 1830 edition of the Book of Mormon, by Deseret Book Company in June 1973 from an LDS church member who had obtained it from a non-Mormon descendant of Martin Harris's brother Emer, living in California. In September 1985 the book was sold by Deseret Book Company to Mark Hofmann, and in

October was obtained by the LDS Church Historical Department. Whether or not the inscription was in the book at the time the Harris family owned it has been questioned.

Neither the Martin Harris 1846 power of attorney nor the 1855 letter to Brigham Young compares favorably with the Harris signatures and other writing, whereas the 1830 letter to Phelps does. Another indication the 1855 letter is not the authentic Harris writing is the misspelling of his name—"Martain." While Harris was not a flawless speller, in existing matching signatures he never misspelled his own name.

On the basis of information available at the time of the initial testing, evidence seemed to favor authenticity of the Harris letter.

Public objections to the Harris and Smith letters have clouded perceptions of the letters and include statements that are untrue and misleading.²¹ Ronald Vern Jackson has questioned the two letters on the basis of their handwriting.²² He reasons that Harris, who was born in 1783, must have learned to write in the last decade of the eighteenth century, that handwriting styles changed drastically from place to place and decade to decade, that the 1830 letter differs from writings produced by people educated in the 1790s, and therefore that the 1830 letter could not have been written by one who had learned to write in the 1790s. Jackson claims that certain letters of the alphabet in the 1830 Harris letter are inconsistent with writing of the time period in which the letter was written. He argues that the *I* and *J* are indistinguishable in authentic 1830 writings but are clearly different in the 1830 letter. He adds that the double *s* in the 1830 letter could not have been made by someone who learned to write in the 1790s. On the grounds set forth here, practically everything written in Joseph Smith's time is suspect. The characteristics Jackson states were not found in writings of the 1790s are in many writings of that period but are not limited to that time.

Jackson further maintains that the spelling in the 1830 letter is far too accurate to be Martin Harris's and that the capital *I* used in the 1830 letter "differs too much to have come from Harris's pen." But where is the authentic Harris handwriting for making these conclusions?

To complete his case, Jackson maintains that the size of the Harris letter leads him to believe that the paper upon which it was written was a blank page torn out of "an old county history" and soaked in water containing ashes or coal dust to give the appearance of age. But this speculation is made without his study of the original.

Typical of Jackson's rationale is his statement that "after having read more than 12,000 reels of micro-filmed data of pure 1850 documents" he finds the so-called Harris letter is highly unusual "for 'every' hump and bump, for every letter in the words with no scrunching of letters together."

Jackson also claims that Joseph Smith did not write, dictate, or sign the 1825 letter. Having discovered supposed handwriting differences in the 1825 letter compared with other Joseph Smith writings produced from nine to nineteen years later and in a variety of situations, Jackson concludes that the letter is a fraud. However, since no one writes with typewriter precision, it is not difficult to find variations in Joseph Smith's writing, especially over a period of time and among materials produced under various circumstances. One sees, for example, that in documents accepted as genuine, Joseph Smith wrote the letter *s* in almost every conceivable way. Consequently, to find different forms of the letter *s* in his writings is no proof of multiple authorship. In his assessment of Joseph Smith's writing, Jackson focuses upon a few random differences but then fails to consider the Smith individualities, some of which alone, and all of which in combination, establish the unique handwriting profile that is Joseph Smith's. It is on this basis that the authenticity of the 1825 letter must be determined.

Another objector to the Harris letter focuses upon differences of literary style between the 1830 letter and other Martin Harris writings.²³ Claiming to have made a careful comparison of sentence structure, rhetoric, grammatical usage, word frequency, and content of the 1830 letter with "known" Harris writings, Rhett Stephens James has argued that the 1830 letter could not have been produced by Martin Harris. The "known" Harris communications used by James to establish the style base for comparing the 1830 letter are (1) Harris's report of his 1828 visit to Charles Anthon as recorded in Joseph Smith's History of the Church; (2) the handwritten 13 August 1855 letter of Martin Harris to Brigham Young; (3) an interview of Martin Harris by Joel Tiffany in January 1859, published in *Tiffany's Monthly*; (4 and 5) two letters of Martin Harris to Hanna B. Emerson, the first dated 23 November 1870, and the second dated January 1871, as published in *The True Latter Day Saints' Herald*; and (6) a handwritten letter of Martin Harris to Walter Conrad dated 13 January 1873.²⁴ James states that based on literary style alone these writings could not have been written by the same person who wrote the 1830 letter.

Style analysis is an attempt to reduce uncertainty about authorship of an unknown writing by comparing its properties with information obtained from writings whose authorship is known. However, as Elinore Partridge has noted, "A stylistic analysis, even an objective, statistical analysis, is not as certain a means of establishing authorship as handwriting."²⁵ While successful work has been done in author attribution by comparing literary style, not every situation lends itself to this procedure. When Frederick Mosteller and David Wallace undertook to determine the authorship of several anonymous *Federalist* papers, the issue was plainly identified and the components for the study clearly defined. The question was whether Alexander Hamilton or James Madison wrote twelve disputed *Federalist* papers. There were sufficient known writings of both men produced about the same time and on the same general subject as the questioned material to allow Mosteller and Wallace to find vocabulary and syntactic evidence that distinguished each author. On the basis of their work they were able to conclude with high probability that Madison was the author of the disputed papers.²⁶

In the case of Martin Harris it is doubtful that sufficient genuine Harris writings exist—and they certainly do *not* exist for the time period in question—to make a valid stylistic comparison with the 1830 letter. James's work, therefore, is unconvincing on several grounds. For instance, he states that "known" Harris writings average thirty words per sentence as contrasted to thirteen words per sentence in the 1830 letter. The problem here is that *none* of the "known" Harris writings were actually penned by Harris. His "known" works exist only in a published form or in the hand of someone who wrote for Harris: the style and the punctuation, therefore, cannot be identified as Harris's. Furthermore, the 1830 letter itself has no punctuation. What James measures as thirteen- and thirty-word sentences are actually his own creation (by providing punctuation), on the one hand, and that of scribes and editors writing or publishing for Harris, on the other.

In 1963, A. Q. Morton used sentence length and computer wordprint analysis to show that the Apostle Paul wrote only five of the fourteen epistles attributed to him in the New Testament, and that the remaining letters were written by at least five other people.²⁷ But the eminent linguist Gustav Herdan questioned Morton's work on his failure to define what he meant by sentences when none of the epistles were available as punctuated by the Apostle. Herdan pointed

out that the absence of original punctuation introduced an uncertainty that made sentence length almost impossible as a test for determining authorship.²⁸ John Ellison also challenged Morton's work on the grounds that the computer wordprint could not take into consideration changes in a writer's attitude that might affect his literary style over a period of time. To illustrate his point, Ellison noted that computers are no more competent than the people who program them. He suggested that by using wordprints to compare the Declaration of Independence with letters of Thomas Jefferson to his wife in June 1776 it could be shown that Jefferson did not write the Declaration or that someone else named Tom was corresponding with Mrs. Jefferson. Furthermore, Ellison, using Morton's variables in a computerized noncontextual wordprint analysis of Morton's essays, found that Morton's own work was written by several different people. Ellison concluded that there are wide limits of tolerance that must be built into such literary studies.²⁹

In the Harris case, James clearly places more trust in stylistic analysis than the procedure will allow—even if we had a reliable corpus of Harris material for comparison. To assume that every individual habitually uses language in a characteristic way which is unique and that by identifying the characteristics a trained eye can create a stylistic register for any person may not be realistic. Studies have shown that a person's style can change with time and situation. In an article on the use of literary style to determine authorship in forensic situations, Richard Bailey cited three examples from the prose of Patty Hearst—one from a diary she kept during a tour of Europe, another from a university examination, and a third from a transcript of a recorded conversation with a childhood friend. The samples differed drastically in style, ranging from simple, choppy, unplanned conversation to fluent, complex composition. Bailey's conclusion was that without some knowledge of their provenance it would be very difficult to attribute these samples to the same author. While a person's fingerprints do not change, his writing style often does.³⁰

Even if the materials in question accurately reflected Harris's style, another difficulty in making a reliable stylistic comparison of Martin Harris's other "writings" with the 1830 letter is the problem of the diversity of the material. One would hardly expect the report, an interview, and four letters written in a variety of settings over a forty-five-year period to compare favorably with an 1830 letter

written in an entirely different context. Using the literary style of heretofore available Harris-related sources as a standard to measure the authorship of the 1830 letter presents the same problem that a stylistic comparison of Joseph Smith's published and dictated works with his holograph writings would produce—the problem of comparing the real Joseph Smith with a version of Joseph filtered through the minds of scribes, ghostwriters, and editors, and the problem of comparing writings created over a long period in a wide variety of situations and varying degrees of concentration.

Rhett James observes that the frequent use of the construction “says he—says I,” as Harris reports conversations between himself and others in the 1830 letter, argues against the authenticity of the letter because similar usage is not found in the other Harris letters. James does not seem to realize that the “says he—says I” usage is absent from other Harris letters because Harris was not reporting dialogue in those writings. The only time a person would use such a construction would be in reporting conversation. We should not expect every form of Harris's grammatical usage to appear in every sample of his writing. James acknowledges that the “says” usage appears twice in the Tiffany interview but adds that it is impossible to know whether this is Tiffany's editorial work or Harris's prose. If so, would it not also be impossible to know whether the other differences he finds between the “known” Harris material and the 1830 letter are not also due to scribal or editorial tampering?

In comparing the 1870 Emerson letter to the 1859 Tiffany interview, James observes that the “fire” of Harris's rhetoric is missing from the 1859 document, which he explains on the grounds that 1858 was a “sad year” for Harris, who was experiencing a psychological low at that time. Again, if psychological disturbance can explain the stylistic difference in this case, why can't it also explain differences in the 1830 letter?

Clearly, with the diversity of the available sources, the absence of a body of Harris holographs, the small amount of total material available, and the limitations in methodology, an accurate stylistic analysis of Martin Harris's literary expression cannot yet be made.

Beyond a consideration of the physical properties, the handwriting, and the literary style of the Smith–Harris letters, the question of authenticity also requires a look at content. Our experience with the study of history shows that questions often arise in proportion to the difficulty of assimilating new ideas. As new information challenges

cherished and long-standing preconceptions, strong feelings may produce voluntary blindness. Hence it is necessary to properly evaluate the new data in order that we do not uncritically accept new information on the one hand or allow our preconceptions to blind us and thus keep us from accepting new information on the other hand. Lessons from the past have taught the value of resisting simple answers.

Perhaps the most challenging aspect of the recently acquired Smith and Harris letters for Latter-day Saints is Joseph Smith's probable involvement in the "folk religion" or "mystical" elements of his time. The description by Martin Harris of the coming forth of the Book of Mormon, using the idiom of contemporary folk magic, for example, seems unfamiliar and foreign to twentieth-century minds. Nonetheless, though LDS readers may be inclined to reject the Smith–Harris letters because they are unfamiliar with the context and terminology, the issues the letters raise are not new, nor are they irreconcilable.

Even if the Smith–Harris letters should prove spurious, substantial other early Mormon sources focus on the issues raised—issues one observer described as Joseph Smith's "supernatural power." A. W. Benton in 1831 wrote that for years prior to the publication of the Book of Mormon Joseph Smith "was about the country in the character of a glass-looker; pretending, by means of a certain stone, or glass, which he put in a hat, to be able to discover lost goods, hidden treasures, mines of gold and silver."³¹ An acquaintance of the Smiths in Palmyra was quoted in 1833 as saying that the Smith family held their son Joseph "in high estimation on account of some supernatural power," which power he received "through the medium of a stone of peculiar quality."³² Joseph's brother-in-law heard him say that "his [Smith's] gift in seeing with a stone and hat, was a gift from God"; and John A. Clark said that Joseph Smith, Sr., claimed for his son "a sort of second sight, a power to look into the depths of the earth, and discover where its precious treasures were hid." He added that on their digging excursions young Joseph was usually the guide.³³ Joel Tiffany, on the basis of interviewing Martin Harris, observed that Joseph, Jr., belonged to a company of money diggers and that Joseph "was the seer. He had a stone, in which, when it was placed in a hat, and his face buried therein, so as to exclude the light, he could see as a clairvoyant."³⁴ And Charles Marshall, reporting testimony at Joseph Smith's 1826 Bainbridge trial, said that Joseph testified that

he “had a certain stone which he had occasionally looked at to determine where hidden treasures in the bowels of the earth were” and that he had also “frequently ascertained in that way where lost property was of various kinds.” Testifying at the same trial, Josiah Stowell said that Joseph had “looked” for him on three occasions—for buried money, gold, and a salt spring—and added that before Joseph ever came to Bainbridge he had described the Stowell house and outbuildings through his stone. Twice during the trial Stowell mentioned his “implicit faith in the prisoner’s skill.”³⁵ According to another report of the trial, Joseph Smith described his finding of a stone in his youth, and upon looking in it he discovered that “time, & place & distance were annihilated; that all intervening obstacles were removed & that he possessed one of the attributes of Deity, an All Seeing Eye.” And Joseph, Sr., testified of his son’s “wonderful triumphs as a seer” and described “very many instances of his finding hidden & stolen goods,” stating that he and his son were both “mortified that this wonderful power which God had so miraculously given him should be used only in search of filthy lucre, or its equivalent,” and that his “constant prayer to his Heavenly Father was to manifest His will concerning this marvelous power.”³⁶

Motivated by abundant sources and a humanistic viewpoint, Fawn Brodie, in her 1945 biography of Joseph Smith, developed the thesis that Joseph Smith’s claim as a prophet evolved wholly from a background of magic.³⁷ Others since that time have followed this theme, assuming that if it could be shown that Joseph was a money digger he could not have been religiously sincere. However, as Marvin Hill has noted, this conclusion rests upon “twentieth-century rationalistic assumptions, not on the nineteenth-century situation,” for many acknowledged religious people of Joseph Smith’s day were engaged in that activity. Hill also draws attention to David Whitmer’s statement that while Joseph was using his stone he remained humble and sincere, and only later grew worldly—the reverse of the evolution some tend to see as they move from the “old spirit” to the “angel.”³⁸

While we need to acknowledge and understand the folk religion in which Joseph Smith participated, we need not accept twentieth-century secular interpretations of what it means. Indeed, initial study suggests that the more we learn about this phenomenon the better we

will see how these folkways were an integral part of the faith and religion of his age, and of others as well. Whatever observers may have perceived in Joseph Smith, he remains the primary witness to the events surrounding the coming forth of the Book of Mormon. His story, and that of his family, both as revealed in the early documents and in their later numerous testimonies, cannot be ignored. If his History lacks detailed discussion of early events, it must be remembered that he wrote at a time when antagonism was strong, no doubt motivating him to omit things he might have included in a less hostile setting. Furthermore, the nature of his experience certainly was such as to preclude a rational explanation. He told a Nauvoo audience just before his death, "You don't know me; you never knew my heart. No man knows my history. I cannot tell it: I shall never undertake it. I don't blame you for not believing my history. If I had not experienced what I have, I could not have believed it myself."³⁹ Nonetheless, the Book of Mormon and Joseph Smith's other accomplishments remain historical realities to be reckoned with, and his accounts of them, though brief, contain precise detail and sincerely expressed feelings which cannot be ignored.

If the Harris letter should prove authentic, any use of it with respect to the origin of the Book of Mormon must consider its deviation from other sources by Harris which portray the Joseph Smith story of the angel Moroni. But even taking the letter at face value, neither the writer nor its recipient seemed to perceive its message as out of the ordinary, or as inconsistent with biblical understanding. That readers in our time do probably tells more about our mind-set and unfamiliarity with the treasure and digging culture that produced the letter than anything else.

The discussion of treasure digging in the context of Mormon beginnings, as introduced by Fawn Brodie and Marvin Hill and continued more recently by Richard Bushman and Jan Shipps,⁴⁰ will no doubt receive further attention in the wake of the Smith and Harris letters until there is, to use B. H. Roberts's phrase, "a profounder and broader view" of Joseph Smith's life and mission.⁴¹

NOTES

¹Joseph Smith, Jr., "Church History," *Times and Seasons* 3 (1 March 1842): 707.

²William D. Purple, *Historical Reminiscences*, Greene, New York, 28 April 1877, 4, MS, Moore Memorial Library, Greene, New York.

³Statement of Isaac Hale, 20 March 1834, cited in Eber D. Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled* (Painesville, Ohio: Published by Author, 1834), 262-63.

⁴Joseph Smith, History of the Church, A-1, pp. 7-8, MS, Library-Archives of the Historical Department, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City; hereafter cited as LDS Church Archives.

⁵John Dart, "Letter Revealing Mormon Founder's Belief in Spirits, Occult Released," *Los Angeles Times*, 10 May 1985.

⁶Benjamin Wishnietsky, ed., *American Stampless Cover Catalog* (Miami: Phillips Publishing Co., 1978), 8, 137.

⁷Joseph Smith, III, "Testimony of Sister Emma," *Saints' Herald* 26 (1 October 1879): 289-90.

⁸On Martin Harris, see Richard L. Anderson, *Investigating the Book of Mormon Witnesses* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1981), chaps. 7, 8; also Andrew Jenson, *Latter-Day Saint Biographical Encyclopedia* 1 (Salt Lake City: Published by Author, 1901): 272-76. The statement of the witnesses is in "The Testimony of Three Witnesses," Book of Mormon (Palmyra, N.Y.: E. B. Grandin, 1830), [589].

⁹*The Mormons, or, Knavery Exposed* (Frankford, Pa.: E. G. Lee; and Philadelphia: George Webber and Wm. Fenimore, 1841), 8-10.

¹⁰"Golden Bible," *Gem* (Rochester, N.Y.), 5 September 1829.

¹¹O. Turner, *History of the Pioneer Settlement of Phelps and Gorham's Purchase* (Rochester: W. Alling, 1851), 215.

¹²Joel Tiffany, "Mormonism—No. II," *Tiffany's Monthly* 5 (May 1859): 167-69.

¹³William W. Phelps to E. D. Howe, 15 January 1831, as cited in Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 273-74; Jenson, *LDS Biographical Encyclopedia*, 3:692-97.

¹⁴*Rochester Republican*, 17 May 1831; William W. Phelps to Oliver Cowdery, "Letter No. 6," *Latter Day Saints' Messenger and Advocate* 1 (April 1835): 97.

¹⁵Kenneth W. Rendell, Kenneth W. Rendell Inc., Newton, Mass., to Mark Hofmann, 20 March 1985; Albert H. Lyter, III, Federal Forensic Associates, Raleigh, N.C., to Steven F. Christensen, 13 February 1985.

¹⁶See photograph on p. 426.

¹⁷See photograph on p. 427.

¹⁸See photograph on p. 420.

¹⁹See photograph on p. 428.

²⁰See photograph on p. 428.

²¹Tim Gurrister, "Is Harris Letter Fake?" *Logan Herald Journal*, 30 April 1985; Janet Bennion, "Computer Determines Letter Fake, Author Says," *Utah Statesman*, 8 May 1985, 1, 6; "Author Says 'Folk Magic' Letter May Be a Forgery," *Deseret News*, 17 May 1985, 6B; "Bishop Says Salamander Letter Declared Genuine Too Soon," *Salt Lake Tribune*, 20 May 1985, 2D; "1830 Letter Linked to Mormons Called Fake," *Deseret News*, 25 May 1985, 6B.

²²Statement of Ronald Vern Jackson, 17 May 1985, 4 pp., typescript; Ronald Vern Jackson to President Gordon B. Hinckley, 23 May 1985.

²³Rhett Stephens James, "Style and Historical Content Analysis of Known and Purported Martin Harris Correspondence and Interviews," 28 January 1985; Rhett Stephens James, "Christian Cultural Religious Superstition: The 1825, 1830 Letters, and Related Documents with Suggestions for Methodological Examination and Presentation," 16 May 1985.

²⁴The report to Anthon is found in Joseph Smith, History of the Church, A-1, p. 9; the letter to Brigham Young is in the LDS Church Archives; Tiffany's interview is published in his "Mormonism—No. II," 163-70; the Emerson letters are in *True Latter Day Saints' Herald* 22 (15 October 1875): 630; the letter of Martin Harris to Walter Conrad, published in the *Ensign* 12 (November 1982): 97-99, is owned by Brent Ashworth, Provo, Utah.

²⁵Elinore H. Partridge, "Characteristics of Joseph Smith's Style and Notes on the Authorship of the Lectures on Faith," 1, typescript, Task Papers in LDS History, no. 14, LDS Church Archives.

²⁶Frederick Mosteller and David L. Wallace, *Inference and Disputed Authorship: "The Federalist"* (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley Pub. Co., 1964).

²⁷Lawrence Fellows, "Cleric Asserts Computer Proves Paul Wrote Only 5 of 14 Epistles," *New York Times*, 7 November 1963, 1, 13.

²⁸A. Q. Morton, "The Authorship of Greek Prose," *Journal of the Royal Statistical Society*, Series A, vol. 128 (1965): 169-233. Herdan's discussion of Morton's paper is on pages 229-31.

²⁹John W. Ellison, "Computers and the Testaments," in *Computers for the Humanities?* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University, 1965), 64-74.

³⁰Richard W. Bailey, "Authorship Attribution in a Forensic Setting," in *Advances in Computer-Aided Literary and Linguistic Research*, Proceedings of the Fifth International Symposium on Computers in Literary and Linguistic Research, University of Aston, Birmingham, UK, 3-7 April 1978, ed. D. E. Ager, F. E. Knowles, Joan Smith, (Birmingham: John Goodman & Sons, 1978), 4.

Anthony Kenny confirms Bailey, noting that "differences between letters, diaries and oral confessions by the same person are likely to be much greater than those between two persons writing in the same mode of composition." He adds, "However the discipline [of stylometrics] may develop in the future it cannot be said that there is as yet such a thing as a stylometric fingerprint: a method of individual style which is as reliable as a fingerprint as a criterion of personal identification.

"What would a stylistic fingerprint be? It would [have] to be . . . a constant feature of an author's writing, as fingerprints remain the same throughout life, and it would have to be unique to him and shared by no other writer. At the present time no one knows whether there are such features of style as not enough data have been collected. Constancy is not too difficult to test and may in some cases have been proved: uniqueness is quite another matter. . . . So there can be no definitive test of authorship." (Anthony Kenny, *The Computation of Style: An Introduction to Statistics for Students of Literature and Humanities* [New York: Pergamon Press, 1982], 12-14.)

³¹Abram W. Benton, "Mormonites," *Evangelical Magazine and Gospel Advocate* (Utica, N.Y.) 2 (9 April 1831): 120.

³²Statement of Joseph Capron, 8 November 1833, as cited in Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 258-60.

³³Statement of Alvah Hale, 1834, in *ibid.*, 268; *Mormons, or, Knavery Exposed*, 9.

³⁴Joel Tiffany, "Mormonism," *Tiffany's Monthly* 5 (May 1859): 119.

³⁵Charles Marshall, "The Original Prophet," in James A. Froude, ed., *Fraser's Magazine* (London) 7 (February 1873): 229.

³⁶Purple, *Reminiscences*, 8-9.

³⁷Fawn M. Brodie, *No Man Knows My History: The Life of Joseph Smith, the Mormon Prophet* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1945).

³⁸Marvin S. Hill, "Secular or Sectarian History? A Critique of 'No Man Knows My History,'" *Church History* 43 (March 1974): 85-86.

³⁹Joseph Smith discourse, Nauvoo, Illinois, 7 April 1844, as reported by Willard Richards and Thomas Bullock, MS, LDS Church Archives.

At a conference in Ohio in 1831, Hyrum Smith "thought it best that the information of the coming forth of the book of Mormon be related by Joseph himself to the Elders present." To which Joseph responded that "it was not intended to tell the world all the particulars of the coming forth of the book of Mormon, & also . . . That it was not expedient for him to relate these things." (Minutes of a general conference held at Orange, Cuyahoga County, Ohio, 25 October 1831, as cited in Donald Q. Cannon and Lyndon Cook, eds., *Far West Record* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1983], 23).

⁴⁰Richard L. Bushman, *Joseph Smith and the Beginnings of Mormonism* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1984); Jan Shipps, *Mormonism: The Story of a New Religious Tradition* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1985).

⁴¹B. H. Roberts, "Book of Mormon Translation," *Improvement Era* 9 (July 1906): 712-13.

Canandaigua June 18th 1825

Dear Sir

My Father has shown me your letter informing him and me of your success in locating the mine as you suppose but we are of the opinion that since you cannot ascertain any particulars you should not dig more until you first discover if any valuables remain you know the treasure must be guarded by some clever spirit and if such is discovered so also is the treasure so do this take a hazel stick one yard long being new but well cleave it just in the middle and lay it asunder on the mine so that both inner parts of the stick may look one right against the other one inch distant and if there is treasure after a while you shall see them draw and join together again of themselves let me know how it is since you were here I have almost decided to accept your offer and if you can make it convenient to come this way I shall be ready to accompany you if nothing happens more than I know of I am very respectfully

Joseph Smith Jr

Courtesy of LDS Church Archives

Letter purportedly written by Joseph Smith to Josiah Stowell,
Canandaigua, New York, 18 June 1825

Palmyra Oct 23rd 1830

Dear Sir

Your letter of yesterday is received & I hasten to answer as fully as I can - Joseph Smith Jr first come to my notice in the year 1824 in the summer of that year I contracted with his father to build a fence on my property in the course of that work I approach Joseph & ask how it is in a half day you put up what surprises your father & 2 brothers a full day working together he says I have not been with out assistance but can not say whose only you better find out the next day I take the older Smith by the arm & he says Joseph can see any thing he wishes by looking at a stone Joseph after sees Spirits here with great kettles of coin money it was Spirits who brought up rock because Joseph made no attempt on their money & latter I saw I converse with spirits which let me count their money when I awake I have in my hand a dollar coin which I take for a sign Joseph describes what I saw in every particular says he the spirits are grieved so I through back the dollar In the fall of the year 1827 I had Joseph found a gold bible I take Joseph aside & he says it is true I found it 4 years ago with my stone but only just got it because of the enchantment the old spirit come to me 3 times in the same dream & says dig up the gold 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 & held the treasure & would not let me have it because I lay it down to cover over the hole when the spirit says do not lay it down Joseph says when can I have it the spirit says one year from to day if you obey me look to the stone after a few days he looks the spirit says bring your brother Joseph says he is dead shall I bring what remains but the spirit is gone Joseph goes to get the gold bible but the spirit says you did not bring your brother you can not have it look to the stone Joseph looks but can not see who to bring the spirit says I tricked you again look to the stone Joseph looks & sees his wife on the 2nd day of Sept 1827 they get the gold bible & give Joseph \$50 to move him

Courtesy of LDS Church Archives

Letter purportedly written by Martin Harris to William W. Phelps,
Palmyra, New York, 23 October 1830

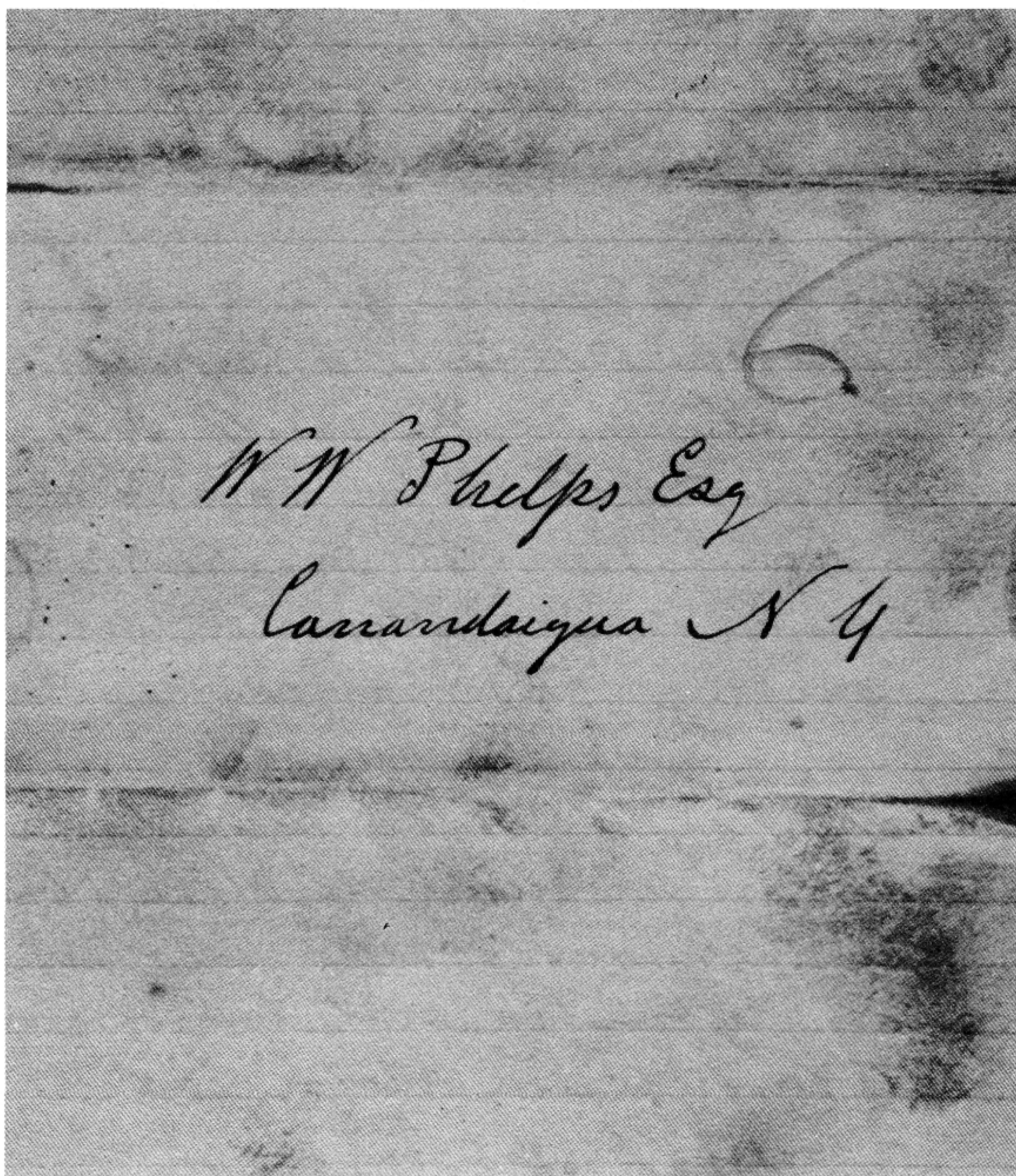
down to Pa Joseph says when you visit me I will give
 you a sign he gives me some hieroglyphics I take them to
 Utica Albany & New York in the last place Dr Mitchell
 gives me a introduction to Professor Barthow says he
 they are short hand Egyptian the same what was used
 in ancient times being me the old book & I will trans-
 late says I it is made of precious gold & is sealed from
 from view says he I can not read a sealed book—
 Joseph found some giant silver spectacles with the plates he
 puts them in a old hat & in the darkness reads the words
 & in this way it is all translated & written down— about
 the middle of June 1829 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 which I
 had printed with my own money— space & time both
 prevent me from writing more at present if there is any
 thing further you wish to inquire I shall attend to it
 Yours Respectfully
 Martin Harris

W W Phelps Esq

W W Phelps Esq
 Canandaigua N Y

Tharred Egyption the same what was used
 times being in the old book & I will town
 is made of precious gold & is sealed down
 by the I can not read a sealed book —
 some giant silver spectacles with the plates be
 a old hat & in the darkness needs the words
 it is all translated & written down — about
 of June 1829 Joseph takes in together with
 & David Whitmer to have a view of the plates
 we appended to the book of Mormon which I
 with my own money — space & time both
 from writing mine at present if there is any
 you wish to inquire I shall attend to it
 Yours Respectfully
 Austin Hays

Enlargement of a portion of the 1830 Harris letter



Envelope of 1830 Harris to Phelps letter



March 20, 1985

Mr. Mark Hofmann
2219 Marie Ave.
Salt Lake City, UT 84109

Dear Mark:

In accordance with your request, I have examined the original letter purported to be in the handwriting of Martin Harris, dated from Palmyra October, 29, 1830.

The letter was examined under ultra-violet light, and the ink floresced in accordance with other inks of this period. The paper itself had a florescence consistent with the period.

I examined the fact that the letter is written on machine-ruled paper, and found that paper of this type was prevalent in upstate New York at the time. In fact, we located a similar, although not identical, paper in the New York State Library in Albany. In 1810, Nathaniel Rochester established in Dansville, New York, near Palmyra, a paper mill which we know by 1835 was producing machine-ruled paper. It is entirely reasonable to believe that the paper of this Harris letter was manufactured at that plant.

I examined the seal tear and the missing paper which had adhered to the wax, located on the integral leaf, and find that they match perfectly. I also examined the folds in the paper and determined that the writing was put on the paper before it was folded. The quality of the line of writing, and the rate of absorption of the ink, are consistent with ink which has been placed on recently manufactured paper.

The postmark on the letter matches another from the same town, at the same time. The "r" in Palmyra was compared and measures precisely with the second postmark example. The overall size of the postmark is also consistent, as is the width of the outer circle with the other example.

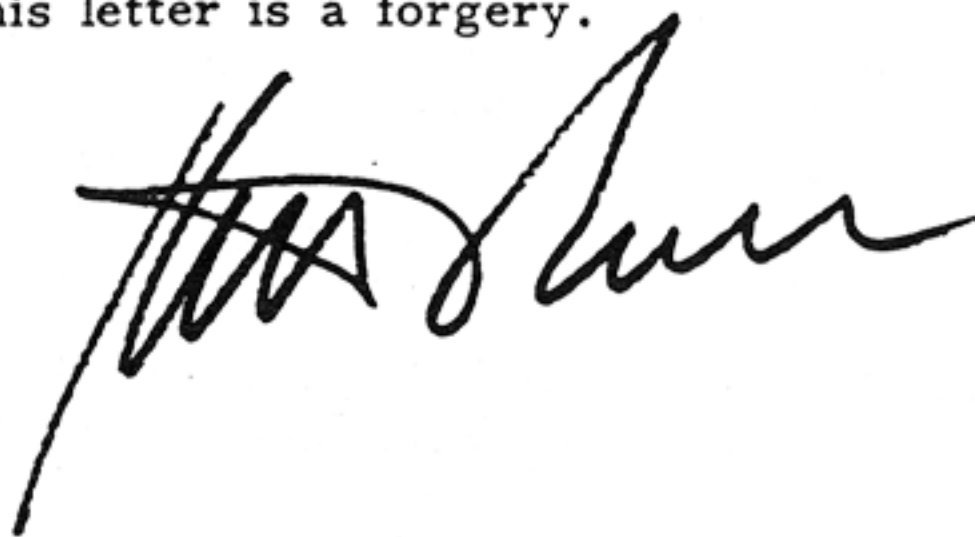


Kenneth W. Rendell, analysis of 1830 Martin Harris letter, 20 March 1985
on which historians relied

There were no examples of the handwriting of Martin Harris with which to compare the body of the letter, however, I examined it for consistency of style and any traces that might indicate that it was forged. I found none.

The signature on the letter is consistent with three other known examples of Harris's signature. The original was examined very closely under a microscope for any signs of tracing, and no signs were found.

It is my conclusion, based upon all of this evidence, as well as the ink and paper tests undertaken independently of me, that there is no indication that this letter is a forgery.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Martin Harris". The signature is written in dark ink on a white background. It features a large, sweeping initial "M" followed by a series of connected loops and a long, horizontal tail stroke.



Federal Forensic Associates
P. O. Box 31567
Raleigh, North Carolina 27612
(919) 848-3696

17842 Irvine Boulevard
Suite 224
Tustin, California 92680
(714) 832-9078
420 Lincoln Road
Suite 450
Miami Beach, Florida 33139
(305) 532-1769

February 13, 1985

Steven F. Christensen
324 South State Street
Fifth Floor
Salt Lake City, UT 84111

RE: Martin Harris Letter

REPORT OF LABORATORY EXAMINATION

A physical and chemical examination was performed on the above referenced document with the following results.

1. All tests for the presence of coloring material in the written line were negative.
2. Examination results are consistent with the ink being of the "Iron Gall" type. This ink was in widespread use at the date appearing on the document.
3. Examination results compare favorably with those of documents from this same time period.

Conclusions: There is no evidence to suggest that the examined document was prepared at other than during the stated time period.

Albert H. Lyter III
Forensic Chemist

AHL/rml
Cert. Mail #P 527 632 905

Albert H. Lyter III, report of ink analysis of 1830 Martin Harris letter,
13 February 1985

- | | | |
|------|----|-----------------------------|
| 1829 | 1 | <i>Martin Harris</i> |
| | 2 | <i>Martin Harris</i> |
| | 3 | <i>Martin Harris</i> |
| | 4 | <i>Martin Harris</i> |
| | 5 | <i>Martin Harris</i> |
| | 6 | <i>Martin Harris</i> |
| | 7 | <i>Martin Harris</i> |
| 1831 | 8 | <i>Martin Harris</i> |
| | 9 | <i>Martin Harris</i> |
| | 10 | <i>Martin Harris</i> |
| 1860 | 11 | <i>Martin Harris</i> |
| | 12 | <i>Martin Harris</i> |
| | 13 | <i>Martin Harris</i> |
| | 14 | <i>Martin Harris</i> |
| 1873 | 15 | <u><i>Martin Harris</i></u> |

Signatures of Martin Harris. The signature on the Harris letter to Phelps is no. 6.

Kirtland Sept the 4th 1846

Know all men by these presents that I Martin Harris
 am about to leave this continent and expect to go to
 Europe and remain there one year or more I therefore
 constitute Jacob Bump and Preserved Harris my
 lawful agents to transact all my business in my
 name and do further more give the said Bump and
 Harris the full care and controll of my farm and
 all my personal property in the township of
 Kirtland and for the benefit of my family and
 the Church of Christ of which I am a member
 It is further understood that the said Jacob
 Bump and Preserved Harris "is hold them acting
 for at least one year and if I do not return
 within one year then their agency to continue until
 my return And I hereby this day by these
 presents deliver to the said Bump & Harris all
 the cattle - sheep - grain - hogs - farming utensils
 for the use above mentioned with the right to
 work or lease my farm as my agents shall think
 proper -

Signed sealed day and year above
 mentioned in presence of -
 I Martin Harris

Martin Harris

Courtesy of the Harold B. Lee Library Archives

Martin Harris, Power of Attorney, Kirtland, Ohio, 4 September 1846

Kirtland, Ohio, Aug. 13, 1855

Respected Friend Brigham Young
 enclosed I send you a Proclamation
 as you will discover by reading it given
 by Moses, Elias, Elisha, and John—
 you no doubt will recollect of a favour
 asked of me of the loan 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 descret news or in some
 of your public journals Published in
 the valley that the word and commandment
 of the Proclamation may go to all the world
 this done you will serve the cause of god
 and help to roll on the cause of humanity
 and justice your friends and relations
 about old Kirtland are well and send
 their respects to you and all that are
 bound by the ties of love and friendship
 I remant as ever a friend to truth and
 righteousness.

Martin Harris.

N B we would be glad to hear from
 you— suppose you write us a few lines
 in remembrance of old acquaintances

M. H.

Courtesy of LDS Church Archives

Letter of Martin Harris to Brigham Young, Kirtland, Ohio, 13 August 1855

Martin Harris
Palmyna County of
Wayne.

Purported Martin Harris writing from unidentified book. Copy in possession of author.

If this book should
wander
and you this book
should find
please to kindly
remember
that what you hold
is mine

Courtesy of LDS Church Archives

A page from *The Book of Common Prayer according to the Use of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America Together with the Psalter* (New York, 1830, 371 pp.; and *Hymns of the Protestant Episcopal Church* (Philadelphia, 1829), 48 pp., bound as one volume, belonging to Nathan Harris, father of Martin Harris. The front of the book contains the signature "Nathan Harris" and "Kirtland, Ohio, 1833." The lines photographed here match the handwriting of the 1830 letter purportedly written by Martin Harris. They are written on the last page of the book.