

# MARTIN HARRIS

## Uncompromising Witness of the Book of Mormon

Susan Easton Black  
and  
Larry C. Porter

BYU Studies  
Provo, Utah

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## Foreword

VIRTUALLY EVERY LATTER-DAY SAINT IS ACQUAINTED WITH THE name Martin Harris. Many, if not most, could identify him as the one who lost the first 116 pages of the Book of Mormon manuscript in 1828, as one of the three witnesses who were shown the gold plates by the angel in 1829, or as the prosperous farmer who sold his property to finance the printing of the Book of Mormon in 1830. A few might even recognize him as one of the men who selected the initial quorum of twelve Apostles in 1835 or as a member of the first high council in the Church. Many are aware that he was excommunicated from the Church in 1837 but that he rejoined the Saints in 1870 in Utah, where he died in 1875. But between that winter of 1837–38 (when Joseph Smith went to Missouri and Martin remained in Kirtland) and Martin’s August return in 1870 sits a thirty-three-year blank spot in the life of this extraordinary witness in the knowledge of almost all general historians and readers.

Through all of the years, only one other biography of Martin Harris has been written, namely a well-respected family biography entitled *The Martin Harris Story: Special Witness to the Book of Mormon* by Madge Harris Tuckett and Belle Harris Wilson, published in Provo by Maasai in 1983. The story of Martin Harris is 110 pages in that book, with the stories of Emer Harris and Dennison Lott Harris being given 78 pages. Mostly in the 1980s, helpful investigations, various encyclopedia articles, two master’s theses, and a pageant script were written about this “man who knew,” but now a generation later, with many more historical documents and insights available, the time is right for this needed landmark biography.

This fine biography by Susan Easton Black, with substantial co-authorship from Larry Porter, fills the gap in Martin’s history. But it does much more than that. This account begins with Martin’s ancestors, their arrival in New England, and their move to upstate New York, where Martin, following his father’s example, became a well-respected citizen and industrious

farmer. The narrative also provides—often for the first time—extensive and fascinating details about Martin’s personal association with Joseph Smith, his early involvement in the translating and then the publishing of the Book of Mormon, and his financial and testimonial support of the fledgling church Joseph founded. Without doubt, Martin was one of the key figures in early Mormonism. He followed Joseph to Kirtland, where he participated influentially in church leadership until he had a falling out with Joseph over the financial troubles of the Kirtland Safety Society and other issues.

So when Joseph moved on to Missouri and then to Illinois, where he and his brother Hyrum were murdered, Martin stayed behind in Kirtland. And there he stayed, even when his second wife, Caroline, took their children and joined the Saints on their trek across the plains. Martin associated with various offshoots of Mormonism and served as unofficial caretaker of the abandoned Kirtland Temple. As he began growing old in Ohio, he drifted into poverty. It was there that missionaries from the LDS Church, on their way to eastern or European missions or returning to Utah from those missions, found Martin. Through their efforts and those of his son and namesake, Martin Harris Jr., he returned to the Church he had helped establish. This biography details every part of his life, down to his reunion with his family, his last testimonial days, and his death in Clarkston, Utah.

Martin Harris’s story is both remarkable and tragic. Although this biography is not a psychological evaluation of Harris’s persona, by honestly noting the strong qualities and troublesome weaknesses in Martin’s character it leads to insights about how his personality contributed to the decisions he made and the experiences he had.

As is detailed in this biography, Martin could be strong-willed, determined, and even stubborn. He was honest in his dealings and generous with his means, but his generosity had limits. When Joseph called for the Saints to support the Kirtland Safety Society, Martin refused to invest in this ill-timed banking partnership. He was an outspoken defender of the faith, but he could also be boastful and overbearing. He was a believing, dutiful follower of Joseph, but it is apparent that he also felt slighted when he was not given a more prominent role in Church leadership. Even though Martin had a falling out with Joseph, his devotion to the Book of Mormon kept him in the orbit of the larger Mormon movement. While his weaknesses have led some people to deprecate Martin in some respects, his strengths are

exactly the kinds of virtues the Prophet Joseph saw in him that qualified him as an unbudging, reliable, and unequivocal witness of the Book of Mormon.

This book is an honest attempt to fully portray Martin's character and to tell his whole life's story. In many ways, it is easy to see Martin positively, but at the same time there are unfavorable aspects of Martin's character that are not to be concealed. In some ways, he even comes across as a tragic or lamentably pathetic figure. With relentless rigor coupled with uncompromising kindness, Professors Black and Porter give all readers an open opportunity to come to know and to feel grateful to this ground-breaking contributor and authentic testifier of several of the key events of the organization of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

The one constant and dominant theme of this biography is Martin's unflinching affirmation of what he saw and heard, together with Oliver Cowdery and David Whitmer, on a day near the end of June 1829, in a stand of trees not far from the Peter Whitmer home in Fayette, New York. During his years of absence from the main body of Saints, he never wavered in his testimony of the angel and the plates. In the end, the draw of his family and his faith brought him to Utah, where he found a measure of fame and contentment in his final days. While Martin Harris did not leave a personal account of his life or experiences, many people who knew him well or interviewed him intently retold what he said to them. Twenty-five such recollections are conveniently included in the documents compiled in *Opening the Heavens*, also published by BYU Studies. Additional second-hand accounts are included in this biography. The primary expression those interviewers and close observers recalled was Martin's firm and unwavering testimony of seeing the angel and the plates. Especially in his later years in Utah, this was rightly his claim to fame, and he welcomed every opportunity until his dying day to bear witness of what he had experienced more than forty years earlier. Now this book masterfully brings all of this back to life more than one hundred forty years later.

John W. Welch  
July 2018

## Chapter Three

# An Honest, Industrious Citizen

*Fortune does not shower her favors on us very often,  
and a man should not turn his plate bottom upwards when it does happen,  
but should turn the right side up and catch all he can.*<sup>1</sup>

—Alexander William Doniphan

**T**HE TREATY OF GHENT WAS SIGNED AT GHENT, BELGIUM, ON Christmas Eve 1814. This agreement made possible the ending of hostilities in the War of 1812 by a formal ratification on February 17, 1815. While high-level arbitration among nations was taking place across the Atlantic, Martin Harris optimistically moved ahead with his personal plans in the comparative quietude of rural Palmyra. Between 1813 and 1814, Martin's father, Nathan, and his older brother Emer deeded to him some 150 acres of prime land extending from his father's property on the south to as far north as the Macedon Center Road.<sup>2</sup> In 1815, Martin Harris was again elected to represent Palmyra Road District No. 9 as an overseer of highways.<sup>3</sup> For his continuing service in this and other capacities, he was

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1. Alexander William Doniphan, quoted in Roger D. Launius, *Alexander William Doniphan: Portrait of a Missouri Moderate* (Columbia, Mo.: University of Missouri Press, 1997), 82.

2. Nathan Harris to Martin Harris, October 5, 1813, 121 acres two rods and 32 perches of land, Ontario County Deeds, 19:506–8, Ontario County Office, Canandaigua, New York; Nathan Harris to Martin Harris, January 4, 1814, 25 acres, Ontario County New York, Ontario County Deeds, 20:237; Emer Harris to Martin Harris, December 9, 1814, 4 acres one rod and eight perches of land, Wayne County Deeds, 10:514–15, Wayne County Historical Office, Lyons, New York.

3. Palmyra Town Record Book, Annual Town Meeting, April 4, 1815, Palmyra Town Hall, Palmyra, New York.

duly praised. For his character, attainment, and growing wealth, he was spoken of as “an honest, industrious citizen.”<sup>4</sup>

Martin was in an enviable position in 1815, but a change was in the offing—a circumstance that would ultimately alter his relationship with family and friends and turn neighborly goodwill to pity and disdain. It was the move of a poverty-stricken family from Vermont to Palmyra and Martin’s eventual decision to employ members of that household in the course of his daily operations that led to the unexpected turn of events. The migrant family surname was Smith, and the hired hands were Joseph Sr. and his sons.

### **A Sense of Belonging: Neighborly Cordiality to the Smiths**

The Smiths moved to Palmyra seeking relief from the disastrous cold season of 1816 and to better their economic fortune like so many fellow Vermonters in the throes of the early-nineteenth-century climatic change. Mount Tambora on the island of Sumbawa in the Dutch East Indies (now Indonesia) exploded on April 10–11, 1815, ejecting some twenty-five cubic miles of debris into the atmosphere and reducing Mount Tambora by some 4,200 feet. “Climatologists rank the eruption as the greatest producer of atmospheric dust between 1600 and the present” and have determined the eruption to be larger than that of the better-known Krakatoa (also in today’s Indonesia) in 1883. For the Smiths and others in New England, the circulating mass of airborne dust created in 1816 “the year without a summer,” or “Eighteen Hundred and Froze to Death.”<sup>5</sup>

Successive crop failures caused what Stilwell called an “emigration out of Vermont.”<sup>6</sup> Newspapers of the day targeted families like the Smiths with

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4. Eber D. Howe, *Mormonsim Unveiled: or, a Faithful Account of That Singular Imposition and Delusion, from Its Rise to the Present Time* (Painesville, Ohio: By the author, 1834), 13.

5. Henry Stommel and Elizabeth Stommel, “The Year without a Summer,” *Scientific American* 240 (June 1979): 176.

6. Stommel and Stommel, “The Year without a Summer,” 176–86; Lewis D. Stilwell, *Migration from Vermont* (Montpelier, Vt.: Vermont Historical Society, 1948), 125, 134–35. More than sixty towns in Vermont lost inhabitants between 1810 and 1820. Migration to western New York and other places rose to flood proportions during these years as residents of Vermont moved to various localities in New York, Pennsylvania, and Ohio.

luring advertisements of available land in western New York that was well-timbered, well-watered, easily accessible, and undeniably fertile. In 1816, Joseph Smith Sr. journeyed to Palmyra to see the land.<sup>7</sup> He liked what he saw and sent for his wife and family. Lucy Smith said that she and the children soon followed. She specified their time of leaving the Norwich, Vermont, area and time of arrival at Palmyra in a chronological listing of family events as “1816 moved to Palmira in Jan [1817]”—a winter’s journey.<sup>8</sup> The Smiths were “much reduced” in wealth at this time. Lucy stressed that this economic situation was “not from indolence, but on account of many reverses of fortune, with which our lives had been rather singularly marked.” Notwithstanding their “misfortunes, and the embarrassments with which [they] were surrounded,” the Smiths appeared to be a happy family hoping to find solutions to their pecuniary circumstances in Palmyra.<sup>9</sup>

They worked hard to achieve financial stability, a dream that had continually eluded them, particularly since the 1803 loss of their mercantile business in Randolph, Vermont, and the resultant forfeiture of their Tunbridge, Vermont, farm equity to cover their indebtedness to Boston suppliers and others.<sup>10</sup> Father Smith opened a small shop on Palmyra’s Main Street and sold gingerbread, pies, boiled eggs, and root beer to paying customers. Mother Smith painted oil-cloth coverings for tables and stands that

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7. See LaMar Garrard, “The Asael Smith Family Moves from Vermont to New York, 1806 to 1820,” in *Regional Studies in Latter-day Saint Church History, New York* (Provo, Utah: Dept. of Church History and Doctrine, Brigham Young University, 1992), 15–32.

8. Lucy Smith, “Autobiography and notes, ca. 1850,” MS 230, p. 21, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah; Joseph Smith Jr. detailed the harrowing journey of the family to Palmyra in “History, 1838–1856, Volume A-1 [23 December 1805–30 August 1834],” note A, p. 131–32, Church History Library, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, <http://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/history-1838-1856-volume-a-1-23-december-1805-30-august-1834/137>.

9. Lucy Mack Smith, *Biographical Sketches of Joseph Smith the Prophet, and His Progenitors for Many Generations* (London: published for Orson Pratt by S. W. Richards, 1853), 70; Lavina Fielding Anderson, ed., *Lucy’s Book: A Critical Edition of Lucy Mack Smith’s Family Memoir* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2001), 317. See also “Lucy Mack Smith,” Leonard J. Arrington Papers, box 107, fd. 20.

10. Larry C. Porter, “A Study of the Origins of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in the States of New York and Pennsylvania, 1816–1831” (PhD diss., Brigham Young University, 1971; Provo, Utah: BYU Studies, 2000), 6.

were sold to near neighbors. Father Smith and his sons worked as common laborers—gardening, harvesting, rocking up wells, and any odd jobs that paid cash or commodities under a loosely configured barter system.<sup>11</sup> Among those who hired the day labor of Father Smith and his sons was Orlando Saunders, a near neighbor to the east on Canandaigua Road. Orlando declared, “They 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.”<sup>12</sup>

Martin Harris would have been aware of the Smith family presence in the community sometime after their arrival. Just how early Martin Harris employed young Joseph to assist him with his farm labors is not certain. In a later remembrance of that association, Martin rehearsed to Edward Stevenson that Joseph “was very poor, and had to work by the day for his support, and he (Harris) often gave him work on his farm, and that they had hoed corn together many a day, Brother Harris paying him fifty cents per day. Joseph, he said, was good to work and jovial and they often wrestled together in sport.”<sup>13</sup> Yet it was not all jovial. Joseph remem-



Joseph Smith, from a daguerreotype taken by Lucian Foster sometime between 1840 and 1844, submitted to the Library of Congress in 1879 by Smith’s son Joseph Smith III. This is a third-generation copy that has been heavily edited by an unknown artist. Courtesy Wikimedia.

11. Pomeroy Tucker, *Origin, Rise and Progress of Mormonism* (New York: D. Appleton, 1867), 12; Smith, *Biographical Sketches of Joseph Smith*, 70; Anderson, *Lucy’s Book*, 318.

12. William H. Kelley interviews, in “The Hill Cumorah, and the Book of Mormon,” *Saints’ Herald* (Plano, Ill.), June 1, 1881, 165.

13. Edward Stevenson, “The Three Witnesses to the Book of Mormon, No. III,” *Millennial Star* 48 (June 21, 1886): 389. Martin states that the payment of fifty cents a day “was the biggest wages given in those times.” See Edward Stevenson, “Martin Harris’s Testimony,” *Millennial Star* 55 (December 4, 1893): 794.

bered many days of excessive toil for himself and his family: “Being in indigent circumstances [we] were obliged to labour hard for the support of a large Family having nine children . . . and . . . it required the exertions of all that were able to render any assistance.”<sup>14</sup> His brother William recalled, “Whenever the neighbors wanted a good day’s work done they knew where they could get a good hand.”<sup>15</sup>

For a year and a half, the family worked for farmers like the prosperous Martin Harris and saved for a down payment on a hundred-acre farm. By 1819–20, the Smiths had moved from the village of Palmyra to the southern end of Palmyra Township on Stafford Road. Here they had constructed a log house<sup>16</sup> on property belonging to Samuel Jennings. The log home in Palmyra was to be their dwelling until late 1825 while they worked across the township lines to acquire ownership of adjoining farmland and construct a new frame home on that acreage in Farmington Township (later Manchester, 1822).<sup>17</sup> The family’s work ethic and strict economy had enabled Father Smith and his son Alvin to article, or contract, for a hundred acres in Farmington Township in the summer of 1820. With easy terms on property valued between \$700 and \$900, the Smiths were confident good fortune smiled upon them. They understood that failure to meet the payments stipulated in their agreement would allow the agent the right to reclaim the farm with all of its improvements and no compensation to the Smiths. But

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14. Dean C. Jessee, *Personal Writings of Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1984), 10.

15. J. W. Peterson, “Another Testimony: Statement of William Smith, Concerning Joseph the Prophet,” *Deseret Evening News*, January 20, 1894, 11.

16. On June 13, 1820, Isaac Durfee and Luman Harrison, Commissioners of Highways from the village of Palmyra, were making a survey of Stafford Road. They used the “Joseph Smith dwelling house” to give them an exact fix with the “Old Town Compass” and measurements right to the rod and link. From that recorded survey we know the precise location of the log home of Joseph Smith in Palmyra Township. See “Old Town Record Book 1793–1870,” June 13, 1820, p. 120, Palmyra Town Hall, Palmyra, New York.

17. Donald L. Enders, “The Joseph Smith, Sr., Family: Farmers of the Genesee,” in *Joseph Smith: The Prophet, the Man*, ed. Susan Easton Black and Charles D. Tate (Provo, Utah: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1993), 213–17; Larry C. Porter, *Sacred Places: A Comprehensive Guide to Early LDS Historical Sites*, vol. 2, *New York and Pennsylvania*, ed. LaMar C. Berrett (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2000), 195–203.

that situation did not appear to be a probability at the time. Fortune had finally smiled upon the Smiths.<sup>18</sup>

The Smith farm was nestled in a densely wooded tract on Stafford Road less than two miles south of the village of Palmyra and about three miles from Martin's farm. Within the year of their residency on that tract, Lucy Smith wrote, "We made nearly all of the first payment . . . and commenced clearing. I believe something like thirty acres of land were got ready for cultivation the first year." By the second year, she added, "We had a snug log-house, neatly furnished, and the means of living comfortably." By the third year, the Smiths had turned their wooded acreage into a productive farm "admired for its good order and industry."<sup>19</sup> With productivity and apparent permanence came a sense of belonging and neighborly cordiality to the Smiths. "The hand of friendship was extended on every side," wrote Mother Smith. "If we might judge [*sic*] by any external manifestation we had every reason to believe that we had many Good and affectionate friends for never have I seen more kindness or attention shown to any person or family than we received from those around us" in Palmyra.<sup>20</sup>

### **"I Saw a Pillar of Light Exactly over My Head"**

Cordiality was tested when revivalism "commenced with the Methodists, but soon became general among all the sects." Joseph Smith wrote, "The whole district of country seemed affected by it, and great multitudes united themselves to the different religious parties, which created no small stir and division amongst the people" (JS-H 1:5). Mother Smith observed, "There was a great revival in religion, which extended to all the denominations of Christians in the surrounding country in which we resided. Many of the world's people, becoming concerned about the salvation of their souls, came forward and presented themselves as seekers after religion."<sup>21</sup>

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18. See Smith, *Biographical Sketches of Joseph Smith*, 70–71; Anderson, *Lucy's Book*, 317–19; Enders, "Joseph Smith, Sr., Family: Farmers of the Genesee," 218–21.

19. Scot Facer Proctor and Maurine Jensen Proctor, *The Revised and Enhanced History of Joseph Smith by His Mother* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1996), 94.

20. Smith, *Biographical Sketches of Joseph Smith*, 71; Anderson, *Lucy's Book*, 319–21.

21. Smith, *Biographical Sketches of Joseph Smith*, 74; Anderson, *Lucy's Book*, 330–31.

From 1816 to 1821 more revival meetings were reported in western New York than any previous period.<sup>22</sup> Worshipers came from miles around to attend sacramental meetings held under the trees in small villages dotting the western landscape. At first, worshipers camped for a night under the trees, expecting to return home the next day. Religious meetings held the following day led many to stay longer. Extended camp meetings were called “revivals.” By 1820, revivals were as common in western New York as farm preachers and circuit riders had been in an earlier era.<sup>23</sup> The effectiveness of their Pentecostal meetings is seen in the number of worshipers who returned to conventional churches and professed a fellowship with the Christian community. Among their number were Lucy Smith and her children Hyrum, Sophronia, and Samuel, who caught the religious stirring and joined the popular Western Presbyterian Church of Palmyra, meeting in the Union chapel.<sup>24</sup>

Martin Harris was not a bystander to the religious awakenings permeating the Christian sects in town. Contemporary George W. Stoddard claimed that Martin associated with five separate churches during this

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22. Milton V. Backman Jr., “Awakenings in the Burned-Over District: New Light on the Historical Setting of the First Vision,” *BYU Studies* 9, no. 3 (1969): 302. “During the summer of 1816 a powerful revival erupted in the town of Palmyra, and the spiritual enlivenment continued throughout the winter. During this productive spiritual quickening, membership in the Presbyterian church nearly doubled.” Milton V. Backman Jr., *Joseph Smith’s First Vision: The First Vision in Its Historical Context* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1971), 67.

23. The task of following the population as it pushed westward was difficult. The Baptist Church met the problem by initiating what was known as the “farmer-preacher.” The Baptist farmer-preacher proved a stimulus to a general spiritual awakening on the frontier. But the changing frontier needed a religion with a flexible system of organization. The Methodists had such an organization in the circuit rider system. See Backman, *Joseph Smith’s First Vision*, 56–57.

24. On February 13, 1817, the Presbytery honored a request from the Presbyterian congregation in Palmyra to divide the congregation and create the Presbyterian Church of East Palmyra and the Western Presbyterian Church of Palmyra. On March 18, 1817, men of the Western Presbyterian Church met in the village of Palmyra and agreed to incorporate as the Western Presbyterian Church and Society in the town of Palmyra. Gain Robinson and Joel Foster acted as moderators. The incorporation certificate was recorded at Canandaigua, New York, on May 13, 1817. Incorporation papers for the Western Presbyterian Church and Society of Palmyra, Ontario County Archives, Palmyra, New York; Betsy Lewis to Larry C. Porter, February 20, 2007. Betsy Lewis serves as the Western Presbyterian Church historian in Palmyra, New York.

general era: “He was first an orthodox Quaker, then a Universalist, next a Restorer, then a Baptist, next a Presbyterian.”<sup>25</sup> Palmyra Episcopal minister John A. Clark also recognized certain of Martin’s positions on religion. He acknowledged, “[Martin] had been, if I mistake not, at one period, a member of the Methodist Church, and subsequently had identified himself with the Universalists.”<sup>26</sup> Rev. Clark also recognized that Martin had attended some meetings with his own Episcopal congregation. Editor, historian, and printer’s apprentice Orsamus Turner did not comment on Martin’s religious positioning. He simply pronounced the man a religious fanatic, yet “the owner of a good farm, and an honest worthy citizen.”<sup>27</sup> Publisher Pomeroy Tucker, who knew him best, concluded Martin was a “religious monomaniac, reading the Scriptures intently, and could probably repeat from memory nearly every text of the Bible from beginning to end, giving the chapter and verse in each case.”<sup>28</sup>

By his own admission, Martin acknowledged investigating a number of religious sects during the revivals. By 1818, however, his immediate

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25. George W. Stoddard (about 1788–unknown) was born in Pennsylvania. He married Maria in 1812 in New York. By 1830, he was a resident of Phelps, Ontario County, New York. In 1850, he was residing in Newark, New York. He wrote an affidavit on the character of Martin Harris, signed on November 28, 1833. The affidavit was quoted in Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 260–61.

26. Reverend Clark also observed that Martin “occasionally attended divine service in our church”—the Zion Episcopal Church. See John A. Clark, *Gleanings by the Way* (Philadelphia: W. J. and J. K. Simon, 1842), 222–23. “The Zion Episcopal Church of Palmyra was organized as a parish June 23, 1823, under the ministry of Rev. Rufus Murray, who had been elected to the charge in 1822, prior to which occasional services had been held here by Rev. Davenport Phelps. In 1824 Rev. John A. Clark became rector and was succeeded in 1826 by Rev. Ezekiel Greer.” See George W. Cowles, *Landmarks of Wayne County, New York* (Syracuse, N.Y.: D. Mason and Company, 1895), 194.

27. See O. Turner, *History of the Pioneer Settlement of Phelps and Gorham’s Purchase, and Morris’ Reserve* (Rochester: William Alling, 1852), 215; Richard Lloyd Anderson, “Martin Harris, the Honorable New York Farmer,” *Improvement Era* 72 (February 1969): 19.

28. Pomeroy Tucker (August 1, 1802–June 10, 1872), son of Jeduthan Tucker and Abi Brow, married Lucy Rogers on December 8, 1824 in Palmyra. He was the former editor and publisher of the *Wayne Sentinel* and acted as office foreman for E. B. Grandin when he published the Book of Mormon. Tucker published his memoirs on Mormonism in 1867 (Tucker, *Origin, Rise, and Progress of Mormonism*).

investigations ceased. In that year, he declared himself an “un-churched Christian,” claiming a divine manifestation to him by the Spirit of the Lord. Glimpses of his vision are few. However, the words of Martin spoken to Edward Stevenson on Sunday, September 4, 1870, in Salt Lake City remain to recount this singular divine manifestation. Martin related:

[I]n the year 1818 = 52 years ago I was Inspired of the Lord & Thought of the Spirit that I Should not Join Eny Church although I Was anxiously Sought for By meny of the Sectarrians[.] I Was taught I could not Walk together unless agreed[.] What can you not be agreed in [is] in the Trinity because I can not find it in my Bible[.] find it for me & I am Ready to Receive it. 3 Persons in one god[.] one Personage I can not concede to for this is Antichrist. . . . Other Sects the Episcopalians alsoe [*sic*] tried me.<sup>29</sup>

In a later letter to H. B. Emerson (Hannah B. Emerson), written from Richmond, Utah, in 1871, Martin gave an amalgamation of his spiritual experiences in the early stages of his religious sojourn and alludes to this very early mind-changing encounter with the Spirit of the Lord. He first writes a testimonial of the Book of Mormon and then references what the Lord had previously shown him by his Spirit, declaring:

No man ever heard me in any way deny the truth of the Book of Mormon, the administration of the angel that showed me the plates; nor the organization of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, under the administration of Joseph smith Jun., the prophet whom the Lord raised up for that purpose, in these the latter days, that he may show forth his power and glory. The Lord has shown me these things by his Spirit—by the administration of holy angels—and confirmed the same with signs following, step by step, as the work has progressed, for the space of fifty years. The Lord showed me . . . when He would bring the record of Joseph which was in the hand of Ephraim, and join with the record of Judah, when the two records should become one in the hand of the Lord to accomplish his great work of the last days. See

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29. “Salt Lake City, September 4, 1870, Sunday Morning, Testimony of Martin Harris,” p. 1, Edward Stevenson Papers Collection, MS 4806, reel 9, box 9, fd. 7, Church History Library, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City. For a detailed description of the particular setting for this dictation, see chapter 14 herein.

Ezekiel 36 and 37, chap.; also Isaiah 29 chapter; also from the 58 chapter to the end of the book; also Ps. 50.

I am very respectfully  
Martin Harris Sr.<sup>30</sup>

Young Joseph Smith did not want the label of an unchurched Christian, a label adopted at that time by Martin. But as Joseph later explained to Alexander Neibaur, he desperately wanted to “get” religion like others in his family, “wanted to feel and shout like the rest but could feel nothing.”<sup>31</sup> “Priest contending against priest, and convert against convert” over conflicting Christian doctrine left him confused as to which denomination was accepted by God. “It was impossible for a person young as I was, and so unacquainted with men and things, to come to any certain conclusion who was right and who was wrong” (JS–H 1:8), wrote Joseph. Searching for answers in the Holy Bible led him to a passage in the Epistle of James: “If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him” (JS–H 1:11; James 1:5).

In accordance with the directive to ask God, “on the morning of a beautiful, clear day, early in the spring of eighteen hundred and twenty,” young Joseph went into the woods near his family’s log home to ask God to unravel the confusion. As he “kneeled down and began to offer up the desires of [his] heart,” he was nearly overcome by “the power of some actual being from the unseen world.” In this moment of great alarm, he exerted “all [his] powers to call upon God to deliver [him] out of the power of this enemy” (JS–H 1:14–16).

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30. Martin Harris to H. B. Emerson, January 1871, in *True Latter Day Saints’ Herald* (Plano, Illinois), October 15, 1875, 630. The letter also serves to illustrate Martin’s proverbial use of the scriptures to prove his particular point of view. This is the second letter sent by Martin in response to two inquiries by Emerson, the first being sent on November 23, 1870, and is also recorded in the above issue of the *Saints’ Herald*. H. B. Emerson was supposed by Martin to be a man, and Martin addresses Emerson as “Sir.” Actually, the correspondent was Hannah B. Emerson, a female.

31. Alexander Neibaur, Journal, May 24, 1844, MS 1674, Church History Library. Alexander Neibaur’s recounting of Joseph Smith’s testimony of the First Vision.