

HISTORICAL LANDMARKS.

Another Interesting Correspondence from Elders Jensen, Stevenson and Black—A Visit to Richmond—The Whitmer and Whitmerites—Manuscript of the Book of Mormon—Testimonies of the Divine Authenticity of the Work—Where the Prophet and Others were Imprisoned.

RICHMOND, Ray County, Mo.
Sept. 13, 1888.

Editor Deseret News:

We (Elders Stevenson, Black and Jensen) left Kansas City yesterday morning, taking the Chicago, and via Far West California Railway to Lexington Junction, 42 miles, where we arrived about 11:30 A. M. There being no train going to Richmond until late in the afternoon, we concluded to walk, the distance being only about five miles. In passing through the country on foot we stopped to converse with a number of the inhabitants and learned from them many things of interest in regard to the country. This is truly a delightful country. Near the Missouri it is quite richly timbered, but as we receded from the river the openings and clearings became more extensive, and finally the prairies enhance the landscape with the various sorts of timber growing on the north side of the river we reached the oak, elm, ash, walnut, hickory, locust, tamarind and others besides the pawpaw and numerous kinds of underwood and vines. Some of the farms are kept in a thrifty condition, while others are seemingly neglected, so that most healthy growths of weeds have got the best of the sown crops. Small grain does not grow so well, but the soil seems to be particularly adapted for raising Indian corn, which in some instances yields about 100 bushels to the acre.

We also saw some of the finest milch cows we have ever beheld in our country, the facilities for pasturage here being second to none in the United States. Having arrived at Richmond we went directly to the residence of late David Whitmer, and received somewhat cool reception from his daughter, Mrs. Schweich, who keeps a house for her brother David, at the farmstead. Elder Stevenson remarked that he found altogether a different influence in the house to that he experienced on his former visit when David was alive, and the place had no longer any attractions. We visited the new cemetery, situated at a short distance west of town, where the mortal remains of the last witness of the Book of Mormon now slumber in the dust. We also visited the old cemetery about half a mile from Richmond centre, where rest the remains of the senior Peter Whitmer (in whose house the Church was organized) and his wife together with his son Jacob (one of the eight witnesses) and Oliver Cowdery. A fine marble tomb stone designates the resting place of Jacob Whitmer, but the grave of Oliver was entirely hid by a thicket of weeds and overgrown with weeds. While we found the new cemetery in a better condition we found the old one entirely neglected and marble monuments, head stones and fences had rotted promiscuously on the ground since the cyclone left it ten years ago.

Standing over the graves of Oliver and Jacob we instinctively uncovered our heads, uttered a silent prayer and passed on with heavy hearts. How we would have appreciated a short interview with him who was blessed with the ministrations of angels, the Savior, Moses, Elijah, the Prophet, and other holy beings!

Toward evening we went on foot about one and a half miles south of Richmond to the house of John C. Whitmer, the only living son of Jacob Whitmer. He is the presiding Elder of the so-called Whitmerites, and is a respectable farmer, fifty-three years of age. He received us kindly and gave us some information that is highly appreciated in regard to the Eight Witnesses of the Book of Mormon and others. His uncles Christian and Peter Whitmer both died as faithful Elders of the Church in Clay County, Mo., the first named Nov. 27, 1833, and the latter Sept. 25, 1836. Both bore faithful and unflinching testimonies to the truth of the divine authenticity of the Book of Mormon. Jacob Whitmer died in Richmond, April 21, 1856, aged 72 years, 2 months and 20 days. John Whitmer died in Far West, Caldwell County, Mo., in 1878, and Hiram Page died on a farm about fourteen miles west of Richmond, near the boundary line of Clay County, Aug. 12, 1852.

John C. Whitmer testified as follows concerning the witnesses:

"I was closely connected with Hiram Page in business transactions and other matters, he being married to my aunt. I knew him at all times and under all circumstances to be true to his testimony concerning the divinity of the Book of Mormon. I was also at the deathbed of Oliver Cowdery in 1836, and I heard him speak to my uncle David (Whitmer) and say: 'Brother David, be faithful to our testimony to the Book of Mormon, for we know that it is of God and that it is verily true.' He then closed his eyes in death. My father, Jacob Whitmer, was always faithful and true to his testimony to the Book of Mormon, and confirmed it on his deathbed. Of my uncle John (Whitmer) I will say that I was with him a short time before he died at Far West, Missouri, when he confirmed to me what he had done many times previously that he knew

the Book of Mormon was true. I was also with Uncle David (Whitmer), who died here in January last, and heard him bear his last testimony in the presence of many witnesses whom he had called together for the occasion. He solemnly declared that the record of the Nephites, as he always called the Book of Mormon, was of God, and his testimony concerning it true."

John C. Whitmer then gave us in substance the following particulars in regard to the church over which he presided: He was baptized by his uncle, David Whitmer, Sept. 15, 1875, and by him also ordained an Elder January 28, 1876, receiving instructions to go forth and preach the Gospel as it had been taught by Joseph the Prophet and organize a new church according to the original pattern, in which he (John C.) was to be the first Elder. In obedience to this he immediately commenced his labors and succeeded in baptizing the first three individuals on the following Feb. 17, (1876). Others followed and soon the new church commenced to hold meetings and completed their organization as far as their numbers would permit them. They now claim to have about one hundred members, all told. Some of these reside in and around Richmond, others in Independence, Jackson County, while the remainder live in a more scattered condition in Iowa, Kansas, Illinois, Tennessee, California and other states. The few around Richmond and as many of the others who can conveniently come together hold meetings every third Sunday in a small schoolhouse situated about a mile and a half south of Richmond in the school district where John C. Whitmer, their president, resides.

The Whitmerites or as they call themselves the Church of Christ, believe only a part of the revelations given through Joseph Smith the Prophet, but they take the Book of Mormon and the New Testament as their standard and rule of faith. Anything that agrees with the teachings of these two books they accept, and everything that conflicts therewith they reject. They have no High Priests in their church as they do not believe in that order of the Priesthood, but they have a few Elders, Priests and Teachers. They have no Deacons, but believe in the order, and would also ordain Apostles and Seventies, if the number of their members would allow it, but there being so few of them they could not possibly find element enough to ordain twelve Apostles, say nothing about seventy men wherewith to make a quorum of Seventies. Elder Stevenson suggested that the Whitmerites and Hendrickites unite so as to make a stronger body; whereupon Mr. Whitmer said he expected to visit Independence in a few weeks, when he hoped to be able to baptize all the Hendrickites into his church.

This morning we visited a number of old settlers trying to gather information in regard to circumstances transpiring fifty years ago. We visited the site of the old jail where Parley P. Pratt, Morris Phelps and others were imprisoned from November, 1838, to May 1839. An old resident told us that he remembered many years afterwards seeing the name of P. P. Pratt on the ceiling of the jail, which was finally torn down and the site is now occupied by a large wagon repairing and blacksmith shop owned by Messrs. Powell & Sons. On the identical spot where the jail stood is a well from which we drew and drank water in memory of the past. The jail site is a little more than half a block east of the northeast corner of the court house square, on the north side of the street. We made several inquiries about the old log house where Joseph the Prophet and his fellow-prisoners were guarded during Judge Austin A. King's mock trial in November, 1838, and where Joseph rebuked the guard; but we were unable to find any who could give us the necessary information. One old settler, Mr. B. H. Quesenberry, who acted as county clerk of Ray County in 1838, told us that there were a number of old log houses on the north side of the court house square at that time, and it was no doubt into one of these that the Prophet and his brethren were ushered on that memorable occasion. This afternoon we visited Mrs. Bisbee, a daughter of the late Jacob Whitmer, and Philander Page, son of the late Hiram Page, and from them and documents in their possession we gained all the information desired in regard to the eight witnesses of the Book of Mormon. This evening we examined the manuscript of the Book of Mormon in the possession of David J. Whitmer, son of the late David Whitmer. We satisfied ourselves beyond a doubt that it was the copy from which the book was printed—a copy of the original manuscript afterwards deposited by Joseph in the foundation of the Nauvoo House. We discerned between at least three different handwritings, the most of it, however, being written by Oliver Cowdery, whose handwriting is well known. It is supposed that Emma Smith and perhaps Christian and Peter Whitmer wrote the balance. The signatures of the witnesses were all written by the same scribe, which is another proof that this is not the original manuscript on which each witness signed his own name. There was 464 closely-written pages, each sheet being written on both sides. We have also learned that General John B. Clark, the notorious mobocrat, died as a drunkard in Fayette, Howard County, about the year 1880, forsaken by his political friends at least. The notorious Austin A. King also died years ago. He

was taken sick very suddenly at St. Louis and died almost immediately. His remains were brought to Ray County for burial.

Richmond is a fine town of nearly three thousand inhabitants. The court house, around which the principal stores and business houses are clustered, is beautifully situated on rising ground, while on another gently sloping hill a little southward, stands the Richmond College, said to be a first class institution of learning. Two weekly newspapers the Democrat and the Conservator are published. About seven hundred men are engaged in coal mining around Richmond, a number of profitable mines having been opened recently. During the present season about one hundred new residences have been erected.

We start for the Crooked River battle-ground tomorrow morning.

ANDREW JENSON,
EDWARD STEVENSON,
JOSEPH S. BLACK.