

Dyer to see Brother Joseph Anderson, who is preparing the letter concerning this, and that I wanted to see the letter so that we could go over it.

*November 27, 1967, First Presidency meeting.* President [Hugh B.] Brown reported that through some of our friends we have been able to acquire some valuable documents which were presented to the First Presidency last Tuesday by President [N. Eldon] Tanner, and the President asked that they be brought here so that the brethren of the Twelve might see them and become acquainted with the procedure that resulted in their acquisition; and also know something of the authenticity of the documents we now have. President Brown asked President Tanner to present to the brethren a report of what happened, and also to show to them the documents themselves. He said that as they are very fragile it wouldn't be wise to pass them around for each one to handle, that they would be placed on the table for each one to see.

President Tanner then made the following report. He said that just over a year ago Dr. Aziz S. Atiya, who is a Coptic and a great student of literature and ancient history, came to him and told him that while he was in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York in the department where they have their papyri and materials of that kind, as he was going through these materials in his study, he accidentally came on to a little parcel which he opened, and recognized it immediately as the original papyrus, a facsimile of which appears at the beginning of the Book of Abraham in the Pearl of Great Price, and is numbered one, which facsimile was made by the Prophet Joseph Smith. When he saw this, he immediately recognized the great discovery he had made, and he told President Tanner about it.

President Tanner then reported the matter to the First Presidency and subsequently told Dr. Atiya that we were extremely interested, that we thought this was a tremendous thing, and he said that he thought possibly he would be able to make this available to the Church, if we were prepared to cooperate with him. He said he had no idea what it would cost but he knew they would not sell it for money. He thought possibly he could get some Egyptian artifacts that would appeal to them, that he might give them in exchange for these papyri. Accordingly Dr. Atiya was authorized to do that.

After negotiating with them for some time, he called President Tanner and asked to see him immediately, and told him that he had just received a phone call from Dr. Henry G. Fischer, curator of the Egyptian section, saying that Dr. Thomas P. F. Hoving,<sup>20</sup> who is the Director of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, had given authorization to present these to the Church at no cost. President Tanner said that when he received this information he wrote to Dr. Hoving, and that Dr. Atiya also wrote him, arranging for the transfer of these items to the Church on November 27 at mid-day. President Tanner said that Dr. Hoving is an outstanding individual, and that he had been most gracious in all their dealings.

President Tanner stated that he had here for the brethren to see the original of Facsimile No. 1 that appears in the Book of Abraham. He said it is not entirely in the condition it was at the time the Prophet had it; and that he also had some other papyri and pictures of these various items, but it would seem advisable not to unwrap the papyri and handle them because of the fragility, and they were carefully packed when they were given to us. He said there are eleven of them.

President Tanner said that Dr. Hugh Nibley says there is no question about their authenticity, that Dr. Hoving, who is the [museum] director; Dr. Fischer, the Egyptologist; and Dr. Joseph V. Noble, who has been with the museum for years, all say that this is actually the original from which the facsimile in the Pearl of Great Price was made.

President Tanner said that in addition we have a letter, a typed copy of which he had brought with him to show to the brethren (he did not bring the original with him to the meeting). He said that in the typed copy there are two mistakes, that in the copy they have 1846 instead of 1856; and in the typed copy the word "his" is used instead of "her." Elder Howard W. Hunter was requested to read the letter. . . .

President Tanner said that the museum people say that the parchment was turned over to Mr. A[bel] Combs,<sup>21</sup> and that when he died he

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20. Thomas Pearsall Field Hoving (1931–2009) had become director of the Metropolitan Museum of Art earlier that year. He would stay for ten years. Born in New York City, he studied at nearby Princeton University for his BA, MFA, and PhD degrees. Fortuitously, his approach at the museum was to emphasize quality over quantity. The Joseph Smith papyri held little intrinsic interest for the museum.

21. Abel Combs (1823–92) purchased the papyri from Emma Smith in 1856, apparently as an investment. He was a metal worker who made and sold lamps.

left some of the material, a part of which is included in this collection, to his housekeeper; and then his housekeeper's son or daughter took them to the museum in 1918 to see if the museum would be interested in them, and the museum was not interested; and then his or her daughter's husband brought them to the museum in 1947, and the museum bought them at that time and has had them in its possession since that time.

President Tanner said that they went to the museum at noon on Monday, November 27, 1967, under assignment from the First Presidency and in accordance with previous arrangement. Provision had been made to have television cameras set up, and representatives of the U[nited] P[ress] I[nternational] and the A[ssociated] P[ress] were present; Arch Madsen [of KSL TV] and Earl Hawkes [of the *Deseret News*] were there with three of their men to take pictures and make reports. He said that at this meeting Dr. Hoving handed these items to President Tanner in the presence of Dr. Atiya [of the University of Utah], [and from the museum] Dr. Fischer and Dr. Noble. President Tanner said he had invited the five stake presidents in that area, and three regional representatives, and the mission president to attend this transfer, but some of them could not be present.

Following the presentation a luncheon was held to which all these men were invited; also Frank Wangemann, who is manager of the Waldorf-Astoria. He said that if anything ever touched Mr. Wangemann he thought this did, and that after lunch Mr. Wangemann talked to Dr. Atiya for some time.

President Tanner said that no one could have been more gracious than was Dr. Hoving. President Tanner said to him, "You cannot understand what this means to us and how much we appreciate it." Dr. Hoving said, "I think we can. We have things like this in our museum, thousands of them, but this is significant and important to your Church, and we think it should go home." ...

President Tanner said that at the luncheon he asked Dr. Atiya and Dr. Noble to speak, that Dr. Hoving was unable to attend the luncheon. Dr. Noble is the vice president of the museum. He said that Dr. Atiya was most complimentary to the people of the Church and the Church itself. He said how pleased he was to be a party to the turning of these manuscripts over to the Church. He said that he had made three very important

discoveries in his life, and many important ones, but this was the crowning discovery of them all, knowing what it meant to the Church.

Dr. Noble made a statement to the effect that in their research they find artifacts here and there and put them all together and say that is the story, but he said that we have the actual thing here, and there is no question about it.

President Tanner said that when this was presented to the First Presidency, President McKay was deeply moved and suggested that the brethren of the Twelve should see it. The President said this is the most significant thing that has happened to the Church in a long time. ...

President Tanner showed to the brethren pictures of the other ten pieces, of which we have the originals, and said that it is the intention to send these papyri to the Brigham Young University for safe keeping, and to make it possible for Dr. Nibley to carry on his careful research. He said that we know that the Book of Abraham was not written from these papyri of which we have the pictures. President Tanner stated that he would have a copy of these pictures made, a full set of them, for each one of the brethren. President Tanner further stated that these papyri are pasted on heavy paper, and on the back of the paper on each of the pieces is some drawing or sketching.

Elder [Gordon B.] Hinckley commented that there might be some reasonable assumption that there are some of these papyri somewhere else.

The brethren urged that the utmost care be taken to preserve these items, particularly the original papyrus from which Facsimile No. 1 [in the Book of Abraham] was taken. President Brown moved that this particular piece of papyrus be left in the hands of President Tanner and Brother [Howard W.] Hunter, with instructions to carefully preserve it, and prepare it for deposit either in the vault in the canyon or the church files in the Historian's Office, President Tanner and Brother Hunter to determine this point, that it be not sent to the Brigham Young University. Motion was seconded by Elder [Delbert L.] Stapley and unanimously approved.

*December 1, 1967.* By appointment, met with Elder Alvin R. Dyer, at which time we discussed the matter of answering [the stake president's] letter [discussed previously on November 21] regarding his membership in the John Birch Society. After considering very carefully the answer