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Rodger I. Anderson, *Joseph Smith's New York Reputation Reexamined*

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Abstract *Review of Joseph Smith's New York Reputation Reexamined* (1990), by Rodger I. Anderson.

Rodger I. Anderson, *Joseph Smith's New York Reputation Reexamined*. Salt Lake City: Signature, 1990. 178 pp., with subject index. \$9.95.

Reviewed by Richard Lloyd Anderson

This short paperback is the latest but not the final installment in the continuing fulfillment of the Moroni-Joseph Smith prophecy: "my name . . . should be both good and evil spoken of among all people" (JS-H 1:33). Rumor and ridicule had intensified for ten years before angry ex-Mormon Philastus Hurlbut collected the worst in signed statements from Joseph Smith's former townsmen.¹ Negative studies of the Prophet rely heavily on these hostile declarations of 1833; but examinations of the religious integrity of Joseph Smith have minimized such statements, maintaining basically that this modern prophet is the ultimate expert on his own spiritual story.

Some forty testimonials of 1833 and later are printed in the last third of Rodger Anderson's short book, but they could not be studied in depth in his 116-page commentary. He mostly argues that Hugh Nibley and I have made a weak case against Hurlbut's work, concluding that these 1833 statements and certain later ones "must be granted permanent status as primary documents relating to Joseph Smith's early life and the origins of Mormonism" (p. 114). But not quite—the concluding chapter is laced with rules on when to trust a testimonial. For instance, "ghost-writing may have colored some of the testimony" (p. 113), and "they did not always distinguish hearsay from observation" (p. 114). In other words, the Nibley-Anderson analysis is attacked, but its main cautions are at least verbally accepted.

Rodger Anderson often falls into the above historical traps. First, his book regularly assumes that signed testimony contains only the views of the signer, ignoring the many ways an interviewer may superimpose his biases on the statement he is taking. And although Rodger Anderson admits his signed

¹ For Hurlbut's personal problems and gathering of New York affidavits, see Richard Lloyd Anderson, "The Mature Joseph Smith and Treasure Searching," *BYU Studies* 24 (Fall 1984; appeared in 1986): 492-94. For additional insights, see my other articles: "Joseph Smith's New York Reputation Reappraised," *BYU Studies* 10 (Spring 1970): 284-85, and "The Reliability of the Early History of Lucy and Joseph Smith," *Dialogue* 4 (Summer 1969): 15-16.

declarations mingle hearsay with observation, he has difficulty keeping the two apart. So the book shows a marked softness in insisting on firsthand evidence: "preference should be given to witnesses speaking from personal, direct knowledge, not hearsay or obvious neighborhood gossip" (p. 115). But why talk of "preference"? Without direct knowledge, responsible history disappears.

The following discussion will give examples of what it means to insist on direct evidence for Joseph Smith's early life. Rebuttal rhetoric is not needed here as much as specific illustrations of the tension between primary and secondary evidence. So my dissent will not be noted for many Rodger Anderson judgments, but the issue between us is nearly always a difference on what is firsthand, reliable documentation. His approach is deficient in the following cases, mainly selected for their relevance in constructing an accurate picture of Joseph Smith's New York character.

Case 1: Atypical Statements in Interviews

Rodger Anderson gives a short critique of Hugh Nibley's historical methods in the *Myth Makers*.² Much of this is beside the point, since Nibley chose to spoof the broad inconsistencies of Joseph Smith's detractors. In Rodger Anderson's view, Nibley too quickly ridicules claims that Joseph found the plates not through an angel, but by the folk art of the seer stone. Two sources are cited, one of which is supposedly Martin Harris:

Nibley . . . chooses to ignore Martin Harris's statement of 1859: "Joseph . . . described the manner of finding his plates. He found them by looking in the stone found in the well of Mason Chase. The family had likewise told me the same thing." (p. 20)

But this quotation comes from an interview with Martin Harris, and the label of "Martin Harris's statement" is misleading. As long as someone else wrote this down, one can call it reported conversation, not a personal statement. The distinction is critical, for David Whitmer was interviewed by

² Hugh W. Nibley, *The Myth Makers* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1961); soon to reappear in *Defending the Kingdom: Informal Studies of the Lucrative Art of Telling Stories about the Mormons*, vol. 11 of *The Collected Works of Hugh Nibley*.

newspapers about a dozen times and normally issued a personal correction of the printed interview on a number of key points. Here we don't know whether Harris ever read Tiffany's report or commented on it. However, it is contradicted by regularly reported Harris comments that an angel first revealed to Joseph Smith where to find the plates.

The interviewer here was Joel Tiffany, an articulate spiritualist. Tiffany says that he purchased a copy of E. D. Howe's *Mormonism Unveiled* (where Hurlbut's affidavits were first printed) and relied on it for the "facts" of Mormonism's beginnings. Tiffany strongly favored a theory in which lower spirits influenced Joseph through a seer stone rather than one in which an angel of God gave him divine truths. The context of the above statement is instructive, for Harris said of Joseph, "an angel had appeared to him, and told him it was God's work." Then Tiffany reported Harris was confused ("seemed to wander from the subject"), after which the above quotation is given about finding the plates through a seer stone. Tiffany's interview leaves a good deal of ambiguity on this point, despite another segment of the conversation reported as a seer stone discovery.³

Tiffany's unusual details should not fly in the face of what Martin Harris consistently said about the angel throughout his life. Two out of a dozen documented examples can be given here. In 1829 the *Rochester Gem* ran an article about Martin Harris contacting printers for the Book of Mormon:

He gave something like the following account of it. In the autumn of 1827, a man named Joseph Smith of Manchester, in Ontario County, said that he 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.⁴

Over forty years later, Harris returned to the Church in Utah and on the way met with an Iowa editor. The newspaperman

³ See Tiffany's comments and interview running in *Tiffany's Monthly*, in 1859, reprinted in Francis W. Kirkham, *New Witness for Christ in America*, vol. 2, rev. ed. (Salt Lake City: Utah Printing, 1959), 373-76, 381.

⁴ *Rochester* [New York] *Gem*, September 5, 1829, cited in Kirkham, *New Witness for Christ in America*, vol. 1, 4th ed. (Salt Lake City: Utah Printing, 1967), 151.

reported how Harris "loves to relate the incidents with which he was personally connected," and then referred to the "story" he had just heard from Martin: "In September, 1828, as the story goes, Joseph Smith, directed by an angel . . . dug up a very solid stone chest, within which were the tablets of gold."⁵

Rodger Anderson also mentions "Orsamus Turner's 1851 recollection that the Smith family 'said it was by looking at this stone in a hat, the light excluded, that Joseph discovered the plates'" (pp. 20-21). But this is not a "recollection" from Turner, a pioneer Palmyra editor of some experience with the Smiths. Turner first said he got reliable information on Martin Harris from "several respectable citizens of Palmyra to whom he made early disclosures." Then Turner said Harris's story was in substance as follows: "The Prophet Joseph was directed by the angel where to find, by excavation, at the place afterwards called Mormon Hill, the gold plates." In this setting, Turner claims an inconsistency in the story, not from his own knowledge, but claims the family "made a new version of it to one of their neighbors." My emphasized phrase indicates the source of the different story of finding the plates by the seer stone, which Rodger Anderson claimed to come from Turner. But Turner is only reporting a rumor from an unidentified neighbor.

So what is really firsthand in the case of finding the plates? Since Joseph Smith is the only one who was directed to them in the first place, his consistent testimony of being directed by the angel should settle the question. The above examples show that Martin Harris and the Smith family gave reports consistent with Joseph's.

Case 2: Substituting Rumor for Experience

Hurlbut's goal in gathering New York evidence was openly declared: to "completely divest Joseph Smith of all claims to the character of an honest man."⁶ His case is essentially: "Since Joseph habit-uually lied and cheated, don't believe he was truthful on his visions." I personally think this causation should

⁵ Orsamus Turner, *History of the Pioneer Settlement of Phelps and Gorham's Purchase* (Rochester, NY: Alling, 1852), 215-16. For background on Turner, see Richard Lloyd Anderson, "Circumstantial Confirmation of the First Vision through Reminiscences," *BYU Studies* 9 (Spring 1969): 376-81.

⁶ Committee statement, *Painesville [Ohio] Telegraph*, January 31, 1834, cited in Richard L. Anderson, "Joseph Smith's Reputation," 284.

be reversed: Since the Palmyra-Manchester communities could not believe in Joseph Smith's visions, they developed the corporate rationalization that the budding prophet lied and cheated. Clearly the affidavits are filled with labels when the documentary historian wants facts, not opinions.

An example of empty vilification is Pomeroy Tucker's *Origin, Rise, and Progress of Mormonism*, an 1867 work chiefly valuable for the author's memories of Martin Harris of and printing the Book of Mormon. Nibley's eye for bluffing caught Tucker telling of Joseph Smith's first money digging, based on "several of the individuals participating in this and subsequent diggings, and many others well remembering the stories of the time."⁷ Rodger Anderson cries "foul" when Nibley points out hearsay in relying on memory of the "the stories of the time," but Tucker did in part appeal to community rumor.

Yet Tucker has a better illustration of hearsay overcoming firsthand recollection. He says there was a general suspicion in the neighborhood of the Smiths because they were idle and there were unidentified thefts in "sheepfolds" and "hencoops." After thus beheading the Smiths morally, Tucker incidentally adds, "though it is but common fairness to accompany this fact by the statement, that it is not within the remembrance of the writer."⁸ This difference between gossip and personal knowledge brought a reaction from John Stafford, a neighbor of Joseph's age who became a respected doctor and later commented about Joseph Smith to inquiring RLDS leaders: "He was a real clever, jovial boy. What Tucker said about them was false absolutely."⁹

Case 3: Reporting Conflicting "Confessions"

Rodger Anderson's book is mainly organized as a refutation of my 1970 article, "Joseph Smith's New York Reputation Reappraised," a negative evaluation of Hurlbut's collected statements.¹⁰ I see most of these 1833 statements as little more than local protests against founding a new religion in

⁷ Pomeroy Tucker, *Origin, Rise, and Progress of Mormonism* (New York: Appleton, 1867), 22.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 15.

⁹ Typescript of handwritten notes, William H. Kelley Notebook, 1881, cited in Rodger I. Anderson, *Joseph Smith's New York Reputation Reexamined*, 172.

¹⁰ See n. 1 above.

their midst, the psychological equivalent of the "how could he, of all people" slurs against Jesus (Matthew 13:53-54). These poison letters far more often express disgust at Joseph Smith than try to explain him. Three longer statements are exceptions, one of which comes from the articulate Willard Chase, a Methodist exhorter and artisan whom Joseph asked to make a chest for the plates. Chase reports what Joseph told about bringing the plates home, and his details remarkably correlate with Lucy Smith's history here.¹¹

But Chase's version of first finding the plates at Cumorah four years before is filled with "exaggerated, ridiculing details." Rodger Anderson objects to my phrase, as he claims that three Mormon sources besides Joseph Smith and four non-Mormon sources agree on these details. The issue is, which details? Chase and the non-Mormon sources add the stage props of magic and money digging to the first Cumorah visit, whereas Joseph Smith and the Mormon sources have only the personal appearances of the angel and of Satan trying to dissuade Joseph Smith.¹² The two versions do not mix, since one claims divine direction and the other human appeasement of a spirit guarding a treasure. The Mormon sources reflect or quote Joseph Smith, while the non-Mormon sources here reflect a sarcastic version in a community that did not accept the reality of Joseph getting plates, whether by revelation or incantation. Rodger Anderson is sure that Joseph first told the magical version and then cleaned up his story. Joseph Smith gives no other report except the coming of an angel to reveal the plates. One can believe that he first told a magical variation only by letting others tell Joseph's story for him. But it is all too easy to put words in another's mouth.

Yet Rodger Anderson believes that Peter Ingersoll invented a Joseph Smith story. Peter lived near Joseph Smith and was employed to go with him to Pennsylvania to move Emma's personal property to the Smith farm in the fall of 1827. Ingersoll claims that after this, Joseph told him he brought home white sand in his work frock and walked into the house to find "the family" (parents, Emma, brothers and sisters) eating.

¹¹ The statements of Chase and other statements collected by Hurlbut first appeared in E. D. Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled* (Painesville, OH: E. D. Howe, 1834), ch. 17. They are reprinted in Appendix A of the Rodger I. Anderson book.

¹² For background, see Richard Lloyd Anderson, "The Alvin Smith Story," *Ensign* (August 1987): 61-63.

When they asked what he carried, he "very gravely" told them (for the first time) that he had a "golden Bible" and had received a revelation that no one could see it and live. At that point (according to Ingersoll), Joseph offered to let the family see, but they fearfully refused, and Ingersoll says that Joseph added, "Now, I have got the damned fools fixed, and will carry out the fun."¹³

Rodger Anderson agrees with me that this is just a tall tale. Why? Family sources prove they looked forward to getting the plates long before this late 1827 occurrence, and Joseph had far more respect for his family than the anecdote allows. So Rodger Anderson thinks that Ingersoll at first believed Joseph and then retaliated: "it seems likely that Ingersoll created the story as a way of striking back at Smith for his own gullibility in swallowing a story he later became convinced was a hoax" (p. 56). That may be, and there are perhaps others making affidavits with similar motives. But the more provable point is that good stories die hard. Facts were obviously bent to make Joseph Smith the butt of many a joke. So anecdotes could be yarns good for a guffaw around a pot-bellied stove.

Ingersoll has another story in this class. Joseph planned to move Emma and the plates to Pennsylvania at the end of 1827. Then Ingersoll has Joseph playing a religious mind game with Martin Harris: "I . . . told him that I had a command to ask the first *honest man* I met with, for fifty dollars in money, and he would let me have it. I saw at once, said Jo, that it took his notion, for he promptly give me the fifty." Willard Chase tells a similar story, not identifying his source. But in this case both Joseph Smith and Martin Harris gave their recollections. Both say that Martin was converted to Joseph Smith's revelations first and then offered the money out of conviction, not because of sudden street-side flattery.¹⁴ The best historical evidence is not

¹³ Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 235-36.

¹⁴ Joseph Smith's 1832 history reads: "And in December following we moved to Susquehanna by the assistance of a man by the name of Martin Harris, who became convinced of the visions and gave me fifty dollars to bear my expenses." Dean C. Jessee, *Personal Writings of Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1984), 7. According to the 1859 Tiffany interview with Harris, Joseph first told Harris that the Lord had called him to finance the Book of Mormon. Then after prayer, God "showed me that it was his work." Then Martin took the initiative to pay Joseph's Palmyra debts "and furnished him money for his journey." Kirkham, *New Witness for Christ in America*, 2:382.

something told by another party, especially one with hostility to the person he is reporting.

Case 4: Prompting the Witness

What specific things could Joseph Smith's townsmen tell about his character? Not much, according to Hurlbut's two general affidavits. The Palmyra group signed a declaration that the Smiths "were particularly famous for visionary projects," a report of public reputation, not personal observation. When "spent much of their time in digging for money" follows, it indeed carries the tone of "famous for," not, "I watched them do it." The bottom line was the evaluation of the Prophet and his father, who were "considered entirely destitute of *moral character, and addicted to vicious habits.*" With "considered" being the same thing as "famous for," the statement is historically empty. We have only learned that 51 prominent men were embarrassed by the Smiths. Eleven more in the Manchester farm area signed a crisper evaluation of the Smith family, "a lazy, indolent set of men, but also intemperate; and their word was not to be depended upon."¹⁵

My 1970 article showed how these similar phrases were sprinkled throughout most New York affidavits. For instance, Parley Chase bunched standard condemnations and signed his own version of "I don't like the Smiths." My 1970 reasoning was that Hurlbut probably wrote the group affidavits (and Parley Chase's cribbed copy), so striking parallels in the other affidavits indicated his influence: "Hurlbut either suggested this language, penned it for signing, or interpolated it afterwards."¹⁶

Rodger Anderson defends the affidavits by noting that these similarities "may only mean that Hurlbut submitted the same questions to some of the parties involved" (p. 28). In this view the interrogator asked the same questions to each party, such as, "Was digging for money the general employment of the Smith family" (p. 28)? Several affidavits using these phrases would then be reflecting Hurlbut's question. Rodger Anderson adds another possible question to explain parallels: Was their reputation respectable, "or were they addicted to indolence, intemperance, or lying" (p. 29)? One of my 1970 possibilities

¹⁵ These two general affidavits are in Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 261-62.

¹⁶ Richard Lloyd Anderson, "Joseph Smith's New York Reputation Reappraised," 288.

was that Hurlbut "suggested this language." Lawyers call the technique "leading the witness," traditionally forbidden on direct examination because legal theory requires that the witness should speak his own mind, not have thoughts and words repackaged for him.

Rodger Anderson recoils at my suggestion that the affidavits were "contaminated by Hurlbut," but he has merely argued harder for one road to this same result. Rodger Anderson then contends that Hurlbut's influence does not matter, since many of the statements were signed under oath before a magistrate. This is one of scores of irrelevancies. The question is credibility, not form. As Jesus essentially said in the Sermon on the Mount, the honest person is regularly believable, not just under oath. Nor does the act of signing settle all, since it is hardly human nature to read the fine print of a contract or all details of prewritten petitions. Rodger Anderson finds Ingersoll's sand-for-plates story "the most dubious" (p. 56) and thus admits that Ingersoll is "the possible exception" in "knowingly swearing to a lie" (p. 114). But Ingersoll does not tell taller stories than many others glinting in the hostile statements reprinted by Rodger Anderson. Like the persecuting orthodox from the Pharisees to the Puritans, the New York community was performing an act of moral virtue to purge itself of the stigma of an offending new religion. Hurlbut contributed to the process of mutual contamination of similar stories and catch-words.

Eight Hurlbut testimonials do not appear in Rodger Anderson's collection; he gathered them in Ohio and Pennsylvania with the motive to prove that early minister Solomon Spaulding wrote fiction of pre-Columbian America that was plagiarized to become the Book of Mormon. Since historians generally dismiss this "Spaulding theory," Hurlbut's affidavits supporting it now appear as prompted propaganda. E. D. Howe, the publisher of Hurlbut's interviews, visited some of those making the Spaulding recollections to verify their signatures. The problem, however, is not the signatures but the strange similarities and overdone content. Fawn M. Brodie, for instance, is strangely divided in believing that Hurlbut's New York affidavits "throw considerable light on the writing of the

Book of Mormon,"¹⁷ but that his Pennsylvania-Ohio statements are factually distorted.

It can clearly be seen that the affidavits were written by Hurlbut, since the style is the same throughout. It may be noted also that although five out of the eight had heard Spaulding's story only once, there was a surprising uniformity in the details they remembered after twenty-two years. Six recalled the names Nephi, Lamanite, etc.; six held that the manuscript described the Indians as descendants of the lost ten tribes; four mentioned that the great wars caused the erection of the Indian mounds; and four noted the ancient scriptural style. The very tightness with which Hurlbut here was implementing his theory rouses an immediate suspicion that he did a little judicious prompting.¹⁸

Oberlin College has the only known Spaulding manuscript, with its broad similarity of migrations to America but with details totally at variance with the neighbors' recollections. Diehards can argue for another Spaulding manuscript, but style predicts what any number of manuscripts would show from the old minister's untalented pen: "florid sentiment and grandiose rhetoric" with all of the "stereotyped patterns" of the melodramatic novels of the day.¹⁹ Since no such mind produced the Book of Mormon, affidavits are incorrect that allege similarities between an exaggerated romance and the sober religious exhortations of the Book of Mormon prophets.

My original article outlined an objective test. The standard phrases of the affidavits stressed indolence among the Smith's cardinal sins, a tip-off on what Hurlbut wanted to prove. But as a serious Smith family historian, the "lazy" epithet strikes me as ridiculous. Lucy Smith's detailed history of the family from New England through New York is a saga of industry against unforeseen setbacks. Her home productions combined with the farm income and cooing of her husband, supplemented with

17 Fawn M. Brodie, *No Man Knows My History*, 2d ed. (New York: Knopf, 1971), 432.

18 *Ibid.*, 446-47.

19 *Ibid.*, 450.

scarce cash as her sons regularly hired out.²⁰ With his strange mixture of admiration and skepticism on the Smiths, Lorenzo Saunders objectively described one of their farm operations: "The Smiths were great sugar makers. . . . They made seven thousand pounds one year and took the bounty in the county—of \$50.00."²¹ The bottom line? A half dozen New York statements speak of indolence, which is demonstrably inaccurate. How can the neighbors' declarations be trusted on other main themes if their idleness claim is clearly false?

Case 5: The Best Joseph Smith Source

Rodger Anderson strangely disclaims responsibility for the consequences of his book. His object is merely to prove that New York testimonials were taken in good faith: "Whether or not it follows that the conclusions of the Smiths' neighbors about the events they witnessed are in fact justified is a task I leave to other researchers" (pp. 7-8). But the author really does not leave judgments on Joseph Smith to others. The Hurlbut affidavits have a single common denominator—the Smiths, and particularly the younger Joseph, deceived their neighbors through money digging and in other things regularly proved their unreliability and dishonesty.

Thus the issue for those who signed the New York affidavits was the trustworthiness of Joseph Smith. Since Rodger Anderson argues so intensely for respecting Hurlbut and his signers, evidently their supposed view of Joseph Smith is really his: "For them, he would always remain a superstitious adolescent dreamer and his success as a prophet a riddle for which there was no answer" (p. 116). But the New York townsmen had a stronger answer—fifty-one signers in Palmyra said the Prophet was "entirely destitute of *moral character*." The Prophet answered the core issue of his youth in the blunt Nauvoo comment: "I never told you I was perfect, but there is no error in the revelations which I have taught."²²

²⁰ For a study of the Smiths' impressive work products from 1820 to 1827, see Richard Lloyd Anderson, "The Reliability of the Early History of Lucy and Joseph Smith," 19-24.

²¹ E. L. Kelley Interview of Lorenzo Saunders, Sept. 17, 1884, E. L. Kelley Papers, Box 1, Fold. 7, RLDS Archives.

²² May 12, 1844 discourse, Thomas Bullock report, in Andrew F. Ehat and Lyndon W. Cook, *The Words of Joseph Smith* (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Religious Studies Center, 1980), 369.

If money digging is part of the young Joseph Smith's imperfection, so be it. Rodger Anderson discusses how my mentality resists all possibility of treasure searching by Joseph Smith, a conclusion aided by quoting an article twenty-one years old instead of my recent articles on the same subject. Yet I would not change my 1970 sentence: "if the Smiths participated aggressively in treasure seeking, they participated in a passing cultural phenomenon, shared widely by people of known honesty."²³

Folklore concerning the Smiths' appropriating a neighbor's sheep circulated in many versions in Palmyra, and probing its source tells something about Joseph Smith's good faith. Rodger Anderson takes a combative stance in treating my study of the William Stafford statement containing the sheep story: "Anderson's first charge is that Hurlbut probably wrote Stafford's affidavit and 'merely had him sign it' " (p. 48). In fact, I made no "charge," but raised a series of possibilities—that because William Stafford became a sailor "beginning in early life," he evidently had little formal education, which in turn would "heighten the possibility that Hurlbut composed Stafford's affidavit and merely had him sign it." Little turns on the point, though I have many doubts about the affidavit with its central story of the Smith family borrowing a sheep for sacrifice but then eating the meat when the treasure dig misfired.

The clever ending made this floating folklore in Palmyra, where the town historian later observed that "various stories have been told about the sacrificing of the sheep."²⁴ In the Hurlbut report of William Stafford, "old Joseph and one of the boys" asked for the sheep for sacrificing at the place where Joseph, Jr., had discovered buried valuables. Permission was granted "to gratify my curiosity," but the dig failed and the affidavit adds: "This, I believe, is the only time they ever made money-digging a profitable business." Rodger Anderson to the contrary, this wording was designed to implicate Joseph and family in dishonestly manipulating Stafford, reinforced by the following comment that the Smiths and digging friends really sought more "mutton than money."

²³ Richard Lloyd Anderson, "Joseph Smith's New York Reputation Reappraised," 302.

²⁴ Thomas L. Cook, *Palmyra and Vicinity* (Palmyra, NY: Palmyra Courier-Journal, 1930), 221.

Joseph's character is the point of all this. In 1970 I was intrigued by a version of sacrificed sheep from two careful historians who talked with Wallace W. Miner in the 1930s. Miner lived near William Stafford, who died about 1863, when Miner was about twenty. Miner said he once asked Stafford if the Prophet stole his sheep, and the answer was that "Joseph came and admitted that he took it for sacrifice but he was willing to work for it. He made wooden sap buckets to fully pay for it." But using Miner's recollection of Stafford was my fatal step, according to Rodger Anderson: "perhaps the most egregious of [Richard] Anderson's errors" (p. 50). Why? Because I admitted the "obvious limitations in recalling the *details* of what one had said almost seventy years earlier."²⁵ I emphasize "details" here, because Miner could certainly remember why he asked Stafford about the story, and the basic answer that Joseph Smith did not steal the sheep. Of course particulars could be blurred, since the story clearly evolved.

After complaining about my quoting a late memory, Rodger Anderson does the same, for he appeals to S. S. Harding hearing the sheep story in a visit to Palmyra in 1829. His footnote cites a Harding letter of 1882, which requires remembering main details for 53 years, which I consider quite possible. Incidentally, Wallace Miner visited Salt Lake City when he was 72 and told a reporter:

As a boy I heard all these stories about Joseph Smith. In our neighborhood he was considered an eccentric character because he did different things from other people. At the same time I never heard anything bad of his character, but much of interest.²⁶

When all is said, Joseph Smith is the best witness on Joseph Smith, saying candidly in the Nauvoo pulpit: "I never stole the value of a pinhead or a picayune in my life."²⁷

Joseph Smith recorded only one direct comment on a Hurlbut affidavit, that of David Stafford, which gives his version of a fight with Joseph Smith. Despite my siding with Joseph Smith, my language does not justify Rodger Anderson's

²⁵ Richard Lloyd Anderson, "Joseph Smith's New York Reputation Reappraised," 294.

²⁶ *Deseret News*, November 10, 1915, sect. B, p. 2.

²⁷ October 15, 1843, discourse, Willard Richards's report, in Ehat and Cook, *The Words of Joseph Smith*, 257.

black and white interpretation: "he dismisses David Stafford's account" (p. 35). My 1970 comment stated a truism—the differing versions show "that controversial events cannot be settled by hearing only one side." In this example, by reading Stafford we simply learn that he claimed that Joseph was hotheaded with alcohol. But Joseph claimed he defended himself after a just dispute:

David Stafford Version

Previous to his going to Pennsylvania to get married, we worked together making a coal pit. While working at one time, a dispute arose between us (he having drunk a little too freely), and some hard words passed between us, and as usual with him at such times, was for fighting. He got the advantage of me in the scuffle, and a gentleman by the name of Ford interfered, when Joseph turned to fighting him. We both entered a complaint against him, and he was fined for the breach of the peace.²⁸

Joseph Smith Version

While supper was preparing Joseph related an anecdote. While young, his father had a fine large watchdog which bit off an ear from David Stafford's hog, which Stafford had turned into Smith[']s cornfield. Stafford shot the dog and with six other fellows pitched upon him unawares. Joseph whipped the whole of them and escaped unhurt, which they swore to as recorded in Hurlbut's or Howe's Book.²⁹

Rodger Anderson argues hard that the two accounts report different events. If so, Joseph's recollection suggests a hostile attitude to him on the part of some neighbors. But some reasons for separating the accounts do not hold up. We are told that one occurred at the coal pit and the other "in a corn field," but Joseph Smith says that the dog bit the hog in a corn field, not that the fight took place there. We are also told that Joseph imperfectly remembered Stafford's version because he remarked "that the

²⁸ Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 249.

²⁹ Willard Richards, Joseph Smith Journal, January 1, 1843, cited in Scott H. Faulring, *An American Prophet's Record* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1989), 267.

seven men who attacked him were the ones who signed the statement, whereas in fact Stafford was alone in making deposition" (p. 41). That may be, though Joseph's remark could be more general in having Stafford signing as representative of the rest.

The chief reason for considering these as two versions of the same event is the "firsthand" question—Joseph was there and said David Stafford had only told part of the story. Rodger Anderson assumes for argument that the two accounts might refer to the same event. Then it is suggested that Stafford's "sworn affidavit" stands on better ground than the Prophet's informal recollection, which misses the point that the trustworthy tell the truth in informal as well as formal situations. Then we are told that Smith beating two men is possible, but winning over seven is "an improbability" (p. 36). I disagree with that conclusion after reading many journal accounts of Joseph's wrestling prowess.

Before and after the publication of the Hurlbut materials, Joseph Smith reviewed his youth without mentioning money digging, except for the Pennsylvania episode of working for Stowell and meeting Emma Hale. After public accusations, one would expect Joseph's total denial if there had been no treasure searching. Indeed, Joseph's use of the seer stone to find lost objects and buried riches is suggested by the phraseology of his mother's history, recollections in the Harris-Tiffany interview, and the surviving but highly selective 1826 trial notes.³⁰ So if some, how much? The Hurlbut affidavits give an answer beyond belief—the large household of ten Smiths survived a dozen years without seriously working but spent days and nights in seeking treasures and finding none. This is why the Palmyra-Manchester accusations of total laziness are the objective key to the situation. Money digging had to be occasional because of the hard necessity of working long hours productively to stay alive.

And this is just what Joseph Smith said about his boyhood period. In pre-Hurlbut 1832, he sketched his early life: "[B]eing in indigent circumstances [the parents] were obliged to labor hard for the support of a large family, having nine children. . . . [I]t required the exertions of all that were able to render any assistance for the support of the family."³¹ Six years

³⁰ See my "Mature Joseph Smith and Treasure Searching," 491-95.

³¹ In Jessee, *Personal Writings*, 4.

later he gave a similar picture from 1823 to 1827, when he received the plates: "As my father's worldly circumstances were very limited, we were under the necessity of laboring with our hands, hiring by days works and otherwise as we could get opportunity. Sometimes we were at home and sometimes abroad, and by continued labor were enabled to get a comfortable maintenance."³²

This last summary of Joseph's youth comes from his official history written to correct "the many reports which have been put in circulation by evil disposed and designing persons," phraseology clearly including the Hurlbut affidavits launched four years before.³³ So what is Joseph's firsthand answer? That daily labor and religious seeking were the main activities of the family, and all else was peripheral and not worth mentioning. If someone demands to know how much treasure digging, the Prophet's answer is essentially, "not enough to matter." Economic survival and Bible-based searching were the main activities of the Smiths, as described in the writings of the Prophet, his mother, his brother William, and incidental reflections of the father and some children. Their attitude is consistent in neither denying nor affirming money digging, but bypassing it as irrelevant.

Case 6: Loaded Samples

The Saunders family lived nearby and later left many recollections of the Smiths in Palmyra. An interviewer asked Benjamin if he knew D. P. Hurlbut, and got this answer: "He came to me, but he could not get out of me what he wanted; so he went to others."³⁴ This Hurlbut procedure is obvious without being documented, since he produced total negatives, and true history will have a credit and debit column for everyone's account. But Rodger Anderson disagrees with the concept: "that does not mean that an investigator less biased would have produced significantly different results" (p. 57). Such language is out of touch with reality—an unbiased investigator would uncover the full range of those opposed, those indifferent, those unacquainted, and those positive. Rodger Anderson tips his hand when he seriously quotes the

³² *Ibid.*, 206-7.

³³ *Ibid.*, 196.

³⁴ William H. Kelley report of interview with Benjamin Saunders, 1884, Miscellany, P 19, f. 44, RLDS Archives.

smug statement of Palmyra's Episcopal minister, who contended (after Latter-day Saint converts moved away) that "there are no Mormons in Manchester, or Palmyra," and it would be impossible "to convince any inhabitant of either of these towns, that Jo Smith's pretensions are not the most gross and egregious falsehood" (p. 62).

Hurlbut and Clark painted the picture that everyone who knew the Smiths rejected their religion because the Smiths' credibility was zero. But that should depend on who talked with whom. Consider the following Mormon journals of visiting the Smith neighborhood very near the time of Hurlbut's exposé. The negative Carter journal represents some random contacts in the general area, whereas the positive Hale journal reflects systematic inquiry in the "neighborhood" of the Smith farm:

John S. Carter, 1833

The people greatly opposed to the work of God. Talked with many of them and found them unable to make out anything against Joseph Smith, although they talked hard against him.³⁵

Jonathan H. Hale, 1835

We went about the neighborhood from house to house to inquire the character of Joseph Smith, Jr., previous to his receiving the Book of Mormon. The amount was that his character was as good as young men in general.³⁶

In the 1880s, two sustained attempts were made to contact the dwindling number of former New York neighbors of the Smiths, one by the avowed anti-Mormon A. B. Deming, and the other by the RLDS general authority brothers, E. L. and W. H. Kelley. In my 1970 article, I touched on Deming's work and

³⁵ John S. Carter Journal, September 1833, LDS Archives, cited in Davis Bitton, *Guide to Mormon Diaries and Autobiographies* (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University, 1977), 62. The context is the migration of a large company of Mormons, who "encamped in Manchester, where the plates were found, also by the Sulphur Springs." The sentence seems to refer to a single location in Manchester-Sulphur Springs, somewhat away from the Smith farm, with contact only with those near the encampment.

³⁶ Jonathan H. Hale Journal, May 30, 1835, also cited in *ibid.*, 134. The context of the quotation is a visit to the Hill Cumorah with apostles Marsh and Patten and an inquiry in that specific area where Joseph Smith had lived.

used the Kelley interviews in order to expand the narrow Hurlbut data base. I stressed that Deming's interviews show how many associates condemned the Smiths for money digging but were themselves involved in it—a clear revelation of the limited line of investigation of Hurlbut. Rodger Anderson seems to miss this point and pours my two pages of comment on Deming into his strange attack-defense mode, noting “charges,” which are but incidental characterizations of Deming as tragic but resentful because of his family reverses from the time that his father was murdered when he defended the Mormons in the civil unrest in Hancock County after the martyrdom.

I profiled the wheat-chaff content of Deming's affidavits in order to cautiously utilize, not obliterate them. Rodger Anderson quickly condemns my adjective “one-sided,” and then more calmly admits that “Deming's methods would not be considered satisfactory today” (p. 65). His main complaint is strangely expressed: “Anderson's final objection to Deming's affidavits is that they ‘reveal no direct knowledge that the Smiths were involved’ in money digging” (p. 68). My 1970 sentence is in a paragraph about “Palmyra-Manchester” money digging, on which point I correctly said that Deming added nothing but hearsay.

If we discuss Rodger Anderson's broader question of Pennsylvania, he favors two statements: Henry A. Sayer and W. R. Hine “claimed to have seen Smith hunting for ‘lost and hidden things’ while in Pennsylvania” (p. 67). The phrase is from Sayer, who “often” saw “Jo, Hyrum, and Bill Smith” doing these things. Does this ring true? Hyrum, the eldest after Alvin died in 1823, took the main responsibility with his father for the farm in Manchester and was married there in later 1826. Treasure jaunts to Pennsylvania are implausible for Hyrum in these years. As for William, he writes of being raised on the Manchester farm and mentions that Joseph went to Pennsylvania part of the time between the angel's first visit and getting the plates in 1827: “During this four years, I spent my time working on the farm, and in the different amusements of the young men of my age in the vicinity.”³⁷ Since Sayer is off base in claiming to see Hyrum and William Smith in Pennsylvania, his credibility is not high in what he claims for Joseph.

³⁷ William Smith, *William Smith on Mormonism* (Lamoni, IA: Herald Office, 1883), p. 10.

W. R. Hine is the other Deming observer of Pennsylvania treasure digging. He repeats the standard rumors of Joseph's searches in the Susquehanna area, but speaks directly only in the case of digging for salt. Hine is ambiguous on how much lore about Joseph's stone is firsthand. Hine says that Joseph's father was in Pennsylvania and told Hine Joseph was 15. But Joseph did not go to the Harmony area until he was nearly 20. In this and other things Hine talks too much. With the record for the most words of any Deming informant (2400), half of his stories are suspicious anecdotes. Hine spreads legends on how Joseph carried the plates around personally, first sent them to Philadelphia for translation, then sat with Cowdery translating in a public tavern with an audience. Their cook was Martin Harris's wife, who stole the 116 pages when they were at dinner, after which a local doctor retained the stolen manuscript in the Susquehanna area and read it to his friends, one of which was Deming's informant Hine.³⁸ This affidavit is touted as the top of the line. Of thirty-two statements reprinted from Hurlbut-Deming, Rodger Anderson names eight as "primary examples of witnesses having firsthand experience," among them W.R. Hine (p. 115). However, only a small percentage of Hine's episodes are firsthand, and few correlate with responsible historical accounts. And the quality of the other Deming testimonials is generally below this. This is enough of an insight on Rodger Anderson's tedious conclusion to most of his chapters: "many of his neighbors" considered Joseph Smith a deceiver who avoided productive work, making empty promises of treasures through looking in his stone (p. 71).

In 1881 the two RLDS leaders, the Kelleys, interviewed a dozen in the Palmyra area that might know about the Smiths, who had moved away some fifty years beforehand. The interviewers were probing a Michigan news story that quoted "old acquaintances" claiming Joseph Smith's "reputation" was that of a "lazy, drinking fellow." One person had it both ways—he knew the Smiths well enough to expose them, but "did not associate with them, for they were too low to associate with."³⁹ My 1970 study showed that the Kelley interviews add

³⁸ Hine's statement is reprinted in Rodger I. Anderson, *Joseph Smith's New York Reputation Reexamined*, 155-60.

³⁹ There is no known copy of the Cadillac, Michigan *Weekly News* of April 6, 1880, other than its quote by Clark Braden in the 1884 *Public Discussion* (Lamoni, IA: Herald House, 1913), 119. In its quoted form, there are only a few sentences, totally negative opinions of the Smiths.

dimension to Hurlbut's short, narrow statements. The Kelleys asked who knew the Smiths, and what they knew firsthand—the critical questions in judging between rumor and reality. Half of those contacted gave answers based on some personal observation of the Smiths. Rodger Anderson spends the longest chapter in his book arguing that the Kelleys can't be trusted, but quotes them to prove negative aspects of the Smith character.

Rodger Anderson mainly focuses on Kelley interviews that don't matter—from those who had little experience with Joseph Smith. The Kelleys found those quoted in the Michigan story, and obviously asked whether they really knew Joseph Smith, and whether they made the statements quoted in Michigan. Four parties were quoted as negative on both issues. But, angry with what the Kelleys printed, three made affidavits that they had been originally quoted correctly in Michigan. Yet none claimed real contact with Smith then or in the original statements. That is why my 1970 article described a "skirmish of affidavits"—the real issue of reporting anything significant about Joseph Smith is not here.

But the loudest explosion came from another party, John H. Gilbert, colorful compositor of the Book of Mormon, who obviously felt used by Book of Mormon believers and made his own affidavit that he was "grossly misrepresented in almost every particular."⁴⁰ I originally observed that many of the "main points in the Kelley interviews can be substantiated as being said to others by Gilbert, and even written by Gilbert himself." Without claiming perfection for the Kelleys then or now, I am impressed with their scope and accuracy on the main things Gilbert characteristically said about his Mormon contacts in the printing process. But Rodger Anderson devotes seven pages to supposed bad reporting of Gilbert.

The Kelleys tackled a complex job in talking to Gilbert, for he had an excellent mind that remembered details. Since he gave far more facts than anyone else interviewed in Palmyra, others with less to say could be reported more simply. Afterward, he gave about eight corrections on about fifty items the Kelleys attributed to him, a score of about 85% in reporting him accurately.⁴¹ Not unexpectedly, Rodger Anderson complains

⁴⁰ John H. Gilbert Affidavit, July 12, 1881, cited by Braden in *Public Discussion*, 119.

⁴¹ The reconstructed Kelley interviews appeared in the *Saints' Herald*, June 1, 1881, 162-68, with Gilbert's at 165-66. Gilbert's criticisms

about the lack of perfection. Gilbert subtracted anything faith-promoting, like Hyrum saying Joseph translated by the power of God, or Gilbert criticizing Tucker's exposé. Perhaps the Kelleys expressed some of Gilbert's general responses in their own vocabulary of faith—and Gilbert objected to the words more than to the ideas. Small misunderstandings included questions of whether two distinct words were changed in typesetting, or the same word changed twice—and whether Gilbert typeset all the Book of Mormon or only 90% of it. Gilbert denied saying that Books of Mormon had sold for \$500 or more—but the Kelleys asked how much he would take for his, and reported his answer as "\$500 for it, and no less." Earlier that year he had written a New York historian: "My copy I ask \$500 for, and I expect to get that price someday."⁴² We could go on—in every case Gilbert's correction is in the context of getting a main issue straight and misconceiving detail.

The only valuable section in Rodger Anderson's book is the four-page segment at the end transcribing William H. Kelley's raw notes as found in the RLDS archives. They are extremely concise and leave open the possibility of additional memo material from the brother, E. L. Kelley. But taking the simplest scenario, W. H. Kelley expanded about 80 words of jottings into a reconstructed Gilbert interview of about 1500 words. Rodger Anderson generates pages of speculation about what the Kelleys originally heard, what they first wrote down, how they possibly expanded the conversations, etc. Yet each set of raw notes is a true skeleton of the main points rounded out in the reconstructed interviews. Rodger Anderson extols the objectivity of A. B. Deming in recovering memories of a half-century before, and yet he doubts whether the Kelleys could reconstruct conversations from a month before. In fact, the Gilbert interview mostly passed that printer's critical scrutiny; despite his rhetoric of being misrepresented in every "important particular," his actual corrections were few.⁴³

are in John H. Gilbert to Thomas Gregg, June 19, 1881, in Charles A. Shook, *The True Origin of Mormon Polygamy* (Cincinnati: Standard, 1914), 37-39. It is largely quoted in Rodger I. Anderson, *Joseph Smith' New York Reputation Reexamined*, 79-82.

⁴² John H. Gilbert to Diedrich Willers, Jr., January 5, 1881, Seneca Falls, N.Y. Historical Society, BYU Film 298, no. 116.

⁴³ John H. Gilbert to Clark Braden, February 27, 1884, cited in *Public Discussion*, 382.

As suggested, the reconstructed Kelley interviews are mainly valuable in the case of some who personally knew Joseph Smith. Those in this category are Abel Chase and Orlando Saunders from neighboring farms, Ezra Pierce somewhat south of the Smith property, Hiram Jackway, somewhat north, and John Stafford, Rochester physician about Joseph Smith's age, and his former neighbor. Actually, Saunders and Stafford were clearest in their memories because they had more contact with Joseph and were old enough then to remember. The Kelleys sought to test the labels pasted on the Smith family from Hurlbut on. They asked about money digging. Three had stories but no personal knowledge. Only Stafford "saw them digging one time for money [this was three or four years before the Book of Mormon was found], the Smiths and others. The old man and Hyrum were there, I think, but Joseph was not there." This glimpse hardly amounts to a main activity for the family.

In Hurlbut's general affidavits, the Smiths were "intemperate," or "addicted to vicious habits," intended to mean the same thing. Yet only a few of his testimonials said much on the subject. A. B. Deming's late statements press the theme of the father drinking in the fields, and occasionally the younger Joseph. The Kelleys questioned the survivors candidly and reported honest answers. Here Rodger Anderson is preoccupied enough with the subject to add opinions of the journalist-interviewer Mather, who in 1880 made broad claims with minimal data. But the give and take of the Kelley questionings produced a context. From the five who knew Joseph Smith, there is only one observed incident of Joseph and his father drunk and wrestling—and John Stafford's report of Joseph intoxicated and tearing his shirt may repeat a family story circulating since Hurlbut. The pioneer culture is prominent in all four who mention drinking. It was the pattern of the time—whatever the Smiths did was not out of the ordinary. Rodger Anderson is out of touch with this period when he exaggerates Father Smith's drinking and sets up a contradiction to William's forceful refutation: "I never knew my father Joseph Smith to be intoxicated or the worse for liquor nor was my brother Joseph Smith in the habit of drinking spiritous liquors."⁴⁴ Whatever the father's problem, it was apparently in control as younger

⁴⁴ Quoted in Richard L. Anderson, "Joseph Smith's New York Reputation Reappraised," 314.

William grew up—and “spiritous liquors” were obviously distinguished from the hard cider then common everywhere.

In 1833, Hurlbut narrowed his interviews to those willing to swear against the Smiths, and targeted limited areas of their lives. Later the Kelleys broadened the type of person consulted, and widened the scope of inquiry. Rodger Anderson proposes the astounding thesis that there really isn't a conflict—that the individuals contacted just had different experiences: “Hurlbut's witnesses did not accuse the Smiths of unqualified laziness”; the Smiths only gave “a disproportionate share of their time to . . . money digging” (p. 96). But such subtleties are foreign to the Hurlbut affidavits, where the cumulative case is made that “a lazy, indolent set of men” had to steal and use trickery to survive, and they so consistently lied that they were “entirely destitute of *moral character*.”⁴⁵ This goes far beyond private money digging and drinking in the norms of their society. Those acts by themselves would not diminish the Smiths' reliability. But Hurlbut's statements assailed Joseph Smith's integrity and character. The Prophet got the message, acknowledging that the New York testimony accused him “of being guilty of gross and outrageous violations of the peace and good order of the community.”⁴⁶

Parley Chase was spokesman in stating without qualification that Joseph Smith was lazy and a habitual liar, an image to be “corroborated by all his former neighbors.” Any statements of neighbors to the contrary would rescue Joseph's reputation and prove at the same time that Hurlbut selected a negative sample. The full community of friends and foes is recreated in Lucy Smith's history, where a positive sample appears in the 1825 letter of recommendation to the land agent when the Smith purchase contract was endangered through misrepresentation. Their respected physician was contacted, and Dr. Gain Robinson “wrote the character of my family, our industry . . . with many commendations calculated to beget confidence in us as to business transactions.” In an hour this

⁴⁵ The phrases are from the two general Palmyra and Manchester affidavits, which were intended to summarize the community case against the Smiths with dozens of signers. The underlining is in the first printing and apparently theirs.

⁴⁶ Joseph Smith public statement, *Latter Day Saints' Messenger and Advocate*, December 1834, cit. Jessee, p. 336.

testimonial had 60 signatures "in the village."⁴⁷ Oliver Cowdery taught school in the Smith neighborhood and is generally favorably remembered in later statements of the families of his district. On publication of the Hurlbut affidavits, he said of Joseph, "I have been told by those for whom he has labored, that he was a young man of truth and industrious habits."⁴⁸

As noted, the Kelleys contacted five with possible personal knowledge, and none were negative on his personal character. Some remembered Joseph as poor and uneducated, but John Stafford said that Joseph "improved greatly" in being taught at home. As mentioned earlier, Stafford admired Joseph's personality, but also said of his ability to work: "would do a fair day's work if hired out to a man." Abel Chase's view of the Smith men is most interesting. In 1833 he signed the general Manchester statement that they were "a lazy, indolent set of men, but also intemperate; and their word was not to be depended upon." In 1881 he said nothing about intemperance and dishonesty, though he remembered that his brother Willard wanted to reclaim a seer stone given to the Smiths and could not get it back. In 1881 he clearly modified "lazy": "poorly educated—ignorant and selfish—superstitious—shiftless but do a good day's work."⁴⁹ "Shiftless" is not "lazy" in this context—it carries an older meaning of "ineffective," essentially unsuccessful. Contending that Chase did not modify his 1833 group statement, Rodger Anderson said that Chase "told the Kelleys in 1881 that the Smith family was superstitious, shiftless, and untrustworthy" (p. 17). But the analyst is fudging on the last word, which is not used at all by Chase.

Orlando Saunders, another neighbor, was totally positive on the reliability of the Smiths, and particularly Joseph: "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." Rodger Anderson makes the Pollyanna comment that "Saunders's report . . . does not conflict with statements collected by Hurlbut" (p. 95), despite nearly all his testimonials contending that no person in the area would respect or trust the Smiths because of lying and laziness. Kelley's raw summary on

⁴⁷ Lucy Smith, preliminary ms., LDS Archives, slightly rephrased in the published versions.

⁴⁸ Oliver Cowdery to W. W. Phelps, Letter 8, *Latter Day Saints' Messenger and Advocate* (October 1835): 200.

⁴⁹ William H. Kelley Notebook, cited in Rodger I. Anderson, *Joseph Smith's New York Reputation Reexamined*, 171.

Saunders has 80 words, which were expanded to a reconstructed interview of a little above 400 words. Rodger Anderson mechanically trusts only "the notes Kelley took at the time of the original interview" (p. 96), but a normal memory certainly recalls much of the original experience by seeing notes or photographs. Kelley's original jottings pertained to the whole family, but the brothers asked for recollections of Joseph from all their contacts.

Orlando's brother Lorenzo had a grudging respect for the Smiths. But since Orlando was born in 1803, and Lorenzo in 1811, the older one had eight years more experience with the family. Lorenzo is highly opinionated, insisting that he saw Sidney Rigdon mysteriously visit early enough to be the real source for the Book of Mormon. Though also claiming to have seen Joseph Smith evading work on a digging project, Lorenzo nevertheless said: "Speaking of the Smith family, I give them credit for everything except Mormonism. . . . They was always ready to bestow anything." Younger brother Benjamin Saunders was also interviewed by William H. Kelley. Born in 1814, he remembered hunting with Joseph and included him with the Smith men in his recollections: "They were good workers by days work. . . . They were big hearty fellows. Their morals were good." What else did he know firsthand? Like Lorenzo, Benjamin had seen the Smiths in a single attempt to dig for treasure, in 1826 he said. With their neighbors, they might drink at log rollings, haying, or harvest: "The Smiths were no worse than others, and not as bad as some." He never suspected them of stealing, nor did they have the habit of profanity. "They were a good family in sickness," and the men were generally peacemakers: "Would put [up] with anything and everything rather than have a quarrel."⁵⁰

No one would suspect such positive insights on the family whose names were blackened in Hurlbut's affidavits. Oliver Cowdery summarized Hurlbut's impact on the Smith reputation: "It has been industriously circulated that they were dishonest, deceitful and vile." The former Manchester schoolteacher added that he had access to "the testimony of responsible persons" who could correct these slanders and accurately characterize Joseph and his family: "They are industrious, honest, virtuous and

⁵⁰ William H. Kelley report of interview with Benjamin Saunders, 1883, Miscellany, P 19, f. 44, RLDS Archives.

liberal to all."⁵¹ That is precisely the picture of neighbors Orlando and Benjamin Saunders. Cowdery spoke from knowledge that many neighbors would uphold the integrity and honesty of Joseph and his family.

Case 7: Half-quotes and Half-truths

Lucy Smith dictated spontaneous memoirs in 1845, and her editors then organized her autobiography on the model of a church history, leaving out many personal materials. Her preliminary manuscript was not available for my 1970 article but contains her important reaction to Hurlbut's materials. Though an authorized publication of Lucy's full manuscript is in preparation, her comment on treasure accusations has been fully quoted by several historians and partially quoted in several anti-Mormon publications. Since the short-form makes possible a narrower conclusion than Lucy intended, Rodger Anderson's use is printed along with Lucy's full thought:

Partial Use

[Lucy denies] that she and her family "stopt our labor and went at trying to win the faculty of Abrac, drawing magic circles or sooth saying, to the neglect of all kinds of business. We never during our lives suffered one important interest to swallow up every other obligation." The implication is that the family did engage in a bit of "sooth saying"—just not to the extent claimed by their neighbors (p. 109).

Full Quotation

I shall change my theme for the present, but let not my reader suppose that because I shall pursue another topic for a season that we stopt our labor and went at trying to win the faculty of Abrac, drawing magic circles or soothsaying, to the neglect of all kinds of business. We never during our lives suffered one important interest to swallow up every other obligation. But whilst we worked with our hands, we endeavored to remember the service of and the welfare of our souls.⁵²

⁵¹ Oliver Cowdery to W. W. Phelps, Letter 8, *Latter Day Saints' Messenger and Advocate* (October 1835): 200.

⁵² Lucy Smith, preliminary ms.

Here Lucy neither admits nor denies the money digging that was tied to the family by the Hurlbut affidavits. Lucy had just described moving to the Manchester wilderness and creating orchards and buildings by hard labor. And her intent to "change my theme" introduces her recollections of Joseph's visions revealing the Book of Mormon. Beyond the taxing job of survival lay the main goal of the family, "the welfare of our souls."

So Rodger Anderson's use of Lucy Smith sells her short spiritually. And the same must be true for the bits and pieces of Joseph Smith's conversations on the plates in the Pennsylvania statements sent from Emma's relatives there. These are not from Hurlbut, though probably generated by his request.⁵³ Some months after Hurlbut visited Palmyra, Isaac Hale published his smoldering version of how Joseph Smith came into his life and married his daughter, with other relatives and neighbors there adding the most damning extracts they could remember in conversing with the young Prophet. Except for the Stowell treasure dig that brought Joseph to Pennsylvania, these statements refer to the time of Book of Mormon translation there in 1828 and 1829.

What did Joseph intend by the half-quotes sprinkled through these Pennsylvania statements? Isaac Hale said that he lifted the box with the plates in it but was told he could not open it; he then inquired who could see the plates and was told "a young child," evidently Joseph's comment meaning that without faith they should not be seen. Isaac adds that he saw Joseph and Martin Harris examining the revelation promising that three would see the plates (D&C 5). All of this coincides with Joseph Smith's statements about the plates in Mormon sources, but the Hale relatives and neighbors had a different slant. Isaac's brother-in-law, Reverend Nathaniel Lewis, claimed the Prophet said "he was to exhibit the plates to the world," a statement similar to one reported by Joshua McKune. And Emma's brother Alva said that Joseph promised that Alva would see the plates personally. One can speculate on whether these statements misinterpret a general promise that the world would have evidence of the plates, whether Joseph said to some that if they would significantly help, they would see the plates (cf.

⁵³ For background on their local publication, see Richard L. Anderson, "The Reliability of the Early History of Lucy and Joseph Smith," 25, and note there.

Ether 5:2-4), or whether Joseph thought he had authorization to show the plates to others but was forbidden. A partial quote does not give context or intent, and the full meaning of what Joseph said hangs on these things. Joseph spoke consistently on the subject of the plates to Isaac Hale, the Book of Mormon witnesses, and his family. The short statements attributed to him in the brief Pennsylvania statements are evidently half-quotes, leading to half-truths about who would see the plates. Nathaniel Lewis says in essence that Joseph was a false prophet because he did not show him the plates. But the full reality is that eleven men met the requirements and did see the plates, a fact already printed in the Book of Mormon when the Harmony group made their statements.

Rodger Anderson closes his survey with the appeal to accept "the Hurlbut-Deming affidavits" as significant "primary documents relating to Joseph Smith's early life and the origins of Mormonism" (p. 114). Some tell of "early life," but many only repeat tall tales or disclose the prejudice that Joseph Smith said faced him from the beginning. There are some authentic facts about the outward life of young Joseph, but his inner life makes him significant. It is this other half that the testimonials brashly claim to penetrate but cannot. To the extent that the Prophet's spiritual experiences are the primary issue, the Hurlbut-Deming statements are not primary documents.

Here I have discussed some aspects of their objective shortcomings, but I do not intend to take much time answering countercharges. Those who think like Rodger Anderson will continue to reason that the Hurlbut-Deming materials contain serious history because "many based their descriptions on close association with the Joseph Smith, Sr., family" (p. 114). That is too sloppy for my taste. Downgrading a reputation is serious business, and I want a reasonable burden of proof to be met on each major contention. Knowing the family is not enough—knowing specific incidents is required.⁵⁴ The mathematics of true personal history is fairly simple: half-truths added to others still retain their category of half-truths; conclusions without personal knowledge have zero value; and any number multiplied by zero is still zero.

⁵⁴ For the religious patterns in the Smith home, see Richard Lloyd Anderson, "Joseph Smith's Home Environment," *Ensign* (July 1971): 57-59.

A final, highly personal reaction: I once discussed a negative biography with a friend, literature professor Neal Lambert. After pointing out shortcomings in method and evidence, I self-consciously added an intuitive judgment: "and I think there is a poor tone to the book." Instantly picking up my apologetic manner, Neal answered vigorously, "But tone is *everything*." In reality, attitude penetrates the judgments we make, whether in gathering the Hurlbut-Deming materials or in defending them. With few exceptions, the mind-set of these testimonials is skeptical, hypercritical, ridiculing. But history is a serious effort to understand, and tools with the above labels have limited value.