



*In March 1831, John Whitmer “was appointed by the voice of the Elders” in Kirtland “to keep the Church Record.” (Courtesy of Church History Library, Salt Lake City.)*

*Scott C. Esplin*

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“A HISTORY OF ALL THE  
IMPORTANT THINGS” (D&C 69:3):  
JOHN WHITMER’S RECORD  
OF CHURCH HISTORY

JOHN Whitmer’s tenure as church historian began inauspiciously and ended acrimoniously. Charged “by the voice of the Elders to keep the Church Record,” Whitmer’s reaction was, “I would rather not do it.” But he would comply, he said, if the Lord manifested his will “through Joseph the Seer.”<sup>1</sup> In March 1831, Joseph Smith received a revelation directing John to “write and keep a regular history . . . [and] to keep the church record and history continually” (D&C 47:1, 3). Eight months later, Whitmer was further counseled through revelation to “continue in writing and making a history” (D&C 69:3). These directives formed the basis for his record, “the Book of John Whitmer, kept by commandment.”<sup>2</sup>

Though John Whitmer began his history with the goal of recording “all the important things which he shall observe and

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*Scott C. Esplin is an assistant professor of church history and doctrine at Brigham Young University.*

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know . . . for the good of the church, and for the rising generations that shall grow up on the land of Zion” (D&C 69:3, 8), his official record keeping ended with his excommunication in 1838. Afterward, Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon sought the history. A letter they sent to Whitmer reflected not only their perceptions of his record but also the divide evident between him and the leaders of the church. Accusing him of “incompetency as a historian, . . . never . . . capable of writing a history,” they wrote, “We were desirous of honoring you by giving publicity to your notes on the history of the Church of Latter-day Saints, after making such corrections as we thought would be necessary, knowing . . . that writings coming from your pen, could not be put to press without our correcting them, or else the Church must suffer reproach.”<sup>3</sup>

Cut off from the church and possibly hurt by the accusation of incompetency, John Whitmer refused the request to surrender the history, keeping it in his possession while the Prophet Joseph Smith and his associates began a new record, now known as *History of the Church*.

Accurate or not, Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon’s negative assessment both of John Whitmer as a historian and of the usefulness of his account continues to plague his record. What happened to “The Book of John Whitmer” after his parting from the church? In addition to Joseph’s initial efforts, what other attempts were made by church leaders to acquire the history? How did it eventually come into the possession of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (now Community of Christ) and subsequently get published? What misunderstandings have persisted over the years regarding John Whitmer’s contributions and record? This paper analyzes these questions, seeking to chronicle the history of Whitmer’s manuscript over more than 175 years.

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CHURCH LEADER AND HISTORIAN

The third son of Peter and Mary Whitmer, John Whitmer was born August 27, 1802, near Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. As a young boy he moved with his family to New York in 1809, and they eventually settled with other German families near Fayette. There, through his younger brother David and future brother-in-law Oliver Cowdery, John was introduced to the Book of Mormon translation Joseph Smith was doing. His interest in the work increased when Joseph and Oliver moved to the Whitmer home in Fayette in June 1829 to complete the translation.<sup>4</sup>

John’s association with Joseph led to his receiving a revelation outlining “the thing which [would] be of the most worth unto [him]” (D&C 15:6), his baptism in June 1829, and a call as one of the Eight Witnesses to the Book of Mormon. At the first conference of the church, held on June 9, 1830, John was listed as one of seven elders in the fledgling organization.<sup>5</sup> Later that year he was called to serve a mission near Fayette, New York (see D&C 30:10).

His call to serve as church historian was connected with the missionary efforts of the early church leaders. At a church conference in September 1830, Oliver Cowdery, who had formerly fulfilled the command to keep a historical record (see D&C 21:1), was called to head a mission to the Lamanites more than a thousand miles away on the western frontier of Missouri (see D&C 28:8–9). While traveling to Missouri, Cowdery and his associates achieved great success in Kirtland, Ohio, causing the Prophet Joseph to send John Whitmer to preside over the new congregation there.

In March 1831, with Cowdery still in Missouri on his mission, Whitmer “was appointed by the voice of the Elders” in Kirtland “to keep the Church Record.”<sup>6</sup> In the divine directive Joseph Smith received for Whitmer, the latter was appointed

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“to keep the church record and history continually; for Oliver Cowdery I have appointed to another office” (D&C 47:3). John’s own history states: “Oliver Cowdery has written the commencement of the church history, commencing at the time of the finding of the plates, up to June 12th, 1831. From this day I have written the things that I have written, and they are a mere sketch of the things that have transpired, they are however all that seemed to me wisdom to write.”<sup>7</sup>

Eight months after John Whitmer’s appointment, further revelation was given directing him to accompany Oliver Cowdery from Kirtland to Independence, Missouri, where publication of the Book of Commandments would occur (see D&C 69). Leaving Ohio on November 10, 1831, Cowdery and Whitmer arrived in Independence on January 5, 1832. This first visit by John to Missouri introduced him to the region where he would spend much of the remainder of his life. Assisting with the publication of the Book of Commandments, Whitmer lived in the Independence area from January 1832 until the expulsion of the Saints in November 1833.

A leader of the church and witness to the Missouri persecutions, Whitmer recorded, “The whole County turned out and surrounded us came to W W Phelps, and my house and took us upon the publick Square, as did Partridge, Corrill, Morly, and Gilbert and were determined to massacre us unless we agreed to leave the county immediately. Finally we agreed to leave.”<sup>8</sup> Settling in nearby Clay County, Whitmer continued as a leader of the church in Missouri while chronicling the struggles of the Saints, including their negotiations with the governor and the arrival of Zion’s Camp in 1834.

While in Missouri with Zion’s Camp, the Prophet Joseph Smith organized the presidency of the church in Missouri,

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appointing David Whitmer as president, with William W. Phelps and John Whitmer as counselors. The new presidency was subsequently instructed to return to Kirtland and “receive [their] endowment . . . with power from on high.”<sup>9</sup> Obedient to the directive, John went to Kirtland in May 1835, where he witnessed and wrote about the organization of the Quorums of the Twelve and the Seventy and the dedication of the Kirtland Temple.

Returning to Missouri, he resumed his duties in the presidency while continuing to write the history. Chief among these responsibilities was the assignment to direct land purchases in the Saints’ new settlement of Far West. By 1837 and 1838, however, the apostasy that ruined the church in Kirtland began to infiltrate John Whitmer’s heart as well. In February 1838 the entire Missouri presidency was rejected by the church membership, an action sustained by the high council a month later.<sup>10</sup> Specifically, John Whitmer was charged with “persisting in unchristian-like conduct” and misusing church funds.<sup>11</sup>

Whitmer’s being “cut off from the Church” and “given over to the buffetings of Satan” led to the disagreement about his manuscript and the end of his record keeping.<sup>12</sup> During these 1838 conflicts Whitmer concluded, “The situation of the Church both here and in Kirtland is in an unpleasant situation in consequence of the reorganization of its authorities, which was not satisfactory to all concerned. And has terminated in the expulsion of some members, as also some temporal movements have not proved satisfactory to all parties [and] has also terminated in the expulsion of many members.”<sup>13</sup>

Whitmer’s account continues, adding (in words he or someone else later crossed out), “among whom is W. W. Phelps and myself. Therefore I close this history of the church of Latter Day Saints, Hoping that I may be for given of my faults, and my sins

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be blotted out and in the last day be saved in the kingdom of God notwithstanding my present situation, which I hope will soon be bettered and I find favor in the eyes of God and All men his Saints Farewell March. 1838.”<sup>14</sup>

Whitmer fled Far West in the summer of 1838, a foreshadowing of the church’s expulsion from Missouri entirely in 1838–39. As feelings cooled, however, he returned to the region, taking advantage of reduced rates on property to become a prosperous farmer in the deserted city of Far West.<sup>15</sup> For nearly four decades he resided in the area, where he was known as “a highly respected and law abiding citizen.” At his death on July 11, 1878, he left behind an estate of 625 acres, livestock, farm machinery, and a beautiful two-story home.<sup>16</sup> He also left behind his history of the church, which at that point passed to other hands.

### LATTER-DAY SAINT ATTEMPTS TO ACQUIRE JOHN WHITMER’S HISTORY

Though out of the church in 1838, John Whitmer and his history continued to attract interest. Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon tried to acquire the history as early as April of that year through their aforementioned letter. There is no record of a response from John Whitmer.

A second dialogue regarding the record exists from the Nauvoo era. This time the history was used as a bartering chip in a possible business transaction. On March 4, 1840, two years after their joint excommunication, William W. Phelps wrote John Whitmer about property in Far West. Writing from Ohio, Phelps reminisced, “I long for the days when we can do as we used to, enjoying ourselves in a happiness that does not exist only where ‘brethren dwell together in unity.’ Say what you will of the world, and think what you may of the Church of Christ, when new

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members walked in the path marked out by the finger of God, the world has no Joys as pure as hers.” Phelps then continued:

As to the debts we contracted, I have ever done and meant to do my part. My house and lot, and some small parcels around town, after paying Mr. Boyce the post office deficit, I want sold to apply on those concerns: The printing office and lot I will deed to you as soon as I can get to some place where I can tarry long enough to do the business. The whole matter shall be arranged as speedily as possible. It would have been arranged on my part last summer with Frye, but sickness prevented, and I barely escaped to a healthier climate by the threads of life, which held soul and body together for the time being. I am in great needs now and mean to realize some money besides cancelling the old debts in Mo from the avails of those lands there.<sup>17</sup>

As with the letter from Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon, no immediate response from Whitmer has survived.

Discussion of transferring land titles, however, did eventually lead Whitmer to reopen conversation about the church history. Four years later, in 1844, Whitmer wrote Phelps, wondering why the land transaction still wasn't resolved:

I should like to know how you are a doing and how you are feeling in regard to what we talked in regard to the old Frye concern before you left this place. I hope you are willing to do the clean thing, and why is it that that matter is not settled agreeable to your letter written to me at Dayton, Ohio, in which you said that as soon as you became settled and found a resting place you would close our business. I feel anxious to have it closed.

Connecting the matter to the history, Whitmer continued:



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[Lyman E. Johnson] stated a few things to me from you in regard to the old Fry concern and also respecting the Church history, which is at my control, but not in my possession, and can be had at a fair price. . . . You have land in this county which is going to destruction. The timber that is valuable is pretty much destroyed. Now, if you will come here in the spring, I will sell to you the history for property, etc, provided we can agree as to price, and I think there will be but little difficulty in that. You own a small quantity of land north of us, joining my field, which I should like to own.<sup>18</sup>

Word of John Whitmer's attempt to part with the history reached Joseph Smith in Nauvoo, probably through Phelps himself, who was now faithfully back in the church. Joseph Smith's journal for February 23, 1844, notes that "W. W. Phelps rec[eive]d letter from J. Whitmer on Church history on which Dr Richards replied to."<sup>19</sup> Like Joseph and Sidney's 1838 letter seeking the history, Willard Richards's 1844 letter forcefully attacks Whitmer's labors as a historian as well as the record itself:

Your Letter of the 8<sup>th</sup> of January to W. W. Phelps came in to our beloved Brother Joseph Smith's office this day. As you mention something about the church records it becomes necessary to reply. We have already compiled about 800 pages of church history. ([Large pages]<sup>20</sup> closely written. One page, probably, contains about 4 times the amount of matter of 1 which you wrote.) Which covers all the ground of which you took notes, therefore any thing which you have in the shape of church history would be of little or no consequence to the church at large.

You enquire about Bro Phelps prospects. He owns no property in Nauvoo, but labors diligently for the Church, and

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like all other Righteous men hardly gets a comfortable living, as the time has scarcely arrived for the “meek to possess the earth.”

Yours respectfully,

Willard Richards

Recorder and Historian for the whole Church of Jesus  
Christ of Latter Day Saints<sup>21</sup>

Nothing further resulted from Willard Richards’s tersely written missive to John Whitmer.

The physical separation between John Whitmer and the church created by the Latter-day Saints’ move to Salt Lake City further divided the two parties. At his death in Far West, Missouri, on July 11, 1878, John Whitmer still had control of the manuscript, leaving church leaders to speculate about its contents.

Whitmer was survived by two children, Jacob D. Whitmer and Sarah Elizabeth Whitmer. While his home and farm in Far West passed into their hands, the record, together with other church materials John owned—including a portion of the Joseph Smith translation of the Bible—were passed to his brother David Whitmer in Richmond, Missouri. David added these materials to other significant church artifacts he had received from Oliver Cowdery before his death in 1850. Prominent among these relics was the printer’s copy of the Book of Mormon translation. When David Whitmer assumed control of John Whitmer’s record, the history became linked with the more famous Book of Mormon manuscript for the remainder of the nineteenth century.

Two months after John Whitmer’s death, Orson Pratt and Joseph F. Smith visited David Whitmer in Richmond, Missouri. Traveling east to visit church history sites, the pair met with this last of the Three Witnesses to interview him and preserve his account of early church history. During their conversation, reported

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later that year in the church's *Millennial Star*, Elders Pratt and Smith inquired about the Book of Mormon manuscript and what would be done with it upon David's death. Whitmer reported his plan to pass the manuscript on to his nephew, David P. Whitmer, son of his brother Jacob. When pressed about "part[ing] with [the manuscript] to a purchaser," Whitmer refused, responding, "Oliver charged me to keep it, and Joseph said my Fathers house should 'keep the Records.' I consider these things sacred and would not part with, nor barter them for money."<sup>22</sup>

Joseph F. Smith stated, "We would not offer you money in the light of bartering for the [pages], but we would like to see them preserved in some manner where they would be safe from casualties and from the caprices of men, in some institution that will not die as man does." Countering this reasoning, David Whitmer responded by referring to the recent tornado that had devastated the Richmond area, severely damaging the Whitmer home except the room where the Book of Mormon manuscript was kept. David's nephew Philander Page, who was present during the conversation, added, "Do you think . . . that the Almighty cannot take care of his own?"<sup>23</sup> David and his family were determined to keep the documents.

The next day, Pratt "again felt closely after the subject of procuring the [pages]." Denied again, Pratt and Smith later summarized: "We found that nothing would move him on this point. The whole Whitmer family are deeply impressed with the sacredness of this relic. And so thoroughly imbued are they with the idea and faith that it is under the immediate protection of the Almighty, that, in their estimation, not only is the [manuscript] itself safe from all possible contingencies, but that it is a source of protection to the place or house in which it may be kept, and, it may be to those who have possession of them."<sup>24</sup>

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Word of church efforts to acquire the Book of Mormon manuscript, and probably John Whitmer’s history with it, was quickly spread and sensationalized. Two weeks after their visit, the *Kansas City Journal* reported: “Orson Pratt and J. F. Smith, two of the leaders of the Mormon Church, visited Ray County to secure this original copy of their sacred book for deposit in the archives of the Church. . . . The Mormon elders offered Mr. Whitmer almost any price for it, but in vain.”<sup>25</sup> Seven years later, the *Chicago Tribune* further enhanced the story:

The original manuscript from which the Book of Mormon was printed is still in Mr. Whitmer’s possession, and most of it is in the handwriting of his brother Christian and his brother-in-law, Oliver Cowdery. Mr. Whitmer also has an exhaustive history of the Church, which was compiled by his brother, and an accurate copy of several plates from which the Book of Mormon was translated. These records he has preserved against all temptations and in the face of death. Several years ago a delegation of Mormons came to Richmond from Salt Lake and made every overture to Mr. Whitmer in a vain attempt to gain possession of the records, but he stood aloof and declined every offer. A prominent businessman of the place, at that time engaged in banking, informed your correspondent that he knows of his own knowledge that the Mormon Church would have willingly paid Mr. Whitmer \$100,000 for the documents, and that the delegation returned home thoroughly convinced that Mr. Whitmer was proof against all financial temptation so far as concerned his records.<sup>26</sup>

The story, including the reported \$100,000 offer to purchase the documents, continued to hound the church. Nearly two decades after Pratt and Smith’s visit, Chicago’s *Daily Inter Ocean*

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called the Book of Mormon document “the most valuable manuscript now owned within the limits of the United States, the Federal constitution and the declaration of Independence alone excepted.” The conclusion was based, in part, on rumors that “the Salt Lake hierarchy offered \$100,000 in gold for it, and it is believed that they would have made an offer of \$500,000 had they thought there was a prospect of Mr. Whitmer parting with it.”<sup>27</sup>

On September 21, 1899, the *New York Times* repeated the story, embellishing again the attempted acquisition by linking it with plural marriage. “Once,” the paper observed, church leaders “offered \$100,000 in cash for the old and yellow manuscript, but its keeper, David Whitmer, one of the founders of the Church, refused the offer because he believed the Utah branch of the Church wished to get hold of the manuscript to insert into it by forgery a clause that would authorize and sanction the practice of polygamy.” The paper further reported that “last week two representatives of the Mormon Church of Utah were [in Richmond, Missouri,] making another attempt to buy the manuscript.”<sup>28</sup>

These and other accounts of church efforts to acquire the historic documents so exasperated Joseph F. Smith that he refuted them in a letter written on March 19, 1901:

The [Book of Mormon] manuscript . . . possesses no value whatever. It has been repeatedly offered to us, and numerous false reports have been put in circulation with regard to our desire to obtain possession of it, but we have at no time regarded it as of any value, neither have we ever offered any money to procure it, all the stories to the contrary notwithstanding, for we have always known it was not the original, as aforesaid, and as many editions of the Book of Mormon have been printed, and tens of thousands of copies of it circulated throughout the world you can readily perceive that this manuscript really

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is of no value to anyone. There is no principle involved in its possession, there could be nothing lost if it were utterly destroyed; it can neither add to or diminish aught from the word of God as contained in the printed work which has already come to the world and been translated into many languages. Indeed, it is not worth the time and paper I am using to convey these thoughts to you.<sup>29</sup>

As evidenced by President Smith’s response, the Book of Mormon was the focus of most stories then circulating about the church’s attempts to acquire the Whitmer manuscripts. But the *Chicago Tribune* account of 1885 indicates that individuals also apparently knew that “Mr. Whitmer also has an exhaustive history of the Church, which was compiled by his brother.”<sup>30</sup>

John Whitmer’s history remained linked to the Book of Mormon manuscript following David Whitmer’s death on January 25, 1888. But the Whitmer collection did not pass to David Whitmer’s nephew David P., as originally intended. This nephew preceded his uncle in death in 1883, so David Whitmer instead conferred the artifacts on his own son, David J. Whitmer.

Near the end of the nineteenth century, the church’s focus shifted from the Book of Mormon printer’s manuscript back to John Whitmer’s history. Attempts to access the document during the late 1880s and early 1890s were headed by Andrew Jenson, who later became assistant church historian. Following David Whitmer’s death, Jenson, together with Edward Stevenson and Joseph S. Black, visited David J. Whitmer in Richmond, Missouri, and examined the Book of Mormon manuscript in his possession.<sup>31</sup> Five years later, Jenson returned to Richmond. There he found the history in the care of George W. Schweich, David J.’s nephew. Describing the experience later in his autobiography, Jenson recorded:

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I went to work immediately copying John Whitmer's old record, in the store of Geo. Schweich, who assisted me some in reading proof. Mr. Schweich did not think that the little old book with faded writing was the very book that I had been hunting for, but as I perused it, I came to the conclusion, without telling him so, that it contained all that John Whitmer ever wrote on Church history; hence I was anxious to copy every word contained in it. Mr. Schweich reluctantly allowed me to take it to my hotel where I spent all night copying, and in the morning returned the original to him. I was very pleased indeed to obtain a copy of this old Whitmer record.<sup>32</sup>

This autobiographical account was published more than three decades after the discovery. Andrew Jenson's contemporary journal entries paint an even more complete picture of how he obtained the church's first copy of John Whitmer's history. On Tuesday, September 5, 1893, Jenson described his search for the record: "Took train to Richmond, Ray Co. . . . where I met David J. Whitmer and Geo Schweich, and succeeded in getting sight of the old John Whitmer Church history; was busy perusing it most of the day."<sup>33</sup>

Nearly three weeks later, Jenson returned to Richmond, where his journal continues, describing the multiday ordeal of copying the record: "Monday 25. . . . I went to work immediately copying John Whitmer's old record in the store of Geo Schweich, who assisted me some in reading proof after I had copied part. . . . Tuesday 26 Continued my labors copying at Mr. Schweich's store and finished the work at my lodging place about 12 midnight. Wed. 27. Mr. Schweich helped me again comparing what I had written with the original record after which I proceeded to the railway station at Richmond."<sup>34</sup>

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Returning the transcription to Salt Lake City, Jenson made several copies, appending a note that explained the state of the original record. Jenson observed: “The original Whitmer record from which this is copied, is a book, containing nearly 300 pages of unruled paper, of which only the first 96 are written, the remaining pages remaining blank. The size of the book is 12½ × 8½ inches, bound very plain, with paper sides and cloth back. The writing is that of an ordinary hand, without any pretence of advanced penmanship; the spelling and punctuation are bad.” Trying to be as accurate as possible, Jenson even traced the length and width of the book, drawing lines to represent its dimensions. Describing the cover, he added, the “book is plainly bound, of the old timers; cloth back, paper sides; size ordinary fools cap folio.”<sup>35</sup>

In addition to including a physical description of the record, Jenson’s appended introduction also explains his transcription method. “During my visit to Missouri in September last,” Jenson recorded, “I obtained permission from said David J. Whitmer to make a copy of the old Whitmer record in his possession. I spent several days doing this labor and was very careful to copy verbatim everything which the record contained, except certain revelations, letters and documents, which are already contained in the history of Joseph Smith. These, as produced in the following pages are copied from said printed history as published in the Mill. Star vol. 14. Hence the following is a full, complete and accurate copy of the original record as written by John Whitmer.”<sup>36</sup>

Jenson’s copy reveals his knowledge of church scripture and history, as he simply refers to Doctrine and Covenants passages rather than copying them. The fact that this was an unplanned effort at transcription is also evident, as the document is largely written on what appears to be scrap paper. Ten of Jenson’s pages are written on the back of George Schweich’s business letterhead.



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Numerous other pages are written on the backs of pages torn from Jenson's monthly periodical, *The Historical Record*.

Jenson also describes any alterations he made to the transcription: "I have corrected . . . errors and introduced some punctuation, but have not altered the construction of sentences in any degree whatever, except in a very few instances where I have introduced single words in brackets in order to make the sense more complete, and in a few other instances where I (also in brackets) have given correct dates after wrong ones given by Mr. Whitmer. The few words thus inserted by me are all underlined in this copy."<sup>37</sup>

Furthermore, Jenson's introductory reflections offer his assessment of John Whitmer's history. His evaluation includes a discussion of how Whitmer may have written the history and added material following Joseph's death. "Whoever reads this copy," Jenson noted, "should observe that Mr. Whitmer closes his record as historian in 1838, at the end of his Chapter 19; but that he subsequently adds three more chapters which are written in altogether a different spirit to that which dictated the first part of the history. It is evident that Mr. Whitmer, after his excommunication from the Church, became very bitter in his feelings toward Joseph the Prophet and the Church generally, and also that he changed his views on different points as he grew older, particularly in regard to the successorship in the Presidency of the Church. This is proven by the erasures which he made of that which he had formerly written, all of which is shown in this copy."<sup>38</sup>

Most important, Andrew Jenson added one additional piece of information regarding the physical state of the manuscript that aids the reader immensely in assessing the record. At the end of the transcription Jenson summarized: "Here the Whitmer record suddenly ends, on the bottom of page 96, the following four pages having been torn off. This is evident from the fact that there are

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small fragments of the leaves left in the book, and the number of the next page left intact is 101. No other writing however appears on this page, nor on any of the succeeding pages, about two hundred in number.”<sup>39</sup> This information is critical because it helps the researcher know that by 1893, up to four pages were missing from the extant Whitmer record.

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LIGHT—THE REORGANIZED CHURCH’S  
ACQUISITION AND PUBLICATION

With a copy of John Whitmer’s long-missing record in hand, church leaders in Salt Lake City were finally able to satisfy themselves regarding its contents. But individuals and institutions with ties to Mormon history continued to be interested in the original. At the beginning of the twentieth century, this interest culminated in the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints successfully acquiring the document from Whitmer family members and leading efforts to see it published.

As noted in Andrew Jenson’s 1893 account, while the record was owned by David J. Whitmer, George W. Schweich maintained some control over the document. A dry goods merchant in Richmond, Schweich was the grandson of David Whitmer, his mother being David’s only daughter, Julia Ann Whitmer Schweich. When his uncle David J. Whitmer died tragically from a sandbar collapse in 1895, George Schweich gained exclusive control over the Whitmer family artifacts, including the Book of Mormon printer’s manuscript and John Whitmer’s history.

Unlike his grandfather, Schweich seemed willing to exhibit and possibly part with the sacred family artifacts. Aware of this possibility, interested parties within the Reorganized Church began inquiring about the documents as early as January 1886,

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long before Schweich actually received them. At that time RLDS Church president Joseph Smith III wrote Albert D. Hager, secretary of the Chicago Historical Society:

It will be comparatively useless for me to approach Eld[er] David Whitmer on the subject of depositing the Mss of the Book of Mormon in his care, in the Archives of the Historical Society at Chicago. He believes himself divinely appointed as the custodian of that Mss, and as such he will not consent to part with it while he lives.

There is in Chicago, or was, in the Customs Office, a Col. VanCleve. . . . He was the husband of a grand daughter of David Whitmer, and I think has great influence with the family. I suggest that you see Col. VanCleve and his wife, and talk the matter over with them. It is my opinion that when father Whitmer dies, he will put the Mss in the hand of his grandson George Schweich, of Richmond, brother of Col. VanCleve's wife. Hence, if you can succeed with the Colonel it may aid you further on.

It will give me pleasure to forward your efforts to secure all that throws light on the history of Mormonism being myself a learner though a believer in it. I Expect to meet the exact truth hereafter, and I desire to be as honest and brave now as I will be compelled to be then. Personally, I have nothing to hide in reference to Mormonism.<sup>40</sup>

Ten years later, following the passing of all Whitmer materials into the possession of George Schweich, the RLDS Church made a specific attempt to contact him regarding the records. In 1896, as RLDS apostle and church historian Heman C. Smith was compiling the official church history of his denomination, he asked Schweich for material from the Whitmer history. In a

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letter Smith explained, “When I met you near a month ago you kindly agreed to find out the where-a-bouts of the manuscript history written by Mr. John Whitmer, and permit us the use of it in compilling the work in which we are now engaged. Have you yet learned any more regarding its where abouts?” Specifically, Smith asked for the “complete and verbatim account as it appears in the account kept by John Whitmer” of the “ordination of High Priests in 1831.”<sup>41</sup>

Due to the increasing number of inquiries regarding the history, Schweich may have become aware of the financial value of the document as well as his other relics from early Mormon history. Apparently this led him to seek to profit financially from his family’s connections to Mormonism. In 1891 he wrote Angus M. Cannon, Salt Lake Stake president and brother to First Presidency member George Q. Cannon, about an artifact in his collection: “I own now the table on which the book of Mormon was written by Oliver Cowdery & others while the prophet translated it. I send you a photo. Can’t you find some of your wealthy men who would give me as much as \$5000<sup>00</sup> for it. If you can I shall consider the sale of it. Would rather let some one of your upright men have it. . . . I hate to sell it to an unbeliever which I can now do. I have a good motive in this and am not so mercenary as it seems. Please know that this is a private letter to one who I think a friend.”<sup>42</sup>

At the turn of the century, Schweich entrusted a portion of his collection with William E. Benjamin, a wealthy rare book collector in New York City. Writing the Reverend O. R. Beardsley about the arrangement, Schweich mentioned: “I am the owner of the Original M.S of the Book of Mor. It is now in New York City with W. E. Benjamin. . . . I consider the M.S. an important

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document for the American people[.] I also have M.S. History of the Church for some unpublished periods.”<sup>43</sup>

News of Schweich’s willingness to part with the Whitmer family collection eventually reached RLDS Church president Joseph Smith III. In April 1897 he wrote Schweich, inquiring specifically about the Book of Mormon manuscript:

Dear Sir and Bro:—

Elder William Vaughan, of Huntsville, Mo., in attendance here at Conference, stated to me . . . that on his way here he called on you and had a chat. He further stated that you expressed a willingness that we should have the custody of the Manuscript of the Book of Mormon, of which your Grandfather was so long the faithful guardian; provided that I would come for it, and engage to keep it safe from mutilation, soiling, or destruction. He stated that you so stated to him that if I would come for it I could get it.

While, I would quite willingly undertake to keep the manuscript with the same fidelity and jealous care that I would the mss of the Holy Scriptures, which my mother kept so long and faithfully, if they were confided to me; I would not have you to think that I would not ask you to surrender the charge delivered to you by your Grandfather for the sake of anything I might say to you; as I have full satisfaction that your Grandfather was made the custodian of them; and, felt contented that they were safe in your hands, believing you to be honorable in your fidelity to the ways of the Lord. . . .

If for any reason satisfactory to you, you are willing to confide the manuscript to my care; or if you are desirous of relieving yourself of the care and anxiety which such a constant custody of them involves; and you will trust them to me, I will come to Richmond for them at any time set by you. . . .

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If Elder Vaughan has misunderstood you in this affair, please pardon the intrusion of this letter; for believe me, I do not seek to deprive you of that committed to your care; or desire in any ignoble or unworthy way to get possession of these manuscripts.<sup>44</sup>

President Smith’s conciliatory manner seems to have opened a door between the RLDS Church and George Schweich, not merely for the transfer of the Book of Mormon manuscript but also for other artifacts, including the John Whitmer history. Deliberate negotiations apparently ensued, with the minutes of the First Presidency of the RLDS Church recording on April 24, 1902:

Joseph Smith and Fred M. Smith, of the First Presidency, E. L. Kelley of the Bishopric, and W. H. Kelley, F. A. Smith, J. W. Wight, of the Twelve, met in the First Presidency’s office at three o’clock in the afternoon, to consider the advisability of accepting an offer from George W. Schweich, of Richmond, Missouri, to turn over to the Reorganized Church, for a money consideration of twenty five hundred dollars the manuscript of the Book of Mormon. All seemed to be agreed that if some other papers which he possessed could be secured together with the Book of Mormon manuscript, they would be worth the price asked. Hence a motion prevailed that negotiations be opened with him for that purpose.<sup>45</sup>

A year later the transaction was finalized when, on April 18, 1903, Schweich delivered to Joseph Smith III and other RLDS leaders the Book of Mormon printer’s manuscript, John Whitmer’s manuscript history, parts of Joseph Smith’s translation of the Bible, manuscript copies of several revelations, and a piece of paper containing copied Book of Mormon characters.<sup>46</sup> An announcement was made at the RLDS Church conference,

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with a subsequent Presiding Bishop's report summarizing: "The present year the Church has been at some considerable special expense, outside of keeping up proper repairs and protection of its property, for matters that will not come up in the future and yet essential to the interests of the work. Of this list the sum of \$2,450 was expended for the original manuscripts of the Book of Mormon, and notes of church history in the hands of relatives of David and John Whitmer, deceased."<sup>47</sup> A far cry from the rumored six-figure amount offered twenty-five years earlier by Orson Pratt and Joseph F. Smith, the sale finally transferred John Whitmer's history from private to institutional hands.

## MAKING JOHN WHITMER'S HISTORY ACCESSIBLE TO THE PUBLIC

Once it possessed the original manuscript of the history, the Reorganized Church quickly sought to make the document accessible to its members. But the manuscript was nearly destroyed by fire shortly after its acquisition. On January 5, 1907, flames ravaged the RLDS Herald Publishing House in Lamoni, Iowa, reducing to ashes nearly 2,800 volumes dealing with the early church and its reorganization that were housed in the historian's office and library. Because the fire occurred at 7:40 a.m., however—prior to the vault materials being opened for the day—the record of John Whitmer and other priceless historical treasures were providentially preserved.<sup>48</sup>

A year later, RLDS Church historian Heman C. Smith first published John Whitmer's record in the January, April, and July 1908 issues of the RLDS periodical *Journal of History* under the title "Church History." Smith concluded the published account with John Whitmer's benediction, written after his 1838 expulsion: "Therefore I close the history of the church of Latter

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Day Saints, hoping that I may be forgiven of my faults and my sins be blotted out and in the last days be saved in the kingdom of God notwithstanding my present situation, which I hope will soon be bettered and I find favor in the eyes of God and all men his Saints. Farewell. March, 1838.”<sup>49</sup> But this farewell was not the end of the record. At the time, RLDS leaders decided not to publish the final three chapters, representing eleven manuscript pages John Whitmer wrote sometime after his disaffection from The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

Following official publication of the record, discussion ensued regarding the accuracy of Andrew Jenson’s 1893 transcript copy. In 1918 Heman C. Smith wrote RLDS Church president Frederick M. Smith, describing both the record and the controversy: “[John Whitmer’s record] is written in a blank book all in one hand presumably that of John Whitmer. . . . It has since developed that the Utah people claim to have made a copy prior to its coming into our hands. I am of the opinion that there is some truth in the statement. How faithfully they have been in copying is impossible to tell from the evidence now in our possession.”<sup>50</sup>

The dispute over differing copies caused continued interest in John Whitmer’s history, leading to additional publication efforts. In 1960 disaffected RLDS member Pauline Hancock produced a typescript copy of the entire manuscript. Explaining her labors, Hancock wrote: “The manuscript up to page 85 was published by the [RLDS Church in 1908]. . . . This includes entries made up to March 1838, but the last three chapters have never been published. . . . We have now obtained the microfilm of John Whitmer’s complete history and have had it printed f[ro]m the microfilm and bound into a book so that others may also read these items of history that have been held back by the churches



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that have the original history.”<sup>51</sup> Six years later, Jerald and Sandra Tanner similarly published a version in Salt Lake City.<sup>52</sup>

Aware of discrepancies between these different versions, the RLDS Church’s Herald Publishing House issued a new version in 1980. The account, edited by historians F. Mark McKiernan and Roger D. Launius, included the disputed final three chapters omitted from the earlier *Journal of History* printing. To aid the reader, it also included extensive explanatory footnotes, an introductory essay on John Whitmer and his history, a detailed biographical essay, and an index. According to Community of Christ archivist Ron Romig, however, “the McKiernan and Launius edition was subject to some editorial oversights and differs in places from both John Whitmer’s manuscript and Jenson’s typescript.”<sup>53</sup>

Latter-day Saint scholar Bruce N. Westergren produced the next edition of John Whitmer’s history in 1995. This annotated version attempted to preserve the accuracy of the text, with “spelling, punctuation, and capitalization . . . retained as they appear in the original. . . . Characters and words stricken out in the original [were] retained.” Effort was made to indicate missing or illegible characters and words, with all editorial insertions indicated.<sup>54</sup>

Care has also been taken regarding the manuscript itself. Following the near destruction of the document in the 1907 Herald House fire, efforts were made to ensure its protection. The construction of the RLDS auditorium in Independence, Missouri, in the early twentieth century provided a fireproof repository within the building for the manuscript. There it remained in the historian’s office and later the RLDS library and archives until 1992, when it was moved to the nearby temple complex then under construction.<sup>55</sup> Most recently, John Whitmer’s original manuscript has been displayed at the new Community of Christ visitors center adjacent to the temple in Kirtland, Ohio.

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Moreover, while the original manuscript has been preserved, cooperative efforts have developed between the RLDS (now Community of Christ) and LDS Churches to increase access to the document. In 1974, LDS and RLDS officials exchanged micro-filmed historical materials, including the John Whitmer manuscript. In an effort to preserve it for future use, RLDS Church historian Richard P. Howard arranged for the pages to be removed from their binding, laminated, and rebound in a modern cover during the early 1970s.<sup>56</sup>

More recently, as part of the Joseph Smith Papers Project, officials from the two churches have worked closely together to preserve the manuscript, employing advanced techniques, including reversing the process of lamination. According to Community of Christ archivist Ron Romig, during 2005 and 2006, officials from The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Salt Lake City took John Whitmer’s ninety-six handwritten pages and “carefully delaminated, cleaned, washed, deacidified, stabilized, repaired, and reassembled [them] back into their original ledger book covers.” At the same time, additional study was made of the original manuscript pages, the transcription of which will be included in subsequent Joseph Smith Papers publications.<sup>57</sup>

ASSESSING JOHN WHITMER’S RECORD

From its inception, “the Book of John Whitmer, kept by commandment” has followed a long and twisted path. Reluctantly begun by commandment, it remained a point of contention during John Whitmer’s lifetime and a subject of mystery following his death. This history, as well as the conflict and obscurity that surrounded it, influenced ways in which church members, leaders, and scholars viewed the record.

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For decades, skepticism and even ridicule have haunted the document. This began with Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon's 1838 letter to John requesting he give up the manuscript and continued through Willard Richards's 1844 rebuff of Whitmer's attempt to sell it. But these decidedly negative statements should be considered within the emotionally charged contexts in which they were delivered. For example, the 1838 letter criticizing Whitmer's "incompetency as a historian" was written following the Kirtland apostasy and the prophet's loss of numerous leaders and close friends, including the entire Whitmer family. The heated 1844 dialogue came as the prophet was discovering the threats both from within and without that ultimately led to his death four months later. The pressures caused by these contexts may have colored any dialogue regarding the history.

Without access to the record itself, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints was unfortunately left to rely on these confrontational statements when assessing John Whitmer's history. Describing his own recording efforts, including filling in the gaps created by the absence of John's record, Wilford Woodruff observed: "I have recorded nearly all the sermons and teachings that I ever heard from the Prophet Joseph, I have in my journal many of the sermons of President Brigham Young, and such men as Orson Hyde, Parley P. Pratt and others." He explained that one "reason I was moved upon to write in the early days was that nearly all the historians appointed in those times apostatized and took the journals away with them."<sup>58</sup>

Others in the Utah church made specific reference to John Whitmer and his failings. In 1907, First Presidency member Anthon H. Lund applauded the efforts of Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Nephi, and Alma in producing scriptural records. Then,

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calling John Whitmer’s command to write a church history “a very important matter,” President Lund continued,

I wish that commandment had been more strictly obeyed and more elaborate records had been kept from the beginning of the Church. What history we have is correct, but John Whitmer’s record and the records of the early recorders of the Church are not very extensive, and if it were not for the history of the Prophet Joseph, and the journals kept by some of our leading men in those early days, our knowledge of the interesting events of that remarkable period of our history would be very meager.<sup>59</sup>

Because his reluctance and subsequent command to keep the church record are described in the *History of the Church* as well as in the record itself, negative feelings about John Whitmer and his history are also common in Latter-day Saint scriptural commentaries. For example, one source critiques “the meager results of his labors” and mentions that John Whitmer’s service as church historian was performed “not always with exemplary diligence.”<sup>60</sup> Another source, emphasizing the brevity of Whitmer’s account, highlights that “his writings, which included revelations given by Joseph Smith during that seven-year period, were only eighty-five pages in length.”<sup>61</sup> A third calls his account “a sketchy history.”<sup>62</sup> Even the church-produced *Doctrine and Covenants Student Manual* notes, “John Whitmer’s history of the Church is a mere sketch of events that actually transpired between 1831 and 1838. His work consisted of eighty-five pages, which included many of the revelations given to the Prophet Joseph Smith.”<sup>63</sup>

To be fair, these assessments reflect the emotional feelings of those who originally sought John Whitmer’s record as well as the longing by modern scholars for more information, especially from

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its official historian, about the early church. But directing criticism at the record's shortcomings or evaluating it against modern standards may be improper. Rather, the history should be valued for the contributions it does make while assessing it against the expectation and charge delivered to Whitmer. Doing so emphasizes the fact that, in some measure, content matters more than coverage.

As one of the earliest elders in the New York area in 1830 and the presiding elder in Kirtland prior to Joseph Smith's arrival in February 1831, Whitmer offers unique insights into early New York and Ohio church history throughout his record. Andrew Jenson himself noted about the transcription, "It contained only a little of historical value. Yet John Whitmer recorded events which are not recorded elsewhere."<sup>64</sup> Especially important are his details about the opposition the church faced in New York, the migration of members to Ohio, and the revelations manifested in Kirtland by Mrs. Hubble and others "led away with foolish and vain imaginations."<sup>65</sup> Later, as Whitmer was reassigned to Missouri, he recorded historical details regarding the expulsion from Zion, the subsequent attempts by the Saints to reclaim their promised land, and the settling of Far West. Finally, as one recent commentary observed, though John "becomes quite cynical about the Church as [he] apostatized in 1838," the record "is an important but sketchy source of early Church history."<sup>66</sup> Even these cynical portions surrounding his disaffection help modern readers understand better the emotion of the time. For these and other reasons, as one author noted, "[John Whitmer's] ninety-six written pages are considered by some historians to be the most authoritative history of the Church before 1838."<sup>67</sup>

With increased availability, John Whitmer's manuscript might be moving to a new era in its history. Gone are the confrontations

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over access to the account and the corresponding negative connotations that it spawned. In its place, we hopefully gain insight from the contributions that his record, kept by commandment of the Lord, offers.

Describing these labors, as well as his desire to be accepted by the Lord and his servants, John Whitmer himself wrote to Oliver Cowdery in 1833, “I want you to remember me to Joseph in a special manner, and enquire of him respecting my clerkship[;] you very well know what I mean & also my great desire of doing all things according to the mind of the Lord.”<sup>68</sup> As modern beneficiaries of one historian’s attempt to please the Lord, we too now remember John Whitmer and his record in a “special manner,” applying lessons from his life to our own historical endeavors.

NOTES

The author expresses special appreciation to Robin Jensen of the Church History Library in Salt Lake City, Ron Romig of the Community of Christ Archives, and David Whittaker at Brigham Young University for their willingness to share both expertise and resources on this topic.

1. F. Mark McKiernan and Roger D. Launius, eds., *An Early Latter Day Saint History: The Book of John Whitmer, Kept by Commandment* (Independence, MO: Herald Publishing House, 1980), 56.
2. This title is taken from the first line on the first page of John Whitmer’s manuscript record.
3. *History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, ed. B. H. Roberts, 2nd ed. rev. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1978), 3:15–16.
4. 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, 2000), 91; Andrew Jensen, *Latter-day Saint Biographical Encyclopedia*, vol. 1 (Salt Lake City: Andrew Jensen History Company, 1901), 251.

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5. Donald Q. Cannon and Lyndon W. Cook, eds., *Far West Record: Minutes of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1830–1844* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1983), 1.
6. McKiernan and Launius, *Early Latter Day Saint History*, 56.
7. McKiernan and Launius, *Early Latter Day Saint History*, 56.
8. McKiernan and Launius, *Early Latter Day Saint History*, 93.
9. Cannon and Cook, *Far West Record*, 68.
10. See *History of the Church*, 3:5–8.
11. *History of the Church*, 3:6–7. *History of the Church* refers to a disagreement involving \$2,000 in Church funds, appropriated for the building of the temple in Far West but retained by Whitmer and Phelps. The financial disagreement is a complicated one, however, and centers on earlier properties purchased by Whitmer and Phelps during the founding of Far West. The *Far West Record* records the allegations leveled against church leaders, as well as their counter-argument that the council was “contrary to the principles of the revelations of Jesus Christ.” See Cannon and Cook, *Far West Record*, 146–49.
12. *History of the Church*, 3:8, 11.
13. Bruce N. Westergren, ed., *From Historian to Dissident: The Book of John Whitmer* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1995), 180.
14. Westergren, *From Historian to Dissident*, 180.
15. Jenson, *Latter-day Saint Biographical Encyclopedia*, 1:252.
16. Richard Lloyd Anderson, *Investigating the Book of Mormon Witnesses* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1981), 131.
17. William W. Phelps to John Whitmer, March 4, 1840, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah. The Frye concern mentioned in this letter by Phelps (and in the follow-up letter four years later by Whitmer—see note 18) involves a loan contracted by Phelps and Whitmer with Mr. William Frye when they purchased property on behalf of the Church in Far West in 1836. Controversy over the repayment of this debt continued for years following the original transaction.
18. John Whitmer to Wm. W. Phelps, January 8, 1844, Journal History of the Church, Church History Library, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah.
19. Joseph Smith, Journal, February 23, 1844, Church History Library.
20. The original letter seems to read “Lage Demi.” The corresponding typescript version of the same letter in the Journal History also reads “Lage Demi,” but

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someone has written over it, in pencil, the words “Large pages.” The exact meaning of “Lage Demi” is uncertain.

21. Willard Richards to John Whitmer, February 23, 1844, Willard Richards Papers, 1821–54, Church History Library. The original to this document includes some words that were lined through and therefore deleted. These have been omitted, without ellipses, from the document as quoted.
22. Orson Pratt and Joseph F. Smith to John Taylor and Council of the Twelve, September 17, 1878, in *Selected Collections from the Archives of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, ed. Richard E. Turley Jr., 2 vols. (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 2002), DVD 27: Joseph F. Smith Incoming Correspondence; also in “Report of Elders Orson Pratt and Joseph F. Smith,” *Millennial Star*, December 9, 1878, 773.
23. Pratt and Smith to Taylor and Council of the Twelve, September 17, 1878.
24. Pratt and Smith to Taylor and Council of the Twelve, September 17, 1878.
25. “The Book of Mormon,” *Kansas City Journal*, September 22, 1878.
26. *Chicago Tribune*, December 15, 1885, cited in “David Whitmer,” *Deseret News*, December 24, 1885.
27. “Book of Mormon Manuscript,” *Chicago Daily Inter Ocean*, September 9, 1895. The authenticity of the \$100,000 offering can be questioned. Jacob T. Child, a resident of Richmond referred to as Colonel Childs in Pratt and Smith’s published account, later wrote: “I was present when Elders Orson Pratt and Smith, from Salt Lake City, called on your grandfather in regard to the manuscript of the ‘Book of Mormon,’ and upon it being shown to them Elder Pratt recognized the handwriting of Oliver Cowdery and Mrs. Smith. After some conversation Elder Pratt asked Mr. Whitmer if he would dispose of the manuscript, stating that he would give anything in reason for it, as the archives of the Church were incomplete without it. There was no fixed sum named but your grandfather was afraid that if he parted with it that they might interpolate.” Jacob T. Child to George W. Schweich, August 28, 1896, cited in I. Woodbridge Riley, *The Founder of Mormonism: A Psychological Study of Joseph Smith, Jr.* (London: William Heinemann, 1903), 98n55.
28. “The Book of Mormon: The Original Manuscript Said to Be in a Missouri Town,” *New York Times*, September 21, 1899.
29. Joseph F. Smith to Samuel Russell, March 19, 1901, Perry Special Collections.
30. *Chicago Tribune*, December 15, 1885, cited in “David Whitmer.”



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31. Andrew Jenson, Edward Stevenson, and Joseph S. Black, letter to the editor, September 13, 1888, in “Historical Landmarks,” *Deseret Evening News*, September 17, 1888.
32. *Autobiography of Andrew Jenson* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1938), 209.
33. Andrew Jenson, Journal, September 5, 1893, *Autobiography and Journals, 1864–1941*, Church History Library.
34. Jenson Journal, September 25–27, 1893.
35. Andrew Jenson, Manuscript and Typescript, Andrew Jenson Collection [ca. 1871–1942], Church History Library. At one point the original document is unclear. Before the words “of the old timers” is another word, perhaps “and” or “one.” That word may be crossed out in the original.
36. Jenson, Manuscript and Typescript. The original to this document includes some words that were lined through and therefore deleted. These have been omitted, without ellipses, from the document as quoted.
37. Jenson, Manuscript and Typescript.
38. Jenson, Manuscript and Typescript.
39. Jenson, Manuscript and Typescript.
40. Joseph Smith III to Albert D. Hager, January 11, 1886, Community of Christ Archives, Independence, Missouri; original located in Collection of Manuscripts about Mormons, Chicago Historical Society, Chicago, Illinois.
41. Heman C. Smith to George W. Schweich, July 20, 1896, Community of Christ Archives.
42. George W. Schweich to Angus M. Cannon, August 19, 1891, Angus M. Cannon Collection, Church History Library. Schweich’s fascination with Church relics did not apparently end with this table. A 1914 Kansas City newspaper account reports that he “is said to be the possessor of the sword of Laban as well as the golden plates from which the Mormon Bible was translated, and other Mormon relics.” Schweich refused to confirm whether he had the plates, replying, “If I had I should not want to make any announcements about it.” He fueled the rumors, however, by giving a description of the plates. See “Tells of Mormon Relics,” *Kansas City Star*, December 27, 1914.
43. George W. Schweich to O. R. Beardsley, January 17, 1900, Perry Special Collections.
44. Joseph Smith III to George W. Schweich, April 5, 1897, Joseph Smith Letter Book, P6, LB 7, 479–81, Community of Christ Archives.

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45. First Presidency Minutes, Reports, and Correspondence, April 24, 1902, microfilm, Community of Christ Archives.
46. Ronald E. Romig, “The New Translation Materials since 1844,” in Scott H. Faulring, Kent P. Jackson, and Robert J. Matthews, eds., *Joseph Smith’s New Translation of the Bible* (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2004), 37.
47. “General Conference Minutes: Presiding Bishop’s Report,” *Supplement to Saints’ Herald* (Lamoni, IA: Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, 1904), 689. Some question as to the legality of the sale persisted following the transaction. During his 1907 visit to Church history sites, photographer George Edward Anderson described his visit with Whitmer relatives in Far West: “Question with Mr. [John David] Whitmer if George Schweich had a right to sell [?] the manuscript of the Book of Mormon. He thought they might belong to the original church and that could be settled by court.” Importantly, Anderson’s interview with John David Whitmer also speculates as to why Schweich sold the documents: “Said George Schweich mortgaged the manuscript for \$1,800. Then had to raise the money.” Richard Neitzel Holzapfel, T. Jeffery Cottle, and Ted D. Stoddard, eds., *Church History in Black and White* (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1995), 82.
48. Romig, “New Translation Materials since 1844,” 37–38.
49. “Church History,” *Journal of History* (July 1908): 305.
50. Heman C. Smith to Frederick M. Smith, March 11, 1918, P10, f 19, Community of Christ Archives.
51. Ronald E. Romig, “Provenance of ‘The Book of John Whitmer,’” November 8, 2007, typescript, Community of Christ Archives.
52. Westergren, *From Historian to Dissident*, xii.
53. Romig, “Book of John Whitmer”; McKiernan and Launius, *An Early Latter Day Saint History*.
54. Westergren, *From Historian to Dissident*, xii–xiii.
55. Romig, “Provenance of ‘The Book of John Whitmer.’”
56. Romig, “Provenance of ‘The Book of John Whitmer.’”
57. Romig, “Provenance of ‘The Book of John Whitmer.’”
58. Matthias F. Cowley, *Wilford Woodruff: History of His Life and Labors* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1964), 477.

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59. Anthon H. Lund, in *Seventy-Seventh Annual Conference of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1907), 54.
60. Stephen E. Robinson and H. Dean Garrett, *A Commentary on the Doctrine and Covenants* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2001), 2:84.
61. Joseph Fielding McConkie and Craig J. Ostler, *Revelations of the Restoration* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2000), 370. By referring to eighty-five pages of text, the authors seem to be referring to Whitmer's record up to 1838. As previously discussed, Whitmer wrote eleven additional pages of manuscript sometime after his disaffection, bringing the remaining manuscript total to ninety-six pages. Also, as is evident in Andrew Jenson's account of transcribing the original, apparently four pages at the end of the text were missing by 1893.
62. Richard O. Cowan, *Doctrine & Covenants: Our Modern Scripture* (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 1978), 85.
63. Church Educational System, *Doctrine and Covenants Student Manual: Religion 324–325* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1981), 102.
64. *Autobiography of Andrew Jenson*, 209.
65. McKiernan and Launius, *Early Latter Day Saint History*, 61.
66. Steven C. Harper, *Making Sense of the Doctrine & Covenants* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2008), 163.
67. Susan Easton Black, *Who's Who in the Doctrine & Covenants* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1997), 332.
68. Whitmer to Cowdery, July 29, 1833, quoted in Lyndon W. Cook, *The Revelations of the Prophet Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1985), 64–65.