
The “Caractors” Document: New Light on an Early Transcription of the Book of Mormon Characters

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On February 27, 1884, George Q. Cannon arrived in Richmond, Missouri, to visit and interview David Whitmer regarding his declaration and testimony as a witness of the gold plates. Although Cannon was a member of the First Presidency and an Apostle in the LDS Church, he had not personally

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known Whitmer, even though he had been a founding member of the Church. Whitmer left the Church in 1838, several years before Cannon's conversion in 1842. Cannon noted their meeting and conversation in his journal, recording with particular interest the manuscripts, books, and paintings Whitmer had in his possession. Cannon reveled in the opportunity to hold the printer's manuscript that Oliver Cowdery prepared in 1829 and 1830 for John H. Gilbert and others to use to set the type of the first edition of the Book of Mormon. "This was exceedingly interesting to me," Cannon explained about the Book of Mormon manuscript, "and I examined it with care, and a feeling of reverence." However, another document also caught his attention. "With this [the printer's manuscript] was another paper which I thought of surpassing interest. It was the characters drawn by Joseph himself for Martin Harris to show to professors Mitchell & Anthon. There were seven lines, the first four being about twice as large in size as the three last." As early as 1829, Martin Harris's visit to Charles Anthon in February 1828 had been interpreted as a fulfillment of a prophecy found in Isaiah chapter 29. With that prophecy in mind, Cannon quickly connected Harris's experience in New York City with the characters document he examined during his visit with Whitmer. Cannon later wrote in his journal: "Here was the very paper which Isaiah saw in vision [blank space] years before and which he called the 'words of a book.'" For decades many in the Church had regarded the story of Martin Harris's visit to Anthon as one of the earliest prophecies fulfilled by the restoration of the gospel. To Cannon, the characters on the document were physical proof that the plates existed and served as a window into a past that he had not experienced, but nonetheless cherished. In his mind there was no question that he held the document Harris took to Anthon. "Though evidently long [ago] written, the characters were as clear and distinct as though just written" by Joseph Smith.¹

Like George Q. Cannon, in later years some who have examined the characters document have generally believed that it had been transcribed by Joseph Smith and that it was the very one taken to Charles Anthon by Harris in 1828. In subsequent years some who have examined the characters document have generally believed that it had been transcribed by Joseph Smith and that it was the very one taken to Charles Anthon by Harris in 1828.² And although a number of scholars have written about Harris's visit to Anthon, relatively little evidence has been presented by historians and archivists about the document's creation, history, chain of custody, provenance, and physical characteristics. However, using newly discovered evidence about the origin of characters document, this article will present additional data resulting in new interpretations that lead to a much deeper understanding of its origins, physical characteristics, and historical context, offering evidence that it was in fact a part of a completely different story altogether (see Figure 1).³

Caractors

A H 44 = IIII, LL 4 6 t A + 1 MC 8-1 A TL 2.0020).

Y IIIII 7 A T ■ 2 H W IIII 8 3 X N. D H T 2 { H Y

D. D V T A Z 6 4 J 8 X, L 206 IIIII 0 T 2 0 2 1 7 0

0 2 1 5 III D V T A H W IIII 8 2 7 6 3 2 H. 1 9

4 MC 0 1 3 9 4 + 2 4 IIII 8 4 4 2 -) W 5 1 4 3 1 7 3 - 2 6 = + + A - 9 2 L -

B 9 1 - D 4 6 = 8 1 3 - + A + 0 - IIII A 2 - 5 H W ... 6 0 - 2 4 + 0 2 - 3 3 0 0

■ IIII 2 - 1 0 0 3 - = 1 2 6 6 1 1 5 2 3 3 5 3 - A 4 8 4 - 0 2 7 2 4 - 3 3 2 4 # 5 1 1 2 1 4 - 0 2 - 5 3 3 1 4

Figure 1. "Caractors" document, image courtesy Community of Christ's Library-Archives, Independence, Missouri.

Provenance

While David Whitmer was the eventual owner of the document, where, when, and by whom he received the document can only be surmised. Although the possibilities abound for its early provenance, there are two probable scenarios regarding how David Whitmer obtained possession of the document. The first can only be understood completely by the discussion of the handwriting below, but in short, David Whitmer received the document from his older brother John Whitmer. The other possibility is that Oliver Cowdery supplied the document to David Whitmer along with the printer's manuscript of the Book of Mormon just before Cowdery died in 1850. The custodial history is difficult to follow because records before 1850 do not indicate who owned the document. To complicate matters, it appears that after 1850, David Whitmer and John Whitmer both owned documents containing copies of the gold plate characters after 1850, and this makes it difficult to assure that David Whitmer owned the "Caractors," and not just another similar document. For instance, when E. C. Brand visited John Whitmer in 1875, he apparently saw "a facsimile of the characters of the plates."⁴ However, three years later P. Wilhelm Poulson was apparently also shown a document containing characters from the gold plates, but Poulson's description did not match the content and form of "Caractors."⁵ Unfortunately, the waters surrounding the precise provenance are quite muddy. Regardless of its hazy early history, however, the document was eventually bequeathed by David Whitmer to his son David J. Whitmer,⁶ and then to George Schweich, David Whitmer's grandson.⁷ Schweich apparently decided to sell the document, along with several other items related to early Mormon history and likely hired William E. Benjamin, a New York autograph and rare book collector and dealer to facilitate this by the end of 1899.⁸ Benjamin advertised the items, trying to find a buyer for both "Caractors" and the printer's manuscript of the Book of Mormon.⁹ "Caractors" was eventually purchased, along with the printer's manuscript and other documents, as a package in 1902 by the First Presidency of the RLDS church and has remained in their possession.¹⁰

Multiple Documents

The earliest interpretations of the document, including George Q. Cannon's, have followed David Whitmer's understanding that it was in fact the very document Martin Harris took to Charles Anthon.¹¹ However, the document clearly developed in a much more complex manner—having itself been copied from another "characters" document. "Caractors" was believed to be the Anthon transcript, in part because the first published copy of any of the characters from the gold plates was done by the Church-affiliated

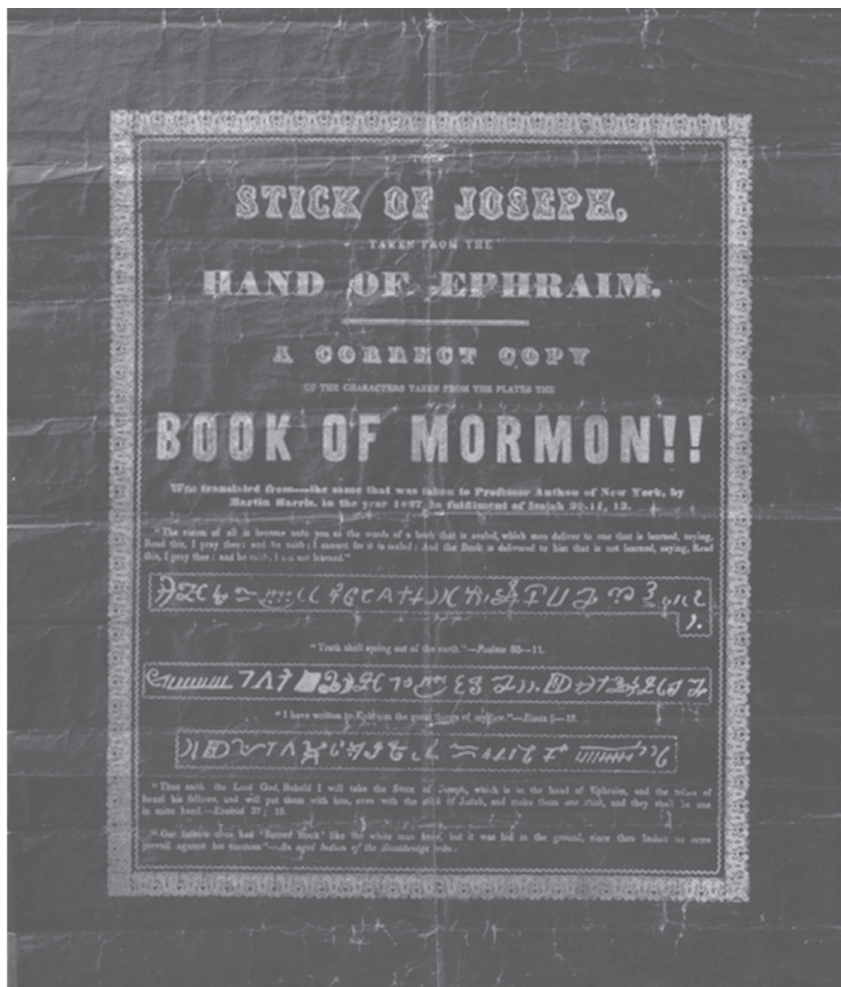


Figure 2. STICK OF JOSEPH, TAKEN FROM THE HAND OF EPHRAIM, broadside, (New York: The Prophet, 1844), one page, Church History Library.

newspaper in New York, *The Prophet*, which included the same written symbols found in the first three lines of “Caractors.” Samuel Brannan, the paper’s lead editor, asserted that the characters were the “same that was taken to Professor Anthon of New York, by Martin Harris, in the year 1829.”¹² The editors of the paper wrote: “We have published a very neat specimen of the original characters or hieroglyphics that were copied from the plates which the Book of Mormon was translated from”¹³ (see Figures 2 and 2a). It is highly unlikely, however, that the editors had “Caractors” in their possession,

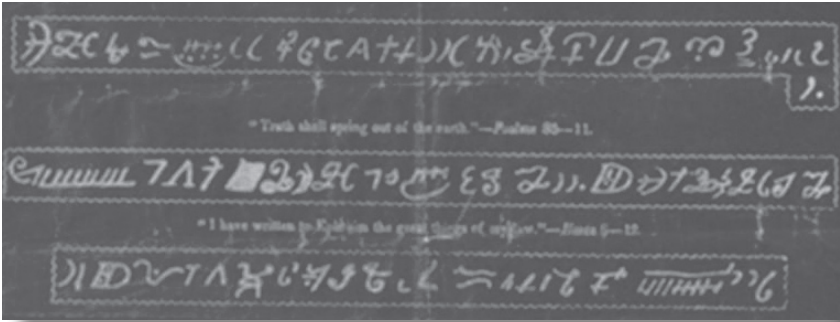


Figure 2a. Broadside, close-up showing copies of the Book of Mormon characters.

even though the first three lines are virtually the same. David Whitmer and Oliver Cowdery, who most likely had possession of the document, had left the Church by 1838; and the placard printed by *The Prophet* was published in December 1844. This suggests that multiple versions of this same characters document had circulated within the Church, serving to bolster and reaffirm the faith of the Latter-day Saints.

Other documents bearing Book of Mormon characters circulated within the early Church as well. In 1828 and 1829, Harris showed a personal document containing characters transcribed from the gold plates to numerous individuals around Palmyra, including the Episcopal preacher John Clark, and others on his travels to New York City.¹⁴ In addition, Harris's document was surreptitiously copied by his future son-in-law Flanders Dyke in 1828 at the behest of Lucy Harris. It is unknown how many copies could have been made from Dyke's transcription.¹⁵ By the mid-1830s in Kirtland, Ohio, interest in ancient languages was growing in part because of a visit from Michael Chandler, who brought with him several mummies with accompanying scrolls of Egyptian papyri. As a result, some revisited Joseph Smith's translation of the reformed Egyptian on the gold plates by viewing and copying documents containing the gold plate characters. At least two documents purporting to include Book of Mormon characters were created during this period by Oliver Cowdery and Fredrick G. Williams. Both made copies of Book of Mormon characters and their translation (see Figures 3 and 4). After Joseph Smith arranged for the purchase of some of the mummies and the papyri, he showed Chandler his own copies of the Book of Mormon characters.¹⁶ Smith apparently continued to show the characters to various visitors later in Nauvoo, such as Reverend George Moore.¹⁷

But among the known extant documents reportedly containing characters from the gold plates, none actually fit the description of the document

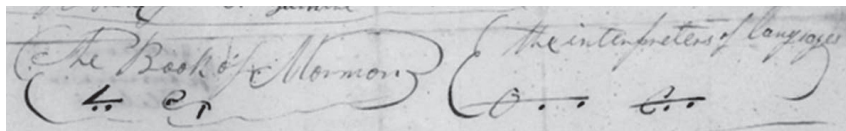


Figure 3. Close-up of the Book of Mormon characters copied by Oliver Cowdery, circa 1835–1836, Church History Library.

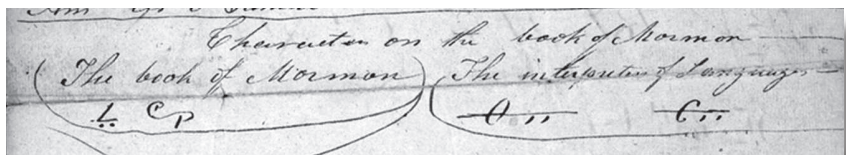


Figure 4. Close-up of the Book of Mormon characters copied by Fredrick G. Williams, circa February 27, 1836, Church History Library.

taken to Anthon. Most accounts from individuals who saw the documents that Harris took to Anthon do not resemble the format or even the basic content of “Caractors.” Though Anthon’s accounts about the document were given to discredit Smith’s claims and were at times likely exaggerated, he described a document that was far different from the layout of “Caractors.” For example, he claimed that the characters were arranged in columns instead of rows and that the characters were “intermingled with sundry delineations of half moons, stars, and other natural objects” with a “rude representation of the Mexican zodiac.”¹⁸ Joseph Knight Sr. explained that Smith copied the characters to “git them translated . . . and sent Martin Harris to see if he Could git them Translated.”¹⁹ Lucy Mack Smith expanded upon his statement by writing that her son was attempting to “transcribe the Egyptian alphabet,” possibly suggesting that he was compiling copies of the known hieroglyphics on the plates.²⁰ Smith stated that once he moved to Harmony, Pennsylvania in the winter of 1827, he “commenced copying the characters of[f] the plates.” His history explains, “I copied a considerable number of them and by the means of the Urim and Thummin I translated some of them.” Unlike “Caractors,” Smith described a document or documents that included “a considerable number” of characters, which were likely more than just seven lines. He also stated that he included “some” translated characters, which is a description of a document that is far different from “Caractors.”²¹

“Caractors” was likely derived from one of the documents that Joseph Smith created in the winter of 1827 and 1828. During that period Smith created more than one document that included copies of the characters on the plates, and one of these was likely copied later in part or in whole to

make “Caractors.” He apparently worked with two and possibly three different scribes to make copies of the characters. For instance, in Harmony, Emma Smith apparently made copies of the characters that Joseph had taken from the gold plates. During the same time period, Reuben Hale, Emma’s brother, may have also helped create copies of the characters.²² Martin Harris also assisted Joseph Smith in making copies. Smith explained that Martin Harris had experienced a vision and was told to take copies of the gold plate characters to New York City. Joseph Smith wrote in his 1832 history that after Harris had described his experience to him, they “proceeded to copy some of [the characters]” from the plates.²³ Therefore, the copy that Harris took could not have been one of the earlier copies created by Emma or Rueben, but would have been created independently. In fact, “Caractors” could have been created by copying any of the numerous documents Joseph Smith created in 1827 or 1828, and it may have even been a portion of a copy of one of the original documents.

Handwriting

The task of determining the provenance and creation of “Caractors” is made more difficult because most of what David Whitmer believed about “Caractors” was simply incorrect, especially his assertion that it was penned by Joseph Smith. The Joseph Smith Papers Project has invested a great deal of research and analysis into identifying handwriting, especially the hands of the most prominent early members of the Church. Through this research we believe we have correctly identified the handwriting of the “Caractors” title (and likely the document’s characters), thereby refuting earlier explanations of the document’s origins and provenance.

Upon examination, the title exhibits significant signs that it was not written by Joseph Smith but by John Whitmer (see Figures 5 and 6). Though one cannot generally identify unknown handwriting with absolute confidence using only one or two shared characteristics, as the number of common characteristics increases, so do the chances of matching the handwriting. An examination of the handwriting in the title of “Caractors” and other samples of John Whitmer’s handwriting revealed several apparent similarities. One of the first signs of commonality is the fact that Whitmer’s writing maintains a fairly consistent slope, with very few adjustments in the angle of each letter.²⁴ Wilson R. Harrison, a celebrated handwriting specialist, explained: “Some [writers] find little difficulty in establishing a reasonably constant slope, whilst others find this beyond their capacity and produce unevenly sloped handwriting to the end of their days.”²⁵ The angle of Whitmer’s slope remains fairly constant as the samples shown demonstrate. Whitmer also

Joseph Smith signature, April 6, 1829, Isaac Hale agreement for Joseph Smith’s Harmony, Pennsylvania, property.

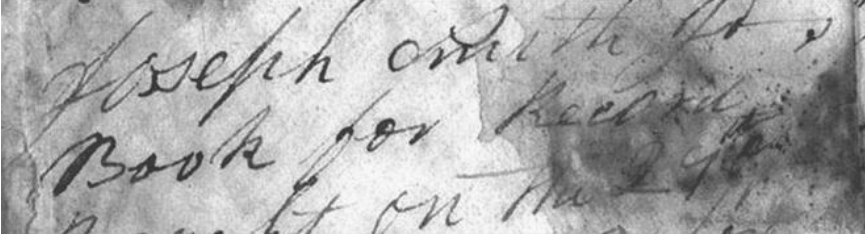
Joseph Smith signature, January 16, 1830, Martin Harris agreement.

Joseph Smith signature, June 9, 1830, Joseph Smith Sr. priesthood license.

Joseph Smith signature, summer 1831, Edward Partridge bishop license.

Joseph Smith signature, October 5, 1831, William Smith priesthood license.

Figure 5. Samples of Joseph Smith’s handwriting from his earliest known signatures.



"Caractors"

Joseph Smith's Handwriting

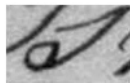
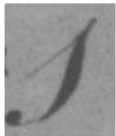
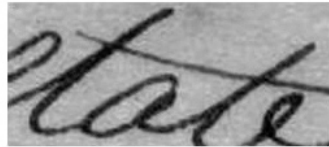
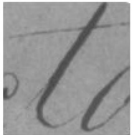
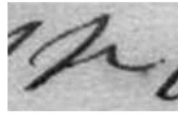
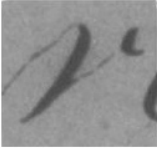
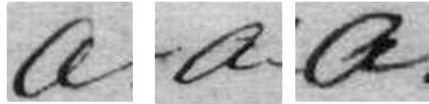
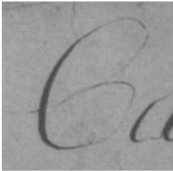


Figure 6. Illustration comparing the title with samples of Joseph Smith's earliest writing samples in his 1832 history and journal.

maintains a fairly constant shape and individual letter design throughout his writing. The shape of "C," "a," "t," "t," and "s" share a similar form. The size of the uppercase and lowercase letters are essentially similar; the lowercase are generally just slightly smaller than half the size of the uppercase. Whitmer also shows his disciplined writing style by following the imaginary textbook lines, generally staying within the bottom, middle, and top lines. Handwriting specialist Dan C. Purdy has demonstrated that this feature of handwriting is generally distinct to specific individuals: "The baseline in a handwritten document is the ruled or imaginary line on which the writing rests. Some individuals have acquired the habit of placing all written words above or below this baseline. In most cases, however, only certain letters or letter combinations are misaligned."²⁶ However, John Whitmer also distinctly steps beyond his otherwise textbook structure by crossing his lowercase "t"s closer to the peak of the stroke rather than at the height of the lowercase letters. In addition, his writing has a peculiar stroke. He applies heavy ink flow on the down stroke of every letter, while most of his up strokes are extremely light. His up stroke is often light enough that it appears absent in some of his lettering. This is a distinctive characteristic that becomes even more pronounced when Whitmer writes titles in his documents, including "Caractors." This style is generally called shading, in which the writer purposefully applies pressure to the quill at calculated points in the cursive looping, giving the writing an artistic quality of a skilled penman—a technique distinctly absent from Joseph Smith's early writing. The initial stroke, or commencement stroke, of any given handwriting can often be idiosyncratic, especially in capitalized letters and in titles. Whitmer's specific style is demonstrated in his unique way of writing his uppercase "C"s, starting near the midway point or below and making a large double looping "C." Though signatures can be different from a person's general writing style, they can demonstrate the author's idiosyncratic shape, form, and quill control (see Figures 7, 8, and 9).

Although it is impossible to determine with absolute certainty, it appears that the characters below the title were also written by John Whitmer. "Caractors" also shows distinct signs that it was itself copied from another larger document. For example, the arch formed by the first line of characters around the title is evidence that the title was written first, and the characters copied subsequently. Furthermore, the size and spacing of the characters in the document reflect an almost haphazard attempt to copy from a larger document. The first characters Whitmer copied to the page were much larger and were spaced farther apart than those copied later in the document. The decreasing size of the characters and the increasing number of them copied to each line indicates an attempt to try to fit a larger copy onto a smaller page. In fact, by the end, Whitmer was copying nearly double the number of



Figure 7. Two samples showing the slant, shading, and control of the author of “Caractors.”

Commandment given Aug 13th 1831

John Whitmer handwriting, Book of Revelations and Commandments.

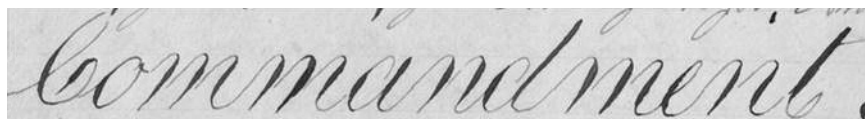
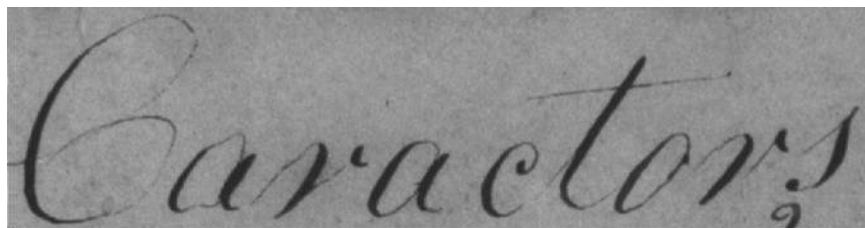
Revelation given Kirtland December 16th 17, 1833.

John Whitmer handwriting, Kirtland Book of Revelation and Commandments.

Organization of high counsel
Kirtland February 17, 1834.

John Whitmer handwriting, Kirtland High Council minutes.

Figure 8. Samples of John Whitmer’s handwriting. These examples were chosen to compare Whitmer’s unique handwriting style when he wrote titles.



"Caractors"

John Whitmer's Handwriting

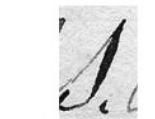
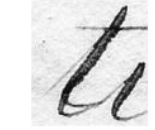
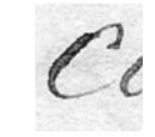
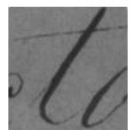
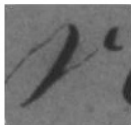
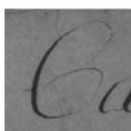


Figure 9. Illustration comparing "Caractors" with individual letters found specifically in the titles of the Book of Commandments and Revelations.

characters per line than when he started. These features indicate that this copy was created by beginning at the top, where the title fills a disproportionately large amount of space, and was written line by line to the bottom, where the characters are copied into the smallest amount of space. Because it seems that there was one continuous flow of the document, the characters were also likely in John Whitmer's handwriting. This was confirmed by x-ray florescence done in September 2012 at the Community of Christ Library-Archives by the authors.²⁷ The ink in the title was shown to atomically match the ink used to copy the characters and were therefore written at the same time as the title and most likely by the same person.²⁸

Knowing that John Whitmer authored the document allows historians to narrow down the period in which the document was likely created. Joseph Smith did not meet John Whitmer until he moved to Peter Whitmer Sr.'s house in Fayette, New York, in June 1829. There is also no evidence that John Whitmer interacted with anyone before that time who had their own copy of the characters, such as those who may have copied Martin Harris's document in Palmyra. Therefore, John Whitmer could not have created "Caractors" before June 1829, but he could have copied it any time thereafter. Whitmer began writing for Smith in June and captured a small portion of Joseph Smith's dictation of the translation of the Book of Mormon.²⁹ By the summer of 1830, Whitmer began gathering and copying Smith's revelations, and by March 1831 he was called as the historian and recorder of the Church.³⁰ He was tasked with keeping minutes for church meetings, collating the first manuscript volume of Joseph Smith's revelations, and writing a history of the Church. Likely as part of these duties, John Whitmer copied "Caractors," from a document containing characters from the gold plates in Joseph Smith's possession. While he may have created the document any time after June 1829 it is less likely that this document was created after Whitmer moved to Missouri in late 1831 because of the distance between himself and Joseph Smith. Whitmer did not return to Ohio until 1835. The time between 1835 and 1836 is the last probable point at which the "Caractors" manuscript could have been drafted; Whitmer returned to Missouri in 1836 and was excommunicated in Far West on March 10, 1838, four days before Joseph Smith's arrival from Kirtland.³¹

However, a recent discovery has helped clarify the format and content of the original "Caractors" document and provides a more likely time frame for its creation. Sometime before early 1886, a photographer from Clay County, Missouri, Jacob T. Hicks, photographed the "Caractors" manuscript in David Whitmer's possession.³² His photograph reveals that the currently extant portion of the document is only between one-fourth or one-third the size of the original document it was once attached to. The missing portion of

the document has an incomplete title written horizontally across the center, reading “The Book of Generation Adam.” The folds apparent in the photograph seem to indicate that the document was creased before the characters were copied. The existing folds forced John Whitmer to copy the characters within the last folded area. “The Book of | Generation | Adam” was written in the center of the document in landscape format, and “Caractors” was confined to one section of the paper in a portrait format. The 1886 image opens the possibility that the copies of the characters were written onto the document as a secondary thought and that the original document had a completely different purpose initially than to capture a copy of the characters (see Figure 10).

Using the newly discovered original title, historians can better postulate a likely creation date as well as the circumstances of that creation. In January 1831, John Whitmer was appointed to go to Ohio to oversee the newly baptized Church members in the Kirtland, Ohio, area.³³ Whitmer took with him a number of revelations for these new members to read and guide them. Following Joseph Smith’s June 1830 revelation detailing Moses’s ancient interactions with God and Satan, Smith began working on an extensive project to revise the King James Bible. Several scribes, including John Whitmer, aided him in that task throughout the fall and winter of 1830. His Bible revision would later become known as the Joseph Smith translation, consisting of substantial additions and redactions made to the King James text. Tasked with regulating the affairs of the Church among the eccentric new converts in Ohio, Whitmer took with him several revelations and apparently made his own copy of Joseph Smith’s Bible revisions at that time as well.³⁴ Whitmer’s copy of the Bible revisions included the first sixteen pages of the revised biblical text, which he titled “The Book of the Generation of Adam,” likely a reference to the fact that the earliest part of the new translation speaks of the book of remembrance that Adam and his children kept.³⁵

After creating his copy of Joseph Smith’s Old Testament revision, Whitmer possibly wrapped the manuscript with a single piece of paper, “Caractors,” and titled it “The Book of the Generation of Adam,” matching the first lines of the Bible manuscript.³⁶ It does not seem to be a coincidence that the titles match, and it makes sense that Whitmer would wrap the manuscript with an additional piece of paper to protect it during his long travel to Kirtland, Ohio. Although the “Caractors” document was not directly connected to the Old Testament manuscript, Whitmer likely copied the wrapper title “The Book of the Generation of Adam” to the back portion of the wrapper to show (along with the revelations and the Bible translation) to the leaderless members in Kirtland. The folds seen in the photograph created a boundary for Whitmer when he copied the characters to the paper, an indication that the paper was already folded when he wrote them down. He likely created

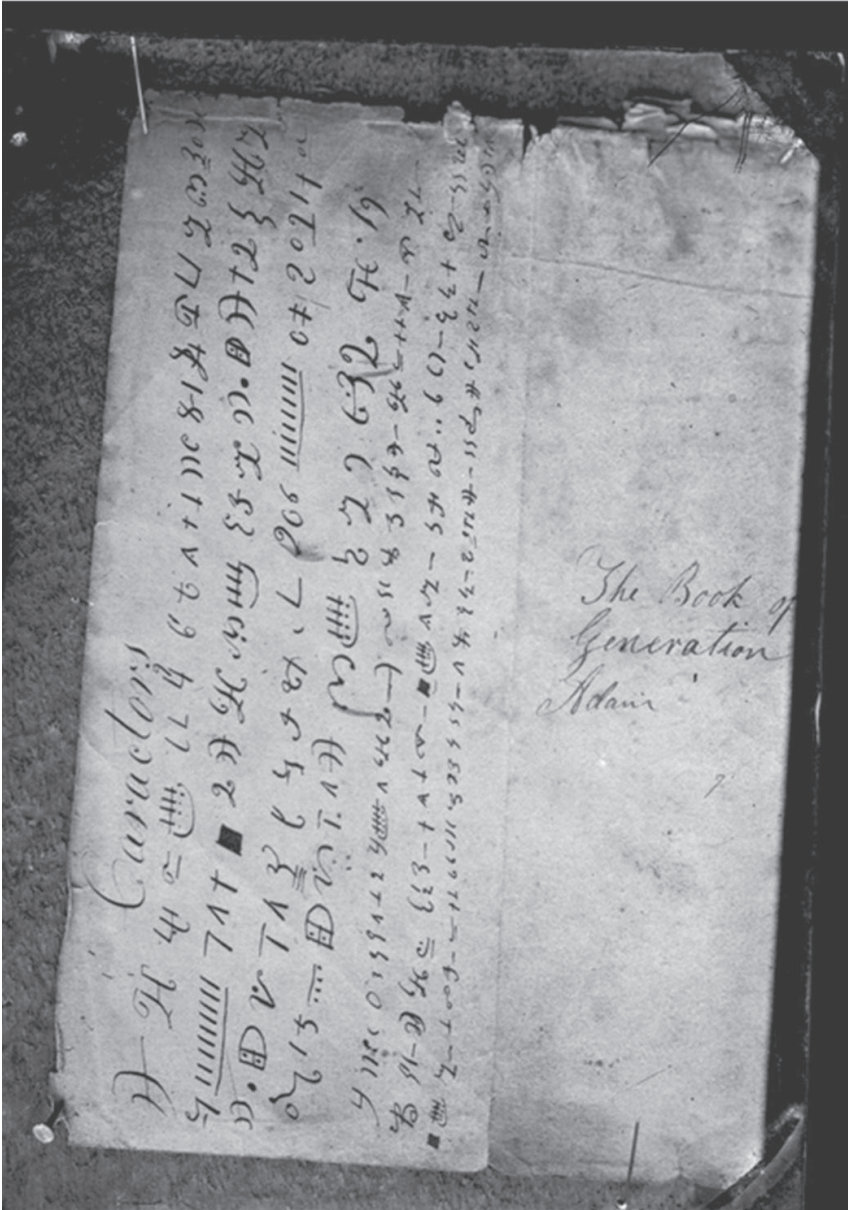
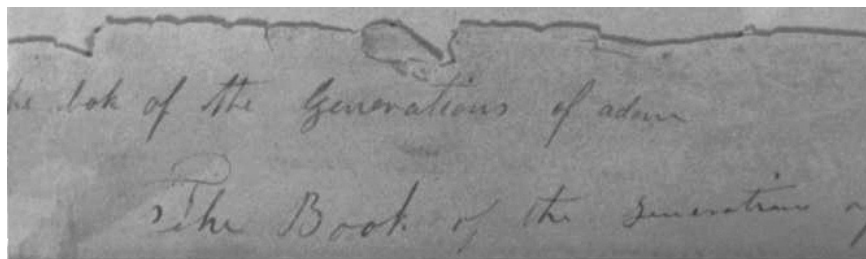


Figure 10. Glass plate negative of the “Caractors” document by Jacob T. Hicks, 1886. Photograph courtesy Clay County Museum and Historical Society, Liberty, Missouri.



"Caractors"

First Page of John Whitmer's OT3

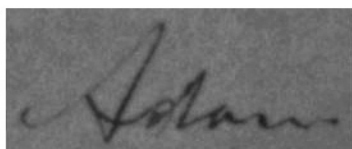
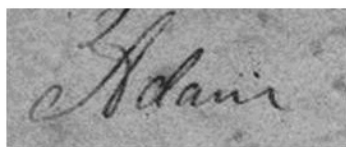
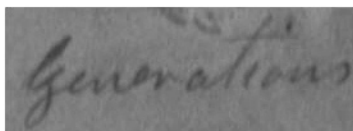
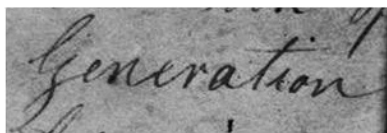
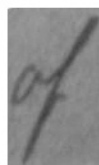
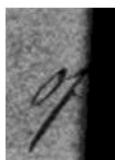
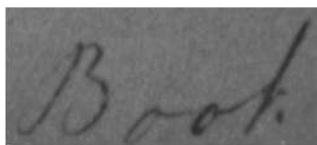
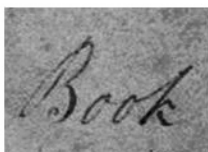
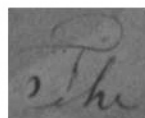
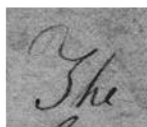


Figure 11. Illustration comparing words from the "Caractors" document with the same words from OT3 manuscript in the handwriting of John Whitmer.

the whole document in one sitting or within the same period before he left for Kirtland because his handwriting is similar within each example. Comparisons demonstrate the likeness between the title in the John Whitmer copy of the Bible revision; the title on the wrapper, “Caractors”; and John Whitmer’s handwriting in the Book of Commandments and Revelations—all of which were created within a year of each other (Figure 11).

John Whitmer apparently showed the documents he copied and took to Kirtland to many members and some non-Mormons in Ohio. Eber D. Howe, editor of the Painesville Telegraph, took notice of Whitmer’s arrival and sarcastically explained in his newspaper that Whitmer had brought with him copies of Joseph Smith’s “pretended” revelations. He explained that Whitmer’s documents contained “a more particular description of the creation of the world, and a history of Adam and his family, and other sketches of the anti-deluvian world, which Moses neglected to record.”³⁷ Whitmer arrived with materials that would demonstrate Joseph Smith’s prophetic gifts, especially his revelations and translations. Coupled with copies of the Book of Mormon, Whitmer likely showed numerous Ohioans the gold plate characters and continued a pattern that began with Harris in 1828 and continued until Joseph Smith’s death in 1844, to show copies of the characters as part of missionary efforts and as evidence that the gold plates existed.

Notes

1. George Q. Cannon, Journal, February 27, 1884, Church History Library, Salt Lake City, Utah.

2. Some investigators of the manuscript agreed with Cannon’s initial assumption about the origins of the document. For instance, James D. Wardle, an RLDS member who researched the history of the document, wrote: “I believe that I can now say with greater assurance that it was Joseph Smith that wrote the transcript of ‘Caractors’ from the Book of Mormon plates.” James D. Wardle to John Blackmore, February 14, 1957, f2160, Community of Christ Library-Archives, Independence, Missouri.

3. The Joseph Smith Papers Project has made most of its contributions to scholarship through a detail-oriented document analysis that takes advantage of the best archival practices. These analyses allow scholars on the project to contemplate the often overlooked minutiae that surface only after careful, document-centered research. The proper application of source criticism, document analysis, and provenance research has opened many new avenues and discoveries. The analysis of the “Caractors” document, as it has unofficially been known, illustrates the types of new insights gained from scholars of the project. See “Appendix 2: Copies of Book of Mormon Characters,” in Michael H. MacKay and Gerrit Dirkmaat, eds., *Documents, Volume 1: 1823–1829*, vol. 1 of the Documents series of *The Joseph Smith Papers*, ed. Dean C. Jessee, Ronald K. Esplin, and Richard Lyman Bushman (Salt Lake City: Church Historian’s Press), forthcoming.

4. See “Visit of E. C. Brand to John Whitmer,” February 18, 1875, copied onto the

end of a letter from John Whitmer to Mark H. Forscutt, March 5, 1876, Whitmer Papers, Community of Christ Library-Archives, Independence, Missouri. The account is also published in Dan Vogel, ed., *Early Mormon Documents*, 5 vols. (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1996–2003), 5:250. In addition, when Edward Stevenson interviewed John’s brother, David Whitmer, in 1877 he asked about documents relating to Mormonism in Whitmer’s possession, and David Whitmer did not mention any documents that included characters from the gold plates. Edward Stevenson, *Journal*, December 22–23, 1877, 15:4–7; Church History Library, Salt Lake City, Utah.

5. P. Wilhelm Poulson, July 31, 1878, to editors of *Deseret News*, August 6, 1878, 2. Complicating matters even further, Poulson reported that David Whitmer lent the inscribed Book of Mormon characters document to his brother John. Thus it is unclear how many documents existed between the two brothers. See Wilhelm Poulson, August 13, 1878 to editors of *Deseret News*, August 16, 1878, 2.

6. T. E. Lloyd, “The Carroll-Lloyd Expose,” *Zion’s Ensign* (Independence, MO), July 15, 1893, 6.

7. I. Woodbridge Riley, *The Founder of Mormonism: A Psychological Study of Joseph Smith, Jr.* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1902), 81 n8; “The Book of Mormon,” *New York Times*, September 21, 1899, 9 (reprinted from the *St. Louis Republican*); and George Schweich to O. R. Beardsley, January 17, 1900, Miscellanea Collection, Marie Eccles-Caine Archives of Intermountain Americana, Utah State University, Logan, Utah.

8. In his letter to O. R. Beardsley, George Schweich informed him that the manuscript was in the possession of William Benjamin in New York. See George Schweich to O. R. Beardsley, January 17, 1900. The *New York Times* reported that the manuscript was “kept in a bank vault in this town.” “The Book of Mormon,” *New York Times*, September 21, 1899, 9.

9. Riley, *The Founder of Mormonism*, 80 n5; Joseph F. Smith to Samuel Russell Jr., March 19, 1901, Samuel Russell Sr., and Samuel Russell Jr., Collection, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University; George Schweich to O. R. Beardsley, January 17, 1900; and Donald C. Dickinson, *Dictionary of American Antiquarian Bookdealers* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1998), 3–14.

10. “Minutes of First Presidency,” April 24, 1902, Community of Christ Library-Archives.

11. The most recent study to be published on the subject is Erin B. Jennings, “Charles Anthon: The Man Behind the Letters,” *John Whitmer Historical Association Journal* 32, no. 2 (Fall/Winter 2012): 170–87. Previous studies regarding Harris’s visit to Anthon include Stanley B. Kimball, “I Cannot Read a Sealed Book,” *Improvement Era* 60, no. 2 (February 1957): 80–82, 104, 106; Stanley B. Kimball, “Charles Anthon and the Egyptian Language,” *Improvement Era* 63, no. 10 (October 1960): 708–10, 765; Sidney B. Sperry, “Some Problems Arising from Martin Harris’ Visit to Professor Charles Anthon,” in *Problems of the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1964), 53–61; Stanley B. Kimball, “The Anthon Transcript: People, Primary Sources, and Problems,” *BYU Studies*, 10, no. 3 (Spring 1970): 325–52; Daniel W. Bachman, “Sealed in a Book: Preliminary Observations on the Newly Found ‘Anthon Transcript,’” *BYU Studies*, 20, no. 4, (Summer 1980): 321–45; Edward H. Ashment, “The Book of Mormon and the Anthon Transcript: An Interim Report,” *Sunstone* 5, no. 3 (May–June 1990): 29–31; and Richard B. Stout, “A Singular Discovery: The Curious Manuscript, Mitchill, and Mormonism,” *Evangel*, 2001–2002, in six parts, accessed at <http://olivercowdery.com/smithHome/2000s/200RBSt.htm>.

12. *STICK OF JOSEPH, TAKEN FROM THE HAND OF EPHRAIM*, broadside, (New York: The Prophet, 1844), one page.

13. “The Words That Were Delivered to the Learned, Isaiah 23:11,” *The Prophet*,

December 14, 1844, 3.

14. See John A. Clark, *Gleanings By the Way* (Philadelphia: W. J. & J. K. Simon; New York: Robert Carter, 1842), 217, 222–31.

15. Lucy Mack Smith, *History*, 1844–1845, bk. 6, 7–8, Church History Library.

16. *Latter Day Saints' Messenger and Advocate* 2, no. 3 (December 1835): 235. See also Joseph Smith, *Journal*, October 1, and November 17, 1835, in Dean C. Jessee, Mark Ashurst-McGee, and Richard L. Jensen, eds., *Journals, Volume 1: 1832–1839*, vol. 1 of the *Journals* series of *The Joseph Smith Papers*, ed. Dean C. Jessee, Ronald K. Esplin, and Richard Lyman Bushman (Salt Lake City: Church Historian's Press, 2008), 67, 105 (hereafter cited as *JSP*, J1).

17. Donald Q. Cannon, "Reverend George Moore Comments on Nauvoo, the Mormons, and Joseph Smith," *Western Illinois Regional Studies* 5, no. 1 (Spring 1982), 11.

18. See Charles Anthon to Thomas Winthrop Coit, April 3, 1841, in Clark, *Gleanings by the Way*, 234. Orsamus Turner also described the document Harris showed him as "concentric circles" with characters written inside, between, and outside the lines. Orsamus Turner, *History of the Pioneer Settlement of Phelps and Gorham's Purchase, and Morris' Reserve* (Rochester: Lee, Mann & Company, 1852), 215.

19. Joseph Knight Sr., *Reminiscences*, 3, Church History Library.

20. Lucy Mack Smith, *History*, 1844–1845, bk. 6, 7.

21. See Joseph Smith, *History*, in Karen Lynn Davidson, David J. Whittaker, Mark Ashurst-McGee, and Richard L. Jensen, eds., *Histories, Volume 1: Joseph Smith Histories, 1832–1844*, vol. 1 of the *Histories* series of *The Joseph Smith Papers*, ed., Dean C. Jessee, Ronald K. Esplin, and Richard Lyman Bushman (Salt Lake City: Church Historian's Press, 2012), 240 (hereafter cited as *JSP*, H1). Martin Harris and Joseph Knight Sr. both thought the move to Harmony might have occurred in November. See Knight, *Reminiscences*, 3, Church History Library; and "Mormonism—No. II," *Tiffany's Monthly* 5, no. 2 (August 1859): 170.

22. Emily C. Blackman apparently interviewed a local resident who stated that Reuben "assisted Joe Smith to fix up some characters such as Smith pretended were engraven on his book of plates." Emily C. Blackman, *History of Susquehanna County, Pennsylvania* (Philadelphia: Claxton, Remsen, & Haffelfinger, 1873), 104; see also Knight, *Reminiscences*, 3.

23. *JSP*, H1, 15.

24. Dan C. Purdy has written: "One of the most obvious features in an individual's handwriting is its slope or slant. Writers who intentionally alter the slope of their writing cause a dramatic change to the appearance of letters. This is why modifying the slope of handwriting is a common method of disguise. While gross changes in writing slant are relatively easy to achieve, slight changes in the slope are exceedingly difficult to maintain and are rarely consistent throughout an extended passage of writing." Dan C. Purdy, "Identification of Handwriting," in Jan Seaman Kelly and Brian S. Lindblom, eds., *Scientific Examination of Questioned Documents* (Boca Raton, FL: CRC Press, 2006), 57.

25. Wilson R. Harrison, *Suspect Documents: Their Scientific Examination* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1958), 295.

26. Purdy, "Identification of Handwriting," 53.

27. We would like to express our sincere appreciation to the Community of Christ for allowing us to perform these tests. In addition, we acknowledge the conservation lab at the LDS Church History Department for providing the XRF machine. Katie Smith, an employee in the conservation lab, played an important part in analyzing the data once it

was retrieved.

28. X-ray fluorescence allows for each atom to be identified within any given spot, but it also calculates the number of any given atom within the chosen spot. This allows historians to examine iron gall ink, which is generally never made with the exact atomic make up twice. Even iron gall ink that was mixed from the same recipe will always display atomic differences. Therefore x-ray fluorescence allows one to differentiate between ink samples.

29. Work on the Joseph Smith Papers has confirmed Dean C. Jessee’s earliest suspicion that one of the unknown scribes of the original manuscript of the Book of Mormon was John Whitmer. See Dean C. Jessee, “The Original Book of Mormon Manuscript,” *BYU Studies* 10, no. 3 (Spring 1970): 259–78.

30. Revelation, circa March 8, 1831—B [D&C 47], in Robin Scott Jensen, Robert J. Woodford, and Steven C. Harper, eds., *Revelations and Translations, Volume 1: Manuscript Revelation Books*, vol. 1 of the Revelations and Translations series of *The Joseph Smith Papers*, ed. Dean C. Jessee, Ronald K. Esplin, and Richard Lyman Bushman (Salt Lake City: The Church Historian’s Press, 2009), 83 (hereafter referred to as *JSP*, R1).

31. Minutes, March 10, 1838, Minute Book 2, Church History Library. See also *JSP*, J1, 237.

32. See Stevenson, diary, February 9, 1886. See also George Edward Anderson’s diary, May 12, 1907, as quoted in Richard Neitzel Holzzapfel, T. Jeffery Cottle, and Ted D. Stoddard, eds., *Church History in Black and White: George Edward Anderson’s Photographic Mission to Latter-day Saint Historical Sites, 1907 Diary, 1907–8 Photographs* (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1995), 74.

33. Book of John, Whitmer kept by Comma[n]d, *JSP*, H1, 22.

34. Kent P. Jackson and Scott H. Faulring, “Old Testament Manuscript 3: An Early Transcript of the Book of Moses,” *Mormon Historical Studies* 5, no. 2 (Fall 2004): 115.

35. Though highly unlikely, the notation by Whitmer may have some connection to work by the early Church members reconstructing the Adamic language. See Sample of Pure Language, circa March 1832, *JSP*, R1, 144; and William W. Phelps to Sally Waterman Phelps, May 26, 1835, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah. See also Samuel Brown, “Joseph (Smith) in Egypt: Babel, Hieroglyphs, and the Pure Language of Eden,” *Church History* 78, no. 1 (March 2009): 26–65. During the early Saints’ efforts to reconstruct the Adamic language, Joseph Smith and others explored the possibility of an unknown language and writing system. However, John Whitmer was not known to have had much involvement in this endeavor, and it seems clear from historical records that “Caractors” included gold plate characters. Additionally, Joseph did not discuss a certain language in association with his Bible revisions, and the earliest example of their interest in Adamic was in 1832.

36. With our preliminary analysis of this document, other researchers could prove or disprove our theory by comparing tests performed on the paper and ink in OT3 and “Caractors.” The folds on OT3 are very close to the size of the section of “Caractors” that includes the Book of Mormon characters, which might indicate that “Caractors” was the wrapper for Whitmer’s sixteen-page copy of Joseph Smith’s Bible revisions.

37. “Mormonism,” *Telegraph* (Painesville, OH), January 18, 1831.

Appendix A
Speculative Filial Chart

