
Book of Mormon Geography in the World of Joseph Smith

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In the course of his efforts to chart the development of ideas regarding Book of Mormon geography, John L. Sorenson has tried to identify what Joseph Smith and other early leaders and members of the Church thought on the topic. Based on the reminiscences, second hand accounts, pamphlets, and other types of sources he has consulted, Sorenson argues that early Church members apparently subscribed to a “hemispheric” model of Book of Mormon geography, with South America representing the Book of Mormon’s “land southward,” Panama representing the “narrow neck of land,” and North America the “land northward.”¹ Finding evidence that at least some may have modified this view during the Nauvoo period,² Sorenson is nevertheless careful to note that his reconstructions of early Latter-day Saint views of Book of Mormon geography are far from certain, and that much remains to be learned about what early Church leaders and members thought on the topic, and why.

Of all the documents that might be studied to help answer these questions, eleven are particularly noteworthy. These are documents that were generated during Joseph Smith’s lifetime, and that Joseph at least allowed, in one way or another, to be associated with his name in significant ways. They thus differ from the second-hand and reminiscent accounts—like those associated with the well-known “Zelph” story—which Joseph never could have reviewed, or accounts which, like the well-known statement in Frederick G. Williams’

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handwriting about Lehi landing in Chile, cannot clearly be linked to Joseph.³ Five of these documents that carry Joseph's name in some way are part of a series of articles published in the *Times and Seasons* when Joseph was the editor of the paper. Joseph's 1839 history fits into this category as well, as does a letter of Oliver Cowdery originally published in the *Latter Day Saints' Messenger and Advocate* in 1834 and later incorporated into Joseph's history. The remaining four documents are letters, the surviving copies of which have Joseph's name appended as author. These include a 1833 letter to N. C. Saxton, editor of a newspaper in Rochester, New York; an 1834 letter to Emma, written while Joseph was traveling from Kirtland to Missouri with Zion's Camp; an 1841 letter to John Bernhisel regarding John L. Stephens' book *Incidents of Travel in Central America, Chiapas, and Yucatan*; and the famous "Wentworth Letter" of 1842. While some of these sources treat Book of Mormon geography in only the vaguest generalities, others make very specific claims on the topic.

The purpose of this paper is to identify the general view or model of Book of Mormon geography that emerges from a careful review of these eleven documents. I do this not in an effort to identify Joseph's particular views on the topic (which I believe is impossible to determine; see below), but to better understand the picture of Book of Mormon geography that was generated as Joseph and his close associates worked to fulfill his responsibilities as newspaper editor, correspondent, historian, and defender of the faith. A review of these documents also helps us understand what Church members were reading on the topic in Church-sponsored publications, where the most explicit of them were published. I argue that while these particular documents paint a picture of an extensive geography for Book of Mormon events, none of them, either separately or in the aggregate, necessarily suggest the fully hemispheric view of the book's geography that Sorenson suggests most Church members held.⁴ Nor can any of them, or any combination of them, be interpreted to support the idea that the author(s), and perhaps Joseph Smith himself, necessarily envisioned a limited Mesoamerican geography for the book's events, as John Clark has recently suggested.⁵ At least one of them, in fact, clearly indicates on its own, without being viewed in the context of the others, a belief in a geography extending from Central America up into the Ohio River Valley. This same document and similar documents, written less than two years before Joseph's death, may also require us to qualify Terryl Givens' suggestion that the "efforts of Joseph and his brethren to identify Book of Mormon lands would increasingly focus southward" over time.⁶ Rather than a hemispheric or limited geography, or some sort of development from one to the other, the view of Book of Mormon geography contained in this particular subset of documents is one that has Book of Mormon peoples, during at least part of their histories,

inhabiting parts (although not necessarily all) of the eastern United States; the final battles of the Nephites and Jaredites taking place in upstate New York; and the centers for both the Nephite and Jaredite civilizations being located somewhere in Central America. South America is largely, if not completely, out of the picture, while sites thousands of miles apart in Central and North America are very much in.

In limiting this analysis to documents associated with Joseph Smith as a correspondent, newspaper editor, historian, and champion of Mormonism, it should be clear that I am not attempting to identify the range of ideas early members of the Church may have entertained about Book of Mormon geography. Nor does the view of geography that emerges from these sources necessarily represent any specific individual's private views of the topic, or suggest that all those who helped produce and record these particular documents necessarily subscribed to the picture of Book of Mormon geography that emerges from the documents in the aggregate. And it must be emphasized that I am not attempting to identify Joseph's own ideas regarding Book of Mormon geography. In spite of their connections to the Prophet (which will be discussed in the text and notes), none of these documents are reliable guides to understanding Joseph's innermost thoughts—if he even had such thoughts—about Book of Mormon geography. This applies even to the letters, the original of only one of which—the one addressed to Bernhisel—is around today. Only copies survive of the others. None contains a holographic signature of Joseph Smith. Even the “Joseph Smith” signature on the original letter to Bernhisel was written by Joseph's amanuensis, who in this case was John Taylor. Given the nature of these letters as we have them today, we must be open to the distinct possibility that Joseph, in “dictating” or even “writing” these letters, gave his scribe general instructions regarding their contents (or some parts of them), and that the precise wording of the letters was not Joseph Smith's. This, in turn, would have a bearing on their possible implications regarding Joseph's own thoughts. In the absence of any holographic material from Joseph, or a clear understanding about how each letter and document was generated and reviewed, the most that we can safely conclude is that Joseph allowed his name to be attached to them without later offering any sort of correction to them. Whether he completely agreed with everything they contained or not is impossible to say.

Ambiguous Texts: Indians and the American Continent

Several of these documents initially appear to support the idea that Book of Mormon events took place almost wholly within the current borders of

the United States. The 1833 letter addressed to N. C. Saxton,⁷ for example, identifies the Book of Mormon as “a record of the forefathers of our western Tribes of Indians. . . . By it we learn that our western tribes of Indians are descendants from that Joseph who was sold into Egypt, and the land of America is a promised land unto them.”⁸ The 1839 history⁹ has Moroni telling Joseph that “there was a book deposited written upon gold plates, giving an account of the former inhabitants of this continent and the source from whence they sprang.”¹⁰ Even more clearly, perhaps, is the famous “Wentworth Letter” of 1842,¹¹ which explained how Moroni had taught Joseph “concerning the aboriginal inhabitants of this country,” and how, in the Book of Mormon, “the history of ancient America” unfolds. “America in ancient times was inhabited by two distinct races of people,” the letter continues, the “remnant” of the second race constituting “the Indians that now inhabit this country.” Retaining the North American-sounding orientation to the end, this part of the letter closes by noting that “our Saviour made his appearance upon this continent after his resurrection, [and] that he planted the gospel here in all its fulness.”¹²

To think, however, that the phrase “this continent” in these documents necessarily meant “North America” to early nineteenth century Americans, or that “America” or “this country” meant the “United States,” would be a mistake. Nor would those reading these documents necessarily have understood “Indian” as many do today. For Joseph and his contemporaries, “continent” typically meant “a great extent of land, not disjoined or interrupted by a sea; a connected tract of land of great extent; as the Eastern and Western *continent*.”¹³ In at least one of the letters cited above, in fact, “this continent” is indeed juxtaposed with “the eastern continent,” reflecting this hemispheric approach to the word rather than the more narrow definition most people would give it today.¹⁴ Similarly, “America,” was considered “one of the great continents, . . . extend[ing] from the eightieth degree of North, to the fifty-fourth degree of South Latitude”—that is, all of North and South America combined. True, “[f]rom Darien to the *North*, the continent [was] called *North America*, and to the *South*, it [was] called *South America*,” but the singular noun makes it clear that “America” alone included everything from Point Barrow to the Cape of Good Hope.¹⁵ “Country,” too, carried the same ambiguity, which explains how either Joseph or John Taylor, writing from Nauvoo in 1841, could praise John Lloyd Stephens’ book on Central American ruins as “the most correct luminous & comprihensive . . . of all the histories that have been written pertaining to the antiquities of this country.”¹⁶ “Indian,” defined as “any native of the American continent,” incorporated the imprecision already inherent in “continent” and “America.”¹⁷ Even the phrase “our western tribes of Indians” does little to clear things up, given how broadly “west” and “western” were, and continue to be, used.

The Plains of the Nephites and the Hill Cumorah

The documents cited above, all of which were associated with Joseph's name in one way or another, were simply conveying the idea that the events in the Book of Mormon took place somewhere in the New World, and that the descendants of Book of Mormon peoples were still around. On other occasions, however, documents produced and recorded in the course of Joseph's activities made far more specific claims. One of the earliest was a letter written to Joseph's wife Emma from Pike County, Illinois, "On the banks of the Mississippi," while Joseph and others were traveling to Missouri with Zion's Camp.¹⁸ In it, the author(s) explained for Emma how the camp has been "wandering over the plains of the Nephites, recounting occasionally the history of the Book of Mormon, roving over the mounds of that once beloved people of the Lord, picking up their skulls & their bones, as a proof of its divine authenticity."¹⁹ While this statement says nothing specific about the extent of Nephite settlement, or about the specific area over which Zion's Camp had been wandering that reminded at least some of its members of the Book of Mormon, or at what point in their thousand year history the Nephites were believed to have been in this area, it appears to show a connection in the minds of some, as of summer 1834 at least, between Book of Mormon history, Nephites, and a site in eastern North America.

The views expressed in this 1834 letter dovetail nicely with the contents of a letter Oliver Cowdery, then living in Kirtland, published in the July 1835 *Latter Day Saints' Messenger and Advocate*. Addressed to W. W. Phelps, who was then in Missouri, the letter was the seventh in a series of letters Cowdery had been writing since September 1834, whose purpose was to provide Phelps, and the Church at large, with "a full history of the rise of the Church of the Latter Day Saints."²⁰ Oliver made it clear at the beginning of his series of letters that Joseph himself was involved with their production. "That our narrative may be correct, and particularly the introduction," he wrote, "it is proper to inform our patrons, that our brother J. SMITH jr. has offered to assist us. Indeed, there are many items connected with the fore part of this subject [the history of the church] that render his labor indispensable. With his labor and with authentic documents now in our possession, we hope to render this a pleasing and agreeable narrative."²¹ This letter was later copied into the "large journal" in which Joseph was keeping the history of the Church,²² after which it was republished in the *Times and Seasons*.²³

Prone to pontificate as much as narrate, Cowdery was still in the "fore part of this subject" by letter no. 7, which discussed Moroni's September 1823 appearance to Joseph and the latter's first visit to the hill to see the plates.²⁴ Having described for his readers the "large hill on the east side" of the mail road

from Palmyra to Canandaigua, Cowdery goes on to describe “another ridge, of lesser height, running parallel with the former” about one mile to the west, “leaving a beautiful vale between” the two ridges. The vale’s significance, he continues, lay in “the fact, that here, between these hills, the entire power and national strength of both the Jaredites and Nephites were destroyed.”

By turning to . . . the book of Mormon, you will read Mormon’s account of the last great struggle of his people, as they were encamped round this hill Cumorah. . . . In this valley fell the remaining strength and pride of a once powerful people, the Nephites. . . . From the top of this hill, Mormon . . . gazed with horror upon the mangled remains [of his people]. . . . This hill, by the Jaredites, was called Ramah: by it, or around it, pitched the famous army of Coriantumr. . . . The opposing army were to the west, and in this same valley, and near by, from day to day, did the mighty race spill their blood. . . . From this same spot, in full view from the top of this same hill, one may gaze with astonishment upon the ground which was twice covered with the dead and dying of our fellowmen.

It was “in this same hill, Cumorah,” Oliver also writes, where Mormon deposited “all the records” of the Nephites.²⁵

This letter from Oliver goes even further than the 1834 letter to Emma in making a connection between a site in the eastern United States and the Book of Mormon. Where the letter to Emma stopped short of trying to identify, on the ground, any specific sites mentioned in the Book of Mormon, Oliver did not—according to him, the Hill Cumorah where Joseph found the plates is the same hill Cumorah that figures so prominently in the Nephite narrative. Oliver says nothing, however, about the extent of Nephite lands or settlement, or where their civilization may have been centered.

Stephens’ *Incidents of Travel and the Times and Seasons*

Not until November 1841 did a statement associated with Joseph Smith appear that would have implications for these issues. Earlier in the year, John L. Stephens had published his two-volume *Incidents of Travel in Central America, Chiapas, and Yucatan*.²⁶ In vividly describing numerous and extensive pre-Columbian ruins in Central America, Stephens destroyed the prevailing early-nineteenth-century view that ancient American societies had never achieved a level of sophistication or civilization comparable to those of Mediterranean or Near Eastern societies of the same period. In the process, he also provided the first empirical evidence most Latter-day Saints, and most Americans for that matter, had seen for the existence of an ancient American civilization as complex and advanced as that portrayed in the Book of Mor-

mon. A letter from Joseph to John Bernhisel, who had sent the prophet copies of Stephens' books earlier, made the connection explicit:

I have read the volumes with the greatest interest & pleasure & must say that of all histories that have been written pertaining to the antiquities of this country it is the most correct luminous & comprehensive. . . . to me [it] is the more interesting as it unfolds & developes many things that are of great importance to this generation & corresponds with & supports the testimony of the Book of Mormon.²⁷

In spite of the letter's obvious endorsement of Stephens' work, it is unclear what the author or authors intended when they wrote that it "corresponds with & supports" the Book of Mormon. While it could be taken to mean that they saw a direct link between the buildings, plazas, and courtyards Stephens found and the evidence for urbanization contained in the Book of Mormon, it could also be interpreted to mean that they saw Stephens' discoveries as only an example of what ancient Americans were capable of doing, and that they were not actually linking, in a specific sense, sites in Central America with Book of Mormon sites.

This November 1841 letter was followed over the course of the next two years by a series of editorials and articles in the *Times and Seasons* on the topic of Book of Mormon geography. While the first was published when Ebenezer Robinson was editor,²⁸ and the last few under the editorship of John Taylor,²⁹ six were published when Joseph Smith was editor.³⁰ Like the earlier letter to Bernhisel, several of these articles mention Stephens' findings; unlike the Bernhisel letter, however, some make very clear claims about where specific Book of Mormon sites are located in the real world.

The last three articles (those of September 15 and October 1) make the most dramatic claims, and have received the most attention from scholars. The first of these follows a lengthy extract from Stephens' work and makes explicit the connection between his discoveries in Central America and the setting for the Book of Mormon:

The foregoing extract has been made to assist the Latter-Day Saints, in establishing the Book of Mormon as a revelation from God. . . . These wonderful ruins of Palenque are among mighty works of the Nephites. . . . They lived about the narrow neck of land, which now embraces Central America, with all the cities that can be found.³¹

This is followed a few pages later, in the same issue of the paper, with a second article, whose main point was to match the Book of Mormon with a tradition Stephens recounts about members of the House of Israel fleeing to the Americas. While building up to his point, the author or authors revealed their thoughts about what constituted the "narrow neck of land" by noting

how “Lehi. . . crossed over to this land, and landed a little south of the Isthmus of Darien [Panama].”³²

The following issue continued the theme, making an explicit connection between Central America and a specific Book of Mormon site:

Since our ‘Extract’ was published from Mr. Stephens’ ‘Incidents of Travel’ &c., we have found another important fact relating to the truth of the Book of Mormon. Central America, or Guatemala, is situated north of the Isthmus of Darien and once embraced several hundred miles of territory from north to south.—The city of Zarahemla . . . stood upon this land. . . . The ruins of Zarahemla have been found where the Nephites left them. . . . We are not going to declare positively that the ruins of Quirigua are those of Zarahemla, but when the land and the stones, and the books tell the story so plain, we are of opinion, that it would require more proof than the Jews could bring to prove the disciples stole the body of Jesus from the tomb, to prove that the ruins of the city in question, are not one of those referred to in the Book of Mormon.³³

These articles clearly place Zarahemla and other (unnamed) Nephite urban areas in Central America. The possibility of South America proper having anything to do with the Book of Mormon is implied only in the brief mention of Lehi and his party landing “a little south” of Panama, while nothing is mentioned about the role places north of Central America might or might not have played in Book of Mormon history—that is, the articles are completely open-ended on that score. Opinions on this last question, however, are abundantly supplied in two of the other three articles on Book of Mormon geography published under Joseph’s name as editor.³⁴ The first of these—that of May 2, 1842—followed a brief article extracted from Josiah Priest’s *American Antiquities* entitled “A Catacomb of Mummies Found in Kentucky.”³⁵ The article concluded with a “Mr. Ash” confessing “the deepest ignorance” about “how these bodies were embalmed, how long preserved, by what nations, and from what people descended.”³⁶ “Had Mr. Ash in his researches consulted the Book of Mormon,” wrote the “ED.” of the *Times and Seasons*, “his problem would have been solved. . . . The Book of Mormon gives an account of a number of the descendants of Israel coming to this continent,” some of whom, he contended, were familiar through their contact with the Egyptians with the art of embalming. “This art was no doubt transmitted from Jerusalem to this continent, by the before mentioned emigrants, which accounts for the finding of the mummies, and at the same time is another strong evidence of the authenticity of the Book of Mormon.”³⁷

The July 15, 1842, editorial similarly followed more extracts from Priest’s book, in which various burial mounds, figurines, copper and iron objects, fortifications, weapons, and other evidences “that this country was once peopled with civilized, industrious nations” are described.³⁸ The sites in question are in Ohio, Tennessee, and Mississippi.³⁹ After quoting a few passages from 1

and 2 Nephi and the Book of Ether which seem to parallel and explain the finds, the editorial suggested that “if men, in their researches into the history of this country, in noticing the mounds, fortifications, statues, architecture, implements of war, of husbandry, and ornaments of silver, brass, &c.-were to examine the Book of Mormon . . . they would find that those things that they are anxiously prying into were matters of history, unfolded in that book.”

They would find . . . that a great and a mighty people had inhabited this continent—that the arts sciences and religion, had prevailed to a very great extent, and that there was as great and mighty cities on this continent as on the continent of Asia. . . . Stephens and Cather-wood’s researches in Central America abundantly testify of this thing. The stupendous ruins, the elegant sculpture, and the magnificence of the ruins of Guatamala, and other cities, corroborates this statement. . . . Their ruins speak of their greatness; the Book of Mormon unfolds their history.⁴⁰

More than any other single document associated with Joseph’s name, this last editorial—published less than two years before Joseph’s death—clearly shows that its author(s) believed archaeological remains found at specific sites in the eastern United States to be “matters of history, unfolded in [the Book of Mormon],” just as the Central American sites were—that is, that Book of Mormon history played itself out in both areas. Stephens’ impressive discoveries may have expanded Joseph’s and his associates’ view of Book of Mormon geography, but they clearly did not cause them to abandon earlier ideas they appear to have entertained about at least some Book of Mormon events taking place in the Eastern United States.

Conclusion

The documents reviewed in this paper suggest an understanding of Book of Mormon geography lying somewhere between a fully hemispheric model, on the one hand, and a limited model on the other. According to this view, which we might dub a “limited hemispheric” or “northern hemispheric” view, Book of Mormon peoples, during at least part of their histories, inhabited parts (although not necessarily all) of the eastern United States; the final battles of the Nephites and Jaredites took place in upstate New York; and the centers for both the Nephite and Jaredite civilizations were located somewhere in Central America. South America appears only once—barely—in a reference to Lehi and his party landing “a little south” of Panama. While none of the documents, alone, contains all the elements of this view, none are at odds with it—that is, each is consistent with the larger view that emerges when all are considered together.

Whether any single individual(s), including Joseph Smith, actually subscribed to this view is impossible to say, as it is fully developed only when comparing documents produced over the course of several years with the help of several people. Through these documents' common association with Joseph Smith's name, however, and the wide dissemination of their most explicit claims through Church-sponsored publications, they suggest a possible corrective to claims that early Church members widely subscribed to a fully hemispheric model of Book of Mormon geography, and that Joseph and his associates eventually came to believe in a limited Mesoamerican geography for Book of Mormon events. These documents also suggest that Joseph's and his associates' growing interest in Central America over time represented an expansion of their view of Book of Mormon geography rather than a fundamental shift in their focus.

Notes

1. John L. Sorenson, *The Geography of Book of Mormon Events: A Source Book* (Provo, Utah: The Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 1992), 9-11, 75-76.

2. Sorenson, *Geography of Book of Mormon Events*, 11-12; 188-89.

3. For a discussion of the documents surrounding Zeph, see Kenneth W. Godfrey, "The Zeph Story," *BYU Studies* 29, no. 2, (Spring 1989): 31-56; and Kenneth W. Godfrey, "What is the Significance of Zeph in the Study of Book of Mormon Geography?" *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 8, no. 2 (1999): 71-79. For an analysis of the Frederick G. Williams statement, see Frederick G. Williams III, "Did Lehi Land in Chile? An Assessment of the Frederick G. Williams Statement" (Provo, Utah: The Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 1988).

4. Sorenson, *Geography of Book of Mormon Events*, 9-11.

5. John E. Clark, "Archaeological Trends and Book of Mormon Origins," in John W. Welch, ed., *The Worlds of Joseph Smith: A Bicentennial Conference at the Library of Congress*, *BYU Studies* 44, no. 4 (2005): 85-86, 100-01, n9.

6. Terryl L. Givens, *By the Hand of Mormon: The American Scripture that Launched a New World Religion* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 99.

7. This letter exists today as an entry in Joseph Smith Letterbook 1, written in Frederick G. Williams' handwriting. The phrase "I cheerfully take up my pen" in the opening paragraph is evidence that Joseph may have written the original himself, although he may also have been speaking in a more metaphorical sense. The copy is signed "Joseph Smith Jr" in Williams' handwriting. See Dean C. Jessee, compiler and editor, *Personal Writings of Joseph Smith*, rev. ed. (Salt Lake City and Provo: Deseret Book and Brigham Young University Press, 2002), 294-95, 298.

8. Jessee, *Personal Writings of Joseph Smith*, 297. According to his journal, similarly, Joseph told a visitor almost three years later that "the Indians were the literal descendants of Abraham." Dean C. Jessee, ed. *The Papers of Joseph Smith*, 2 vols. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1989-1992), 2:70.

9. According to Joseph's journal, kept by George W. Robinson at the time, this history was originally written "by the first Presidency" and Robinson himself between April 27

and May 4, 1838. See Jesse, *Papers of Joseph Smith*, 2:233-37; 1:230. The version quoted here was apparently “dictated,” in some fashion, by Joseph to James Mulholland beginning June 11, 1839. Jessee, *Papers of Joseph Smith*, 1:267.

10. Jessee, *Papers of Joseph Smith*, 1:278.

11. No manuscript of the “Wentworth Letter,” and no record of how it was produced, have been found. It was published in the March 1, 1842, issue of the *Times and Seasons*, the first issue of the paper published under Joseph’s tenure as editor. Joseph’s journal indicates that he “Read the Proof” of this issue of the paper on March 2, 1842. Jessee, *Papers of Joseph Smith*, 2:364. Although written in the first person and bearing the name JOSEPH SMITH at the bottom, it is clearly based on at least one earlier document—Orson Pratt’s pamphlet *An Interesting Account of Several Remarkable Visions, and of The Late Discovery of Ancient American Records* (Edinburgh, 1840).

12. Jessee, *Personal Writings of Joseph Smith*, 243-44. These statements were included in a letter from Joseph to I. Daniel Rupp the following year, which Rupp published in 1844 in his book *An Original History of the Religious Denominations at Present Existing in the United States*. After receiving a copy, Joseph had a letter sent to Rupp in June 1844 thanking him “for so valuable a treasure,” and praising him for “the design, the propriety, the wisdom of letting every sect tell its own story.” Jessee, *Papers of Joseph Smith*, 1:449-51.

13. See Noah Webster, *An American Dictionary of the English Language* (New York: S. Converse, 1828), s.v. “Continent.”

14. The 1842 Wentworth Letter informs the reader that “This book [the Book of Mormon] also tells us that our Saviour made his appearance upon this continent after his resurrection, . . . that they had apostles, prophets, pastors, . . . the same ordinances, gifts, powers, and blessing, as was enjoyed on the eastern continent.” An 1835 letter informs the elders of the Church “that there is a New Jerusalem to be established on this continent.—And also the Jerusalem shall be rebuilt on the eastern continent.” See Jessee, *Personal Writings of Joseph Smith*, 244, 377.

15. See Webster, *Dictionary*, s.v. “America.”

16. See Webster, *Dictionary*, s.v. “Country;” Jessee, *Personal Writings of Joseph Smith*, 533. Stephens’ book is treated in greater detail below.

17. See Webster, *Dictionary*, s.v. “Indian.”

18. The letter exists today as an entry in Joseph Smith Letterbook 2, written in the handwriting of James Mulholland. It is written in first person and signed “Joseph Smith Jr” in Mulholland’s hand. Joseph indicated that the letter was “dictate[d]” in some way. Jessee, *Personal Writings of Joseph Smith*, 344, 346.

19. Jessee, *Personal Writings of Joseph Smith*, 345-46; spelling in original.

20. *Latter Day Saints’ Messenger and Advocate* 1, no. 1 (October 1834): 13.

21. *Latter Day Saints’ Messenger and Advocate* 1, no. 1 (October 1834): 13. After reading of Oliver’s intended history, Joseph sent him a brief sketch of his birth and early life. *Latter Day Saints’ Messenger and Advocate* 1, no. 3 (December 1834): 40. In the course of these letters, Oliver makes at least two additional references to Joseph’s personal involvement in the project. One is his February 1835 letter, in which Oliver says that he does not know how many hours Joseph prayed before Moroni first appeared to him in September 1823, and that Joseph is not “able to inform me; but supposes it must have been eleven or twelve, and perhaps later, as the noise and bustle of the family . . . had long since ceased.” The other is in the July 1835 letter, where Oliver uses “his [Joseph’s] own words” to tell his readers what was going through Joseph’s mind as he walked to the hill to view the plates the first time. *Latter Day Saints’ Messenger and Advocate* 1, no. 5 (February 1835): 79; and *Latter Day Saints’ Messenger and Advocate* 1, no. 10 (July 1835): 157. Countless

other details that Oliver could have learned only through Joseph occur throughout the letters.

22. Jessee, *Papers of Joseph Smith*, 1:15-17, 26-95. While distinct from his diary, which he did not begin until November 1832, the contents of this “large journal” nevertheless had personal significance for the prophet—“my Journal,” he called it, in which his scribes were keeping “a history of my life.” Jessee, *Papers of Joseph Smith*, 2:58. It represents Joseph’s second attempt (after his uncompleted 1832 history) to produce an official history of his own life and the rise of the Church, with special attention being given to all that had happened prior to the commencement of his daily diary. Jessee, *Papers of Joseph Smith*, 1:15-17.

23. *Times and Seasons* 2, no. 12 (April 15, 1841): 377-80.

24. *Latter Day Saints’ Messenger and Advocate* 1, no. 1 (October 1834): 13; and *Latter Day Saints’ Messenger and Advocate* 1, no. 10 (July 1835): 155.

25. *Latter Day Saints’ Messenger and Advocate* 1, no. 10 (July 1835): 158-59.

26. John L. Stephens, *Incidents of Travel in Central America, Chiapas, and Yucatan* (New York: Harper Brothers, 1841).

27. Jessee, *Personal Writings of Joseph Smith*, 533. Both the text of this letter and Joseph’s “signature” on the bottom are in the handwriting of John Taylor.

28. “Evidences in Proof of the Book of Mormon,” *Times and Seasons* 3, no. 5 (January 1, 1842): 640-44.

29. “Ruins Recently Discovered in Yucatan Mexico,” *Times and Seasons* 4, no. 1 (November 15, 1842): 15-16; “Stephens’ Works on Central America,” *Times and Seasons* 4, no. 22 (October 1, 1843): 346-47.

30. Joseph began editing the paper with the March 1, 1842, issue, even though his name appears as editor on the February 15 issue. See his statement in *Times and Seasons* 3, no. 9 (March 1, 1842): 710. Joseph continued as editor until the November 15, 1842, issue, when he turned editorial control over to John Taylor. *Times and Seasons* 4, no. 1 (November 15, 1842): 8. According to Wilford Woodruff, John Taylor assisted Joseph Smith “in writing” during Joseph’s tenure as editor. Wilford Woodruff’s journal entry of February 19, 1842, throws into serious question the extent to which these editorials were the products of Joseph’s own hand. See Wilford Woodruff, *Wilford Woodruff’s Journal, 1833-1898*, typescript, ed. Scott G. Kenney, 9 vols. (Midvale, Utah: Signature Books, 1983-1984), 2:154-56. At the same time, Joseph apparently took his responsibilities as editor seriously, announcing in the March issue that “this paper commences my editorial career, I alone stand responsible for it, and shall do so for all paper having my signature henceforward.” His valedictory statement in November, that “it is impossible for me to fulfil the arduous duties of the editorial department any longer,” also suggests he spent a fair amount of time with the paper.

31. *Times and Seasons* 3, no. 22 (September 15, 1842): 914-15. Palenque may date as far back as 500 B. C., although the existing architecture was not erected until between A. D. 600 and 700. See Merle Greene Robertson, *The Sculpture of Palenque*, 4 vols. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983-91), 2:3.

32. *Times and Seasons* 3, no. 22 (September 15, 1842): 922.

33. *Times and Seasons* 3, no. 23 (October 1, 1842): 927. The earliest dated monuments at Quirigua date to A. D. 478, although the site appears to have been occupied as early as 400 B. C. See Robert J. Sharer, *Quirigua: A Classic Maya Center and Its Sculpture* (Durham: Carolina Academic Press, 1990), 103.

34. The June 15, 1842, editorial which links “Traits of the Mosaic History, Found Among the Azteca Nations” with the Book of Ether, deals with Book of Mormon geography only tangentially. See *Times and Seasons* 3, no. 16 (June 15, 1842): 818-20.

35. The portions of this article quoted in the *Times and Seasons* were originally published in Josiah Priest, *American Antiquities and Discoveries in the West* (Albany: Hoffman and White, 1833), 114-15.

36. Priest, *American Antiquities*, 115.

37. *Times and Seasons* 3, no. 13 (May 2, 1842): 781-82.

38. *Times and Seasons* 3, no. 18 (July 15, 1842): 858-59. The quote is from Priest, *American Antiquities*, 229.

39. The Ohio sites Priest describes in this extract—Paint Creek, Marietta, Portsmouth, Circleville, and sites near Chillicothe—have subsequently been identified as Hopewell (ca. 200 B.C.–A. D. 500). Priest describes the finds in Tennessee and Mississippi too vaguely to allow us to easily pinpoint them today.

40. *Times and Seasons* 3, no. 18 (July 15, 1842): 859-60.