

## LUCY HARRIS: TOWARD A COMPASSIONATE REINTERPRETATION

*Rhett Stephens James*

Lucy Harris was hard of hearing. This fact was not used to interpret Lucy in Latter-day Saint history until the publication of *The Man Who Knew: The Early Years—A Play About Martin Harris, 1824-1830*<sup>1</sup> and the first production of the Martin Harris Pageant in 1983. Lucy's life, her marriage to Martin Harris, and her response to Joseph Smith Jr. cannot be understood without considering the effects of hearing impairment in her life. In this historical essay, I suggest the possibility that Lucy Harris suffered from progressive deafness and the psychological abnormalities that may eventually accompany such a condition.<sup>2</sup>

### Origins of the Reinterpretation

The new look at Lucy Harris came from the rediscovery that Lucy Mack Smith, mother of the Prophet Joseph Smith Jr., recorded that Lucy Harris "was rather dull of hearing and when anything was said that she did not hear distinctly she suspected that it was some secret which was designedly kept from her."<sup>3</sup> Lucy's hearing loss influenced her behavior. I believe it was a significant factor as to why Lucy appeared the way she did in the documentary record and in subsequent histories. If her dullness of hearing resulted from an infection, Lucy Harris probably suffered severe pain, which may have contributed to her early death at age forty-four.<sup>4</sup>

In November 1982, during my research for writing the Martin Harris Pageant, I took my findings to Utah State University where I visited with Tom Johnson, department head and professor of speech and language pathology, and Fred Berg, professor of audiology. Describing Lucy's behavior, I asked the professors for help with sources that might shed some light on Lucy's condition. Berg and Johnson provided the following sources from which I concluded Lucy's condition may well have been "progressive deafness." Berg and Johnson saw this as a distinct possibility. Note the

description of symptoms by Westley M. Hunt in his "Progressive Deafness Rehabilitation," *The Laryngoscope* (May 1944): 4-5.

Diagnosis: Fear. Fear of failure, fear of ridicule, imagined sounds; fear of being slighted, avoided, made conspicuous—these are but a handful of the fears that haunt the waking and even the sleeping hours of the sufferer from progressive deafness. Small wonder that, at best, he (she) tends to live in an atmosphere of despondency and suspicion. Small wonder that, at worst, he (she) may not particularly want to live at all.

Hunt's article was reprinted in Edna Simon Levine's *The Psychology of Deafness: Techniques of Appraisal for Rehabilitation* (1960).<sup>5</sup>

Hollowell Davis and S. Richard Silverman, in *Hearing and Deafness*, say, "Even in many persons with normal hearing there is a tendency to feel that conversation interrupted on their entrance into a room must have been about them or that half-heard remarks were critical and unfriendly. Deafness accentuates this tendency and may make an oversensitive person unduly suspicious of hostility in those around him." And again: "Deafness seems to be a powerful stimulus to any latent paranoid trend in the personality." And again: "A person secure in his own emotional life will develop no paranoid trends even when deafened. The frequency of such paranoid trends shows, however, how many persons feel insecure in their social relations."<sup>6</sup>

Persons born deaf do not have the verbal skills Lucy Harris enjoyed. Other reasons for hearing loss are disease or nerve damage. Deaf persons in Lucy Harris's lifetime were often the brunt of terrible unkindness and bigotry. Some people regarded them as mentally deficient or even demonic. It was not uncommon for a fami-

ly to put a deaf member in another room when guests visited. If Lucy Harris's deafness were progressive, she undoubtedly would have felt herself slipping in her capacities. Perhaps even more painful may have been Lucy's awareness that her position of respect and honor in the community faded from respect and envy to one of low regard and pity. The trauma of such a social evolution might account for Lucy's need to have Martin Harris home and with her on all public occasions. When Martin began traveling to Pennsylvania to serve as scribe for Joseph Smith, who was translating the Book of Mormon, Lucy became insecure, despondent, suspicious, resentful, and jealous.

With this brief introduction in place, let us review a few selections from Lucy's known history, inviting you, the reader, to keep in mind the profile of a person suffering from progressive deafness and the possible subsequent social and emotional dislocations.

#### Some of Lucy's History

Lucy Harris, born 1 May 1792 to Rufus and Lucy Harris in Palmyra, was the ninth child in a family of ten children. Rufus Harris was brother to Nathan Harris, the father of Martin Harris, making Martin Harris and Lucy Harris first cousins. Martin was nine years older than Lucy. Martin (age twenty-five) and Lucy Harris (age sixteen) were married on 27 March 1808. The couple parented at least five children born between 1809 and 1821: Lucy, Henry, Duty, George, and Elizabeth called Betsy. The couple lost one child to an early death. Martin fought in the Great Lakes Campaigns of the War of 1812 against the British, attaining to the rank of sergeant. The town and county records show both Martin and Lucy as industrious, hardworking, and civic-minded—real people with deep feelings, emotions, and convictions.

Lucy Harris has been represented in literature by most writers, historians, and media persons as a very cantankerous woman. For some, she represented an embodiment of evil, if not as a metaphor for rebellion against truth, refusing even spiritual hearing—nearly worthy of the ancient demonic stereotype Lilith. The most written about Lucy Harris appears in *The History of Mother Smith, Mother of the Prophet*, by Mrs. Martha Jane Knowlton Coray acting as Lucy Mack Smith's amanuensis.<sup>7</sup> In Lucy Mack Smith's history, a reader might sense a controlled disappointment—even anger mixed with pity—for the trouble Lucy Harris caused her

family and Lucy's own husband, Martin Harris. To understand Lucy Mack Smith's impressions of Lucy Harris, we must realize Mrs. Harris laid the blame for her marriage problems at the feet of Joseph Smith Jr. and the publication of the Book of Mormon.

Lucy Mack Smith and the younger Lucy Harris were both bright, determined, and talented women. Lucy Smith was sixteen years older than Lucy Harris. They each had three-year-old daughters. Both had sons precede them in death, and Lucy Smith twice assisted Lucy Harris as a midwife. Lucy Smith tried not to meddle in men's affairs.<sup>8</sup> Lucy Harris enjoyed being involved in men's business.<sup>9</sup> Lucy Smith remembered that Lucy Harris viewed "herself altogether superior to her husband" in business matters.<sup>10</sup> Lucy Smith did not fault her husband and sons when gospel duties took them away from domestic affairs. Lucy Harris became impatient when Martin's religious responsibilities took him away from home and business.

Lucy Smith saw her family lose money, crops, homes, and lands from thieves, and yet she remained hopeful.<sup>11</sup> Lucy Harris owned her own money and property. She enjoyed Martin Harris's well-to-do affluence.<sup>12</sup> Martin Harris employed Joseph Smith Jr., Joseph's father, and Joseph's brother, Hyrum, to plant and harvest crops, dig a well, and improve the Harris property. The Harrises were recognized for their quality cloth production. When Lucy Harris lost the better of her two homes and a portion of property for the printing of the Book of Mormon, she never recovered.

Lucy Smith was Presbyterian. Lucy Harris was a Quaker. Lucy Smith was a newcomer to Palmyra. Lucy Harris was born in Palmyra. The Harrises were among Palmyra's earliest settlers. Martin Harris was active as a leader in civic affairs. The Smiths were not. The Harrises enjoyed status and influence. The Smiths did not. Though poor, Lucy Mack Smith enjoyed respect in the community. As Lucy Harris's hearing worsened, she spoke loudly, annoyed people, and became an embarrassment to others in her daily affairs.

Lucy Smith was a powerful, positive presence in her family. She experienced a life of "uncommon hardship and toil," endured "poverty, persecution, trials, troubles and sorrows of the bitterest kind," and acquired, or was gifted to possess, an unusual combination of spiritual



*Martin Harris Farm*  
courtesy LDS Church Archives

and sorrows of the bitterest kind,” and acquired, or was gifted to possess, an unusual combination of spiritual sensitivity and emotional toughness. Lucy Harris was of a more delicate constitution. Lucy Mack Smith enjoyed good health. Born in Gilsum, Cheshire County, New Hampshire, on 8 July 1776,<sup>13</sup> she died near Nauvoo, Illinois, on 5 May 1855,<sup>14</sup> having lived nearly seventy-nine years. Lucy Harris, born in Palmyra, Ontario County, New York, on 1 May 1792, suffered progressive deafness and poor health. Lucy Harris’s influence in her family as a positive force disintegrated as her health failed. She died and was buried in the town of her birth at age forty-four during the summer of 1836.

Lucy Smith recounts that Lucy Harris “was rather dull of hearing . . . [and was] a very peculiar woman, one that was naturally of a very jealous disposition.”<sup>15</sup> Lucy Smith recalled that “when anything was said that Lucy

Harris did not hear distinctly, she suspected that it was some secret which was designedly kept from her.”<sup>16</sup> Lucy Mack Smith remembered Lucy Harris as an insistent<sup>17</sup> and “determined” and scheming<sup>18</sup> woman—a person who could be “highly exasperated” and “ill-natured.”<sup>19</sup> Lucy Harris feared loss of economic security<sup>20</sup> but was also given to great generosity. She could feel very hurt when her liberality was rejected.<sup>21</sup> When Lucy Harris was left out or left alone, without being told what was happening, Lucy Mack Smith remembered that Lucy Harris could show “great rage” and “irascible temper,” especially when Lucy Harris’s property was threatened or damaged.<sup>22</sup> Many of these behaviors suggest progressive deafness.

On hearing of the golden plates, Lucy Harris and her sister, Polly Cobb, were among the first to offer financial assistance. Tension increased in the Harris home when

Joseph Smith thought it best to refuse financial assistance directly from Lucy Harris and to do business with Martin Harris.<sup>23</sup> The crises in the lives of Martin and Lucy Harris jumped another level when they traveled to Harmony, Pennsylvania, where Joseph Smith and his family fled for safety from religious persecution—a journey that Martin Harris encouraged and helped finance.<sup>24</sup> Feeling people were keeping things from her and wanting to see the golden plates, Lucy Harris “commenced ransacking every nook and corner” in the Smith home—“chests, trunks, cupboards, and so on. Finding nothing, she searched until a great black snake spooked her.”<sup>25</sup> Also, Lucy did not approve of Martin Harris’s acting as scribe for Joseph Smith from about 12 April 1828 to 14 June.<sup>26</sup>

Tension in the Harris family jumped measurably when, in February 1828, Martin Harris refused to take Lucy to New York City with Joseph’s older brother, Hyrum Smith, where Martin invited “learned men” Samuel Lathan Mitchell and Charles Anthon to examine, translate, and give opinions on the authenticity of writings copied from the golden plates, some with sample translations provided by Joseph Smith.<sup>27</sup> Lucy Harris felt slighted and ridiculed when Martin finally left without her knowing. On his return, Martin Harris found Lucy had prepared “a separate bed and room for him, which room she refused to enter.”<sup>28</sup> Lucy felt she was made conspicuous before all the people in the town. Despondent and suspicious, Lucy Harris accused Lucy Smith of putting Martin up to leaving without his wife.<sup>29</sup> Lucy Harris’s behavior in this period does seem to echo Westley Hunt’s diagnosis of progressive deafness: “Fear of failure, fear of ridicule, imagined sounds; fear of being slighted, avoided, made conspicuous...and suspicion.”<sup>30</sup>

Shortly thereafter, Lucy Harris, fearing she was being left out of important matters, promised Flander Dikes (Dikes or Dykes) that if he would steal Joseph’s writings from Martin (those Martin took to New York City), she would withdraw her objection to Dikes’s marriage to her daughter. Lucy told Dikes she would “procure a room in Palmyra for the purpose of transcribing them [the stolen sample writings].” She succeeded in her scheme.<sup>31</sup> Dikes took the documents and presumably returned them without Martin Harris’s knowing, whereupon Lucy consented to the marriage. Did Flander Dikes’s success later embolden Lucy Harris in her presumed complicity with the thief and the eventual report-

ed burning of the first 116 Book of Mormon pages called the “Book of Lehi”?<sup>32</sup>

By Lucy Smith’s account, Lucy Harris was not without evidence that Joseph Smith was a prophet of God. During Lucy Harris’s troubled visit to the Whitmer in Harmony, Joseph Smith’s mother remembered that Lucy Harris dreamed an angel of the Lord (presumably Moroni) showed her the golden plates in a night vision. Martin wanted his wife’s support to help finance publication of the Book of Mormon, a project that Lucy herself had wanted to help finance.<sup>33</sup> Lucy Harris was the first recorded person after Joseph Smith Jr. to have had any kind of a view of the golden plates. Lucy Smith’s account reads:

The next morning, soon after she [Lucy Harris] arose, she related a very remarkable dream which she said she had had during the night. It ran about as follows:

Lucy Harris said that a personage appeared to her who told her that as she had disputed the servant of the Lord [Joseph Smith Jr.], and said his word was not be believed, and had also asked him many improper questions, she had done that which not right in the sight of God. After which he said to her, “Behold, here are the plates, look upon them and believe.”<sup>34</sup>

Lucy Harris’s troubled visit to the Whitmers in Harmony has been ignored or forgotten by most. Usually, only Mary Whitmer is remembered as the only woman known to have seen the golden plates. Lucy described the plates in precise detail, and she insisted Joseph Smith take \$28 she received from her dying mother, asking Joseph for a note of repayment. Joseph, having rejected earlier offers, politely obliged.<sup>35</sup> Lucy’s conduct today might be considered stingy and mercenary, but in the 1820s, cash money was scarce on the frontier, and Yankee frugality was a quality to be admired. Using Westley Hunt’s diagnosis, one might argue that Lucy’s troubled dream was evoked by pressures arising from progressive deafness.

After returning to Palmyra from Harmony, Lucy Harris was again taken with doubts and fears of poverty. Having failed to dissuade Martin from helping Joseph publish the Book of Mormon, Lucy began to go “from place to place, and from house to house, telling her griev-

ances, and declaring that Joseph Smith [Jr.] was practicing a deception upon the people." She accused young Joseph of trying "to strip her of all that she possessed." Acting in fear, which suggests paranoia, Lucy Harris moved things from her new home, depositing "furniture, linen, and bedding . . . [and] other movable articles until she nearly stripped" her home of "comfort or convenience, depositing them with those of her friends and acquaintances, in whom she reposed sufficient confidence to assure her of their future safety."<sup>36</sup>

Loving Lucy and wanting to please her,<sup>37</sup> Martin Harris urged Joseph Smith to let Martin take the first 116 pages of the Book of Mormon translation home to show Lucy and her family that a book was actually in the making.<sup>38</sup> Joseph Smith recorded that the Lord Jesus Christ warned him not to let Martin take the 116 manuscript pages. Joseph's and Martin's coaxing prevailed. The Lord permitted it with a stern warning. The immediate response of Lucy Harris was positive. She withdrew her opposition.<sup>39</sup>

Three weeks passed. Martin took an ill Lucy to vacation with relatives. After a few days, Martin left to take care of business in Palmyra. Afterwards, he left for jury duty in Lyons. In the third week, Lucy, home alone, ill, and feeling pressure from community opposition to the Book of Mormon's publication, presumably stole the 116 manuscript pages. The 116 pages were not simply "lost" or misplaced by Martin Harris's carelessness as many writers state. The stolen manuscript was altered to discredit Joseph Smith by forcing a second translation that would naturally read differently than the altered first manuscript.<sup>40</sup>

When Joseph learned from the Lord what happened (D&C 10), he and Martin confronted Lucy. Insecure, fearful, and confused, she denied any responsibility.<sup>41</sup> In 1867, Pomeroy Tucker, who knew the Harrises, wrote that Lucy Harris burned the 116 pages in a potbelly stove in the middle of the night to hide her role in the theft and alteration of the manuscript.<sup>42</sup> Lucy Mack Smith was convinced Lucy Harris took the 116 pages and supervised the alterations.<sup>43</sup> In November 1833, Abigail Harris remembered Martin and Lucy's disagreement over the Book of Mormon as well as Lucy's discomfort over the subject.<sup>44</sup>

Between July 1828 and April 1829, Joseph Smith failed to progress much in his translation of the golden

plates. Martin Harris remained at home in Palmyra to care for Lucy, his family, his various business ventures, and his wheat farm, about two-thirds of which had been lost to blight.<sup>45</sup> Terrible pressures unleashed themselves in the lives of Lucy and Martin in the months following the loss of the 116 pages. The Lord called Martin "a wicked man" for his conduct, which must have brought the devout Martin pain.<sup>46</sup> It was during this period of time when Lucy, ill and distraught over the threat of financial ruin, accused Martin of becoming "cross, turbulent and abusive," which conduct he denied.<sup>47</sup>

In February 1829, Joseph Smith was again in possession of the golden plates and the Urim and Thummim used for translation.<sup>48</sup> By March 1829, only sixteen pages had been translated.<sup>49</sup> Oliver Cowdery, who was in the Palmyra district on school business, learned about Joseph Smith and the golden plates. Cowdery became eager to meet Joseph. On 5 April, Cowdery traveled with Joseph's brother Samuel to Harmony, Pennsylvania, to meet Joseph.<sup>50</sup> By 7 April, Oliver Cowdery began serving as scribe.

By 1 June 1829, Pennsylvania mobs forced the work of translation to shift to Peter Whitmer's home in Fayette (Waterloo), Seneca County, New York.<sup>51</sup> During this month, the Palmyra citizenry openly increased their efforts to stop publication of Joseph Smith's translation, and Lucy Harris increased her efforts to stop her husband from giving any further help to young Joseph Smith.

Martin Harris learned that Joseph and Oliver were making good progress in the translation. Eager to help, even though his family circumstances no longer permitted him to act as a scribe, Harris determined to visit Joseph Smith. Lucy Harris worked to prevent Martin from helping and "also to bring Joseph into difficulty," ridding herself of worry that Martin would finance publication of the translation. Local religionists and other citizens announced a boycott of the Book of Mormon. In Lucy's view, Martin's helping Joseph Smith meant financial failure and loss of the Harris fortune. Lucy Smith remembered that Lucy Harris mounted a horse and rode from "house to house through the neighborhood, like a dark spirit, making diligent inquiry," gleaning evil reports, and "stirring up every malicious feeling" to achieve "her wicked purpose,"<sup>52</sup> which either inspired the boycott or strengthened it.

Lucy Smith recalled that Lucy Harris accused Joseph of fraud with the intent to obtain money from falsely claiming to have golden plates. Lucy Harris was successful in gathering adherents to her cause. Persons such as Mason, Willard, and Sally Chase and Sam Walters were convinced Joseph Smith had golden plates. Others believed Joseph found the plates while digging for treasure.<sup>53</sup> Martin Harris told Joel Tiffany in 1859 that Joseph Smith indeed had plates and that Joseph did not find them while digging for treasure but received them from an angel of God.<sup>54</sup>

The youthful Joseph Smith, not wanting Palmyraites and others to think him dishonest, let some people hold the golden plates while the plates were stored in a wooden box or wrapped in a cloth covering. On one such occasion, Martin Harris remembered he could feel the metal plates and metal rings that held them together. The only people permitted to see the plates were those designated by the resurrected Jesus Christ. Joseph's pushing to the edge of the angel's instruction excited interest in the plates and caused increased persecution and efforts by cash-poor people to get the plates from him.<sup>55</sup> Lucy Harris was one of the first people permitted to heft the plates.<sup>56</sup> For this liberality, the inexperienced Joseph Smith was warned and scolded by revelations from Jesus Christ.<sup>57</sup>

In late May or early June, Lucy Harris lodged her complaint against Joseph before a magistrate at the Lyons District Court.<sup>58</sup> Lyman Cowdery, Oliver Cowdery's brother, was employed to assist officers of the law to arrest Joseph Smith Jr., should he be judged guilty. Lucy drew up affidavits against Joseph and "directed officers" whom to subpoena. Lucy included her husband Martin Harris.<sup>59</sup>

The day of the trial arrived. Witnesses against Joseph Smith traveled to Lyons.<sup>60</sup> The Smith family was greatly distressed over the whole affair. Lucy Mack Smith remembered that she "trembled for the issue, for this was the first time a suit had ever been preferred before a court against any of my family." (Lucy Smith did not know about or had forgotten the 1826 Pennsylvania trial, if such a trial ever had taken place.) The Prophet's mother retired to a secluded place and poured out her heart to God, asking that her son be safe. She wrote that the Spirit of the Lord rested upon her, and she heard a voice saying, "Not one hair of his head shall be harmed."<sup>61</sup>

At district court, the first witness stood and testified that Joseph Smith told him that the box, which was believed to hold the golden plates, contained nothing but sand and that Smith said it to deceive people. The second witness swore Joseph Smith told him that lead was in the box and that "he was determined to use it as he saw fit." Years later, interviewed by New York spiritualist Joel Tiffany, Martin Harris remembered he tried to convince people of Joseph Smith's account about golden plates, telling them that nothing inside the box could be so heavy unless it was gold or lead, and then saying, "I knew that Joseph had not credit enough to buy so much lead."<sup>62</sup> The second witness may have heard Harris use this explanation but distorted it as a court witness.

The third witness testified that he asked Joseph Smith what was in the box and that Joseph Smith told him nothing was in the box, "that he had made fools of the whole of them," and that "all he wanted was to get Martin Harris's money away from him." The person said Joseph Smith by "persuasion" defrauded people of "two or three hundred dollars."<sup>63</sup>

The next evidence entered into the record was Lucy Harris's affidavit "in which she stated, that she believed the chief object which Joseph Smith had in view, was to defraud her husband out of all his property, and that she did not believe that Joseph Smith had ever been in possession of the gold plates." The judge refused "the introduction of any more witnesses" and directed that Martin Harris, a frequent jury member at Lyons, be sworn.<sup>64</sup>

What happened next could have only further stressed Martin and Lucy's relationship. Friends present at the trial reported to Lucy Smith and her family in Manchester that Martin Harris "testified with boldness, decision and energy, to a few simple facts." Martin Harris stood and raised his hand to heaven, and said, "I can swear, that Joseph Smith never has got one dollar from me by persuasion," explaining God directed him to assist the youth. "I did once, of my own free will and accord put fifty dollars into his hands, in the presence of many witnesses, for the purpose of doing the work of the Lord. This, I can pointedly prove," the forty-six-year-old businessman said, "and I can tell you, furthermore, that I have never seen in Joseph Smith, a disposition to take any man's money, without giving him a reasonable compensation for the same in return. And as to the plates which he professed to have," Martin Harris continued, "gentlemen, if you do not believe it, but continue to resist

the truth, it will one day be the means of damning your souls.”<sup>65</sup>

The judge ordered that no more witnesses be called. He directed that the “written testimony already given” be brought to him, whereupon he tore it “in pieces before their eyes” and instructed Joseph Smith’s accusers “to go home about their business, and trouble him no more with such ridiculous folly.” Lucy Smith recorded that the false accusers went home “perfectly discomfited.”<sup>66</sup> The statement made by the hostile witnesses in this trial may also be a clue to who they were. Willard Chase and his associates, who were convinced such golden plates did exist and who tried to steal them from Joseph Smith, made similar statements at a later date to anti-Mormon E. D. Howe.<sup>67</sup> In her history, Lucy Mack Smith made no further mention of Lucy Harris after the trial at Lyons. Opposition from journalists, writers, and publishers like E. B. Grandin, Pomeroy Tucker, and Abner Cole replaced Lucy Harris in Lucy Smith’s memory.

Lucy Harris’s health grew worse. Martin Harris and Lucy were never divorced (there is no record of divorce and the Harris family recounts that divorce did not occur). Martin wanted Lucy and the children to join him in Kirtland, Ohio. Lucy wanted Martin to stay in Palmyra. Her health apparently prevented such a move. Martin maintained two residences, one in Kirtland and one in Palmyra, traveling back and forth between the two residences until Lucy’s death, at which time his aging parents and some of his children moved to Kirtland. Lucy Harris died in the summer of 1836 at the age of forty-four after the dedication of the Kirtland Temple. Harris family tradition has it that Joseph Smith Jr. accompanied Martin Harris to Lucy’s bedside before her death. Lucy Harris was buried in The Gideon Durphey Cemetery in Palmyra, New York.<sup>68</sup>

Questions still remain. Does Lucy’s early death suggest her deafness may have been caused by something other than genetics (experienced some in the Harris family today)? Could it be that her deafness was caused by a serious ear infection, which played a part in her early death? If this were the case, an additional reason for her ill temper and behavior would be understood. How even tempered can a person be with earaches? Did the stress in her life make her susceptible to cancer? The historical record is too quiet to know for certain the answers to these questions. What is known is that Lucy suffered

hearing loss, which provides some insight into her life and conduct as found in the historical record.<sup>69</sup>

#### The Continuing Historical Performance

The 1986 motion picture, *Children of a Lesser God*, about a fictional deaf woman played by Marlee Matlin, herself deaf, and honored as Best Actress by the Academy Awards, gave international exposure to the plight of the hearing impaired in a world of noise, hearing, and speaking. Matlin’s subsequent performances in a television series as a successful deaf lawyer continued to acquaint the public mind with the talents of the deaf and their ability to contribute to society.

The Lucy Harris reinterpretation in the Martin Harris Pageant preceded the movie, *Children of a Lesser God*, by three years. Fifteen years after the first production, more than four hundred thousand persons had traveled to the small rural town of Clarkston, Utah, and watched the portrayal of the lives of Martin and Lucy Harris and their association with Joseph Smith Jr., one of history’s most significant persons to contribute to religious thought and practice. The annual August performance happens in a valley surrounded by ten-thousand-foot mountains. The Martin Harris Memorial Amphitheater leans against the south hill of the Clarkston Cemetery, less than a hundred feet from the grave of Martin Harris, and overlooks all of the Cache Valley. The history continues in the tradition of storytelling, one in which Lucy is portrayed as a person with progressive deafness and poor health who evolves from a protagonist to a reluctant antagonist. Unlike the fictional deaf woman in *Children of a Lesser God*, Lucy may never have resolved her crises at home and in society.

An enlightened public sensitive to persons with special life challenges has emerged in the United States. Visitors to most university campuses will find students deaf signing in public gatherings. Television programs accommodate communication for nonhearers. Public gatherings and arts productions arrange for persons to sign for the deaf. Historians should likewise examine history in the context of all members of the community—never excluding persons with any physical or emotional life expression. Historical inquiry benefits from considering such subjects as deafness, blindness, stuttering, health, and illness in the lives of individuals and communities.

As for Lucy Harris, perhaps a more compassionate view should be entertained. Poor health can make a cantankerous person out of the best of people, especially when the illness or life condition evokes bigotry from people within a culture, as has deafness. There is room for compassion in the writing of history—even self-censorship, restraint, and a willingness to be still on occasion. Jesus of Nazareth's warning, "as we judge so will we be judged, and with what measure we measure, so will it be measured to us again," has profound implications for historians.

### Notes

1. Rhett Stephens James, *The Man Who Knew: The Early Years—A Play about Martin Harris, 1824-1830* (Cache Valley, Utah: Martin Harris Pageant Committee, 1983), 14, 20, 27-31, 107-108, note 43. Pages 95 through 169 are annotations to the drama, which include commentary and citation of sources used to write the historical musical play. The first edition was sold to raise funds for the then community production sponsored by the Martin Harris Memorial Amphitheater. A second edition was published in 1993 by the Logan Whittier Community Center to raise funds for the restoration of the historical school building. Some corrections of printer's errors in the first edition were made and are noted in bold print.
2. This theme was also addressed by Beverly James Scott and Rhett S. James in "Lucy Harris: Wife of the Witness," *Mormon Heritage Magazine*, July/August 1995, 7-13.
3. *History of Joseph Smith by His Mother, Lucy Mack Smith*, with notes and comments by Preston Nibley (Salt Lake City: Stevens & Wallis, Inc., 1945), 114, hereafter cited as LMS. See also Lucy Mack Smith, *Biographical Sketches of Joseph Smith, and His Progenitors for Many Generations* (Liverpool, England: Published for Orson Pratt by S. W. Richards, 1853), and Scot Facer Proctor and Maurine Jensen Proctor, eds., *The Revised and Enhanced History of Joseph Smith by His Mother* (Salt Lake City, Utah: Bookcraft, 1996). The relevant passages about Lucy Harris in these three sources read the same.
4. James, 17, 20, 27-31, 113, note 68, 107-10, note 43.
5. Edna Simon Levine, *The Psychology of Deafness: Techniques of Appraisal for Rehabilitation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1960), 60.
6. Hollowell Davis and S. Richard Silverman, *Hearing and Deafness* (New York: Holt, Reinhart and Winston), 509.
7. LMS, vii.
8. *Ibid.*, 119-20.
9. *Ibid.*, 115-17, 119-20.
10. *Ibid.*, 116; James, 109.
11. LMS, 37-41, 59-66, 94-101.
12. *Ibid.*, 115.
13. *Ibid.*, 30.
14. *Ibid.*, vii.
15. *Ibid.*, 114.
16. *Ibid.*
17. *Ibid.*, 115-16, 120-21.
18. *Ibid.*, 120.
19. *Ibid.*, 119, 121.
20. *Ibid.*, 122-23.
21. *Ibid.*, 115-20.
22. *Ibid.*, 120, 131.
23. *Ibid.*, 114-16.
24. *Ibid.*, 111-18.
25. *Ibid.*, 121-22.
26. *Ibid.*, 124 note; see also *Documentary History of the Church*.
27. James, 57-62, 138-45; LMS, 119.
28. LMS, 120.
29. *Ibid.*, 119.
30. Westley Hunt, "Progressive Deafness Rehabilitation," *The Laryngoscope* (May 1944), 4-5.
31. LMS, 120.
32. Pomeroy Tucker, *Origin, Rise, and Progress of Mormonism. Biography of Its Founders and History of Its Church. Personal Remembrances and Historical Collections Hitherto Unwritten* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1867), 45-46, 125; James, 76-79, 154-55 reviews writers who

have written on the burning of the 116 pages. See also D&C 5 and 10.

33. LMS, 115, 117.

34. Ibid., 116-17.

35. Ibid., 117.

36. Ibid., 122-23.

37. Pilkington, 15-16.

38. LMS, 124.

39. James, 63-66 and notes 200-16.

40. D&C 10:10-46; Words of Mormon 1:5-7; and letter to the public in the 1830 edition of the Book of Mormon about the theft of the 116 pages.

41. Howe, 254.

42. Tucker, 45-46, 125; James, 76-79, 154-55 reviews writers who have written on the burning of the 116 pages. See also D&C 5 and 10.

43. LMS, 131.

44. Howe, 253-54.

45. LMS, 132.

46. D&C 10:7-8.

47. Howe, 254-55.

48. LMS, 133.

49. Joseph Smith's wife, Emma, acted as scribe for these sixteen pages of translation.

50. LMS, 138-42.

51. Ibid., 147-50.

52. Ibid., 143.

53. James, 32, 103-28.

54. Ibid.

55. Ibid; Tiffany, 165-68; LMS, 77-78, 84-85, 105-23.

56. James, 43, 130, note 143.

57. D&C 3, 5, 10.

58. Samuel H. Smith returned from his visit with Joseph at Harmony the last of May and 1 June, at which time Joseph and Oliver shifted the translation to the Whitmers in Fayette. See Preston Nibley note in LMS, 143. Martin Harris heard from Samuel that the translation was going well and visited Joseph in Fayette.

59. LMS, 143-44.

60. Ibid., 144-46.

61. Ibid., 144.

62. James, 157.

63. LMS, 145.

64. Ibid., 146.

65. Ibid.; James, 157.

66. LMS, 146.

67. Howe, 246; James, 157.

68. N. B. Lundwall, comp., *Temples of the Most High* (Salt Lake City: Zion's Printing and Publishing Co., 1941), 41; see also Madge Harris Tuckett and Belle Harris Wilson, *The Martin Harris Story with biographies of Emer Harris and Dennison Lott Harris* (Provo, Utah: Vintage Books, 1983), 60.

69. Some who read this essay have wondered if Lucy Harris may have suffered PMS or a related condition as an explanation for her behavior. These conditions would not, of course, account for her early death. Doctors with whom I have shared this essay do not think so. The paranoia, fear, and suspicion do point to progressive deafness and/or other related behaviors coming from serious hearing loss.