

Timeline of Witnesses 1829

March, Harmony, PA—Martin Harris receives God’s promise that he may see the plates if he is faithful (D&C 5:23-29)

April 7, Harmony, PA—Oliver Cowdery begins as Joseph’s scribe in Harmony, PA, starting in Mosiah

June 1 Joseph and Oliver leave Harmony and move into the Whitmer home in Fayette, NY (~100 mi) with Emma coming later

June 4-29 Translation continues upstairs in Peter Whitmer’s home—with Oliver and Whitmer sons (Christian, John, David) assisting as scribes

June Angel Moroni visits Mary Whitmer and shows her the plates

June 20 Translated 2 Nephi 27:12

June 26 The newspaper, *Wayne Sentinel*, published Book of Mormon title page

June 25-30 Translation of the Book of Mormon finished (Mosiah to Moroni, Word of Mormon, and small plates)

Finished translation according to D&C 17:6 (“he has translated the book, even the part which I have commanded”)

June 27 Saturday, Hyrum and Jerusha’s daughter, Mary, is born in their family log home in Palmyra

June 28* Sunday, Three witnesses (Oliver Cowdery, David Whitmer, and Martin Harris) see the plates

July 6* Joseph shows eight male witnesses the plates: Christian, Jacob, John and Peter Whitmer Jr., Hiram Page, Hyrum, Samuel, and Joseph Smith Sr. (*Gale Y. Anderson, “Eleven Witnesses Behold the Plates,” *Journal of Mormon History*, 38, Spring 2012, p. 152; Welch, *Opening the Heavens*, 101)

Translation Moves from Harmony, PA to Fayette, NY

Between April and May, 1829, persecution against Joseph and Emma grew in Harmony, PA. Oliver had corresponded with his friend David Whitmer via letters about the translation of the Book of Mormon. In the third known letter, Oliver included a message from the Urim and Thummim that Joseph received for David. It instructed him to come south to Harmony to help transport Oliver and Joseph up north to live with in the Whitmer family home in order to finish the translation in peace. David spoke to his family about the matter, and they agreed. The timing led to a miracle that affirmed to the whole family that this was the work of God.

According to the records, before David could leave for Harmony, he had to prepare the soil for planting on a portion of the family farm:

It was planting season, and David needed to plow twenty acres and enrich the soil with plaster of paris to help their wheat grow. His father said he ought to pray first to learn if it was absolutely necessary to leave now. . . . The next morning, David walked out to the fields and saw rows of dark furrows in ground that had been unplowed the evening before. Exploring the fields further, he saw that about six acres had been plowed overnight, and the plow was waiting for him in the last furrow, ready for him to finish the job (*Saints*, 69).

Once the fields were plowed, David needed to fertilize them with plaster of paris or gypsum (it is an excellent source of calcium and sulfur). Lucy Mack Smith recorded that other family members saw three men spreading the plaster of paris faster than they had ever seen anyone work (“Lucy Mack Smith, History, 1844–1845, Page [9], bk. 8,” p. [9], bk. 8, *The Joseph Smith Papers*, accessed March 18, 2020, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/lucy-mack-smith-history-1844-1845/101>). When David and the family put the pieces together, they believed it was miraculous and David left immediately.

The Whitmers’ home became an answer to prayer and became a great help in the next seven years in establishing the church. It was during this time that of transition and living together that David Whitmer remembered that one day, “Joseph was ‘put out about . . . something that Emma, his wife, had done.’ As a result, ‘he could not translate a single syllable. He went downstairs, out into the orchard and made supplication to the Lord; and was gone about an hour—came back to the house, and asked Emma’s forgiveness and then came upstairs where we were and the translation went on all right’” (ibid., 95). In addition to three Whitmer sons acting as scribes, Mary and five male members of the family became witnesses of the golden plates during the month of June.

First Witness: Mary Whitmer Early June 1829

Mary Whitmer became the first witness of the plates and Moroni in addition to Joseph the Seer. Moroni transported the plates from Harmony, PA to the Whitmer’s home in Fayette, NY. After the translating party had relocated there, Joseph hid them there once he received them again. Their arrival was a strain on their hostess. Mary Whitmer, had five grown sons and a husband under the same roof already. But everyone was more interested in the translation and more work fell to her once the three visitors arrived. Church historians has often recorded David Whitmer’s account of what happened:

Soon after [Joseph, Oliver, and David’s] arrival home, I saw something which led me to the belief that the plates were placed or concealed in my father’s barn. I frankly asked Joseph if my supposition was right, and he told me it was. Sometime after this, my mother was going to milk the cows, when she was met out near the yard by the same old man

The Whitmer family included Peter Sr., Mary Elsa Musselman, and their eight children: Christian, Jacob, John, David, Catherine, Peter Jr., Nancy, and Elizabeth Ann. In 1809 they left PA and Presbyterianism and moved to upstate NY and became members of the German Reformed church. In 1827 they moved to Fayette, NY. Into this home, the Whitmer’s welcomed Joseph, Emma, and Oliver for the last month of translation of the Book of Mormon in June 1829. On April 6, 1830, their home was used to gather for the organization of the Church of Christ.

(judging by her description of him) who said to her: “You have been very faithful and diligent in your labors, but you are tired because of the increase of your toil; it is proper therefore that you should receive a witness that your faith may be strengthened.” Thereupon he showed her the plates. My father and mother had a large family of their own, the addition to it therefore of Joseph, his wife Emma and Oliver very greatly increased the toil and anxiety of my mother. And although she had never complained she had sometimes felt that her labor was too much, or at least she was perhaps beginning to feel so. This circumstance, however, completely removed all such feelings and nerved her up for her increased responsibilities” (*Testimonies of Book of Mormon Witnesses*, 72-73, 215).

This account sounds as if the Lord sent an angel as encouragement due to Mary Whitmer’s sacrifice. Yet the account of Mary’s descendants includes her additional detail. Mary’s attitude needed to be corrected, which is consistent with scriptural angelic intervention.

With her increased work load, Mary became fed up with Joseph and Oliver not offering to help. Especially when Oliver’s right hand grew sore from writing or Joseph’s eyes grew tired from straining at the seer stone, the two would go outside and skip rocks on a pond. Mary Whitmer noticed this and felt if they were men of God and needed a break, why didn’t they offer to help her by carrying a bucket of water or chopping some wood to help? According to an account in the Whitmer family history, Mother Mary Whitmer got so worked up about this that she had decided that the next day that she was going to “order them out of her home.” But the next morning, before dawn, as she finished her milking and lugged two full buckets of milk out of the barn, in the dim morning light, she saw “a short, heavy-set, gray-haired man carrying a package [who] met her and said, ‘My name is Moroni. You have become pretty tired with all the extra work you have to do. The Lord has given me permission to show you this record:’ turning the golden leaves one by one!” (Royal Skousen, *Interpreter*, 2014). Although she was frightened of the man at first, “[H]e spoke to her in a kind, friendly tone, and began to explain to her the nature of the work which was going on in her house, and she was filled with inexpressible joy and satisfaction” (<https://knowwhy.bookofmormoncentral.org>).

Another account recorded that Moroni carried a “knapsack.” This description of Moroni has been puzzling to some, but it is also consistent with an experience that David Whitmer saw as he drove Joseph and Oliver in his wagon on a hot summer day about the same time, and his nephew recorded:

He [David Whitmer] had seen the same messenger on the way from Harmony to Fayette. When he brought Joseph and Oliver in his wagon from Harmony, Pa., he appeared walking with a knapsack on his back with straps across his breast. Uncle David asked him to ride with them, to which he replied, “No. I am going over to Cumorah,” and suddenly disappeared in the midst of a plain (*The Latter-Day Saints' Millennial Star*, Volume 55, p. 27).

The two descriptions of Moroni share similarities which gives more credence to Mary Whitmer’s family accounts. However, at that time in America, a legal witness needed to be male. So twelve men bore witness of seeing and handling the plates too.

Three Witnesses: Oliver, David, and Martin—June 28 (possibly 27th-30th)

By late June of 1829, Joseph had already translated Ether 5:2-4 and 2 Nephi 11:3, 27; and 2 Nephi 27:12-14, which all refer to the need for other witnesses of the plates containing the text of the Book of Mormon. Joseph and Oliver (as well as Martin Harris and David Whitmer) wondered about these witnesses and received the revelation known as D&C 17:

I say unto you, that you must rely upon my word, which if you do with full purpose of heart, you shall have a view of the plates, and also of the breastplate, the sword of Laban, the Urim and Thummim . . . after that you have obtained faith, and have seen them with your eyes, you shall testify of them, by the power of God (D&C 17:1, 3)

The same section suggests that the translation was complete when three witnesses were named (D&C 17:6).

According to *History of the Church* 1:49, Martin Harris, Lucy and Joseph Sr., left together and journeyed twenty-five miles from Palmyra to Fayette so that they arrived “before sunset” at the Whitmer home. “The evening was spent in reading the manuscript” of the Book of Mormon (Anderson *Lucy’s Book*, 268). Lucy also remembered that “the next morning after breakfast” in the Whitmer’s parlor they had a “Morning service.” Afterwards Joseph told Martin that if he humbled himself “before your God this day and obtain if possible, a forgiveness of your sins,” he could become a witness. (ibid., 452). Martin “likely spent the morning in this effort for David Whitmer was engaged in ‘plowing in the field’ at ‘about 11 o’clock in the morning,’ or ‘about noon,’ when the others came to get him (Gale Y. Anderson, *Journal of Mormon History*, Spring 2012, 150).

The four men went into some woods on the Whitmer property and prayed. Their prayers were hindered until Martin left them to pray alone a short distance away. Then Joseph, Oliver, and David “engaged in prayer, when presently we beheld a light above us, in the air, of exceeding brightness, and behold an angel stood before us. In his hands he held the plates. . . . He turned over the leaves, one by one, so that we could see them, and discern the engravings thereon distinctly” (*History of*

Why God sends an Angels?

The Holy Spirit is often sent to believers as encouragement. When disciples are striving to follow the Lord, they often receive peace, enlightenment, and the gifts of hope, faith, etc. Most early church members who sacrificed for the cause like Emma, Lucy and Joseph Sr., did not see angels to encourage them. However, when someone heads in the wrong direction, opposing God’s plan, stronger intervention is needed and angels have been visualized (i.e. to redirect Laman and Lemuel, Saul/Paul, Balaam’s donkey, etc.) or to instruct a complete change of heart (as with Angel Gabriel sent to Zacharias, Manoah and his wife, and the women at the tomb, etc.). It appears this was also the case with Mary Whitmer as she was planning on kicking Joseph out of her home the night before she received divine intervention.

the Church, 1:54). Afterward, Joseph found Martin and they prayed together. The witnesses had been told earlier, “it is by your faith that you shall obtain a view of them” (D&C 17:2). Martin obviously still had some spiritual work to do. He and Joseph prayed and once Martin’s heart was ready, the vision opened to his view. Martin “cried out, apparently in an ecstasy of Joy ‘Tis enough, tis enough; mine eyes have beheld, mine eyes have beheld’ and jumping up he shouted, Hosanna, blessing God” (www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/history-1838-1856-volume-a-1-23-december-1805-30-august-1834/31). Interestingly, it was almost exactly one year earlier that Martin confessed the loss of the 116 pages.

After the three witnesses saw the plates, Joseph came into the family’s log house and cried out in joy. Lucy Smith recorded: “They returned to the house . . . between 3 & 4 o’clock,” and Joseph exclaimed to his waiting parents: “Father! Mother! . . . You do not know how happy I am. The Lord has caused the plates to be shown to 3 more besides me” (*Lucy’s Book*, 453). Joseph continued:

They have seen an angel, who has testified to them, and they will have to bear witness to the truth of what I have said, for now they know for themselves, that I do not go about to deceive the people, and I feel as if I was relieved of a burden which was almost too heavy for me to bear, and it rejoices my soul, that I am not any longer to be entirely alone in the world.

Later Joseph also recorded details about the experience:

We heard a voice from out of the bright light above us, saying, “These plates have been revealed by the power of God, and they have been translated by the power of God; the translation of them which you have seen is correct, and I command you to bear record of what you now see and hear” (*History of the Church*, 1:54-55).

Eight Witnesses: ~July 2 (possibly July 1-6)

Around July 1, Joseph next traveled to Palmyra to find a publisher. Yet his trip also had the additional purpose of gathering more witnesses. At least five Whitmer men joined him: Christian, Jacob, John and Peter Whitmer Jr., Hiram Page (who married Catherine Whitmer in 1825), and three Smith men Hyrum, Samuel, and Joseph Smith Sr.. We deduce from Lucy’s writings that women came to Palmyra too (*Lucy’s Book*, 455). Even though they did not see the plates, they became witnesses of the eight witnesses.

Lucy remembered that “a few days” after that she and Martin Harris returned from Fayette when “Joseph and Oliver and the Whitmers . . . came to make us a visit and also to make some arrangements about getting the book printed. Soon after they came . . . the male part of the company,” accompanied by Joseph Sr. and two of Joseph’s brothers, twenty-nine-year-old Hyrum and twenty-one-year-old Samuel H., went to the grove where they “looked upon the plates and handled them” (Anderson, *Journal of Mormon History*, 154; *Lucy’s Book*, 455-456).

The witnesses did not record the exact date—so it is only deduced as Thursday July 2. The eight witnesses left their signed testimony which was published at the end of the 1830 Book of Mormon. At least two of the eight left a record of their experience:

- Hyrum Smith: “I felt a determination to die, rather than deny the things which my eyes had seen, which my hands had handled, and which I had borne testimony to, wherever my lot had been cast” (*Times and Seasons*, Dec 1, 1839: 23).
- John Whitmer: “I desire to testify to all that will come to the knowledge of this address, that I have most assuredly seen the plates from whence the book of Mormon is translated, and that I have handled these plates” (*Messenger and Advocate*, 2; Mar 1836, p. 287).

This event is the last time we hear of the Prophet Joseph having the plates. His mother recorded that after the eight witnesses handled the golden plates, they all returned inside, but Joseph remained in the woods until Moroni, “the Angel again made his appearance to Joseph and received the plates from his hands.” Lucy also added, “We commenced holding meetings that night in which we declared those facts that we knew to be true” (*Lucy’s Book*, 457; “Lucy Mack Smith, History, 1845,” p. 156-157, *The Joseph Smith Papers*, accessed March 18, 2020, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/lucy-mack-smith-history-1845/164>).

The timing of the eight witnesses was around the July 4th holiday—which was a big celebration at that time. It was this type of event where the Smiths often sold their beer and cakes and may have done so that week as well (Gale Y. Anderson, *Journal of Mormon History*, *Spring 2012*, 145-162).

Time Line: Martin Harris in Church History

- **1824** hired Smiths as farmhands to help work his 240 acres (and learned about Joseph’s visions)
- **1827** donated \$50 in silver to help Joseph move to Harmony PA (Emma’s brother came to help too)
- **Feb 1828** went to NYC to ask Drs. Charles Anthon and Mitchell about Joseph’s translation of Reformed Egyptian (thus fulfilling Isa 29:11)
- **1828** acted as scribe for much of the Book of Lehi (Emma was the first scribe),
- **Jun 1828** Lost the 116 pages of manuscript of the Book of Lehi
- **1829** Mortgaged his family farm to pay for the publishing of the Book of Mormon
- **Jun 1829** became one of the Three Witnesses
- **Apr 6, 1830** was baptized by Oliver Cowdery
- **Jun 1831** Arrived in Kirtland
- **Jun 7, 1831** called to Missouri and consecrate properties to the church (D&C 58:35)
- **1832** Served mission with his older brother Emer to western NY and PA (baptized at least 180)
- **1833** Joined Zion’s Camp traveling from OH to MO and assisted Joseph in selecting 12 Apostles
- **1835** selected as first High Council in Kirtland
- **1837** Married Brigham Young’s niece Caroline Young and had 5 more children (8 total)
- **1838** removed himself physically from the body of the church, but remained a verbal witness
- **1842** rebaptized into the Church in Kirtland
- **1870** Re-joined his family and rebaptized in Utah