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A STUDY OF THE HILL CUMORAH: A SIGNIFICANT LATTER-DAY SAINT  
LANDMARK IN WESTERN NEW YORK

by

Cameron J. Packer

A thesis submitted to the faculty of

Brigham Young University

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

Religious Education

Brigham Young University

December 2002

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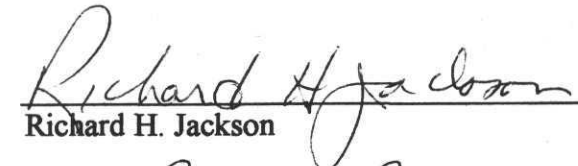
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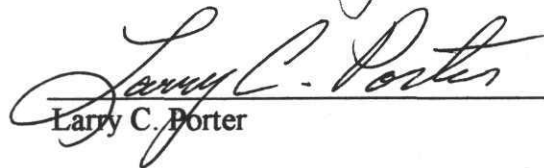
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## ABSTRACT

### A STUDY OF THE HILL CUMORAH: A SIGNIFICANT LATTER-DAY SAINT LANDMARK IN WESTERN NEW YORK

Cameron J. Packer

Religious Education

Master of Arts

Early Church member W. W. Phelps wrote, “Cumorah...is well calculated to stand in this generation, as a monument of marvelous works and wonders” (*Latter-day Saints’ Messenger and Advocate*, November 1835, 2:221). With a stately monument of the Angel Moroni cresting its summit, and a yearly pageant commemorating salient events associated with the coming forth of the Book of Mormon, it is fulfilling the exact role that Phelps envisioned. However, the general population of the Church is relatively unfamiliar with the history of this significant Latter-day Saint landmark. The following thesis is an in depth study and documentation of certain historical aspects of the Hill Cumorah as a significant, sacred geographic location to members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The writer is deeply indebted to the BYU Religion faculty for their time and energy spent in teaching as well as assisting in this work. Special thanks is also expressed to Dr. Larry C. Porter, who, although retired, consented to assist in this work and spent a great amount of time helping the writer in this research. His knowledge and experience with New York Church history was invaluable in the completion of this work. The writer also wishes to express appreciation to the many individuals at the LDS Church Historical Library, LDS Church Historical Department Archives, and the Missionary and Real Estate Departments for the information that they provided. The writer would also like to acknowledge the King's Daughter's Free Library in Palmyra, New York, that provided helpful information on the subject of this thesis. The writer wishes to thank David W. Reeves, Sr., and David W. Reeves, Jr., for making it possible for the writer to visit the Hill Cumorah for the first time. This not only allowed the writer to gather critical research, but more importantly, perhaps, experience the feelings that are associated with this sacred place. Most importantly, the writer expresses love and appreciation to his wife Steffani for her countless hours spent in reading and correcting this work, and for her encouragement and confidence in the writer. Also for Coleman, and Calvin and their patience, love, and understanding of not having as much play time with their father.

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## INTRODUCTION

Thousands of years before the Restoration, Old Testament prophets testified of the coming forth of the Book of Mormon. Psalm 85:11 says, “Truth shall spring out of the earth; and righteousness shall look down from heaven.” Isaiah similarly prophesied, “Thy speech shall be low out of the dust, and thy voice shall be, as of one that hath a familiar spirit, out of the ground, and thy speech shall whisper out of the dust” (Isaiah 29:4). One of the most eloquent of these prophecies regarding the Book of Mormon is that which Moses recorded:

And righteousness will I send out of heaven; and truth will I send forth out of the earth, to bear testimony of mine Only Begotten; his resurrection from the dead; yea and also the resurrection of all men; and righteousness and truth will I cause to sweep the earth as with a flood, to gather out mine elect from the four quarters of the earth (Moses 7:62).

Interestingly, each of these prophecies shares a common theme—that of truth coming forth out of the “ground.”

Throughout the centuries, cultures have found purpose in hallowing sacred ground or space for the religious, cultural, and political events associated with specified sites. As one writer put it, “Discrimination of space into sacred and profane is as old as mankind.”<sup>1</sup> The Jews, for example, reverence the place where the last remnants of their temple stand. In the same city, the Muslims reverence the site where Muhammad is said to have ascended into heaven. Americans have memorialized the ground at Gettysburg where thousands of men lost their lives in a national conflict. Each of these places is set apart because of what happened there. As Mircea Eliade wrote, “Every sacred space implies...an irruption of the sacred that results in detaching a territory from the

---

<sup>1</sup> Richard H. Jackson, “Perception of Sacred Space,” *Journal of Cultural Geography* 3, no. 2 (1983), 94.

surrounding cosmic milieu and making it qualitatively different.”<sup>2</sup> To Latter-day Saints, the “ground” out of which the Book of Mormon came, is one such space that is “qualitatively different” from other ground.

Around A.D. 421, Moroni, the last prophet of the Nephite nation, inscribed his final testimony, “And now I bid unto all, farewell. I soon go to rest in the paradise of God, until my spirit and body shall again reunite, and I am brought forth triumphant through the air, to meet you before the pleasing bar of the great Jehovah, the Eternal Judge of both quick and dead. Amen” (Moroni 10:34). What happened to this last Book of Mormon prophet after he wrote that farewell is uncertain. At some point, he deposited the records of his people and other sacred relics in a stone box on the west side of a prominent hill in what is now western New York. Years later, after a long period of obscurity, a young farm boy would be directed to this hill where he would meet with angels, experience visions, and receive a record that would be translated into a book of scripture comparable to the Bible. With many of these events being religious or mystical<sup>3</sup> in nature, rather than simply historical, the Hill Cumorah would take on an added sense of sacredness to Latter-day Saints as it became a place “of passage between heaven and earth.”<sup>4</sup> These experiences of Joseph Smith at Cumorah helped set this hill apart as sacred, as well as a key ignition point to the entire Restoration movement.

Even though this hill had a vital role in the restoration of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, its environs would be abandoned as members moved west to avoid mounting persecutions. Once again, the hill would assume a role of relative

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<sup>2</sup> Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, trans. Willard R. Trask (New York: Harcourt, Brace, & World, Inc., 1959), 26.

<sup>3</sup> According to Richard H. Jackson, “places associated with a perceived supernatural event...can be characterized as mystico-religious sites.” See Jackson, “Perception of Sacred Space,” 95.

<sup>4</sup> Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, 27.

obscurity in the Manchester-Palmyra communal setting. However, members whose lives were forever changed by the coming forth of the Book of Mormon could not forget this hill that once held such a treasure, and was vitally connected with their theological origins. The teachings of many nineteenth century Church leaders helped to further define the hill as sacred space<sup>5</sup> and ensured that it would become forever emblazoned in their minds as a holy place, a veritable Sinai. Some of the most intriguing of these early teachings are those that describe a cave in Cumorah. Analyzing these cave accounts illuminates how Brigham Young, Wilford Woodruff, Heber C. Kimball and others viewed the hill, and used it to teach certain gospel principles. Likewise, insights from early members' memoirs and journals from this time period reveal the important role the Hill Cumorah played in their theology. As a result of Joseph Smith's experiences at the hill, and perhaps, also, as a result of these teachings, many Latter-day Saints made the Hill Cumorah a key destination when they traveled back to the birthplace of their religion. Notables such as George Q. Cannon in 1873, and Susa Young Gates in 1901, leave interesting accounts of their first visit to the Hill Cumorah.<sup>6</sup>

While local citizens living in the vicinity of the hill where "Mormonism" got its start may have hoped that "Mormonism" would completely fade away, this new religious society took just the opposite course. In the West, the Church increased in numbers, strength and prosperity and with the passage of years a grateful membership began to look back towards the birthplace of their religion in hopes of purchasing their precious

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<sup>5</sup> Jackson, "Perception of Sacred Space," 94. Jackson states "Sacred space does not exist naturally, but is assigned sanctity as man defines, limits and characterizes it through his culture, experience and goals."

<sup>6</sup> George Q. Cannon, "The Hill Cumorah," *Juvenile Instructor* 8, no. 15, (5 July 1873), 108, and, Susa Young Gates, "A Visit to the Hill Cumorah," *Young Woman's Journal* 12, no. 1, January (1901), 21-22.

homelands.<sup>7</sup> In 1907, the Church was able to purchase the hundred-acre Joseph Smith, Sr. farm in Manchester, New York. This acquisition made it possible to do some advance planning relative to the actual occupancy of the site. Although the initial Saints who returned as residents to the hearth of “Mormonism” were too often treated with contempt by the community, they were successful in opening doors previously closed to the Church. Gradually, these doors opened wide enough to also allow for the purchase of the hill that gave birth to the “keystone” of the Latter-day Saint faith.<sup>8</sup> With a substantial portion of the hill in the possession of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints its members could visit a place vitally connected with their Church’s origin without fear of being run off by ill-disposed tenant farmers, as had often been the case previously.<sup>9</sup>

Due to the efforts of a few early stalwarts living on the Joseph Smith Farm, the local citizens learned to tolerate the Latter-day Saints. Tolerance eventually grew into acceptance, and with that came a change of climate that allowed the Church to acquire the essential area of the Hill Cumorah with its associated acreage.<sup>10</sup> The appearance was beautified by an extensive reforestation project in an attempt to restore the site to its pristine state of earlier days.<sup>11</sup> On 21 July 1935, a monument was placed on its summit to announce to all passersby that something significant transpired there, and a Bureau of Information erected in 1936 introduced the message of the record that had lain unheralded in that repository for hundreds of years. By 1937, a pageant was being

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<sup>7</sup> Jackson, "Perception of Sacred Space," 95.

<sup>8</sup> The principal portion of the Hill Cumorah itself was purchased in two different parcels. The first, smaller portion of the hill, was purchased in 1923, and the rest in 1928. Other purchases have subsequently been made to secure the integrity of the hill, “Hill Cumorah” Files, Real Estate Department of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah.

<sup>9</sup> Willard W. Bean, Letter, 9 February 1925, General Office Files, Presiding Bishopric, LDS Church Archives, as extracted by Church Archives staff.

<sup>10</sup> Willard W. Bean, "Change of Sentiment," *The Improvement Era* 31, no. 8 (June, 1928), 682-84.

<sup>11</sup> "Mormonism," *Christian Register*, 24 September 1831 states that in 1831 the hill was “profusely covered to the top with Beech, Maple, Bass, and Whitewood—the northern extremity is quite bare of trees.”

performed on its slopes, commemorating the story of the Book of Mormon. In the nineteenth century and forepart of the twentieth, this hill had been associated with a religion that the local residents viewed as an embarrassment. As time passed, however, it would become something that many viewed as an asset to the community.<sup>12</sup>

Today, for a variety of reasons, native Palmyrans welcome members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. The surrounding towns benefit economically, culturally and even religiously<sup>13</sup> from a steady flow of persons streaming through to see the sites associated with early "Mormonism." One of the foremost locations is quite naturally the Hill Cumorah.<sup>14</sup> The Hill Cumorah pageant alone attracts over a hundred thousand people each year.<sup>15</sup> In addition, a temple now adorns a spacious location just a few miles north of the hill where angels once descended to help usher in a new dispensation.

Just like every other religious community, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints regards certain places as sacred. These places became sacred to them for a variety of reasons. One scholar wrote:

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<sup>12</sup> 22 March 1934 correspondence from Willard Bean to the Presiding Bishopric stated how the local residents enjoyed the yearly celebrations that were held at the Hill Cumorah. They would open up their homes at cut-rate prices and praise the Latter-day Saints after they were gone. Local newspaper columns were also positive towards the Church. Letter in General Office Files, Presiding Bishopric, LDS Church Archives. See also, Gerald Argetsinger, "Palmyra: A Look at 40 Years of Pageant," *The Ensign*, December 1977, 70-71.

<sup>13</sup> Klaus D. Gurgel performed a study and found that of the pageant goers, 37% were Latter-day Saint, almost 1/3 were Protestant, and 1/3 were Catholic, see Klaus D. Gurgel, "God's Drumlin: Hill Cumorah in the Religious Geography of Mormonism" (paper presented at the 70th Annual Meeting of the Association of American Geographers, Special Session: Geography of Contemporary Religions, Seattle, April 28-May 1, 1974). He did another study in Syracuse, New York and found that 20% of recent converts to the Latter-day Saint faith (last ten years) in his study "were motivated to join The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints after they had seen the Hill Cumorah Pageant" Klaus D. Gurgel, "Salt City Saints: A Historical Geography of Mormonism in Syracuse," (Syracuse: Department of Geography, Syracuse University, 1973).

<sup>14</sup> Richard H. Jackson, "Mormon Pilgrimage and Tourism," *Annals of Tourism Research* 19, no. 1 (1992), 119.

<sup>15</sup> Jackson, "Mormon Pilgrimage and Tourism," 111.

Three broad categories of sacred space can be recognized on the reasons for assigning sanctity to them. Mystico-religious space is associated with religious or other experiences inexplicably through conventional means. Homelands are sacred space because they represent the roots of each individual, family or people. Historical sacred spaces represent sites which have been assigned sanctity as a result of an event occurring there.<sup>16</sup>

The Hill Cumorah in Western New York qualifies as sacred space by all three categories.

This study will document and explore pertinent historical background and salient events associated with the Latter-day Saint sacred space called the Hill Cumorah and resultant ramifications for The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and its membership in the present era.

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<sup>16</sup> Jackson, "Perception of Sacred Space," 95.

## Chapter 1

### BACKGROUND INFORMATION

“Man becomes aware of the sacred because it manifests itself, shows itself, as something wholly different from the profane.”<sup>1</sup> To Latter-day Saints, the Hill Cumorah is an example of a place that has become different from its surrounding area. The following briefly outlines the pertinent information regarding the land that contains the hill held in reverence by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

#### **Physical Description**

Although the state of New York is currently one of the most eastern of the United States, in the early colonial days, western New York was still Indian territory and considered the western frontier of that day. One of the earliest descriptions of this frontier, which contained the Hill Cumorah, comes from Lewis Evans, a geographer and mapmaker of the early 18<sup>th</sup> Century. After observing the terrain that was occupied by the Iroquois Indians that included western New York, he wrote:

To look from these Hills into the lower Lands, is but, as it were, into an Ocean of Woods, swelled and deprest [sic] here and there by little Inequalities, not to be distinguished, one Part from another, any more than the Waves of the real Ocean.

The Uniformity of these Mountains, tho' debarring us of an Advantage in this Respect, makes some Amends in another. They are very regular in their Courses, and confine the Creeks and Rivers that run between; and if we know where the Gaps are, that let through these Streams, we are not at a Loss to lay down their most considerable Inflections.<sup>2</sup>

From a higher vantage point, the land that contains the Hill Cumorah does, indeed, appear to be filled with “waves.” These waves, of course, are the hills of upstate New

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<sup>1</sup> Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, 11.

<sup>2</sup> Lewis Evans, *Geographical, Historical, Political, Philosophical and Mechanical Essays. The First, Containing an Analysis of a General Map of the Middle British Colonies in America; and of the Country of the Confederate Indians: A Description of the Face of the Country; the Boundaries of the Confederates; Several Rivers and Lakes Contained Therein.* (Philadelphia: B. Franklin, and D. Hall, 1755), 5-6.



York. These hills, technically referred to as *drumlins*, are “regular in their courses” in that almost all of their long axes run in a north/south direction. The prevailing theory for this phenomenon is that drumlins are a result of glacial movement across the surface of the earth. When the glacier came in contact with a friction point, it deposited the sand, gravel, clay, and other debris along behind the friction point.<sup>3</sup>

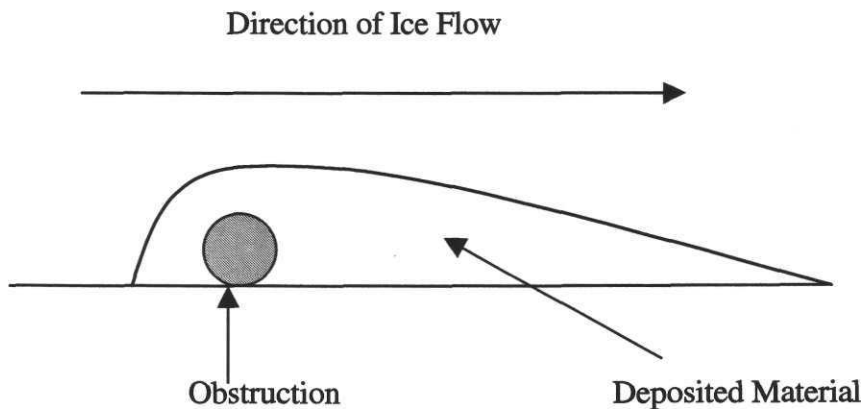


Figure 1. Diagram of drumlin formation

In further describing drumlins, one geology text states the following:

Individual drumlins come in all sizes. Mostly they are highly elongated, stretching parallel with the direction of ice movement for 3 km or more. They may be over 100 m or less than 10 m in height. Generally they have rather blunt rounded up-glacier ends and more elongated ‘tails’.... Quite often drumlins exist in dense ‘swarms’, showing that they probably grow in response to a particular set of subglacial environmental conditions.<sup>4</sup>

It is within these “swarms” of drumlins that we find the Hill Cumorah. The area between Rochester and Syracuse contains around 10,000 drumlins, with about 1,000 in

<sup>3</sup> Richard H. Jackson, "Hill Cumorah," in *Historical Atlas of Mormonism*, ed. Donald Q. Cannon, S. Kent Brown, Richard H. Jackson (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1994), 8. When the glacier retreats, it is smaller and lighter and, therefore, melts around the drumlins it had previously formed rather than scraping or flattening them down, Personal Interview with Dr. James L. Baer, emeritus professor of Geology, Brigham Young University, 13 August 2002.

<sup>4</sup> Brian S. John, *The Ice Age: Past and Present* (London: William Collins Sons & Co Ltd., 1977), 73.

the Palmyra vicinity alone, making it one of the largest drumlin fields in the world.<sup>5</sup> A geo-hydrology report in the Church's Real Estate Department gives further information regarding this specific drumlin field:

Hill Cumorah and the surrounding terrain are remnant deposits of the great ice cap which covered the northern part of North America during the early Quaternary time. Linear shaped hills of clayey and silty alluvium called till because of their ice origin, have been deposited over northern New York State in the form of drumlins. These drumlins are aligned near parallel to magnetic north and vary in height up to as much as 200 feet. Hill Cumorah is one of these being a little over 100 feet high (elevation 700 feet above mean sea level), and surrounded by moderately sloping small valleys with elevations ranging from 570-580 feet. The unconsolidated sediments of silt, clay, sand and gravel with interspersed boulders, comprising the valley bottom and slopes, and the drumlins are a mantle approximately 40-200 feet thick. The larger number includes the higher and thicker section of the drumlins. The ancient topography of the underlying bedrock is moderate within the Hill Cumorah part of Ontario County, but the southern and especially southwestern part of the county is comprised of many ancient ravines and ridges... Apparently, the drumlins represent the filling of crevasses within the ice mass which were aligned in the direction of ice movement. After the confining ice melted away, the drumlins slumped along their sides, with the northerly ends to be the last to have their supports removed, and thus, today the steeper slopes.<sup>6</sup>

The topographical map in the Appendix, page 155 of this work, shows the Hill Cumorah and some of the surrounding drumlins that are part of this particular drumlin field.

As far as the appearance of the Hill Cumorah in the early Eighteenth Century, Oliver Cowdery provided some of the earliest accounts. In 1830, he visited the hill and wrote at least two descriptions. The first, in the July 1835 issue of the *Latter-day Saints' Messenger and Advocate* states:

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<sup>5</sup> P. Jay Fleisher, "Geology of the Wine Country of New York," in *Glacial Geology and Geomorphology of North America*, ed. Penelope M. Hanshaw, *Glacial Geology and Geomorphology of North America* (Washington D.C.: American Geophysical Union, 1989), 29.

<sup>6</sup> Geo-Hydrology Report contained in the "Hill Cumorah" files, file number 505-4907, located in the Real Estate Department of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City. See also, Jackson, "Hill Cumorah," 8. As far as an exact measurement of the height of Cumorah, Larry C. Porter, with the aid of a Global Positioning System, has calculated the height of the peak to be about 117 feet above ground level, see LaMar C. Berrett, ed., *Sacred Places: A Comprehensive Guide to Early LDS Historical Sites*, vol. 2, *New York and Pennsylvania* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 2000), 155.

You are acquainted with the mail road from Palmyra, Wayne county, to Canandaigua, Ontario county, New York, and also as you pass from the former to the latter place, before arriving at the little village of Manchester, say from three to four, or about four miles from Palmyra, you pass a large hill on the east side of the road. Why I say large, is because it is as large perhaps, as any in the country. To a person acquainted with this road a description would be unnecessary, as it is the largest and rises the highest of any on that route. The north end rises quite sudden until it assumes a level with the more southerly extremity, and I think I may say an elevation higher than at the south a short distance, say half or three-fourths of a mile. As you pass toward Canandaigua it lessens gradually until the surface assumes its common level, or is broken by other smaller hills or ridges, water-courses and ravines. I think I am justified in saying that this is the highest hill for some distance round, and I am certain that its appearance, as it rises so suddenly from the plain on the north, must attract the notice of the traveler as he passes by.<sup>7</sup>

A few months later, in October 1835, he again elaborated:

The hill of which I have been speaking, at the time mentioned, presented a varied appearance: the north end rose suddenly from the plain, forming a promontory without timber, but covered with grass. As you passed to the south you soon came to scattering timber, the surface having been cleared by art or by wind; and a short distance further left, you are surrounded with the common forest of the country. It is necessary to observe, that even the part cleared was only occupied for pasturage its steep ascent and narrow summit not admitting the plow of the husbandman, with any degree of ease or profit.<sup>8</sup>

The *Christian Register*, in 1831, corroborates Cowdery's description:

This hill has since been called by some, the *Golden Bible Hill*. The road from Canandaigua to Palmyra runs along its western base, at the northern extremity the hill is quite abrupt and narrow. It runs to the south for half a mile then spreads out into a piece of broad table land, covered with beautiful orchards and wheat fields. On the east, the Canandaigua outlet runs past it on its way to the beautiful village of Vienna in Phelps. It is profusely covered to the top with Beech, Maple, Bass, and Whitewood—the northern extremity is quite bare of trees.<sup>9</sup>

These three accounts are all very similar, especially with their description of the rather barren, northern end of the hill. According to Dr. James L. Baer, emeritus professor of geology at Brigham Young University, this lack of natural forestation is due to the steep

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<sup>7</sup> Oliver Cowdery, *Latter-day Saints' Messenger and Advocate*, July 1835, 1:158.

<sup>8</sup> Cowdery, *Latter-day Saints' Messenger and Advocate*, October 1835, 2:195-196.

<sup>9</sup> "Mormonism," *Christian Register*, 24 September 1831.

angles characteristic of the northern ends of drumlins. The northern exposure that this end of the drumlin receives is also not conducive to the growth of the sub-alpine variety of trees that grows indigenous to the Palmyra-Manchester region.<sup>10</sup>



Figure 2. ca. 1920 photograph from the north ascent of Cumorah, looking north. Palmyra Bean Packer Collection, Provo, Utah.

The hill lies about 3.0 miles southeast of the Joseph Smith, Sr., farm, and 4.0 miles south of the village of Palmyra (road distance). When traveling north from Canandaigua to Palmyra on New York State Highway 21 (also known as Canandaigua Road) the hill is on the east side.<sup>11</sup>

### **Pre-Colonial and Colonial Era**

After Moroni buried the gold plates in the side of the drumlin called Cumorah, it, and its hidden record, became lost to the knowledge of humankind. The first human

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<sup>10</sup> James L. Baer, Personal Interview, 13 August 2002. Dr. Baer explained that the trees mentioned in the *Christian Register* are known as “sub-alpine” and struggle to grow on the steep, northern exposed ends of drumlins in that area, but thrive on the other, more lenient slopes.

<sup>11</sup> Larry C. Porter, "A Study of the Origins of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints in the States of New York and Pennsylvania, 1816-1831" (Ph.D. diss., Brigham Young University, 1971), 24-5.

contact with the hill after Moroni seems to be that of the Native Americans that assumed control of the area prior to the colonization of America. This region of western New York containing the Hill Cumorah was formerly known as “Genesee Country,” and when the first Dutch settlers arrived in this area in 1609, it was controlled by the Seneca tribe of Indians.<sup>12</sup> The Seneca tribe was the strongest of several Indian nations that formed an alliance or league sometimes referred to as the Iroquois confederacy.<sup>13</sup> The other tribes included in this alliance were the Mohawks, Oneidas, Onondagas, Cayugas, and later, the Tuscaroras. Together they dominated the New York area and formed a type of chain across the central part of New York with each tribe making up a link.<sup>14</sup>

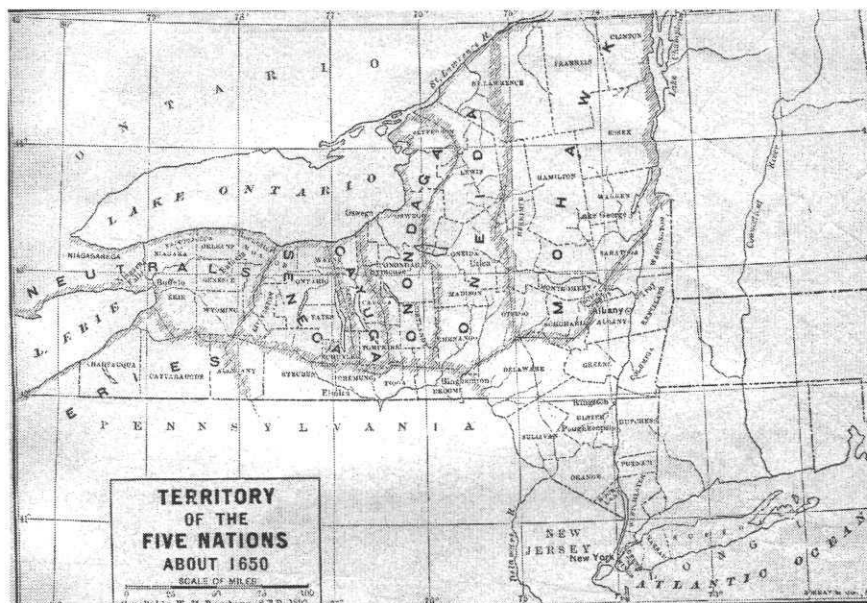


Figure 3. Map of the Iroquois Nation, *Harper's Atlas of American History*, 11.

<sup>12</sup> E.W. Vanderhoof, *Historical Sketches of Western New York* (New York: AMS Press, 1907), 1.

<sup>13</sup> George W. Cowles, *Landmarks of Wayne County, New York* (Syracuse: D. Mason & Company, 1895), 19, and W.H. McIntosh, *History of Ontario Co., New York* (Philadelphia: Everts, Ensign & Everts, 1876), 9, and Orsamus Turner, *History of the Pioneer Settlement of Phelps and Gorham's Purchase and Morris' Reserve* (Rochester: William Alling, 1851), 109. See also, Willard W. Bean, *A.B.C. History of Palmyra and the Beginning of "Mormonism"* (Palmyra: Palmyra Courier CO., Inc., 1938), 5.

<sup>14</sup> Vanderhoof, *Historical Sketches of Western New York*, 1, see also, *Harper's Atlas of American History* (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1920), 6,11,13.

These Indians, specifically the Seneca tribe that inhabited the land that now makes up Wayne and Ontario counties of New York, were intimately connected to the hills that made up their territory. In fact, the Seneca tribe's original title was the "Great Hill People" due to the legend that they claim explains their origination. The legend states:

The base of Genundewah Mountain, as it is usually called, they believed to have been encircled, when their nation was in its infancy, by a huge serpent, so vast in proportions as to coil himself entirely around the mountain. The head and tail of the monster united at the gateway of the path leading to and from the steep summit, and there were few who attempted to pass that escaped his voracious jaws. Thus environed, a long time elapsed, during which the people were not only besieged and reduced in numbers, but made to suffer from the poisonous breath of the reptile. Finally, their torment being beyond endurance, the Indians resolved to attempt a sally. Armed with such weapons as were at hand, they rushed down the hill towards the dreaded portal, where all were seized and swallowed with the exception of two children, who somehow contrived to overleap this fearful line of circumvallation, and so avoid the terrible fate of the tribe. These children, thus spared and orphanized, were reserved for a high destiny,—the destruction of the serpent. Mysteriously the information was imparted how this object could be accomplished. Direction was given to form a bow from a specified kind of willow, and an arrow from the same material. The barb of the arrow was to be dipped in poison and shot obliquely, to allow of penetration beneath the scales. Obeying divine injunction, the death of the serpent was effected. As the deadly arrow penetrated the skin, the huge monster was seized with violent convulsions. Uncoiled from around the mountain, and writhing in the most frightful contortions, the reptile threw up the heads of the people he had devoured, and rolled down the steep into the lake, sweeping down the timber in his course....From these two survivors sprang the new race of Senecas.<sup>15</sup>

While this well known Genundewah hill is at the head of Canandaigua Lake, it is probably safe to assume that this same group of Indians were aware of the Hill Cumorah just a few miles north. John D. Giles, director of the Hill Cumorah Bureau of Information in the 1940's, and one who did considerable research on the Hill Cumorah wrote about the connection between the Senecas and the Hill Cumorah:

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<sup>15</sup> McIntosh, *History of Ontario Co., New York*, 9.

It is of more than ordinary interest, if not of real significance, that Hill Cumorah is in the heart of the lands of the League of the Iroquois, the Six Nations, with its federal system of government that made it not only the most influential of all Indian groups, but that the Hill is in the heart of the lands of the Senecas, most powerful and influential of the Six nations in the League of the Iroquois. To what purpose if any, early Senecas put the Hill, with its overview of surrounding country, is not known, but it seems reasonable to believe that, although it was not near any of the larger Indian villages it served as a lookout in times of trouble.

One of the old Indian Trails which became the route of the first road of the white man in this area, from Canandaigua Lake, two miles south of the Hill to Lake Ontario twenty-two miles north passing the “nose” of the Hill Cumorah.

The finding of Indian arrow and spear heads in great quantities on the slopes of the Hill and in the fields surrounding it indicates that long after the great battle in which the Nephites were annihilated Hill Cumorah has been an important battle ground.<sup>16</sup>

Willard Bean's<sup>17</sup> experience coincides with Giles' conclusion as he found many arrowheads and artifacts as he visited and worked on the Hill Cumorah in the early 1900's. Some of these are shown below.

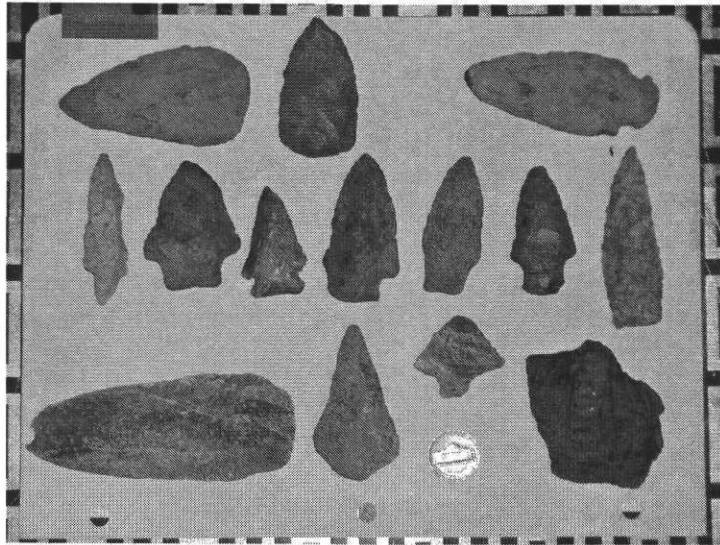


Figure 4. Collection of arrowheads found at or near the Hill Cumorah, Palmyra Bean Packer Collection.

<sup>16</sup> John D. Giles personal writings, in *John Davis Giles Collection* (LDS Church Archives, Salt Lake City), Box 6, reel 5, folder 12, original spelling and punctuation retained. The writer has access to a number of arrowheads found on and around the slopes of the Hill Cumorah that were found in the early 1900's (see visual), courtesy of the Palmyra Bean Packer Collection, Provo, Utah. Alvin P. Bean corroborates the finding of these arrowheads as he is one that personally found many on and around the hill in the 1920's-30's, Personal Interview, Orem, Utah, 24 October 2002.

<sup>17</sup> Willard Washington Bean was the caretaker of the Joseph Smith farm from 1915-1939.

## Phelps/Gorham Purchase

According to the Treaty of 1763, the land upon which the Hill Cumorah stood was still part of Indian territory, although title to the land had long been in dispute by the English, French, and the Dutch who each granted it out to different colonists.<sup>18</sup> After the War of Independence, both the Massachusetts and New York colonies laid claim to the Genesee Country (western New York including the Finger Lakes region). On 16 December 1786, representatives of both colonies met at Hartford, Connecticut to work out an agreement over the disputed land. Part of the settlement “gave to New York the sovereignty of all the disputed territory within her chartered limits, at the same time giving Massachusetts title in the soil, or the right to buy the soil from the Indians, who were then in actual possession.”<sup>19</sup> This gave Massachusetts the right to sell the land after which it would revert back to the control of the colony of New York.<sup>20</sup> Massachusetts then sold this pre-emption right to all six million acres to two men named Oliver Phelps and Nathaniel Gorham for \$1,000,000.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> *Harper's Atlas of American History*, 16. See also, Vanderhoof, *Historical Sketches of Western New York*, 7, and Cowles, *Landmarks of Wayne County, New York*, 15, and Turner, *History of the Pioneer Settlement of Phelps and Gorham's Purchase and Morris' Reserve*, 105.

<sup>19</sup> Cowles, *Landmarks of Wayne County, New York*, 15.

<sup>20</sup> Bean, *A.B.C. History of Palmyra and the Beginning of "Mormonism"*, 6.

<sup>21</sup> Cowles, *Landmarks of Wayne County, New York*, 18, also Child, ed., *Gazetteer and Business Directory of Ontario County, N.Y. for 1867-8*, 29-30.



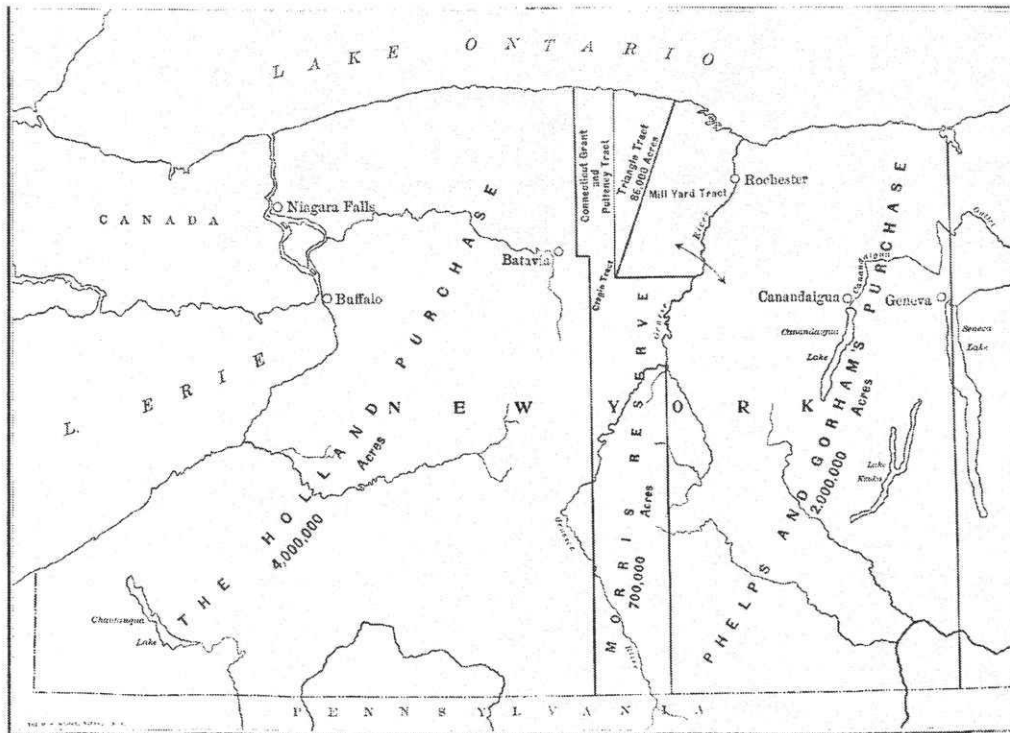


Figure 5. Map of Phelps and Gorham Purchase, Vanderhoof, *Historical Sketches of Western New York*, 233.

Although Phelps and Gorham had purchased the pre-emption rights they still had to officially purchase the land from the current inhabitants, the Iroquois, namely Seneca, Indians.<sup>22</sup> Oliver Phelps was put in charge of negotiating with the Indians and a meeting was scheduled with them at Kanadesaga, which is now the city of Geneva.<sup>23</sup> On July 4, 1788, Phelps and his party met with a group of Indian chiefs headed by Red Jacket, representing the Senecas, Oneidas, and Tuscaroras whose lands were the principal object of the purchase.<sup>24</sup> After several days of bargaining the Indian chiefs agreed to sell

<sup>22</sup> Cowles, *Landmarks of Wayne County, New York*, 20.

<sup>23</sup> McIntosh, *History of Ontario Co., New York*, 16.

<sup>24</sup> McIntosh, *History of Ontario Co., New York*, 13.

2,600,000 of the 6,000,000 acres to Phelps and Gorham for the price of \$5,000 down and an annual payment of \$500 forevermore.<sup>25</sup>

In 1789, Oliver Phelps opened the first official land office in Canandaigua and began dividing the land into townships and ranges.<sup>26</sup> Ontario County, which includes Manchester township where the Hill Cumorah lies, was formed from Montgomery County in 1789<sup>27</sup> (Manchester township was not organized until March 31, 1821). From the time the land office was opened, settlers came in rapidly to this new area, attracted by the beautiful country and fertile soil.<sup>28</sup>

The early settlers to Ontario County were mostly from New England. According to one source, three fourths of all the men were former Revolutionary War soldiers.<sup>29</sup> Some of these men had previous knowledge of the Genessee country as they had been with General Sullivan on his 1779 campaign through the area to quell hostile Indian activity. While there, they had taken note of the fertility and beauty of the Indian lands they traveled through, and were amongst some of the first settlers when the land opened up for settling.<sup>30</sup> This 2,600,000 acres of land purchased by Oliver Phelps and Nathaniel

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<sup>25</sup> Cowles, *Landmarks of Wayne County, New York*, 20, according to Cowles, this equaled about a half cent an acre. See also Child, ed., *Gazetteer and Business Directory of Ontario County, N.Y. for 1867-8*, 29-30, also Bean, *A.B.C. History of Palmyra and the Beginning of "Mormonism"*, 6.

<sup>26</sup> McIntosh, *History of Ontario Co., New York*, 17.

<sup>27</sup> Horatio Gates Spafford, *A Gazetteer of the State of New York* (Albany: H.C. Southwick, 1813), 91, Child's *Gazetteer* gives the exact date as 27 January 1879, see Child, ed., *Gazetteer and Business Directory of Ontario County, N.Y. For 1867-8*, 21,29-30.

<sup>28</sup> Child, ed., *Gazetteer and Business Directory of Ontario County, N.Y. for 1867-8*, 21,29-30. Cowles claims that many soldiers who accompanied General Sullivan on his campaign through western New York in 1779 to quiet Indian troubles, saw this territory as "the Canaan of the wilderness," and helped to portray the Genessee country as a favorable place to homestead to those in the colonies, see Cowles, *Landmarks of Wayne County, New York*, 14-15.

<sup>29</sup> Vanderhoof, *Historical Sketches of Western New York*, 10.

<sup>30</sup> Cowles, *Landmarks of Wayne County, New York*, 14-15. Bean states that another group of settlers into the northern part of Ontario County was the group led by Jonathan Swift and John Jenkins from the Wyoming Valley of Pennsylvania, see Bean, *A.B.C. History of Palmyra and the Beginning of "Mormonism"*, 9-11.

Gorham and settled in large part by former Revolutionary War veterans included the hill  
out of which the Prophet Joseph Smith would remove the gold plates in 1827.

## Chapter 2

### JOSEPH SMITH, JR. YEARS

One of the main factors contributing to the creation of sacred space is the occurrence at that site of things perceived by a certain group as being religious or mystical.<sup>1</sup> Joseph Smith's visits to the Hill Cumorah, in the minds of Latter-day Saints, epitomize religious or mystical experiences. It is these experiences that first begin to set the Hill Cumorah apart as a sacred place.

#### **The Arrival of Joseph Smith, Jr.**

The timing of the settlement of western New York seems to be providential. It was only twenty-seven years after the first settlers entered this pristine wilderness area that Joseph Smith, Sr. brought his family into the area in which Joseph Smith, Jr. would receive the gold plates. By 1816, Joseph Sr. had experienced three successive years of crop failure in Vermont. According to Lucy Mack Smith, this prompted him to find a suitable place for his family to make a new start:

The first year our crops failed and we bought our bread with the proceeds of the orchard and our own industry the 2<sup>nd</sup> year they failed again In the ensuing spring Mr. Smith said that he would plant once more on this farm and if he did not succeed better he would go to New York where the farmers raised wheat in abundance This year was like the preceding seasons vegetation was blighted by untimely frost which well nigh produced a famine. My husband now decided upon going to New York.<sup>2</sup>

From a Latter-day Saint perspective, perhaps these crop failures occurred in part, at least, to help get the future prophet in the correct geographical location. The Smiths first located in Palmyra village in 1816 but by 1819 or 1820 they had constructed a small log home on the outskirts of Palmyra on Stafford Road. It was in the upstairs room of this

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<sup>1</sup> Jackson, "Perception of Sacred Space," 95.

<sup>2</sup> Lucy Mack Smith, "The History of Lucy Smith ca. 1845," in Archives of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah. Original spelling and punctuation retained.

log home that the angel Moroni appeared to Joseph Smith and made known to him the record that was lying in a hill just a few miles away.<sup>3</sup> Since the Smith farm was only about three miles northwest of the hill, it seems probable that Joseph Smith would have been familiar with it. In Oliver Cowdery's October 1835 description of the hill he said that it was next to the mail road, and that when Joseph went to the hill the capstone which covered the box containing the plates was only partially visible above ground so as not to be noticeable to the normal "passer by" thereby raising their curiosity.<sup>4</sup> One wonders how many passersby may have climbed the hill prior to Joseph Smith simply to get a view from the top.

### **The Classroom Called Cumorah**

In the spring of 1820, Joseph experienced the First Vision in the grove near their log home on Stafford Road. Part of the instruction he received in that glorious vision was that he "continue as [he] was until further directed" (JS-H 1:26). This "further" direction came three and a half years later by the visitation of the angel Moroni who would be an intimate instructor of the young prophet for at least the rest of that decade.<sup>5</sup> On the evening of 21 September 1823, Moroni appeared three times, giving specific instruction to Joseph relative to his upcoming mission. Part of the instruction included a prophecy that Joseph Smith's name would be had for good and evil among all peoples of the earth

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<sup>3</sup> Berrett, ed., *Sacred Places: A Comprehensive Guide to Early LDS Historical Sites*, 177-78, 195-96.

<sup>4</sup> Cowdery, *Latter-day Saints' Messenger and Advocate*, October 1835, 2:197. An 1852 account also states that the Hill Cumorah was on the old plank road that led from Palmyra to Manchester, see Orsamus Turner, *History of the Pioneer Settlement of Phelps & Gorham's Purchase, and Morris' Reserve*, 213. Lucy Mack Smith's 1845 manuscript also says that the reason Joseph Smith set the plates down was in order to "cover up the box least some one should come along and take away whatever else might be deposited there," Smith, "The History of Lucy Smith ca. 1845."

<sup>5</sup> For more information on Moroni's visits to Joseph Smith, Jr., see H. Donl Peterson, "Moroni: Joseph Smith's Teacher," in *Regional Studies in Latter-Day Saint Church History*, ed. Larry C. Porter, Milton V. Backman, Jr., Susan Easton Black, *New York* (Provo: Brigham Young University, 1992), and Alexander L. Baugh, "Parting the Veil: The Visions of Joseph Smith," *B.Y.U. Studies* 38, no. 1 (1999), 23-69.

(JS-H 1:33). One of the main reasons for this was what lay hidden in a nearby hill.

According to Moroni, a record that included an account of the early inhabitants of this hemisphere as well as the fullness of the gospel of Jesus Christ was buried in a hill just a few miles to the southeast (JS-H 1:34). Indeed, this record would prove to be a major source of both praise and persecution to the young prophet. During his last visit that night, Moroni added a vital caution. Joseph Smith's record states that Moroni's warning was as follows:

Satan would try to tempt me (in consequence of the indigent circumstances of my father's family), to get the plates for the purpose of getting rich. This he forbade me, saying that I must have no other object in view in getting the plates but to glorify God, and must not be influenced by any other motive than that of building his kingdom; otherwise I could not get them (JS-H 1:46).

This instruction was painfully emphasized the following day. The next morning, the angel appeared to him yet a fourth time, rehearsed his previous message, and commanded him to tell his father. Joseph did so and was told to follow the instructions of the angel and seek out the plates (JS-H 1:49-50). It is that day, 22 September 1823, that the seventeen year-old Joseph made his first historic trip to the "classroom" called Cumorah. Joseph Smith's own record of this event is as follows:

Convenient to the village of Manchester, Ontario County, New York, stands a hill of considerable size, and the most elevated of any in the neighborhood. On the west side of this hill, not far from the top, under a stone of considerable size, lay the plates, deposited in a stone box. This stone was thick and rounding in the middle on the upper side, and thinner towards the edges, so that the middle part of it was visible above the ground, but the edge all around was covered with earth. Having removed the earth, I obtained a lever, which I got fixed under the edge of the stone, and with a little exertion raised it up. I looked in, and there indeed did I behold the plates, the Urim and Thummim, and the breastplate, as stated by the messenger. The box in which they lay was formed by laying stones together in some kind of cement. In the bottom of the box were laid two stones crossways of the box, and on these stones lay the plates and the other things with them. I made an attempt to take them out, but was forbidden by the messenger, and was again informed that the time for bringing them forth had not yet arrived (JS-H 1:51-3).

Oliver Cowdery gives us further insight into this first visit to Cumorah, and why Joseph Smith was forbidden to remove the plates at that time. In the *Latter-day Saints' Messenger and Advocate*, he recorded that as Joseph walked to the hill

it seemed as though two invisible powers were influencing, or striving to influence his mind: one with the reflection that if he obtained the object of his pursuit, it would be through the mercy and condescension of the Lord, and that every act of performance to it, must be in strict accordance with the instructions of the personage who communicated the intelligence to him first; and the other with the tho'ts [sic] and reflections like those previously mentioned, contrasting his former and present circumstances in life with those to come. That previous instructions recorded on the sacred page—pray always—which was expressly impressed upon him, was at length entirely forgotten, and...a fixed determination to obtain and aggrandize himself, occupied his mind when he arrived at the place where the record was found.<sup>6</sup>

Cowdery went on to explain that upon seeing the sacred contents in the box, Joseph reached in and tried to remove them. Three times he attempted to remove them each time being repelled by progressively stronger shocks that seemed to drain his natural strength. In frustration, Joseph cried out, "Why can I not obtain this book?" At that instant the angel Moroni appeared again and answered, "Because you have not kept the commandments of the Lord."<sup>7</sup> Upon hearing this rebuke, Oliver said:

All the former instructions, the great intelligence concerning Israel and the last days, were brought to his mind,...but he had failed to remember the great end for which they [the gold plates] had been kept and in consequence could not have power to take them into his possession and bear them away.<sup>8</sup>

Joseph Smith's own record of this, as contained in his 1832 account of his First Vision and subsequent events reads as follows:

I immediately went to the place and found where the plates was deposited as the angel of the lord had commanded me and straightway made three attempts to get them and then being exceedingly frightened I supposed it had been a dream of

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<sup>6</sup> Cowdery, *Latter-day Saints' Messenger and Advocate*, July 1835, 1:157-58.

<sup>7</sup> Cowdery, *Latter-day Saints' Messenger and Advocate*, October 1835, 2:198.

<sup>8</sup> Cowdery, *Latter-day Saints' Messenger and Advocate*, October 1835, 2:198.

Vision but when I considred I knew that it was not therefore I cried unto the Lord in the agony of my soul why can I not obtain them behold the angel appeared unto me again and said unto me you have not kept the commandments of the Lord which I gave unto you therefore you cannot now obtain them for the time is not yet fulfilled therefore thou was left unto temptation that thou mightest be made acquainted with the power of the advisory therefore repent and call on the Lord thou shalt be forgiven and in his own due time thou shalt obtain them [p. 4] for now I had been tempted of the advisory and saught the Plates to obtain riches and kept not the commandment that I should have an eye single to the glory of God therefore I was chastened and saught diligently to obtain the plates and obtained them not until I was twenty one years of age.<sup>9</sup>

These records give us precious insight into what Joseph Smith was taught on his first day of class at Cumorah. The learning came out of a predicament that Joseph found himself in, namely that he had not heeded the counsel of God as he had been commanded. Joseph's response to this predicament, although somewhat self inflicted, serves to illustrate the greatness of the Prophet's soul. Rather than taking offense because he had been reprimanded, he knelt down and began to pray.<sup>10</sup> As he did so, "the glory of the Lord shone round about and rested upon him..." and "Joseph stood gazing and admiring." At this point, Moroni, apparently wanting to teach by contrast, showed Joseph another vision, this time of "the prince of darkness, surrounded by his innumerable train of associates."<sup>11</sup> Moroni explained:

All this is shown, the good and the evil, the holy and the impure, the glory of God and the power of darkness, that you may know hereafter the two powers and never be influenced or overcome by that wicked one. Behold, whatever entices and leads to good and to do good, is of God, and whatever does not is of that wicked one: It is he that fills the hearts of men with evil, to walk in darkness and blaspheme God; and you may learn from hence forth, that his ways are to destruction, but the way of holiness is peace and rest.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Dean C. Jessee, ed., *The Papers of Joseph Smith*, vol. 1 (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1989),

8. Original spelling and punctuation retained.

<sup>10</sup> Peterson, "Moroni: Joseph Smith's Teacher," 54.

<sup>11</sup> Cowdery, *Latter-day Saints' Messenger and Advocate*, October 1835, 2:198.

<sup>12</sup> Cowder, *Latter-day Saints' Messenger and Advocate*, October 1835, 2:198.



Lucy Mack Smith, also commenting on this experience, and specifically, the effect that it had on her son, wrote:

While Joseph remained here, the angel showed him, by contrast, the difference between good and evil, and likewise the consequences of both obedience and disobedience to the commandments of God, *in such a striking manner, that the impression was always vivid in his memory until the very end of his days*; long prior to his death he remarked, that “ever afterwards he was willing to keep the commandments of God.”<sup>13</sup>

These contemporary accounts of what occurred on Cumorah give us valuable insight into what and how the Lord was instructing his future prophet. Joseph was taught, in a painful and memorable way, the necessity of keeping his eye single to the glory of God, and he had a year to think about it and let the events sink deeply into his soul. He also learned something on Cumorah that he would later translate from the gold plates. Moroni said that part of the reason he showed the contrasting visions of good versus evil to Joseph was to show “whatever entices and leads to good and to do good, is of God, and whatever does not is of that wicked one.” To students of the Book of Mormon it should be readily apparent that Moroni had recorded this same principle on the gold plates some 1400 years earlier (see Moroni 7:12-13). As a result, Joseph, even before translating the plates, learned how to plainly judge between good and evil.

Superficially, this first visit may appear to have been a failure in that Joseph did not obtain the plates, but below the surface, this first meeting at Cumorah was foundational for the Prophet’s future mission. Oliver Cowdery, perhaps, best summarizes

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<sup>13</sup> Lucy Smith, *Biographical Sketches of Joseph Smith the Prophet* (Liverpool: S.W. Richards, 1853), 83, italics added. This book is an 1853 edition of Lucy Mack Smith’s history of the Prophet Joseph Smith taken from one of the earliest manuscripts of Lucy’s history. Two editions of Lucy Smith’s history that provide a critical analysis of the text are, Lucy Mack Smith, *The Revised and Enhanced History of Joseph Smith by His Mother*, ed. Scot Facer Proctor and Maurine Jensen Proctor (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, Inc., 1996), and *Lucy’s Book: A Critical Edition of Lucy Mack Smith’s Family Memoir*, ed. Lavina Fielding Anderson (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2001).

this first visit to Cumorah. After citing the events associated with Joseph's first visit, he wrote:

In this, which occasioned a failure to obtain, at that time, the record, do not understand me to attach blame to our brother; he was young, and his mind easily turned from correct principles, unless he could be favored with a certain round of experience. And yet, while young, untraditionated [sic] and untaught in the systems of the world, he was in a situation to be lead into the great work of God, and be qualified to perform it in due time.<sup>14</sup>

Upon reviewing the events associated with this first visit, it becomes apparent that Joseph Smith was entering a "certain round of experience" that would eventually prepare him to begin and finish the work that God had for him.

#### **The First Annual Visit, 22 September 1824**

At the end of this first experience at Cumorah, Joseph Smith was told by Moroni to return to that place in precisely one year and that he (Moroni) would there meet with him and continue to do so until the time came for Joseph to obtain the plates (JS-H 1:53). These "interviews" at the Hill Cumorah would continue for the next four years, providing Joseph with more valuable instructions (JS-H 1:54).<sup>15</sup>

September 22, 1824 arrived with what must have been a great deal of excitement. Joseph Smith's mother, Lucy Mack Smith, gives us the best details of what transpired during this second tutorial experience. According to her, Joseph supposed "at this time that the only thing required, in order to possess them until the time for their translation was to be able to keep the commandments of God—and he firmly believed he could keep every commandment which had been given him." He, therefore, returned to the hill fully

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<sup>14</sup> Cowdery, *Latter-day Saints' Messenger and Advocate*, October 1835, 2:197.

<sup>15</sup> Peterson, "Moroni: Joseph Smith's Teacher," 49-70, this chapter is a good source for information on Moroni's visits to Joseph Smith, and what occurred at the Hill Cumorah.

expecting to carry the plates home with him.<sup>16</sup> When he arrived at the hill, he went to the same place, removed the capstone, and took the plates out of the stone box. Up to this point, all seemed to be going well, but as Mother Smith told the story, "...as he was taking them hence, the unhappy thought darted through his mind that probably there was something else in the box besides the plates which would be of some pecuniary advantage to him." Joseph, therefore, laid the plates down "very carefully," in order to cover the box back up. Lucy tells us his motivation for doing so was in case "some one might happen to pass that way and get whatever there might be remaining in it."<sup>17</sup> When he turned back around to pick up the plates, they were gone. Panicking, he knelt down and prayed to the Lord about why the plates were taken from him. Moroni then appeared and told him that once again he had not done as he was commanded. Lucy explained the broken commandment and its consequence as follows:

In a former revelation he had been commanded not to lay the plates down, or put them out of his hands, until he got into the house and deposited them in a chest or trunk having a good lock and key, and contrary to this he had laid them down with the view of securing some fancied or imaginary treasure that remained.

In the moment of excitement, Joseph was overcome by the powers of darkness, and forgot the injunction that was laid upon him.<sup>18</sup>

After realizing his mistake, Joseph continued to converse with Moroni. At some point during their conversation Joseph was permitted to raise the capstone and view the plates again. Upon doing so, he reached in to take the plates again, "but instead of getting them, as he anticipated, he was hurled back upon the ground with great violence.

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<sup>16</sup> Smith, *Biographical Sketches of Joseph Smith the Prophet*, 85. Compare with Smith, "The History of Lucy Smith ca. 1845."

<sup>17</sup> Smith, *Biographical Sketches of Joseph Smith the Prophet*, 85.

<sup>18</sup> Smith, *Biographical Sketches of Joseph Smith the Prophet*, 85-6.

When he recovered, the angel was gone, and he arose and returned to the house, weeping for grief and disappointment.”<sup>19</sup>

### **The Second Annual Visit, 22 September 1825**

Unfortunately, we do not have much information about what exactly transpired at the yearly Cumorah interview of 1825. One insight that might have reference to this year, as well as all the other interviews Joseph had with the angel, prior to his receiving the plates, is from Lucy Mack Smith.<sup>20</sup> She said the following:

In the course of our evening conversations Joseph would give us some of the most amusing recitals which could be imagined he would describe the ancient inhabitants of this continent their dress thier maner of traveling the animals which they rode The cities that were built by them the structure of their buildings with every particular of their mode of warfare their religious worship—as particularly as though he had spent his life with them<sup>21</sup>

While this information was most likely related to Joseph Smith by Moroni, whether or not it was given at the hill is uncertain.

### **The Third Annual Visit, 22 September 1826**

One of the main things to come out of the 1826 visit to the hill of which we have record concerns Joseph Smith’s future marriage to Emma Hale. According to the recollection of Joseph Knight, Sr., on 22 September 1826, Moroni told Joseph that if “he Brot [sic] the right person” the following year, he could have the plates. Knight said that Joseph Smith then queried Moroni:

“Who is the right Person?” The answer was you will know. Then he looked in his glass and found it was Emma Hale, Daughter of old Mr Hail of Pensylvany, a girl that he had seen Before, for he had Bin Down there Before with me....He came to me perhaps in November and worked for me until about the time that he was Married...and I furnished him with a horse and Cutter to go and see his girl

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<sup>19</sup> Smith, *Biographical Sketches of Joseph Smith the Prophet*, 86.

<sup>20</sup> Peterson, "Moroni: Joseph Smith's Teacher," 56.

<sup>21</sup> Smith, "The History of Lucy Smith ca. 1845," see also Smith, *Biographical Sketches of Joseph Smith the Prophet*, 85 (original spelling retained).

Down to Mr. Hails. And soon after this he was Married and Mr Stowel moved him and his wife to his fathers in Palmyra Ontario County.<sup>22</sup>

Although Joseph Smith had been courting Emma Hale, it appears that the confirmation that she was “the right one” for him reportedly came during this yearly visit to the Hill Cumorah.

Orson Pratt recalled that during these four years<sup>23</sup> of interviews Joseph Smith “frequently received instruction from the mouth of the heavenly messenger,”<sup>24</sup> implying that perhaps Moroni met with Joseph in excess of what we have record of. Joseph Smith himself summarized what occurred during those four years of instruction by saying that he learned “what the Lord was going to do, and how and in what manner his kingdom was to be conducted in the last days” (JS-H 1:54). While accurate, these statements do not reveal the intense nature of this education. These four yearly interviews and periodic interaction in between were, to Joseph Smith, as a refiner’s fire. Even by the scanty records we have of these interviews, one can see the strict and sometimes painful tutelage that the Prophet submitted to. By the time Joseph Smith received the plates he had been fine tuned, and was ready for the work that was ahead of him.

### **Joseph Receives the Record, 22 September 1827**

Sometime before the yearly interview that was to take place at Cumorah on 22 September 1827, Joseph had another, unexpected interview with Moroni at the hill. Early in the year of 1827 Joseph had gone to Manchester but returned later than anticipated.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Dean Jessee, "Joseph Knight's Recollection of Early Mormon History," *BYU Studies* 17, no. 1 (1976), 31-32.

<sup>23</sup> Joseph Smith's first visit was in 1823, his first annual visit was in 1824, with three more following in 1825 and 1826, and finally received the plates in 1827. This is a total of four years, with at least five meetings with Moroni at the hill.

<sup>24</sup> Orson Pratt, *A Interesting Account of Several Remarkable Visions and of the Late Discovery of Ancient American Records* (Edinburgh: Ballantyne and Hughes, 1840), 12.

<sup>25</sup> Peterson, "Moroni: Joseph Smith's Teacher," 56.

When questioned by his father as to the reason, Joseph “smiled and said in a calm tone, I have taken the severest chastisement that I have ever had in my life.” Father Smith, supposing someone had mistreated his son, became angry, to which Joseph Smith responded:

Stop, father, stop...it was the angel of the Lord: as I passed by the hill of Cumorah, where the plates are, the angel met me, and said that I had not been engaged enough in the work of the Lord; that the time had come for the Record to be brought forth; and that I must be up and doing, and set myself about the things which God had commanded me to do. But, father, give yourself no uneasiness concerning the reprimand which I have received, for I now know the course that I am to pursue, so all will be well.<sup>26</sup>

Once again, we see that rather than taking offense because of a rebuke, Joseph actually gained a sense of peace or edification because of the manner in which it was given. He seems to have gained a sense of confidence from this occasion that resulted from his knowing more about what was expected of him and how he was going to do it.

By 22 September 1827, Joseph had received sufficient instruction and was prepared sufficiently to receive the plates. Sometime in the early hours of that day, Joseph, with his new wife, Emma, borrowed Joseph Knight’s horse and wagon, and made the three-mile trip to the hill for his final session on Cumorah.<sup>27</sup> Martin Harris explained that while Joseph climbed the hill and met with Moroni, Emma was kneeling in

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<sup>26</sup> Smith, *Biographical Sketches of Joseph Smith the Prophet*, 99. Compare with Smith, "The History of Lucy Smith ca. 1845."

<sup>27</sup> Smith, "The History of Lucy Smith ca. 1845." The Smiths became acquainted with Joseph Knight in 1826 when he and Josiah Stool came to Palmyra to purchase wheat. Lucy Smith’s 1845 manuscript states that, “a couple of gentlemen from Pennsylvania who were desirous of purchasing a quantity of wheat which we had Sown on the place.” The 1853 edition identifies the two men as “the before-named Stool, the other a Mr. Knight.” See Smith, *Biographical Sketches of Joseph Smith the Prophet*, 92-93. Lucy Smith later explains that the reason Knight and Stowell were there on September 21-22, 1827 was “to see how we were managing matters with Mr. Stodard and company.” However, Dr. Larry C. Porter also explains that the fortuitous timing of these two men’s visit at this specific time was most likely because Joseph had related to them that the time for him to receive the plates had come, see Porter, "A Study of the Origins of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints in the States of New York and Pennsylvania, 1816-1831," 27.

prayer at the bottom of the hill.<sup>28</sup> While on the hill, Joseph said that “the same heavenly messenger delivered them up to me with this charge: that I should be responsible for them; that if I should let them go carelessly, or through any neglect of mine, I should be cut off; but that if I would use all my endeavors to preserve them, until he, the messenger, should call for them, they should be protected” (JS-H 1:59). Although secondary in nature, Lucy Mack Smith’s account of what Moroni said in this last interview may give further insight. According to her, Moroni said:

Now you have got the record into your own hands and you are but a man therefore you will have to be watchful and faithful to your trust or you will be overpowered by wicked men for they will lay every plan and scheme that is possible to get them away from you and if you do not take heed continually they will succeed while they were in my hands I could keep them and no man had power to take them away but now I give them up to you beware and look well to your ways—and you shall have power to retain them until the time for them to be translated.<sup>29</sup>

This last warning of Moroni’s when he delivered the plates to Joseph foreshadow the battle between good and evil that would begin the moment the Prophet walked off the Hill Cumorah with the plates.

### **The Beginning of a Battle**

On “the eventful evening of September 22, 1827,” Heber C. Kimball and others experienced a vision that testified that a war between good and evil had reached new heights. Kimball was awakened by his neighbor, John P. Greene, who told him to come outside and see an amazing display in the heavens. Along with his wife and Fanny Young (Brigham Young’s sister) and others, Heber saw a belt of white smoke that formed a bow across the sky from the east horizon to the west, and which was accompanied by a “the sound of a mighty wind.” Heber C. Kimball recalls:

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<sup>28</sup> "Interview with Martin Harris," *Tiffany's Monthly*, January 1859, 164-65.

<sup>29</sup> Smith, "The History of Lucy Smith ca. 1845," (spelling standardized).

In this bow an army moved, commencing from the east and marching to the west; they continued marching until they reached the western horizon. They moved in platoons, and walked so close that the rear ranks trod in the steps of their file leaders, until the whole bow was literally crowded with soldiers. We could distinctly see the muskets, bayonets and knapsacks of the men, who wore caps and feathers like those used by the American soldiers in the last war with Britain; and also saw their officers with their swords and equipage, and the clashing and jingling of their implements of war, and could discover the forms and features of the men. The most profound order existed throughout the entire army; when the foremost man stepped, every man stepped at the same time; I could hear the steps. When the front rank reached the western horizon a battle ensued, as we could distinctly hear the report of arms and the rush.<sup>30</sup>

Heber C. Kimball explained the significance of this vision by saying, “After I became acquainted with Mormonism, I learned that this took place the same evening that Joseph Smith received the records of the Book of Mormon from the angel Moroni, who held those records in his possession.”<sup>31</sup> This vision symbolized the literal war between good and evil that heightened in intensity once Joseph Smith descended Cumorah with the plates. The Book of Mormon coming forth from its resting place in Cumorah was a powerful frontal assault on the Adversary’s kingdom and would result in intensified attacks on their new caretaker, Joseph Smith. The accounts of the persecutions that were heaped upon the young Prophet after he secured the plates from the hill are numerous.<sup>32</sup> They effectively testify of what Moroni told Joseph would happen, and are perhaps responsible for many statements of Church leaders that reflect this ‘war-like’ tone.

Brigham Young, for example, spoke about the timing of the persecution that Joseph and the fledgling Church faced. He said, “Persecution did not commence in Kirtland, nor in Jackson County, *but it commenced at the time Joseph the Prophet sought*

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<sup>30</sup> Orson F. Whitney, *Life of Heber C. Kimball: An Apostle, the Father and Founder of the British Mission*, 2nd ed. (Salt Lake City: Stevens & Wallis, Inc., 1945), 15-17.

<sup>31</sup> Whitney, *Life of Heber C. Kimball*, 15-17.

<sup>32</sup> See Smith, "The History of Lucy Smith ca. 1845."



*the plates in the hill Cumorah.*”<sup>33</sup> Likewise, George A. Smith taught that, “When Joseph Smith took the plates of Mormon from the hill Cumorah, he was immediately surrounded by enemies.”<sup>34</sup> Joseph Smith would spend the rest of his life with his enemies circling around him, but held in abeyance until he finished his work. However, since “Mormonism” did not end with the death of the Prophet, his enemies turned their attention to those who still believed what he had brought forth from Cumorah. George A. Smith later commented, “From the time that Joseph Smith took the plates of Mormon from the hill Cumorah, to the present moment, the enemy of all righteousness has been howling, and exercising every means in his power to destroy *those who believe in the Book of Mormon.*”<sup>35</sup>

Wilford Woodruff also commented on the heightened persecution that accompanied the removal of the plates from Cumorah. The appendix of his journal for the year 1880 contains a prayer he gave under the direction of President John Taylor. This prayer is written in the tone of pleading for the Lord to hedge up the way against the Church’s enemies. In that prayer Wilford Woodruff said:

Now our Father who art in heaven we bear testimony unto thee that *from the hour that Moroni gave into the hands of thy servant Joseph the sacred Record from the hill Cumorah* wicked and ungodly men sought his life and Continued to persecute him up to the hour of his death and finally shed his Blood and martyred [sic] him with his Brother Hiram [sic] in Carthage Jail for the word of God & Testimony of Jesus Christ.<sup>36</sup>

It is clear from these records that some of the early leaders of the Church viewed the Hill Cumorah, and the events associated with the coming forth of the Book of

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<sup>33</sup> *Journal of Discourses*, 26 vols., vol. 2 (Liverpool: F.D. Richards and Sons, 1855-86), 5, italics added, (hereafter cited as *JD*).

<sup>34</sup> *JD*, 13:104.

<sup>35</sup> *JD*, 16:193, italics added.

<sup>36</sup> Wilford Woodruff, *Wilford Woodruff's Journal*, ed. Scott G. Kenney, 9 vols., vol. 7 (Midvale, UT: Signature Books, 1988), 622, (italics added).

Mormon, as the beginning of an increased level of persecution against the Prophet and the Church.

### **Records and Traditions Associated with the Exact Location of the Plates**

It is human nature, perhaps, that people want to know the exact location of where Joseph Smith unearthed the Gold plates and accompanying articles. Thousands of visitors have trampled the west side of the hill, near the top hoping to at least walk over the exact location where the plates were buried. As far as the official record goes, Joseph Smith only generally identified the location on the hill where the plates were located: "On the west side...not far from the top" (JS-H 1:51). However, from contemporary sources it appears that the prophet did show the exact location, including the stone box, to a number of people.

One of the more prominent persons that claimed to have seen the exact location as well as the stone box that contained the plates is David Whitmer. At age 73, Whitmer was interviewed by a man named P. Wilhelm Poulson, an interview that was later published in the *Deseret Evening News*. Poulson asked about the location where the plates were buried. Whitmer responded:

I saw the place where the plates were found, and a great many did so, and it awakened an excitement at the time, because the worst enemies of "Mormonism" stirred up the confusion by telling about the plates which Joseph found, and the "gold bible" which he was in possession of, so he was in constant danger of being robbed and killed.

When pressed by Poulson about how the place looked, Whitmer said, "it was a stone box, and the stones looked to me as if they were cemented together. That was on the side of the hill, and a little down from the top."<sup>37</sup> Despite being nearly forty years removed from these events, David Whitmer's recollection of the location and the box

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<sup>37</sup> Dr. P. Wilhelm Poulson, "Interview with David Whitmer," *Deseret Evening News*, 16 August 1878, 2.

match very well the record Joseph Smith left (JS-H 1:52). Another intriguing aspect of this account is that Whitmer said “a great many” people got to see this site. One would assume that if David Whitmer and a great many others saw it, Oliver Cowdery was likely one of them. Although he didn’t specifically say he saw the site with his own eyes, his detailed description of the place and the stone receptacle lends one to believe that he, too, may have been an eye-witness to the exact location. His account reads as follows:

First, a hole of sufficient depth, (how deep I know not,) was dug. At the bottom of this was laid a stone of suitable size, the upper surface being smooth. At each edge was placed a large quantity of cement, and into this cement, at the four edges of this stone, were placed, erect, four others, *their* bottom edges resting *in* the cement at the outer edges of the first stone. The four last named, when placed erect, formed a box, the corners, or where the edges of the four came in contact, were also cemented so firmly that the moisture from without was prevented from entering. It is to be observed, also, that the inner surface of the four erect, or side stones was smooth. This box was sufficiently large to admit a breast-plate, such as was used by the ancients to defend the chest, &c. from the arrows and weapons of their enemy. From the bottom of the box, or from the breast-plate, arose three small pillars composed of the same description of cement used on the edges; and upon these three pillars was placed the record of the children of Joseph...I must not forget to say that this box, containing the record was covered with another stone, the bottom surface being flat and the upper, crowning. But those three pillars were not so lengthy as to cause the plates and the crowning stone to come in contact...when it was first visited by our brother, in 1823, a part of the crowning stone was visible above the surface while the edges were concealed by the soil and grass, from which circumstance you will see, that however deep this box might have been placed by Moroni at first, the time had been sufficient to wear the earth so that it was easily discovered, when once directed, and yet not enough to make a *perceivable* difference to the passer by. So wonderful are the works of the Almighty....<sup>38</sup>

Another person that claims to have seen the location where the plates were buried, including the stone box, was Andrew Galloway. In 1870, as a Latter-day Saint missionary, he was holding meetings in the Palmyra area and was asked if he had visited

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<sup>38</sup> Cowdery, *Latter-day Saints' Messenger and Advocate*, October 1835, 2:196-97. The Prophet's account, instead of mentioning three cement pillars in the box, said that the plates were resting on two stones lying crossways of the box, see JS-H 1:52, while Lucy Smith's account says that the plates were on four pillars, see Smith, "The History of Lucy Smith ca. 1845."

“Bible Hill.” Upon realizing how close he was to the Hill Cumorah, he took a day and visited. He claims to have found not only the site but the stone box that contained the plates as well. He wrote:

I spent one day on the Hill, an [sic] saw the Box that had contained the plates from which the Book of Mormon was translated. This Box as far as I remember was something like three feet long a trifle over Two feet wide, and, two feet in depth. The Box and lide [sic. lid] showed no marks of any tools having been used. The Lide [sic] was a little rounding on the upper side. The Box was made of lighter gray rock, of what I think Geologists would say of the Carboniferous Period.<sup>39</sup>

In 1916, Joseph F. Smith wrote a letter to two of his daughters who were about to visit the Hill Cumorah. In this letter he tells of having visited the Hill Cumorah in the company of Orson Pratt in 1878.<sup>40</sup> Together, they ascended the west side of the hill.

President Smith wrote:

At that time [1878] there were seven good sized trees growing on the west side of the hill – near the north end. And about two-thirds or a little more than halfway up the hill – and a distinct depression – near this clump of trees—which bro. Pratt said—must have been the very spot from whence the Plates were taken—when they were delivered to Joseph by Moroni.”<sup>41</sup>

It is interesting to note that while this was Elder Pratt’s first visit to the Hill Cumorah, he still seemed confident that they were very near the original resting site of the plates. This may be due to some additional information that he had received from the Prophet Joseph Smith.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Andrew Galloway letter, 1870, LDS Church Archives, (original spelling and punctuation retained). The year he claimed to have seen this was 1870, however, due to the extremely shaky handwriting, the letter may have been written some time afterward, from memory. Sometime prior to 1893, Edward Stevenson interviewed a local Palmyra resident who said that he had seen the flat stones that had made up the stone box lying at the bottom of the Hill Cumorah, Edward Stevenson, *Reminiscences of Joseph, the Prophet, and the Coming Forth of the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Edward Stevenson, 1893), 13.

<sup>40</sup> “Report of Elders Orson Pratt and Joseph F. Smith,” *Journal History*, 27 September 1878, 7.

<sup>41</sup> Letter from Joseph F. Smith to Emily and Edith Smith, 16 July 1916, LDS Church Archives.

<sup>42</sup> A man named Mitchell claims that Joseph F. Smith told him that Orson Pratt received his information regarding the location of the plates from Joseph Smith. Letter from Frederick Mitchell to Milton R. Mitchell, 30 November 1909, LDS Church Archives.

With the general population of the Church moving away from the Manchester/Palmyra region, together with the fact that the Church did not own the Hill Cumorah, these accounts of the exact location of the plates never materialized into a place marker identifying the site. Later, after the Church purchased the hill in 1928, attempts were made to once again identify and mark the exact location. What authoritative source these attempts were based on is unclear. However, at one point a clump of trees on the west side near the summit were said to mark the approximate site.<sup>43</sup>



Figure 6. ca. 1920 photograph of west side of Cumorah, not far from the top, Palmyra Bean Packer Collection.

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<sup>43</sup> *Journal History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, Comp. Andrew Jenson. LDS Church Archives, Microfilm copy at BYU Library, 1 August 1914, 5. Hereafter cited as *Journal History*.



Figure 7. Another view of west side of Cumorah, looking down from the north end of the hill showing reported site where plates were buried, ca. 1920, Palmyra Bean Packer Collection.

Likewise, in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, someone planted a rose bush in an attempt to mark the exact spot.<sup>44</sup> Another tradition stated that the plates were buried in the spot where the “R” of the old privet hedge spelling CUMORAH used to be on the west side of the hill. At one point, photographs appeared in local newspapers as well as *The Deseret News* that showed a hole near the top of Cumorah believed to be the exact location.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Orson F. Whitney, "The Book of Mormon," *The Improvement Era* 30, no. 11, (September 1927), 942. See also, *Journal History*, 1 August 1914, 5.

<sup>45</sup> Rand H. Packer, "The History of Four Mormon Landmarks in Western New York: The Joseph Smith Farm, Hill Cumorah, the Martin Harris Farm, and the Peter Whitmer, Sr., Farm" (Master's Thesis, Brigham Young University, 1975), 22.

## Chapter 3

### MEMORIALIZING THE HILL CUMORAH

Because Joseph Smith chose to communicate certain of his miraculous experiences on and associated with the Hill Cumorah, some nineteenth century Church members and leaders began to speak and teach about this new, sacred place. These teachings and writings not only solidified, but also expanded the sacred nature of the Hill Cumorah, further establishing it as a key homeland<sup>1</sup> site in the minds of the early Latter-day Saints.

#### **The Name ‘Cumorah’**

Some of the writings of the nineteenth century Saints regarding the hill related to the derivation of the name “Cumorah.” For readers of the Book of Mormon, the name “Cumorah” is automatically familiar. In Mormon 6:2, the Nephites and Lamanites gathered for a final battle at “the land of Cumorah, by a hill which was called Cumorah.” After pitching their tents around this hill, which “was in a land of many waters, rivers, and fountains,” Mormon “hid up in the hill Cumorah all the records which had been entrusted to [him] by the hand of the Lord,” except for a few plates which he gave to his son Moroni (Mormon 6:4,6). Thus, the word “Cumorah” identifies the last battleground of the Lamanites and the Nephites, and the place where Mormon hid up many sacred records.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Jackson, "Perception of Sacred Space," 95. Klaus Gurgel referred to the Hill Cumorah as being part of the “Mormon Culture Hearth” see Klaus D. Gurgel, "Mormons in Canada and Religious Travel Patterns to the Mormon Culture Hearth" (Dissertation, Syracuse University, 1975), 6.

<sup>2</sup> As to what, exactly, the word “Cumorah” means, there is apparently no authoritative etymology. One hypothesis is that “Cumorah” is equivalent to the Hebrew “Qum-ora,” which means, “Arise-O-Light,” or “Arise Revelation,” see David A. Palmer, *In Search of Cumorah* (Bountiful: Horizon Publishers & Distributors, 1981), 21. Dr. Hugh Nibley agrees that this is a possible etymology of the word “Cumorah,” however, he adds a word of caution to not “push it too far.” Telephone interview with Hugh Nibley, 30 October 2002.

But when was this outstanding drumlin in western New York first identified by the name "Cumorah"? The title "Cumorah," at least for the first century of the Church's existence, was a term used only by members of the Church. Difficulty in specifying just when that title came into usage in the Church is exacerbated by the fact that Joseph Smith's personal writings only mention the hill by that name, for certain, one time. Doctrine and Covenants 128 is extracted from a letter written by Joseph Smith to the Church dated 6 September 1842 and contains the sentences, "And again, what do we hear? Glad tidings from Cumorah! Moroni, an angel from heaven, declaring the fulfillment of the prophets—the book to be revealed" (D&C 128:20).<sup>3</sup> As some scholars point out, all other references to the hill as "Cumorah" in the Prophet's personal writings appear to have "been added by later editors or is being quoted from another individual."<sup>4</sup> Some of these other individuals quoted, however, give reason to believe that the hill was known as Cumorah in the Church prior to 1842, and can help give a more accurate picture of just when the hill began to be identified by that name.

For example, in 1835, Edward Partridge recorded in his journal that, "we passed the hill Cumorah about 3 miles south of Palmyra."<sup>5</sup> During that same year, W.W. Phelps and Oliver Cowdery wrote letters that were printed in the *Latter-day Saints' Messenger and Advocate*, plainly identifying the hill as Cumorah, and elaborating on events that

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<sup>3</sup> Some people who favor the idea that the hill Cumorah of the Book of Mormon is in Central America question whether this verse is referring to the hill in Manchester, Ontario County, New York. However, John L. Sorenson, one of the foremost advocates of the Central America model of Book of Mormon geography states that "It is clear that by the date of this revelation, Joseph Smith, and seemingly his readers generally, commonly recognized the term Cumorah to refer to the hill in New York." see John L. Sorenson, *The Geography of Book of Mormon Events: A Source Book*, Revised ed. (Provo: The Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 1992), 374.

<sup>4</sup> Rex C. Reeve, Jr., and Richard O. Cowan, "The Hill Called Cumorah," *Regional Studies in Latter-day Saint Church History*: New York (Provo: 1992), 73.

<sup>5</sup> Edward Partridge, "The Journal of Bishop Edward Partridge," 22-3, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah.



occurred there.<sup>6</sup> The manner in which these letters refer to the Hill Cumorah and the occurrence of the name Cumorah in journal entries leads scholars to the conclusion that at least by 1835, the Church membership was referring to the hill from which Joseph Smith unearthed the gold plates as "the hill Cumorah."<sup>7</sup>

There are still other sources, however, that perhaps lend credence to the idea that the hill was known as Cumorah even earlier than 1835. In 1830 Oliver Cowdery was sent on a mission to the Lamanites. According to Parley P. Pratt, who was present on this occasion, Oliver Cowdery taught a tribe of Delaware Indians that the Book of Mormon "was hid in the earth by Moroni, in a hill called by him, Cumorah, which hill is now in the state of New York, near the village of Palmyra."<sup>8</sup>

Oliver Cowdery was also present during an interesting encounter with Moroni in 1829 in which the word "Cumorah" may have first been introduced. According to David Whitmer, he, Oliver Cowdery, and Joseph Smith had the following experience while moving Joseph Smith from Harmony, Pennsylvania to Fayette, New York. While en route, David recalled:

A very pleasant, nice-looking old man suddenly appeared by the side of our wagon who saluted us with, "Good morning, it is very warm," at the same time wiping his face or forehead with his hand. We returned the salutation, and, by a sign from Joseph I invited him to ride, if he was going our way. But he said very pleasantly, "No, I am going to Cumorah." This name was something new to me, I did not know what Cumorah meant. We all gazed at him and at each other, and as

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<sup>6</sup> Oliver Cowdery, *Latter-day Saints' Messenger and Advocate*, July 1835, 1:158, and October 1835, 2:195-202.

<sup>7</sup> Rex C. Reeve and Richard O. Cowan, "The Hill Called Cumorah," 74.

<sup>8</sup> Parley Parker Pratt, *Autobiography of Parley Parker Pratt*, ed. Parley P. Pratt, 3rd ed. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1938), 55-6.

I looked around inquiringly at Joseph, the old man instantly disappeared, so that I did not see him again.<sup>9</sup>

Because of this experience, and the fact that David Whitmer and Oliver Cowdery were so influential in the early Church, some scholars attribute the identification of the hill in western New York as "Cumorah" to them rather than Joseph Smith.<sup>10</sup> Others refute this opinion by pointing out that if Joseph Smith did not think that the Hill Cumorah was in Manchester, Ontario County, New York, he certainly would have corrected this notion that seemed to catch on so rapidly.<sup>11</sup>

Lucy Mack Smith's history also contains some interesting information relative to the name "Cumorah." According to her, in 1827, before his yearly interview with Moroni in September, Joseph was late returning from Manchester where he had been sent on business by his parents. He returned later than expected and when questioned why, Joseph said, "...as I passed by the hill of Cumorah, where the plates are, the angel met me, and said that I had not been engaged enough in the work of the Lord."<sup>12</sup>

Earlier in her history she also wrote that one of the instructions Moroni gave during his night visits of 21 September 1823, was, "the record is on a side of the hill of Cumorah, three miles from this place. Remove the grass and moss, and you will find the

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<sup>9</sup> Orson Pratt and Joseph F. Smith, "Report of Elders Orson Pratt and Joseph F. Smith," *Deseret Evening News*, 16 November 1878, 1. For other sources for this experience, see, Edward Stevenson, "Diary of Edward Stevenson," December 22-23, 1877, LDS Church Archives, Joseph F. Smith and Orson Pratt, "Interview with David Whitmer," 7-8 September 1878, in *Joseph F. Smith Collection* (Salt Lake City), LDS Church Archives, Stevenson, "Diary of Edward Stevenson," 9 February 1886, and 2 January 1887, LDS Church Archives, and Edward Stevenson, "A Visit to David Whitmer," *The Juvenile Instructor* 22, no. 4 (February 15, 1887), 55. See also Lyndon W. Cook, ed., *David Whitmer Interviews: A Restoration Witness* (Provo, Utah: Grandin Book Company, 1991), 13, 41-42, 49-50, 181-82, 213-16.

<sup>10</sup> David A. Palmer, *In Search of Cumorah* (Bountiful: Horizon Publishers & Distributors, 1981), 20.

<sup>11</sup> Joseph Fielding Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation*, 3 vols., vol. 3 (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1956), 3:234. Joseph Fielding Smith, "Where is the Hill Cumorah?," *Church News*, 10 September 1938, 1.

<sup>12</sup> Lucy Smith, *Biographical Sketches of Joseph Smith the Prophet*, 99. The 1845 manuscript of Lucy Smith's history does not include the phrase "hill of Cumorah." See *Lucy's Book: A Critical Edition of Lucy Mack Smith's Family Memoir*, ed. Lavina Fielding Anderson (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2001), 91-113 for an explanation of the manuscripts of Lucy Mack Smith's history.

record under it, lying on four pillars of cement.”<sup>13</sup> Therefore, depending on the accuracy of Lucy Mack Smith’s history, it is possible that the family of Joseph Smith could have been aware of the name "Cumorah," and referring to the nearby hill by that name as early as 1823.

### “Gold Bible Hill”

Parenthetically, it should be noted that outside of the Church, the Hill Cumorah came to be known by much different titles, usually having some reference to the gold plates. It is easy to see from the following newspaper article, how one of the more prevalent titles, “Gold Bible Hill,” caught on with the Manchester-Palmyra residents.

The *Rochester Daily Advertiser and Telegraph*, dated Aug. 31, 1829, reported:

The greatest piece of superstition that has ever come within our knowledge, now occupies the attention of a few individuals of this quarter. It is generally known and spoken of as the “Golden Bible.” Its proselytes give the following account of it: - In the fall of 1827 a person by the name of Joseph Smith, of Manchester Ontario County, reported that he had been visited in a dream by the Spirit of the Almighty, and informed him that in a *certain hill in that town*, was deposited a Golden Bible, containing the ancient record of a divine nature and origin. After having been thrice visited, as he states, he proceeded to the spot, and after penetrating “mother earth” a short distance, the Bible was found, together with a huge pair of spectacles.<sup>14</sup>

After the Book of Mormon was published, it seems that the hill also took on the name “Mormon Hill.” These nicknames became commonplace and persisted throughout the years among the local citizens. In fact, the name “Mormon Hill” can still be found on highway maps as recent as 1997.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Smith, "The History of Lucy Smith ca. 1845,"

<sup>14</sup> *Rochester Daily Advertiser and Telegraph*, 31 August 1829, italics added, Palmyra Bean Packer Collection, Provo, Utah.

<sup>15</sup> Bruce Russell, "Highway Map of Ontario County New York," (Canandaigua: Ontario County Highway Dept., 1997). Although on the map, the Hill Cumorah is designated as “Mormon Hill,” it is important to note that “Mormon Hill” was apparently also used in reference to Miner’s Hill, where local tradition stated that the Mormons dug a cave, see George Q. Cannon, "The Hill Cumorah," *Juvenile Instructor* 8, no. 14, 5 July 1873, 108 (see also section in this paper entitled “Cave Lore and Miner’s Hill”).

## **A Nineteenth Century Geographic Perspective of the Hill Cumorah**

Since the name “Cumorah” is identified with the hill in western New York out of which Joseph Smith extracted the plates, the question of Book of Mormon geography arises. The writer is aware of the different theories revolving around the historicity and geography of the Hill Cumorah and other Book of Mormon events. However, since this study’s focus is on the hill known as Cumorah in western New York, the writer will limit this study to just those references pertaining to the hill in this location. While many of these references reflect the position that the New York Hill Cumorah is the same spoken of in the Book of Mormon, the writer is not citing them in an attempt to prove the superiority of this theory over any other, but only to document what has been taught about the hill in New York. For further information regarding different models of Book of Mormon geography that include the Book of Mormon Hill Cumorah being in Central America, see the sources included in the footnote below.<sup>16</sup>

As persecution against the young Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints gained momentum, it forced the Saints further and further away from the Church's birthplace in New York. In what appears to be an effort to keep the members from forgetting the Church’s remarkable beginnings, Church leaders like W.W. Phelps and Oliver Cowdery wrote memorial-like commentary on sacred places related to the

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<sup>16</sup> Joseph L. Allen, *Exploring the Lands of the Book of Mormon* (Orem: S.A. Publishers, 1989). John L. Sorenson, *The Geography of Book of Mormon Events: A Source Book* (Provo: The Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 1992). David A. Palmer, *In Search of Cumorah* (Bountiful: Horizon Publishers, 1981). Kenneth W. Godfrey, "Joseph Smith, the Hill Cumorah, and Book of Mormon Geography: A Historical Study, 1823-1844," (Paper presented at the conference of the Mormon History Association, 1989). Jeanette W. Miller, Donald W. Parry, Sandra A. Thorne, ed., *A Guide to the Publications on the Book of Mormon: A Selected Bibliography* (Provo: FARMS, 1996). Also, Dr. Alan C. Miner of Springville, Utah has compiled a large amount of information and statements regarding Book of Mormon geography and created a searchable CD.

beginnings of the Restored Church. Regarding his feelings when he visited the Hill

Cumorah, Cowdery wrote:

Whatever may be the feeling of men on the reflection of past acts which have been performed on certain portions or spots of this earth, I know not, neither does it add or diminish to nor from the reality of my subject. When Moses heard the voice of God, at the foot of Horeb, out of the burning bush, he was commanded to take his shoes off his feet, for the ground on which he stood was holy. The same may be observed when Joshua beheld the ‘Captain of the Lord’s host’ by Jerico [sic].—And I confess that my mind was filled with many reflections; and though I did not *then* loose my shoe, yet with gratitude to God did I offer up the sacrifice of my heart.<sup>17</sup>

W.W. Phelps, responding to Cowdery’s letter, also memorialized Cumorah and compared its importance to that of Mount Sinai:

I want to drop an idea or two about Cumorah. Yes, Cumorah which must become as famous among the latter day saints, as Sinai was among the former day saints...The law of the Lord, by the hand of Moses, was received upon Sinai, for the benefit of Israel...the history of the first settlers of America; even the book of Mormon, preparatory to gathering Israel from their long dispersion, came from Cumorah; Glorious spot!—sacred depository! Out of thee came the glad tidings which will rejoice thousands!... There began the church of Christ in 1830; yea, there the stone cut out of the mountain without hands, as foretold by Daniel, commenced rolling to fill the earth, and may it continue, in a moral sense, in dreadful splendor, till it fills the whole, and wickedness is ended. So much for the Hill Cumorah.<sup>18</sup>

It is obvious that these early Latter-day Saints saw the Hill Cumorah in Manchester, New York as playing a pivotal role in helping to usher in the Restoration. What is also obvious from reading their writings, is that they saw the Hill Cumorah in Manchester as being the same as the Hill Cumorah in the Book of Mormon. This is evidenced by what many Church leaders wrote in newspaper editorials, journals, and other publications about their visits to the Hill Cumorah.

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<sup>17</sup> Cowdery, *Latter-day Saints’ Messenger and Advocate*, October 1835, 2:196.

<sup>18</sup> William Wine Phelps, *Latter-day Saints’ Messenger and Advocate*, November 1835, 2:221.

A common experience seems to be that when the members of the Church visited the Hill Cumorah, they would reflect upon the hill Cumorah as depicted in the Book of Mormon, and experience certain emotions that they directly associated with the geography of that Manchester hill. For example, in July 1835, Oliver Cowdery wrote a description of the Hill Cumorah in *The Messenger and Advocate*. After giving a geographic description he wrote:

When one reflects on 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 529th and 530th pages of 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, with a few others, after the battle, gazed with horror upon the mangled remains.<sup>19</sup>

W.W. Phelps, also in the *Messenger and Advocate*, similarly wrote, "Around that mount died millions of the Jaredites; yea, there ended one of the greatest nations of this earth.... There, too, fell the Nephites, after they had forgotten the Lord that brought them. There slept the records of age after age, for hundreds of years, even until the time of the Lord."<sup>20</sup>

William Hyde was another early Church member who felt strongly that this New York hill was the same one from the Book of Mormon. While returning to Nauvoo from a mission in 1842, William Hyde and others rented a carriage in Palmyra, and drove out to see the Hill Cumorah. While standing on the hill and surveying the landscape, William recorded in his journal:

While viewing the country round about many peculiar sensations crossed my bosom, as here many thousand strong men had fallen in battle, and the numerous hosts of the Jarodites, as well as the armies of the Nephites had become extinct -- and here it was that Moroni, the man of God, had deposited the records of the

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<sup>19</sup> Cowdery, *The Latter-day Saints' Messenger and Advocate*, July 1835, 1:158.

<sup>20</sup> Phelps, *The Latter-day Saints' Messenger and Advocate*, November 1835, 2:221.

Nephites by the command of the Lord. And here it was they were revealed in the due time of the Lord by an holy angel to Joseph Smith as the commencement of the great work of the Dispensation of the Fulness of Times.<sup>21</sup>

During this same year there was a hint that Book of Mormon geographical understanding had expanded to the point that some Church leaders were able to accept Central America as the location for the existence of certain Book of Mormon cities. However, this apparently did not alter Church leaders' conviction regarding the location of Cumorah.<sup>22</sup> This is evident in the subsequent writings and teachings of 19th century Church leaders that continue to locate the Book of Mormon Hill Cumorah in the state of New York. For example, in 1846, Parley P. Pratt wrote in his booklet "Voice of Warning":

Previous to his death, the abridged records fell into the hands of his [Mormon's] son Moroni, who continued them down to A.D. 421; at which time he deposited them carefully in the earth, on a hill which was then called Cumorah, but is situated in Ontario Country [sic.], township of Manchester, state of New York, North America....This record lay concealed or sealed up, from A.D. 420 to September 22, 1823, at which time it was found by Mr. Joseph Smith, Jr., he being directed thither by an angel of the Lord.<sup>23</sup>

Similarly, on 13 August 1853, Heber C. Kimball stated in a talk that, "I have lived in the state of New York, town of Bloomfield, Monroe County, right in the heart of the

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<sup>21</sup> William Hyde, *The Private Journal of William Hyde* (1968), 11. Located in Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, BYU (original spelling and punctuation retained).

<sup>22</sup> In 1842, Joseph Smith learned of a book by John Lloyd Stephens, who had traveled to Central America and recorded his findings. The editor of the *Times and Seasons* (either Joseph Smith or John Taylor, depending on who was actually editing at the time) wrote, "It would not be a bad plan to compare Mr. Stephens ruined cities with those in the Book of Mormon: Light cleaves to light, facts are supported by facts. The truth injures no one..." *Times and Seasons*, 1 October 1842. Joseph Smith, also in 1842, wrote D&C 128:12 that identifies Cumorah as being in New York, see, Sorenson, *The Geography of Book of Mormon Events: A Source Book*, 374. It therefore appears that in the minds of the early Church leaders, these new ideas did not contradict the concept of Cumorah being in New York.

<sup>23</sup> Parley P. Pratt, *A Voice of Warning* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1978), 60.

country where the ancient Lamanites, and other veterans, destroyed each other, root and branch; where the Book of Mormon was discovered in the hill of Cumorah."<sup>24</sup>

Heber C. Kimball, while addressing the question of the geography of the Hill Cumorah, also alluded to the role the hill might play in a future national event. According to Wilford Woodruff's Journal, President Kimball uttered an interesting prophecy concerning its future role. It reads, "On Saturday the 15 President Heber C. Kimball while at the Endowment House Prophesied that when the final last struggle Came to this Nation it would be at the Hill Cumorah whare [sic] both of the former Nations were destroyed."<sup>25</sup> Thus, while the Hill Cumorah was intimately associated with the rise of God's kingdom on the earth, according to Elder Kimball, it will also be intimately involved with the yet-future demise of earthly kingdoms.

While these brethren, in passing, have mentioned the Hill Cumorah and their understanding of its historicity, there remains one who was quite outspoken on this topic. Orson Pratt was the most energetic speaker of all the brethren on the historicity of the hill Cumorah. Accordingly, he took the most detailed approach of the early brethren in trying to establish the New York hill as the hill of Book of Mormon fame.

In a discourse on 27 December 1868, Orson Pratt taught that the Jaredites landed "just below the Gulf of California, on our western coast. They inhabited North America, and spread forth on this Continent." After reviewing the decree that all who inhabit this land must serve God or be destroyed, Elder Pratt continued his discourse by talking about a group of the Jaredites that were righteous enough to be spared: "The Lord warned them [the Omerites] by a dream to depart from the land of Moran, and led them forth in an

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<sup>24</sup> *JD* 2:110.

<sup>25</sup> Woodruff, *Wilford Woodruff's Journal*, 6:305.



easterly direction beyond the hill Cumorah, down into the eastern countries upon the sea shore." After the wicked were destroyed Elder Pratt said that these "Omerites, who dwelt in the New England States, returned again and dwelt in the land of their fathers on the western coast."<sup>26</sup>

A few years later, Elder Orson Pratt sermonized on the Nephites and their relation to the Hill Cumorah in New York. After teaching about where Lehi's group landed and began colonizing, Pratt wrote that the Lamanites

...drove all the Nephites out of South America and followed them with their armies up into the north country, and finally overpowered them. They were gathered together south of the great lakes in the country which we term New York. The Lord ordered that the plates on which the records were kept should be hid, and one of the prophets knowing that it was the last struggle of his nation, hid them in the hill Cumorah, in Ontario county, in the State of New York.<sup>27</sup>

It is obvious that during the first hundred years of the Church's existence the predominant thought was that the Hill Cumorah and other site locations spoken of in the Book of Mormon were located solely in western New York and the surrounding area. During the twentieth century, however, new models of Book of Mormon geography were introduced by some suggesting the possibility of two locations. In response, a number of Church leaders focused their addresses or writings on upholding the traditional view of Book of Mormon geography; especially it seems, with regards to the Hill Cumorah.<sup>28</sup> These types of responses by Church leaders, however, have seemingly dwindled over the

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<sup>26</sup> *JD* 12:341-42; see also 17:281.

<sup>27</sup> *JD* 12:11-12.

<sup>28</sup> The most significant talks or writings by Church leaders during the past century maintaining the idea that Cumorah is in western New York are: Elder Joseph Fielding Smith's talk, see Joseph Fielding Smith, "Where Is the Hill Cumorah?" *Church News*, 10 September 1938, 1,6. President Anthony W. Ivins in Conference Report, 6 April 1928, 10-15. James E. Talmage, *Articles of Faith*, 31 ed. (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1952), 255-56. Bruce R. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, 2 ed. (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1979), 175. LeGrand Richards, *A Marvelous Work and a Wonder*, Revised Edition, (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1963), 74.

years and today, one of the most official statements available emphasizes that there is no official position of the Church relative to Book of Mormon geography:

The official position of the Church is that the events narrated in the Book of Mormon occurred somewhere in the Americas, but that the specific location has not been revealed. This position applies both to internal geographies and to external correlations. No internal geography has yet been proposed or approved by the Church, and none of the internal or external geographies proposed by individual members...has received approval. Efforts in that direction by members are neither encouraged nor discouraged. In the words of John A. Widtsoe, an apostle, "All such studies are legitimate, but the conclusions drawn from them, though they may be correct, must at the best be held as intelligent conjectures."<sup>29</sup>

However, Church annals have remained specific relative to the exact site of Joseph Smith's interaction with Moroni at the hill labeled Cumorah in Manchester Township.

### **The Hill Cumorah Cave Accounts**

The Hill Cumorah's significance in the Restoration goes beyond its being a depository for the Book of Mormon. In delivering a speech recounting the miraculous events of the Restoration, Heber C. Kimball said, "I have also been over the hill Cumorah, and I understand all about it."<sup>30</sup> Aside from Joseph Smith's yearly interviews with Moroni one might wonder what else there is to understand about the Hill Cumorah. In the second half of the nineteenth century, a certain teaching about a cave in Cumorah began surfacing in the writings and teachings of several Church leaders. This contributed to the significance of the Hill Cumorah due to the fact that the hill became not only the place where Joseph Smith received the plates, but the repository of them and other sacred treasures after the translation was finished.

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<sup>29</sup> Daniel H. Ludlow, ed., *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 4 vols., vol. 1 (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1992), 178. Ludlow asserts that while most members and many leaders have taken the individual position that the hill in New York is the Book of Mormon Hill Cumorah "the Church has no official position on the exact location," Daniel H. Ludlow, Telephone interview, 1 October 2002.

<sup>30</sup> *JD* 12:191.

According to some, Joseph Smith and others returned the plates to a cave in the Hill Cumorah after he had finished translating them. Several of the early Brethren, in at least six different accounts,<sup>31</sup> refer to this cave and what was found there. In a discourse given on 28 September 1856, Heber C. Kimball said that Joseph and others went into a cave in the Hill Cumorah and had a "vision" wherein they "saw more records than ten men could carry...There were books piled up on tables, book upon book."<sup>32</sup> Where Heber C. Kimball received his knowledge of the cave is not known. Brigham Young is a likely source simply because three other accounts can be traced to him; however, it is possible that Elder Kimball got his information from Oliver Cowdery, as Brigham Young possibly did.

In 1869, Wilford Woodruff recounted what he had heard Brigham Young say about the cave. His journal records:

President Young said in relation to Joseph Smith returning the Plates of the Book of Mormon that He did not return them to the box from wh[ence?] He had Received [them]. But He went [into] a Cave in the Hill Comoro [sic] with Oliver Cowdry [sic] & deposited those plates upon a table or shelf. In that room were deposited a large amount of gold plates Containing sacred records & when they first visited that Room the sword of Laban was hanging upon the wall & when they last visited it the sword was drawn from the scabbard and [laid?] upon a table and a Messenger who was the keeper of the room informed them that that sword would never be returned to its scabbard untill [sic] the Kingdom of God was Esstablished [sic] upon the Earth & untill [sic] it reigned triumphant over Evry

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<sup>31</sup> The six cave accounts presented in this paper were told by: Brigham Young, JD 19:38; Brigham Young, found in Journal of Wilford Woodruff, 11 December 1869; Brigham Young, found in Jesse Nathaniel Smith, *The Journal of Jesse Nathaniel Smith*, ed. Oliver R. Smith (Provo: Jesse N. Smith Association, 1970), 217, located in BYU Special Collections; Heber C. Kimball, JD 4:105; Orson Pratt, "Cumorah," *The Contributor* 3, no. 12, September 1882, 357; and David Whitmer, found in P. Wilhelm Poulson, "Interview with David Whitmer," *Deseret Evening News*, 16 August 1878, 2. Other sources for the cave account are Brigham Young, "Brigham Young Manuscript History," 6 May 1849 in *LDS Church Archives* (Salt Lake City); Edward Stevenson, *Reminiscences of Joseph, the Prophet, and the Coming Forth of the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Edward Stevenson, 1893), 14-15; and William Horne Dame, *William Horne Dame Diary*, 14 January 1855, Special Collections, University of Utah Library.

<sup>32</sup> JD 4:105.

[sic] Enemy. Joseph Smith said that cave contained tons of choice Treasures and records.<sup>33</sup>

An 1874 account of the cave is found in the journal of southern Utah Saint, Jesse Nathaniel Smith, who heard Brigham young speak in Cedar City, Utah. His journal records:

I heard him [Brigham Young] at an evening meeting in Cedar City describe an apartment in the Hill Cumorah that some of the brethren had been permitted to enter. He said there was great wealth in the room in sacred implements, vestments, arms, precious metals and precious stones, more than a six-mule team could draw.<sup>34</sup>

Although he actually never visited the cave, Brigham Young related the experience as told to him by Oliver Cowdery. In an 1877 sermon recorded in the *Journal of Discourses*, he described how Moroni instructed Joseph to return the plates back to the hill, and that when Joseph and Oliver arrived, the "hill opened, and they walked into the cave." He described the cave as a large, lighted room with plates "as much as two feet high" and that there were likely "many wagon loads filling up every corner and wall."<sup>35</sup> President Young continued by explaining that the first time Joseph and Oliver visited the cave they saw the sword of Laban hanging on the wall, but when they returned on a second occasion it was lying across the gold plates. In his own words:

It was unsheathed, and on it was written these words: "This sword will never be sheathed again until the kingdoms of this world become the kingdom of our God and his Christ." I tell you this as coming not only from Oliver Cowdery, but

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<sup>33</sup> Woodruff, *Wilford Woodruff's Journal*, 11 December 1869, 6:508-09.

<sup>34</sup> Smith, *The Journal of Jesse Nathaniel Smith*, 217, located in Special Collections, BYU Library, Provo, Utah.

<sup>35</sup> *JD* 19:38. Most of the cave accounts seem to find their way back to Oliver Cowdery. Although Cowdery is not formally on record as having shared this experience in speaking or writing, there is one obscure line from Cowdery that might be referring to the cave experience. In describing his feelings about the Hill Cumorah, Cowdery wrote, "In my estimation, certain places are dearer to me for what they *now* contain than for what they *have* contained," *Latter-day Saints' Messenger and Advocate*, October 1835, 2:196-97, (original punctuation and italics).

others who were familiar with it, and who understood it just as well as we understand coming to this meeting.<sup>36</sup>

In an 1878 interview with P. Wilhelm Poulson, David Whitmer told his version of the cave experience. This account differs slightly from the other five in that Whitmer described the cave's location differently. In this interview, Whitmer was asked, "Where are the plates now?" He responded, "In a cave, where the angel has hidden them up till the time arrives when the plates, which are sealed, shall be translated. God will yet raise up a mighty one, who shall do his work till it is finished and Jesus comes again." Poulson then asked, "Where is the cave?" To which Whitmer responded, "in the state of New York." Up to this point in the interview it appears as though there is good corroboration of the cave experience. However, the next exchange between Poulson and Whitmer shows an apparent deviation from the narrative given by the others. Poulson asked if the cave was "in the Hill Cumorah?" To which Whitmer responded, "No, but not far from that place."<sup>37</sup> It is interesting that his account differs from the others, and yet, it should be remembered that Whitmer's designation of "not far from that place" may have been referring to the exact place that the plates were found, and, therefore, the cave, which was nearby, could have still been in the hill proper.

The sixth, and final account of the cave cited in this paper comes from Orson Pratt in 1882. In an article for *The Contributor*, he wrote:

But the grand repository of all the numerous records of the ancient nations of the western continent, was located in another department of the hill, and its contents

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<sup>36</sup> *JD* 19:38.

<sup>37</sup> Dr. P. Wilhelm Poulson, "Interview with David Whitmer," *Deseret Evening News*, 16 August 1878, 2. One wonders if, for some reason, Whitmer was thinking of Miner's Hill, which is just north of the Hill Cumorah and was said to have had a cave in it dug by Mormons, see section entitled, "Cave Lore and Miner's Hill."

put under the charge of holy angels, until the day should come for them to be transferred to the sacred temple of Zion.<sup>38</sup>

### **The Context of the Cave Accounts**

With this teaching of a cave in the Hill Cumorah comes the question of reality. Was this a real cave that they actually walked into, or was it more of a visionary, or “virtual experience”? The wording of the accounts leaves this open to speculation. While this question cannot be answered until firsthand information regarding the cave is obtained, a great deal can be learned by studying the context in which the cave stories were shared. A closer look at the contextual setting of the cave accounts reveals certain gospel principles that Church leaders learned, and wanted to emphasize in a memorable way. Coincidentally, a byproduct of their sharing the cave story was the further hallowing and sanctifying of a place already held in reverence by the membership of the Church.

In Brigham Young’s 1877 account, it seems he shared the story of the cave with the Saints in order to teach them about God’s dominion over earthly treasures and to steer them from the dangers of prospecting for silver and gold. For example, President Young said, “You will find just enough [gold and silver] to allure you and to destroy you.”<sup>39</sup> In this talk he also revealed his motive for telling the cave story: “Now, you may think I am unwise in publicly telling these things, thinking perhaps I should preserve them in my own breast; but such is not my mind. I would like the people called Latter-day Saints to understand some little things with regard to the workings and dealings of the Lord with his people here upon the earth.”<sup>40</sup> Just prior to sharing the cave story: Brigham Young

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<sup>38</sup> Pratt, “Cumorah,” 357.

<sup>39</sup> *JD* 19:39.

<sup>40</sup> *JD* 19:38.

shared the experience of Porter Rockwell and others searching for treasure. According to Rockwell, they found it but were unable to withdraw it because it kept sliding back into the earth.<sup>41</sup> Therefore, in sharing the cave story, Brigham Young seems to be trying to teach that an important principle regarding the "workings and dealings of the Lord" is that the earth's treasures belong to God, who can either bless or curse them. This must have come as encouragement to the impoverished Saints in the Great Basin—that God controlled great wealth, and could bless the Saints with it, if it were in their best interest, and they were worthy of it. As he states in the same sermon, "Are not the earth and the treasures the property of the Lord who created them?"<sup>42</sup>

Jesse Nathaniel Smith's account also shows Brigham Young using the cave experience to illustrate God's dominion over earthly treasures. It appears his motive was to help convert the members to the idea of the United Order. In Smith's account, Brigham Young was traveling South and organizing the United Order, or the "Order of Enoch."<sup>43</sup> Jesse Smith wrote:

In February, 1874, Pres. Young sent letters to the authorities at Parowan announcing the inauguration of a new order of life designed to bring about greater harmony among the Saints and to do away with selfish feelings, to be called the Order of Enoch. He soon after started from Salt Lake City organizing the people at the different settlements along the road. With others I met this company at Kanarra and attended [sic] the meetings until he reached our place. He spoke with great power upon the all-absorbing theme. *I heard him at an evening meeting in Cedar City describe an apartment in the Hill Cumorah that some of the brethren had been permitted to enter. He said there was great wealth in the room in sacred implements, vestments, arms, precious metals and precious stones, more than a six-mule team could draw.* Upon arriving at our place he organized all into an order with the local authorities in charge. All my property was valued by the appraising committee and taken charge of by the authorities of the order. I

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<sup>41</sup> *JD* 19:37.

<sup>42</sup> *JD* 19:38.

<sup>43</sup> Smith, *The Journal of Jesse Nathaniel Smith*, 217.

continued to work in the Co-op store but my boys worked under the Field Superintendent.<sup>44</sup>

Jesse Smith wrote that President Young "spoke with great power upon the all-absorbing theme [United Order]."<sup>45</sup> The cave account (in italics) is then sandwiched in his journal between Brigham Young's powerful teaching on the United Order, and Jesse recording that he turned all his property over to the local authorities in order to be able to live the Order. It is possible that Jesse suddenly remembered the story of the cave and included it in his journal entry. However, the question arises that if the purpose of Brigham's traveling down to Cedar City was to convert the people to the United Order and set it in motion, what was he doing talking about the cave in Cumorah in the first place? What makes this account of the cave stand out even more in this journal entry dedicated to consecration is that it blatantly focuses on wealth more than the other accounts ("great wealth," "precious metals and precious stones"). Perhaps Brigham Young was using the cave experience to illustrate, as he had previously, that God is in charge of his treasures; and, furthermore, that He will give them to the righteous and the unselfish that have the faith to live the United Order.

It seems that Heber C. Kimball shared his account of the cave in order to teach the early Saints about the miraculous dealings of God in establishing his Church on the earth. When Heber C. Kimball shared the cave account, he was speaking to a group of people in the bowery in Salt Lake City. A man by the name of Mills expressed the opinion that "crossing the Plains with hand-carts was one of the greatest events that ever transpired in this Church."<sup>46</sup> In response to this statement, Heber admits that the handcart treks were

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<sup>44</sup> Smith, *The Journal of Jesse Nathaniel Smith*, 217.

<sup>45</sup> Smith, *The Journal of Jesse Nathaniel Smith*, 217.

<sup>46</sup> *JD* 4:105.



an important event, but that they were not on the same plane as events such as "the visitation of the angel of God to the Prophet Joseph, and with the reception of the sacred records from the hand of Moroni at the hill Cumorah."<sup>47</sup> He then cites the cave story as another example of something that could be considered one of the "greatest events that ever transpired in this Church."<sup>48</sup> The point that Heber C. Kimball seems to be driving at is not the demeaning of the handcart pioneers, or the cheapening of their experience, but rather to call attention to the grander principles of the restored gospel—those of revelation, ministration of angels, and keys.

From Wilford Woodruff's record of the cave, the theme of war resurfaces. In his account, which he received from Brigham Young, he described that an angel<sup>49</sup> was in the cave and spoke the words that Brigham said were written on the sword of Laban. How the message was related, whether written or spoken by the angel is not as important as what the message was. It was a message that was consistent with the night vision of Heber C. Kimball wherein he saw soldiers marching across the sky—it was the message of war. Wilford Woodruff's account says "a Messenger who was the keeper of the room informed them that that sword would never be returned to its scabbard untill the Kingdom of God was Esstablished upon the Earth & untill it reigned triumphant over Evry Enemy."<sup>50</sup> This message may have been a sign that the war that began when Joseph received the plates was still on, and that with the completion of the translation of the plates, the side of righteousness had just gained a powerful weapon to aid its side in the

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<sup>47</sup> *JD* 4:105.

<sup>48</sup> *JD* 4:105.

<sup>49</sup> Others also mentioned an angelic guardian in the cave as evidenced by Orson Pratt's account, "...The grand repository of all the numerous records of the ancient nations of the western continent was located in another department of the Hill and its contents put under the charge of holy angels" Pratt, "Cumorah," 357.

<sup>50</sup> Woodruff, *Wilford Woodruff's Journal*, 11 December 1869, 6:508-9.

war against evil--the Book of Mormon. The sword is an offensive weapon, it is also a symbol throughout scripture of the word of God (Ephesians 6:17).<sup>51</sup> It seems very fitting that the Lord, also known as the "man of war," (Exodus 15:3) would want Joseph Smith and others to know that this mortal experience is indeed a war, and that He would conquer the enemies of righteousness. This may have given Joseph Smith and others the reassuring feeling that divine help was on their side. At first reading, the sword aspect of the cave experience seems even more mystical than the whole cave experience.

However, by looking at the context of what was going on at the time, namely the severe persecution the young Church was under, it might have served as an effective teaching tool for a principle that the Lord wanted emphasized in a memorable way.

### **Teachings Regarding Future Role of the Cave**

While the cave accounts were used in the second half of the nineteenth century to teach early members important principles of the gospel, the role of the sacred records seen in these caves was also discussed by at least one Apostle. Orson Pratt, in a discourse delivered at the tabernacle in Ogden, 18 May 1873, talked at great length about the records in the Hill Cumorah coming forth at a future date and that not all of the records of the Nephites were included in the Book of Mormon. He stated: "But will these things be brought to light? Yes. The records now slumbering in the hill Cumorah, will be brought forth by the power of God, to fulfill the words of our God, that 'the knowledge of God shall cover the earth, as the waters cover the great deep.'"<sup>52</sup> In this way, it seems that the cave experience was used to teach the idea that there were more

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<sup>51</sup> See also, Elder Jeffrey R. Holland, "*Therefore, What?*" An Address at the 2000 CES Conference, 8 August 2000, Brigham Young University, 2.

<sup>52</sup> *JD* 16:57.

records to be received if the Saints were willing to study the existing revealed word, and were worthy to receive more.

Elder Orson Pratt, outspoken on the fact that these records will come forth at a future date, also did not reserve his comments about what they would contain. He taught, "And when these plates, now hidden in the hill Cumorah, are brought to light we shall have the history of the Old Testament much more fully, with the addition of a great many prophecies that are not now contained in the record."<sup>53</sup> These additional prophecies are, according to Elder Pratt, "The prophecies of Joseph in Egypt...Neum, a great Prophet who prophesied concerning Christ; also those of Zenos and Zenock, and others of which only bare reference is given..."<sup>54</sup> Thus, the Apostle taught that these records will yet serve an important role in the future of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

While these cave accounts may stir up desires in individuals to start digging up the Hill Cumorah, perhaps the more important issue at hand is what this experience taught those who did experience it, and how it was used to teach others. It is apparent from the existing records that many of the early Church leaders viewed the cave experience as a legitimate event, whether an actual physical experience or more of a visionary experience. By looking at the context in which these experiences were recorded, one can see that regardless of the metaphysical nature of the cave, it has served to teach important gospel principles—principles such as God's miraculous dealings with man, His dominion over all things, consecration, and continuing revelation.

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<sup>53</sup> *JD* 19:218.

<sup>54</sup> *JD* 19:218.

## Local Cave Lore and Miner's Hill

Along with referring to the Hill Cumorah as “Gold Bible Hill,” it seems many of the local residents began creating rumors and legends to perhaps explain their version of the cave experience. In early newspaper articles, writers purported that Joseph Smith dug himself a cave in order to secure a place to write the Book of Mormon. One newspaper reported:

Many persons each year visit and locate the spot at the north end midway down the side of the hill where the cave was dug by Joseph Smith and his followers, his chiefs being Sidney Rigdon and Martin Harris.

Later Smith claimed to be rewarded by finding the golden plates from which the Book of Mormon was written. It is said that Smith and his followers prepared the copy for the Book of Mormon in a cave on this hill, where the plates are said to have been found.<sup>55</sup>

Another article claimed that a man named Otis Bird found a shovel used by Joseph. The article reports that it was

...a wrought iron shovel which he thinks is probably the instrument used by Joe Smith, the founder of the Mormon faith, when he was digging in that section for the “gold plates” which he alleged that he found, and from which the Mormon Bible was compiled.

The shovel is of wrought iron, including the handle, and is like those used in connection with the brick ovens many years ago. Experts pronounce the shovel to be about ninety years old.<sup>56</sup>

The following photograph found in the collection of the Ontario County Historical Society reflects these traditions. This circa 1920 photograph shows a man on the summit of Cumorah, supposedly “viewing cave where plates were taken.”

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<sup>55</sup> Circa 1914 miscellaneous newspaper articles found in the King's Daughter's Free Library, Palmyra, New York, file folder marked “Churches—Latter Day Saints, History—‘Con’ Views and Opinions.”

<sup>56</sup> Same source as note 56, this article dated 25 July 1914.

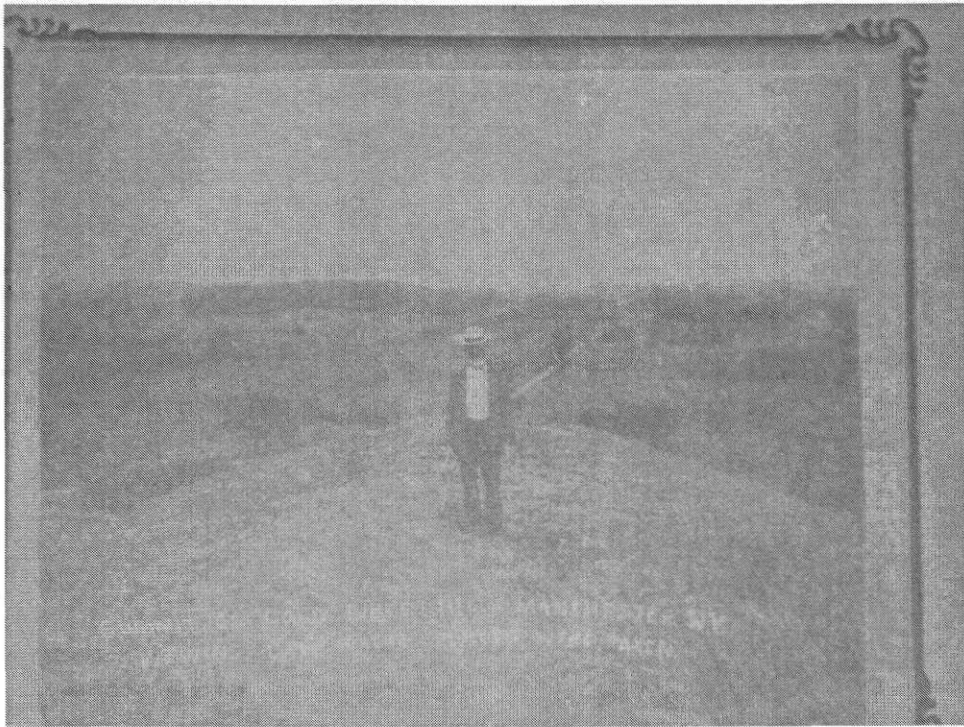


Figure 8. Photograph of a man on the north end of Cumorah. Caption below the man reads, “Summit of Gold Bible Hill, Manchester N.Y. Viewing cave where plates were taken. Courtesy Ontario County Historical Society, Canandaigua, New York.

While the cave spoken of by Brigham Young and others seems to be more divine<sup>57</sup> by nature than a cave that someone dug, some early sources, like those quoted above, insert the idea of a cave used by Joseph and others to bring forth the Book of Mormon. There is a lack of uniformity in the articles and statements as to where the cave was. Some, like the one above, say Joseph Smith and others dug it in Cumorah. Others say it was in another hill nearby. George Q. Cannon had an interesting experience illustrating this discrepancy that he recounted in 1873. According to him, their driver on this occasion pointed out an insignificant looking hill and said that it was “Mormon Hill.” Both Cannon and his companion, Brigham Young, Jr., assuming that “Mormon Hill” was local

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<sup>57</sup> Brigham Young said that the hill “opened up,” and that Oliver Cowdery was not sure if it was lighted artificially or naturally, *JD* 19:38.

terminology for the Hill Cumorah, were highly disappointed at its unimpressive appearance, it not being what they had expected. A short while later they came to the real Hill Cumorah and when they expressed their awe, the driver said, "Yes, this is Gold Bible Hill." When Cannon questioned the driver as to what, then, Mormon Hill was, the driver "replied that there was a cave in that hill which the 'Mormons' had dug and some of them lived in it, so the people said."<sup>58</sup> This hill is just north of the Hill Cumorah on property owned by Amos Miner in Joseph Smith's day, hence the name "Miner's Hill."<sup>59</sup> The site of the man-made cave in Miner's Hill was known and again uncovered in 1974 by the man who then owned and farmed the land, Andrew Kommer. He opened it back up and placed an iron bar door over the entrance and posted a sign to attract tourists.<sup>60</sup> The writer has found no evidence of any early LDS link with the excavation of this cave other than that created by local folklore.

An interesting side note to the folklore that surrounds the Hill Cumorah is relevant to this section. While the early LDS were usually the ones accused of either digging for treasures, or even digging caves as seen above, it appears that some of the local residents in the early part of the twentieth century were similarly engaged. In 1930, a story in the *Rochester American* revealed a hoax that was supposedly the result of some of this digging. Reverends Charles E. Driver and Fay C. Martin, along with the song leader, Melvin Lawton, claimed to have unearthed two bronze plates from the side of Cumorah in 1923. "Their contents, according to the finder, refuted all the tenets of the Mormon Church." However, upon further inspection, it was found that the two plates

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<sup>58</sup> Cannon, "The Hill Cumorah," 108.

<sup>59</sup> The map of Palmyra, New York in the Appendix, page 156, shows the general location of Miner's Hill.

<sup>60</sup> *The Courier-Journal*, 1 May 1974, "Miner's Hill" folder, H. Michael Marquardt Collection, Special Collections, University of Utah Library, Salt Lake City, Utah.

only had a few phrases inscribed on them in imperfect Greek. One bore the word “Metanoete,’ meaning, “Repent ye,” and the other, “Dei Unas Gennetheuai Anoseu,” translated to mean “Must be from Above, or Again.”<sup>61</sup> This hoax was recognized for what it was, and passed without making much of a stir among the local residents.

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<sup>61</sup> *Rochester American*, 6 April 1930, located in Willard Bean Scrapbook, MSS 298, No. 38, Copy #1, L. Tom Perry Special Collections.

## Chapter 4

### ACQUIRING CUMORAH

As a result of the religious experiences Joseph Smith had on the Hill Cumorah and the subsequent teachings of early Church leaders, members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints naturally desired to visit the hill along with other sites belonging to the “Mormon Culture Hearth.”<sup>1</sup> Initially, the Latter-day Saints, may have been content to just visit these sites, however, as the Church’s resources increased, so did the desire to own them. While the story of how The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints acquired the Hill Cumorah is historical in nature, it also manifests the intervening hand of Deity.<sup>2</sup> An understanding of the events associated with the acquisition of the Hill Cumorah will increase the sense of sacredness that Latter-day Saints associate with the hill.

#### **Remembering the Beginnings**

The experiences of Joseph Smith at the Hill Cumorah along with the teachings and writings of the early leaders effectively memorialized the hill in the minds of the Church members. One writer for the *Deseret News* wrote:

When Joseph Smith received the plates from Moroni the Hill Cumorah had faithfully discharged its sacred trust and as far as historical importance is concerned “passed out of the picture.” But not so in the memories of the thousands and thousands of people who have accepted the Gospel message and followed the inspired teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith. To them it is and always will be a sacred shrine.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Klaus D. Gurgel, “Mormons in Canada and Religious Travel Patterns to the Mormon Culture Hearth” (Dissertation, Syracuse University, 1975). “Mormon Culture Hearth” is the terminology Gurgel assigned to the Palmyra-Manchester, New York region where many of the events significant to the rise of the LDS Church transpired.

<sup>2</sup> President Anthony W. Ivins, in the April 1928 General Conference of the Church said that the purchase of the Hill Cumorah “appears to be providential.” See Anthony W. Ivins, “The Hill Cumorah” (Address presented at the 98th Annual Conference of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, 6 April 1928).

<sup>3</sup> “Hill Where Book of Mormon Plates Rested Is Held in Sacred Memory,” *Deseret News*, 20 August 1932.



As this article reflected the growing attitude of Church members at that time, it is easy to see why the Saints in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries began traveling back to Palmyra to see the Hill Cumorah. From this time period, there are records of numbers of individuals who made the trek east, essentially enacting some of the first Church history tours. The Hill Cumorah was high on the list of "must sees" for these early Latter-day Saint pilgrims. One such visitor, James A. Little, reflected on the wellspring of feelings generated by his visit to Cumorah. He said:

On the 11th of last December I stood for the first time on the hill Cumorah. I had longed to see this spot, now associated in the minds of the Saints with the events of the deepest interest. I seemed impressed with an inspiration peculiar to the place. Although enveloped in a cold scudding snow storm, I was able to call up from the shadowy past some of the important events which have closed and commenced grand epochs in the history of the Western Hemisphere with a rapidity and vividness impossible to represent to others.<sup>4</sup>

A few years after James A. Little's visit to Cumorah, Elders Orson Pratt and Joseph F. Smith departed Salt Lake City for the east. On this journey they stopped at a number of Church history sites, and while in Kirtland they diligently sought to acquire "the mind of the spirit," and concluded that while they were so near, they should visit the Hill Cumorah. In a correspondence to President John Taylor dated 17 September 1878, they wrote the following of their experience at Cumorah:

In a beautiful little grove on this memorable hill, we bowed in humble and fervent prayer, rendering prayer and thanksgiving to Almighty God for the treasure of knowledge and truth so long concealed beneath its surface, to be brought forth by the gift and power of God to us and the world in this dispensation. The spirit of prayer, of blessing and prophecy rested upon us so that we rejoiced exceedingly. After prayers we laid our hands upon and blessed each other, giving utterance as the spirit dictated. We spent several hours looking over the hill, viewing the surrounding country, in meditation, prayer, and thanksgiving. After which we drove to the little town of Manchester and returned to Palmyra, rejoicing and

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<sup>4</sup> James A. Little, "Reminiscences of Cumorah," *Journal History*, 21 April 1876, 3.

feeling that we had not spent our time in vain. We cut a few sticks from near the summit of the hill, which we brought with us as mementoes [sic] of our visit.<sup>5</sup>

Another notable Latter-day Saint, Susa Young Gates, daughter of Brigham Young, also found the Hill Cumorah to be a place of great significance. She recounted:

The drive around the north end of the Hill repaid us for coming; the mighty sentinel rises with a strength and majesty when you face him which impresses you with all the dignity and force of which an inanimate custodian is capable.

What a rush of emotions filled my heart!<sup>6</sup>

Perhaps the most significant of these visits or pilgrimages to the Hill Cumorah came shortly after Susa Young Gates when Joseph F. Smith, as president of the Church, would once again set foot on the slopes of Cumorah. In company with others he traveled back to Sharon, Vermont in December 1905, for the purpose of dedicating a monument commemorating the one hundredth anniversary of the birth of the Prophet Joseph Smith. On their return, President Smith and party stopped at the railway station in Palmyra, New York and drove out to the Hill Cumorah. After climbing to its summit and discussing some of the history of the place, President Smith offered a prayer. As reported in the *Deseret News*:

[this prayer was a] comprehensive and splendid prayer, which brought tears to many an eye, and softened all hearts, evoking a unanimous Amen at the close. The party rejoiced exceedingly at this fresh manifestation of the presence of the Holy Spirit, testifying to the soul of the truth of the latter-day work and foretelling its ultimate triumph over all opposing powers.<sup>7</sup>

It is apparent from these accounts that many Latter-day Saint visitors had spiritual experiences that renewed their faith in the Restoration while visiting the hill wherein was found the keystone of their religion, the Book of Mormon.

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<sup>5</sup> "Report of Elders Orson Pratt and Joseph F. Smith," *Journal History*, 27 September 1878, 7.

<sup>6</sup> Gates, "A Visit to the Hill Cumorah," 21-2.

<sup>7</sup> *The Deseret News*, 6 January 1906, see *Journal History*, 6 January 1906, 8-9.

By 1911, larger groups, numbering around 200 to 250 Latter-day Saints were making their way to the Hill Cumorah.<sup>8</sup> The Palmyra newspaper headlines often portrayed these “pilgrimages” in an almost ominous, “invasion” like tone.<sup>9</sup> However, these same newspapers at times portrayed a sense of hospitality and graciousness towards these Latter-day Saint pilgrims of the late 1800’s and early 1900’s.<sup>10</sup> This positive feeling reflected in the local newspapers, however, would noticeably cool with the arrival of a permanent Latter-day Saint presence in the area.<sup>11</sup>

### **A Foot in the Door**

As a direct result of the Saints’ adherence to the law of tithing, the Church was able to remove itself from the bonds of financial debt by the beginning of the twentieth century. In the April 1907 general conference of the Church, President Joseph F. Smith announced: "Today the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints owes not a dollar that

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<sup>8</sup> A ca. 1910 article with the headline, “Mormon Pilgrimage to Gold Bible Hill: Two Hundred Believers in Church of Latter Day Saints Visit Birthplace of Faith in Town of Manchester.” Found in King’s Daughter’s Free Library, Palmyra, New York, file marked, “Churches L.D.S. (Mormon) Hill Cumorah.”

<sup>9</sup> 1911 article with headline, “250 Utah Mormons Invade Palmyra,” and “Huge Mormon Choir making First Invasion of the Eastern State,” and “Palmyra Awaits Mormon Visit,” found in King’s Daughter’s Free Library, Palmyra, New York, file marked, “Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS) or (Mormon) History—‘Pro’ –views and opinions.”

<sup>10</sup> While the local newspapers report a hospitable reception of these early LDS pilgrimages, there are records of some Church members being rudely treated as in the case of Susa Young Gates, who was ordered off the Hill Cumorah because she was a “Mormon,” see Gates, “A Visit to the Hill Cumorah,” 21-22. The larger groups may have been looked at as bringing in some business to the area and therefore treated better. Such seems to be implied by one article that stated how the town members and businesses went to great lengths to court the patronage of a 200-person party of Saints; 1 November 1911 newspaper article entitled, “Mormon Pilgrims Visit Home of Prophet who found ‘Golden Plates,’” located in the King’s Daughter’s Free Library, file marked, “Church of Jesus Christ Historical Sites (LDS).” In lieu of this, President Joseph F. Smith still commented that Palmyra, New York was one of the most prejudiced places in the world, see Willard Washington Bean, “Autobiography of Willard Washington Bean,” in *Palmyra Bean Packer Collection* (Provo), 2:24.

<sup>11</sup> Willard Bean was the permanent presence of the Church in Palmyra from 1915-1939. While he was there, Mormon pilgrimages to the hill continued. Since Bean was there, he took on the responsibilities of showing the visitors around the farm and hill. One example of this is a letter from Joseph F. Smith to Willard Bean requesting Bean to show his daughters the Hill Cumorah and Sacred Grove. Joseph F. Smith, 16 July 1916, Palmyra Bean Packer Collection, Provo, Utah.

it cannot pay at once. At least we are in a position that we can pay as we go."<sup>12</sup> This newfound financial freedom allowed the Church to further expand what had already begun as a limited and careful acquisition of selected Church history sites. Two months after President Smith's declaration of financial freedom, Elder George Albert Smith purchased the 100-acre Smith homestead near Palmyra, New York from a man named William Avery Chapman. Because Mr. Chapman was getting too old and arthritic to run the farm himself, he decided to sell it to George Albert Smith with whom he had developed a friendship during many visits.<sup>13</sup> Although the purchased farm did not include the Hill Cumorah, this was the foot in the door that the Church needed in order to begin acquiring the hill and many other New York and Pennsylvania historical sites.<sup>14</sup>

One problem, as alluded to earlier, was a prejudice that had been festering in that region of the country for almost a century. Some citizens of the Palmyra-Manchester area had become embittered against the Latter-day Saints, as Susa Young Gates found out in her visit to the Hill Cumorah. Mr. George Sampson, who operated a farm embracing the north end of the hill and a significant portion of the east side, approached the party, and upon learning that they were Mormons, rudely stated: "Well, no Mormons can set foot inside my house, I know them all! They are a bad, wicked, deceitful lot; I know them, O, I know them...Old Joe Smith and Brigham Young and the men that started this

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<sup>12</sup> Joseph F. Smith, Conference Report, April 1907, 7; punctuation standardized.

<sup>13</sup> Willard Washington Bean, "Autobiography of Willard Washington Bean," 3 vols., 2:24, located in the Palmyra Bean Packer Collection, Provo, Utah.

<sup>14</sup> Although the purchase of the Joseph Smith farm did not include the Hill Cumorah, Eastern newspapers were reporting that it did. They also reported that the Mormon Church was planning on putting a tabernacle on top of it; see *The Deseret News*, 12 June 1907, as found in *Journal History*, 11 June 1907, 2. Two informative works on this era of the Hill Cumorah are Rex C. Reeve and Richard O. Cowan's article entitled "The Hill Called Cumorah," *Regional Studies in Latter-day Saint Church History: New York*, (Provo: Brigham Young University, 1992), 71-91, and Rand Hugh Packer's Master's Thesis, "History of Four Mormon Landmarks in Western New York: The Joseph Smith Farm, Hill Cumorah, The Martin Harris Farm, and The Peter Whitmer, Sr. Farm" (Master's Thesis, Brigham Young University, 1975).

thing were rascals and scoundrels. I know them all, and a worse lot of men never lived."<sup>15</sup>

Despite the antagonistic feelings against them, the Church still purchased the one hundred acre Smith farm in 1907, but allowed the current owner, Mr. William Avery Chapman, to move out on his own timetable. This turned out to be about seven years later. When in 1915, Mr. Chapman finally moved from the farm, it became necessary for the Church to find a man to move into the Smith home that could handle the local prejudice and hopefully begin changing the attitude towards the Church.<sup>16</sup>

### **Willard Washington Bean**

With this in the back of his mind, Elder George Albert Smith visited Richfield, Utah in 1914 for a stake conference. While the Apostle was seated on the stand, a man by the name of Willard Washington Bean walked in the back. According to Elder Smith, "when [Willard] stepped in that door the impression was so strong it was just like a voice said to me, 'There's your man.'"<sup>17</sup> Willard Bean, a former boxer who had tutored the great Jack Dempsey, was a perfect match for the challenge. He had seen much of prejudice while serving a mission in the Southern States, and succeeded in winning friends from among those who, at first, were the most hostile towards the Church.<sup>18</sup> As a result of his unique personality and abilities, Willard Bean became a key figure in the Church's acquisition of the Hill Cumorah and many other significant historical sites.

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<sup>15</sup> Gates, "A Visit to the Hill Cumorah," 21-2.

<sup>16</sup> Rebecca P. Bean, "An Account of the Palmyra Missionary Experiences of Willard W. Bean and Rebecca P. Bean, 1964," Palmyra Bean Packer Collection, Provo, 1-2.

<sup>17</sup> Bean, "An Account fo the Palmyra Missionary Experiences of Willard W. Bean and Rebecca P. Bean," 2.

<sup>18</sup> Bean, "Autobiography of Willard Washington Bean," 1:24-5.



Figure 9. Willard and Rebecca Bean, Palmyra Bean Packer Collection.

In 1915, Willard and his new bride, Rebecca, were set apart for their mission to Palmyra-Manchester by President Joseph F. Smith and told that they were heading to "the most prejudiced place in the world."<sup>19</sup> This prophetic statement was fulfilled upon the Bean's arrival in Palmyra. No sooner had they settled into the Smith's Manchester frame home than a committee of townspeople was sent to inform them that they were to leave the area. Willard went out on the doorstep and said: "Well, now, I'm sorry to hear that. We had hoped to come out here and settle with your people and be an asset to this community, but I'm telling you we're here to stay if we have to fight our way...I'll take you on one at a time or three at a time. We're here to stay."<sup>20</sup> Willard attributed the residents' hostility to their embarrassment in being associated with the birthplace of a religion that had practiced polygamy and was politically unpopular.<sup>21</sup> As a result, several people with strong anti-Mormon feelings were hired to lecture to the community regarding the evils of "Mormonism." The Bean children<sup>22</sup> were ostracized at school, lies and rumors were spread, and life, in general, was made difficult for the family from Utah.

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<sup>19</sup> Bean, "Autobiography of Willard Washington Bean," 2:24.

<sup>20</sup> Bean, "An Account of the Palmyra Missionary Experiences of Willard W. Bean and Rebecca P. Bean," 2.

<sup>21</sup> Rand H. Packer, "The History of Four Mormon Landmarks," 25.

<sup>22</sup> Willard Bean had two children from a previous marriage, Paul and Phyllis, who went to Palmyra with Willard and Rebecca.

This treatment seemed to bring out the best in Willard Bean, and even led to the first purchase of part of the Hill Cumorah. According to Willard:

When they began to abuse the Mormon people my fighting blood came to the surface and I didn't hesitate to transfer it [the Smith homestead] over to the church. It was then that the Mormon Church was getting a foothold that might well become a problem and disgrace to the community. *But I met the issue by negotiating for a slice of the Hill Cumorah.*<sup>23</sup>

### **The Purchase of the First "Slice" of the Hill Cumorah, 1923**

The first time the Beans visited the Hill Cumorah, they were met by a man holding a shotgun who said, "Nobody steps on this hill belongs to Mormon Church."<sup>24</sup> But within about five years, Willard had become friendly with a man named James H. Inglis whose farm included a small "slice of the Hill Cumorah." The Inglis farm was 98 acres and extended half way up the West side of the Hill Cumorah and included "the entire apron or flat between the hill and the highway." Bean thought that if the Church were ever able to purchase the rest of the hill they would certainly need this portion to be able to access it easily, as well as provide parking space for visitors.<sup>25</sup> It, therefore, must have struck Bean as providential when one day while visiting with Mr. Inglis he said: "Let me sell you my farm. You will then be able to say that you own part of the hill at least."<sup>26</sup> On 19 June 1923, Bean wrote to the Presiding Bishopric as follows:

I am writing you about a farm which I am fully convinced the church should acquire. Perhaps you will remember a beautiful, well kept farm at the foot of Cumorah hill taking in part of the foot of the hill proper. Infact [sic] the fence at the point of the hill runs probably 2/3 of way up.

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<sup>23</sup> Bean, "Autobiography of Willard Washington Bean," 2:31, italics added. The transfer of the farm referred to in this quote is the fact that the farm was bought by George Albert Smith as a private party and not by the Church. Willard had been directed not to be too hasty in transferring the title to the Church, but the negative treatment they received hastened the transfer according to Bean.

<sup>24</sup> Bean, "An Account of the Missionary Experiences of Willard W. Bean and Rebecca P. Bean," 5.

<sup>25</sup> Bean, "Autobiography of Willard Washington Bean," 2:31; 3:100. See Appendix, page 157, for sketch of Inglis farm.

<sup>26</sup> Bean, "Autobiography of Willard Washington Bean," 2:31-32.

The farm is a nicely kept, productive farm, has never been tenanted out, hence not run down, consisting of 90 acres practically all tillable...Has a house of probably 12, or more rooms. At [sic] attractively located commanding beautiful view of west side of hill where the Plates were obtained, and on the state road where could do a big missionary work with tourists and others who stop to view and snap the hill.

He asks \$11,000, for the property which is not above the market price. Infact [sic]when he told his neighbor that he had offered his farm for sale his neighbor thot [sic] him foolish as he asked \$15,000 for his which has only 10 acres more and not as good a house.

I didn't intend to bring this to your attention until fall when I plan to be to conference. But am most afraid it wont keep. Am afraid if it becomes rumored about that he has offered to me for \$11,000 that some fellow, to be ornery, will grab it and then hold it for a fabulous price. And it seems to me that this is THE chance to get part of the Hill, thus gaining a foothold, at market value.<sup>27</sup>

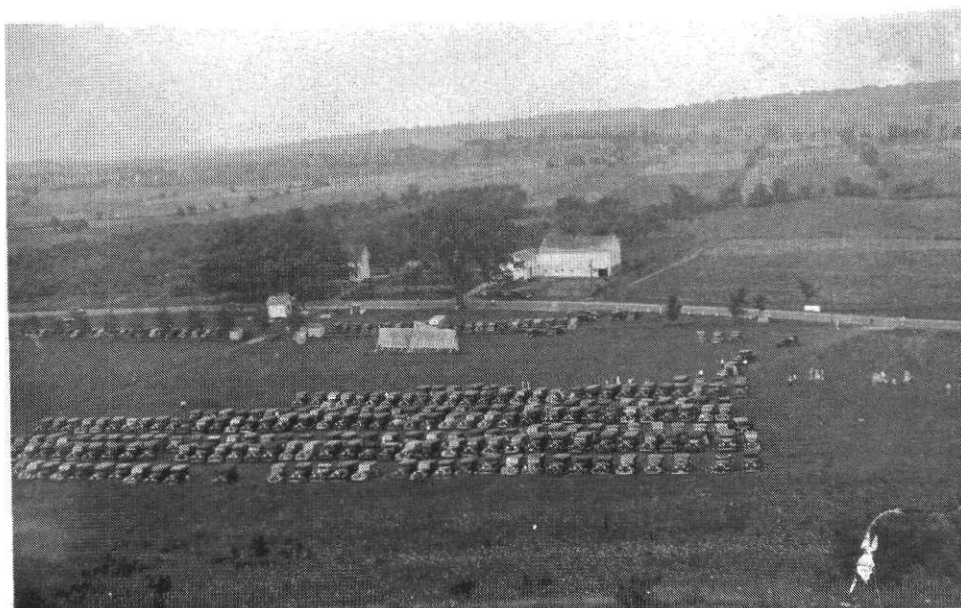


Figure 10. ca. 1930 photograph of the Inglis farm taken from the brow of Cumorah looking west, Palmyra Bean Packer Collection.

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<sup>27</sup> Letter, Willard W. Bean to the Presiding Bishopric, 19 June 1923, General Office Files, Presiding Bishopric, LDS Church Archives, as extracted by Church Archives staff. All letters from Willard W. Bean to the Presiding Bishopric were obtained from this source unless otherwise specified. Apparently, another reason Bean was so motivated to acquire a portion of the Hill Cumorah was that members of the RLDS Church were making advances on another owner of the Hill Cumorah property, Pliny T. Sexton, with regards to purchasing his lands, one of which included a major portion of the Hill Cumorah. Willard said that six carloads of members of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints had visited two weeks previously; see Letter, Willard W. Bean to the Presiding Bishopric, 15 September 1923.



However, by the time he obtained permission to proceed, Mr. Inglis' wife had all but talked him out of selling the farm. Willard learned that at the time Inglis offered to sell, he was having difficulty with his hired help. But shortly thereafter, his old helper who had been with him for nine years returned to work for him again which caused Inglis to rethink his offer.<sup>28</sup> Mr. Inglis, however, advancing in age and realizing that he had given his word, told Willard Bean that if he would purchase the equipment and livestock in addition, he would still sell him the farm. One more condition that Inglis requested was that the sale be done without any publicity because they expected some "criticism and scensure [sic] from their neighbors and friends" for selling to the "Mormons."<sup>29</sup> This prompted Inglis to transfer the title to Bean, rather than the Church. Although the price of the Inglis farm was \$13,000,<sup>30</sup> the public records show the transfer of title on 17 September 1923 to Willard Bean for only one dollar.<sup>31</sup> Because New York is a "nondisclosure" state, Mr. Inglis was not required to publicly disclose the actual sales price of his farm. However, he was required to assign and disclose some monetary value to the transfer of title of the property to Willard Bean. He followed a longstanding legal precedent—still in effect today—that was to assign a value of one dollar to the property. This, along with requiring that Willard Bean be the buyer, ensured that public records would not disclose the actual amount for which he sold it.<sup>32</sup> Bean explained this procedure to the Presiding Bishopric as follows: "You will observe that had to make

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<sup>28</sup> Letter, Willard W. Bean to the Presiding Bishopric, 31 July 1923.

<sup>29</sup> Letter, Willard W. Bean to the Presiding Bishopric, 31 July 1923.

<sup>30</sup> The Inglis farm was valued at \$11,000 and the equipment and livestock at \$3,000 making the purchase what B.H. Roberts called "a good buy." Letters, Willard W. Bean to the Presiding Bishopric, 15 September 1923 and 16 October 1923.

<sup>31</sup> A copy of this transaction is found in the "Hill Cumorah" file of the Real Estate Department of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. See also, John Davis Giles Collection, Reel 5, Box 6, Folder 12, LDS Church Archives. See also Bean, "Autobiography of Willard Washington Bean," 2:31-2.

<sup>32</sup> Personal Interview with Jeff Reeves, *Advantage Lending, LLC*, Orem, UT, 20 August 2002.

transfer to me first. That was not necessary but he was so afraid somebody would think he was selling to the Mormon Church and censure him.”<sup>33</sup> On the contrary, it surprisingly turned out that many of the Palmyra residents, by that time, had warmed up to the permanent Latter-day Saint presence in Palmyra, and even wished the Church could obtain the rest of the Hill Cumorah. Bean wrote:

As soon as the paper announced the sale the business men and larger caliber citizens almost shouted for joy and wished that we could get the balance of the Hill and establish a Shrine here etc. etc. Every man who had a farm between us and the Hill came to me and wanted to sell. A hotel men [sic] in Palmyra got it into his head that we would even want a Hotel and offered to sell at a bargain.<sup>34</sup>

Thus, within the space of eight years, the efforts of the Bean family resulted in at least a partial change of sentiment towards the Latter-day Saints, and the purchase of part of the Hill Cumorah. President Heber J. Grant officially announced to the Church in the October 1923 General Conference the following:

We are now the owners of a part of the Hill Cumorah. The Church, a few weeks ago, purchased a farm of ninety odd acres, which embraces the West slope of the Hill Cumorah, about one-third of the way up the hill. There is a nice farm house, and it is a very fine piece of property. Elder Willard Bean, in charge of the Memorial Home, of the Smith Farm, wrote us that he could purchase this property, and we are glad that at least part of the hill is in the possession of the Church.<sup>35</sup>

### **The Purchase of a Second Sizeable Portion of the Hill Cumorah, 1928**

The remainder of the Hill Cumorah was owned by a man named Pliny T. Sexton.

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<sup>33</sup> Letter, Willard W. Bean to the Presiding Bishopric, 14 January 1924.

<sup>34</sup> Letter, Willard W. Bean to the Presiding Bishopric, 14 January 1924.

<sup>35</sup> Heber J. Grant, in Conference Report, October 1923, 22-3.

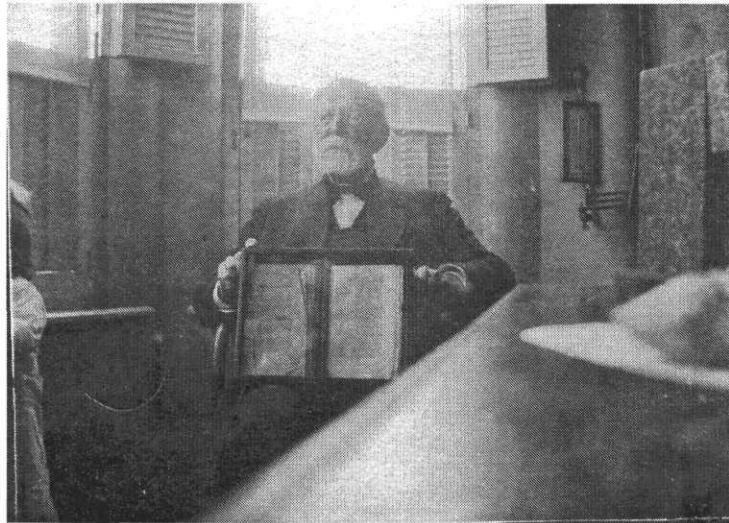


Figure 11. Pliny T. Sexton, holding his printer's copy of the Book of Mormon that he obtained from John H. Gilbert, typesetter of the Book of Mormon, Palmyra Bean Packer Collection.

A local banker and millionaire, Mr. Sexton owned at least 48 properties including many farms and about 1/4 of all the village property of Palmyra.<sup>36</sup> He also held large portions of land in Kansas and Nebraska.<sup>37</sup> The farm that contained the major portion of the Hill Cumorah (excluding the Inglis property) was deeded to Sexton in 1903 by the widow of Rear Admiral William T. Sampson, who had been in command of the North Atlantic Squadron in the Spanish-American War. Sampson had owned this property since 13 March 1879, when it was deeded to him by the estate of George A. Parker who died intestate and without descendants. From Parker, the ownership of this portion of the Hill Cumorah made its way back to Anson Robinson who received it by will from his father Randall Robinson, who owned the property from 1826 until his death in 1862. Randall

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<sup>36</sup> Bean, "Autobiography of Willard Washington Bean," 2:33.

<sup>37</sup> Bean, "Autobiography of Willard Washington Bean," 3:101.

Robinson purchased the property from Nathaniel Gorham on 8 April 1826.<sup>38</sup>

After Pliny T. Sexton came into possession of this property, he did what he did with many of his other properties, hiring the Sampson farm (also referred to by some as “Mormon Hill farm”) out to tenant workers. These tenants were usually those who were hostile towards Latter-day Saints when visiting the Hill. But after Mr. Sexton became acquainted with Willard Bean, he demanded that his tenants be respectful towards Latter-day Saint visitors to the Hill Cumorah.<sup>39</sup>



Figure 12. 24 July 1916 Rochester Missionary Conference at the Hill Cumorah, Palmyra Bean Packer Collection.

Upon becoming friends with Mr. Sexton, Willard Bean did all he could to convert him to the restored gospel. Although he never joined the Church, Mr. Sexton was impressed with Bean's religion and even commented that he had never heard such a clear interpretation of the scriptures as that which Willard Bean would give in his street

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<sup>38</sup> Information taken from copies of the pertinent land deeds that are in the writer's possession, obtained from Ontario County R.A.I.M.S., 3051 County Complex Drive, Canandaigua, NY 14424. See also the LDS Family History Library, *Journal History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, 21 December 1929, 8-10, and the John Davis Giles Collection, Reel 5, Box 6, Folder 12, LDS Church Archives. See also the “Historic Sites” file, LDS Church History Library, folder labeled “Hill Cumorah.”

<sup>39</sup> Willard W. Bean, “How We Got the Hill Cumorah,” *Church News*, 23 January 1943, 3.

meetings outside Sexton's window.<sup>40</sup> Mr. Sexton also became acquainted with some of the Church's leaders. When General Authorities would visit the Joseph Smith farm, Willard Bean would take the opportunity to introduce them to the owner of the Hill Cumorah. During one such visit,<sup>41</sup> the Church made its first attempt to buy the rest of the Hill. President Heber J. Grant, Presiding Bishop Charles W. Nibley, and his son Preston Nibley, accompanied by Willard Bean, visited the aging Pliny Sexton at his bank office. After an enjoyable visit, Bishop Nibley ventured to obtain the Hill Cumorah by saying:

Mr. Sexton- this has been a most pleasant visit. We have enjoyed it immensely and now in order to make a perfect day of it, let me phone up the morning newspaper in Rochester and have them send a photographer over with a movie camera and have you go down in history by having you photographed on top of Cumorah Hill in the act of handing the deed to that historic property, to Heber J. Grant, president of the Mormon Church.<sup>42</sup>

While Pliny Sexton was considered a kindhearted and generous man, he was also known to be "cold blooded in business deals" and replied, "Well, I am ready and willing provided I get the proper monetary consideration."<sup>43</sup> Following this response, the visit quickly came to an end, but while returning to the Smith homestead, Bishop Nibley told Willard, "When the Lord wants us to get possession of that hill the way will be opened up."<sup>44</sup>

Another opportunity to obtain the hill came in 1919. Willard Bean reported that Mr. Sexton, at the end of World War I, was having trouble finding suitable tenants to

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<sup>40</sup> Bean, "Autobiography of Willard Washington Bean," 2:34.

<sup>41</sup> The exact date of this particular visit is not known; however, Bean said that it occurred prior to 1919, Bean, "How We Got the Hill Cumorah," 3.

<sup>42</sup> Bean, "Autobiography of Willard Washington Bean," 2:33.

<sup>43</sup> Bean, "Autobiography of Willard Washington Bean," 2:33.

<sup>44</sup> Bean, "Autobiography of Willard Washington Bean," 2:34.

work some of his properties.<sup>45</sup> Knowing that the Church was interested in the Hill Cumorah property he called Willard Bean and requested a visit. When Willard arrived at his office, Mr. Sexton stated that due to his tenant dilemma it might be a good time for him to sell the hill to the Church. When Willard asked him what price he was asking, Mr. Sexton responded, "Right at the present time I believe I could handle \$100,000 with less trouble than the hill property." This exorbitant price shocked Willard and he jokingly asked if Mr. Sexton had been out to hear the latest anti-"Mormon" speaker, Mrs. Shepherd, talk about the tremendous wealth of the "Mormon Church." Mr. Sexton denied this but said "a piece of property connected with the early rise of a Church as that is with yours should be worth a king's ransom." Willard then explained that "the Church had gone along now nearly a hundred years without any noticeable suffering, and could probably go on indefinitely without possessing the hill." Willard did, however, promise to inform the Presiding Bishopric regarding Mr. Sexton's offer, which he did, and was promptly supported in his rejection at that price.<sup>46</sup>

Although disappointed in not being able to obtain the Hill Cumorah, Willard Bean maintained a good relationship with Mr. Sexton. It seems at one point that Willard thought Mr. Sexton might make a change in his will that would turn the Hill Cumorah over to the Church upon his death, but no change was made.<sup>47</sup> More time passed, and on 5 September 1924, Pliny T. Sexton passed away without selling any of his property to the

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<sup>45</sup> Bean implied that Sexton had accumulated numerous properties by "buying up and foreclosing mortgages" and simply had too many properties to find tenants for; Bean, "Autobiography of Willard Washington Bean," 2:32. An unfortunate result of this was that many of his properties fell into disrepair. In 1924, Bean wrote "...dozens of his [Sexton's] farms are so badly run down that they will hardly be able to give them away." See Letter, Willard Bean to the Presiding Bishopric, 1 December 1924.

<sup>46</sup> Bean, "How We Got the Hill Cumorah," 3. Sexton would not budge from his original asking price of \$100,000 for the remainder of his life and even told Bean that if the Church did not purchase it at that price, his hill property would go to the State Historical Society upon his death; Letter, Willard W. Bean to the Presiding Bishopric, 1 March 1923.

<sup>47</sup> Bean, "Autobiography of Willard Washington Bean," 2:34.

Church.<sup>48</sup> Local newspapers heralded Sexton as the “Perfect Billionaire,” and although the Church had refused to buy Sexton’s property at the unwarranted price he asked, these same papers all mentioned how the “Mormon billions” could not persuade him from parting with his property, as if the Church had offered a blank check to him.<sup>49</sup>

A few weeks after Sexton’s passing, Bean received a letter from Presiding Bishop Charles W. Nibley. It requested that Willard keep the Church leaders informed in respect to any developments regarding the Hill Cumorah but to not appear too anxious about obtaining it. Nibley further stated: "If we use caution and the Lord wants us to have possession of the hill, it will be so overruled. Or, on the other hand, no matter how anxious and how hard we may try, unless the matter is overruled in our favor, we will not succeed."<sup>50</sup>

An article in *The Deseret News* at the time of Mr. Sexton’s death, implied that while Sexton would not sell to the Church, maybe some of his heirs would.<sup>51</sup> Ironically, some of Sexton’s heirs would prove to be a bigger obstacle than he was. Mr. Sexton's nearest of kin was a niece who had married a German count named Hans Giese, and an adopted niece, Mrs. Ray. These two ladies, according to Willard, "rounded up other prejudiced heirs and formed a little group who pledged themselves not to sell the ‘Mormon Hill,’ as it was familiarly known, to the Mormon Church at any price." Part of their reason for their prejudice, and therefore refusal to sell the remainder of the Hill

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<sup>48</sup> Mr. Sexton’s will was made in 1907, and probated on 13 September 1927 at Lyons, New York. One paper reported, “The estate, valued at \$2,000,000, one-half of which is represented by real estate and the other half by personal property, is reported to be the largest ever taken before the Wayne county surrogate court for settlement,” *Journal History*, 13 September 1927, 2.

<sup>49</sup> Miscellaneous articles found in King’s Daughter’s Free Library, Palmyra, New York, family file cabinet, folder marked “Pliny Titus Sexton.”

<sup>50</sup> The Presiding Bishopric to Willard W. Bean, 23 September 1924, in Palmyra Bean Packer Collection, Provo, Utah.

<sup>51</sup> *Journal History*, 16 September 1924, 6.

Cumorah to the Church, was because the Church had refused to pay the exorbitant price of \$100,000 the first time Mr. Sexton had offered to sell it.<sup>52</sup> Therefore, whenever these heirs, or their representatives would meet at the county seat in Lyons, New York, they would register a protest against selling the hill to the Church that legally blocked the Church being able to buy it.<sup>53</sup> On top of this, these heirs put a staunch anti-“Mormon” as the tenant farmer on the farm that included the significant remaining portion of the Hill Cumorah. These tenants once again began driving Latter-day Saint visitors off the hill. Willard Bean told the Presiding Bishopric how he responded to this situation:

They ordered our people off a time or two, but when I threatened to post a big sign on our land by the state road where the little lane leads up to his house, warning all Mormons to keep off the hill by order of Frank Burgiss lessee, he began to change his attitude. I would have had it photographed for the local correspondent of a Rochester daily, who is friendly, which would have given him a little publicity he wouldnt [sic] relish...The executors sent their foreman out yesterday to talk with him, which was probably unnecessary as he has been [on] very good behaviour [sic] since my little talk with him.<sup>54</sup>

At this point, it appeared that the Church would not be able to acquire the remaining portion of the hill anytime soon due to a few of the heirs who were decidedly against selling to the Latter-day Saints. This course of events may have continued for some time were it not for a key player named C.C. Congdon. Mr. Congdon was the lawyer of the Pliny T. Sexton estate, with whom Willard Bean had just happened to become good friends since moving to Palmyra. Congdon was somewhat upset that Mr. Sexton had not just willed the Hill Cumorah over to the Church before his death, and although loyal to his charge as the Sexton estate lawyer, he kept Willard informed regarding the heirs' plans. Although not a member of the Church, Mr. Congdon would

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<sup>52</sup> Bean, “Autobiography of Willard Washington Bean,” 3:101.

<sup>53</sup> Bean, “Autobiography of Willard Washington Bean,” 2:34.

<sup>54</sup> Letter, Willard Bean to the Presiding Bishopric, 3 October 1924. In this letter, Willard also states that Burgiss “is out of harmony with public sentiment which is overwhelmingly in favor of us getting the Hill.”



ultimately prove to be a major factor in the Church being able to purchase the Hill Cumorah.<sup>55</sup>

By 1925, despite the portion of heirs opposed to the Church, one half of the Sexton heirs had settled on asking the Latter-day Saints to pay \$50,000 for the Sampson farm that included the north and most of the eastern portion of the Hill Cumorah, or \$75,000 for this and other surrounding farms.<sup>56</sup> The Sampson farm was worth \$13,000 to \$14,000 dollars as a farm, and Willard Bean felt like the Church might consider paying up to \$20,000 for it in light of the sentimental value it held, but \$50,000 was far beyond reasonable.<sup>57</sup> Even if the Church had been willing to pay this exorbitant price for the hill, they would not have succeeded, as the anti-“Mormon” contingent of heirs continued to register protests against selling to the Church.<sup>58</sup> As time passed, however, the diehard members of the opposition bloc began to pass away. In January 1925, the cashier, Mr. Smith, who had worked for Sexton for fifty years, passed away.<sup>59</sup> Although he was only paid \$50.00 a month and had only received one small raise during that time, he had sided with the Sexton heirs opposing the sale of the hill to the “Mormons.”<sup>60</sup> Coincidentally, in this same year, the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints made an appearance in Palmyra and expressed interest in purchasing the Sexton portion of

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<sup>55</sup> Bean, "Autobiography of Willard Washington Bean," 2:34.

<sup>56</sup> Letter, Willard Bean to the Presiding Bishopric, 22 January 1925, and Bean, "Autobiography of Willard Washington Bean," 2:34. Also Letter, Willard Bean to the Presiding Bishopric, 24 January 1927. The other farms Bean is referring to are the Bennett and Tripp farms. See Appendix page 158 for sketches of the Cumorah farms.

<sup>57</sup> Letter, Willard Bean to the Presiding Bishopric, 9 February 1925.

<sup>58</sup> Bean, "Autobiography of Willard Washington Bean," 2:34.

<sup>59</sup> Letter, Willard Bean to the Presiding Bishopric, 22 January 1925.

<sup>60</sup> Bean, "Autobiography of Willard Washington Bean," 2:34.

Cumorah. An Elder Landes, along with two others from their church, made an inquiry and said they would send an offer on the hill.<sup>61</sup>

Mrs. Lucy A.S. Giese was the next heir who was strongly opposed to selling the Hill Cumorah to the Church that passed away. In 1924 she experienced health problems and decided to go to Europe with her husband in order to visit his parents, and hopefully aid in her recovery.<sup>62</sup> However, in 1927 she returned to Palmyra in a wheelchair and died shortly thereafter.<sup>63</sup>

By 1927, the heirs that were willing to sell to the Church were still stuck on the \$50,000 price tag they had originally assigned to the Sampson farm. But in January 1927, C.C. Congdon thought that the heirs might go as low as \$35,000 for the Sampson farm as long as they were getting \$50,000 for the entire purchase. So he packaged a deal including additional farms bordering Cumorah that would bring the entire package to around \$50,000. On 11 August 1927, Willard Bean wrote a letter to President Heber J. Grant outlining this proposal. It presented the offer of the Sampson farm for \$35,000 plus some surrounding property for a total of \$48,000.<sup>64</sup>

Therefore, in 1927, it looked as if the Church might be able to obtain the rest of the Hill Cumorah at close to market value with the additional property averaged into the deal. However, in December 1927, the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints made another appearance. In a letter to the Presiding Bishopric, Bean said that President Frederick M. Smith (of the RLDS church) made a visit to the executors of the Sexton estate and intimated that he would talk to some of their rich members about

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<sup>61</sup> Letter, Willard Bean to the Presiding Bishopric, 22 January 1925. The amount of the RLDS offer was not known to Bean.

<sup>62</sup> Letter, Willard Bean to the Presiding Bishopric, 31 December 1924.

<sup>63</sup> Bean, "Autobiography of Willard Washington Bean," 2:32.

<sup>64</sup> Letters, Willard Bean to the Presiding Bishopric, 18 January 1927, and 11 August 1927.

making an offer for the hill. This naturally excited the heirs who, according to Bean, got the idea that they could “pit one church against the other” and turn it into a bidding war for the hill property.<sup>65</sup> This turned out to be a false alarm, however, and it was not long before the Sexton heirs realized that their best chance for getting any money for the property was still The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. A few months later would prove to be the ideal time for the Church to secure the remaining significant portion of the Hill Cumorah.

On 30 January 1928, Mr. C.C. Congdon telephoned Willard Bean and requested him to come to his office. Willard told him that he would be over as soon as he had eaten his lunch, but Congdon replied that he wanted to talk with him while nobody was around, including his secretary. Willard promptly went over and Mr. Congdon informed him that he had just returned from Lyons where the heirs had met, but that because Mrs. Ray, the foremost remaining anti-“Mormon” heir, was sick, nobody had remembered to register a protest.<sup>66</sup> He had also just met with the surrogate judge and told him that there were three bids for the Hill Cumorah (Sampson farm): one for \$25,000 by a local company, one by a California man for \$30,000 who felt he could sell it to the Church for \$35,000, and the Church's bid of \$35,000. The judge told him that if he could complete the deal with the Church before any protest could be filed that the deal would be legally binding.<sup>67</sup>

Congdon went on to tell Willard:

Now you know, and I know that the proper thing would have been for the old gentleman, Sexton, to have willed that hill to the Mormon Church. But he didn't. You are the only people who can use that hill and by right ought to have it. Now

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<sup>65</sup> Letter, Willard Bean to the Presiding Bishopric, 20 December 1927. The RLDS interest in the Hill Cumorah provides good corroborative evidence of the historical importance of the hill.

<sup>66</sup> Bean, "Autobiography of Willard Washington Bean," 2:34.

<sup>67</sup> Bean, "How We Got the Hill Cumorah," 6.

its [sic] up to us to fix this deal up so they can get what they demand and at the same time arrange so you people can get the worth of your money.<sup>68</sup>

In order to reach the \$50,000 mark expected by the heirs, some additional property surrounding the Hill was added to the deal. The "Bennett Farm" consisting of 220 acres and bordering the Hill Cumorah on the southeast side was valued at \$10,000. A smaller, 97 acre, but unproductive farm known as the "Tripp Farm" bordered the Sampson farm on the east and was valued at \$2,000. These two farms, together with the Hill proper at \$35,000 only brought the total to \$47,000. Willard then suggested that the heirs had a "white elephant" on their hands in the form of a red brick building known as the Grange Hall.<sup>69</sup> Although it had cost \$27,000 when it was first built in 1911, the heirs were not able to sell it. Willard offered \$6,000 for it, bringing the total to \$53,000. Mr. Congdon thought it was a deal that he could get by the heirs, and succeeded in obtaining the needed signatures. He did not, however, require Willard Bean to sign a forfeit on the sale because he was afraid that it might become public, and threaten the deal.<sup>70</sup>

It is interesting to note that while events in obtaining the hill were developing rapidly in New York, Church Leaders in Salt Lake City were right in step without actually having conversed with Willard Bean. On 2 February 1928, Willard wrote up the proposal for the purchase of the hill and surrounding properties and airmailed it to the First Presidency, asking them to let him know "at their earliest convenience."<sup>71</sup> Two days later, Willard received a telegram from the First Presidency that said:

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<sup>68</sup> Bean, "How We Got the Hill Cumorah," 6.

<sup>69</sup> The Grange Hall was a building that was appraised at \$38,000 at the time of this deal. Mr. Sexton had previously foreclosed a mortgage of \$9,500 on it, but Willard was able to get it in the deal for only \$6,000; Bean, "Autobiography of Willard Washington Bean," 2:34.

<sup>70</sup> Bean, "How We Got the Hill Cumorah," 6. See also Bean, "Willard Washington Bean Autobiography," 2:34.

<sup>71</sup> Bean, "How We Got the Hill Cumorah," 6. See also Letter, Willard Bean to the Presiding Bishopric, 2 February 1928.

See lawyer of Sexton estate and get definite offer for Hill Cumorah alone if possible; if not, with adjacent properties, put it in writing, put up forfeit, and let us hear from you at earliest convenience.<sup>72</sup>

This telegram was dated the same day that Willard had written and sent his letter to the First Presidency. Two days after receiving this telegram, Willard received another from the First Presidency that said: "Terms satisfactory. Close deal."<sup>73</sup> It is therefore evident that the First Presidency was well aware that the time had come for the Church to purchase the Hill Cumorah, a point acknowledged by the First Presidency in a letter they sent to Willard Bean that said:

We were very glad to learn that you had secured an option on the Hill Cumorah Farm and other property before receiving word from us to do so. We had already noticed the singular coincidence of your writing to us the very same day and possibly the same hour that we were writing to you.<sup>74</sup>

Also of interest is the timing of this purchase in relation to the centennial of the organization of the Church in 1930. With this purchase the Church would not only have the Joseph Smith, Sr. farm and Sacred Grove, but the Hill Cumorah as well—all sites where significant events occurred prior to the Church's organization.

The Church closed the deal with the Sexton heirs and thus came into the possession of 482 acres of land, in addition to the 97.5 acres they already owned, that included almost all of the Hill Cumorah and much of the surrounding land. By 1929, the Church had sold the Tripp farm on the east side of the hill that did not border the Hill Cumorah or have any historical significance, for the price they paid for it, bringing the total acreage of Hill Cumorah property to 487 acres.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Bean, "Willard Washington Bean Autobiography," 2:35.

<sup>73</sup> Bean, "How We Got the Hill Cumorah," p. 6.

<sup>74</sup> Letter of the First Presidency to Willard W. Bean, 6 March 1928, Palmyra Bean Packer Collection.

<sup>75</sup> Bean, "Willard Washington Bean Autobiography," 2:35.

## Reaction to the Purchase

By the time the Church purchased the rest of the Hill Cumorah, the local sentiment had already changed dramatically from the time that the Beans moved to Palmyra. The Beans' good nature, industry, and determination had won them many friends in the area. Therefore, aside from the hostile Sexton heirs (most of whom had died) and a few others, it seems that many of the local Palmyra residents viewed the Church's acquisition of the Hill Cumorah favorably.<sup>76</sup>

Some people, farther away from Palmyra, who were not acquainted with the Beans, however, used the purchase of the Hill Cumorah as another excuse to attack the Church. A Detroit newspaper, for example, printed an article stained with anti-“Mormon” rhetoric by a man named Jackson D. Haag. The article begins with a short paragraph explaining that the “Mormon” Church had just purchased the Hill Cumorah, then spends the rest of a full page casting Joseph Smith and his family in a negative light. Scattered throughout the article are derogatory terms that the author used to describe Joseph Smith and his father. The article attempts to appear objective by quoting much of Joseph Smith's own history, but used words and phrases unmistakably calculated to smear the name of Joseph Smith. While the author claimed he did not know what the Church was planning to do with the Hill Cumorah, he flippantly asserted that the Church would make a “shrine” out of it.<sup>77</sup> Although he used this term pejoratively, he waxed somewhat prophetic in that one day millions would view it as a sacred place. Although

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<sup>76</sup> Bean, “How We Got the Hill Cumorah,” 3; also personal interview with Palmyra Bean Packer who was living at the Joseph Smith farm at the time the Church purchased the Hill Cumorah, and is now (2002) residing in Provo, Utah.

<sup>77</sup> Jackson D. Haag, *The Detroit Michigan Evening News*, 11 July 1928, see *Journal History*, 14 July 1928, 7.

these attacks existed, they seem relatively few and the Church took over ownership without any noticeable public relations problems.

In Utah, the Saints were kept up to date regarding the purchase of the Hill Cumorah via *The Deseret News* that printed articles documenting basic events of the purchase.<sup>78</sup> Naturally, there was great excitement among the Saints at having been able to acquire this piece of property that was so prominent in our history.<sup>79</sup> In the April 1928 general conference of the Church, President Heber J. Grant officially announced the purchase of the rest of the Hill Cumorah as follows:

Within a short time the Church has purchased the Hill Cumorah. The purchase embraces the farm where the hill stands, and the adjoining farm, which together with one that we had already purchased, including part of the hill, gives us now the entire possession of the Hill Cumorah. I know that the hearts of the latter-day Saints thrilled with pride when the announcement was made that we had secured this property.<sup>80</sup>

Following this announcement, President Anthony W. Ivins of the First Presidency dedicated his entire address to the topic of the Hill Cumorah. This talk seems to have been a directive to the Latter-day Saints on how they should view the Hill Cumorah and its purchase by the Church. President Ivins wasted no time in stating the magnitude of the hill's purchase. He said:

The purchase of this hill, which President Grant has announced, is an event of more than ordinary importance to the membership of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. The memories of the remote past which cluster round this sacred spot, its close association with the opening of the present gospel dispensation, which has resulted in bringing together this congregation of people, for without it this tabernacle would not have been erected, nor would we have been gathered here in worship today, and the thought which we entertain of the

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<sup>78</sup> *Journal History*, 18 February 1928, 2.

<sup>79</sup> *Journal History*, 18 February 1928, 2.

<sup>80</sup> Heber J. Grant, in Conference Report, April 1928, 3. For all intents and purposes, the Church does own the "entire" hill; however, technically, the Church's property ends on the south before the hill actually does. See the map of the current Church property in the Appendix page 159.

possibilities which its bosom may unfold, *make the acquisition of this hill almost an epochal accomplishment in the history of the Church.*<sup>81</sup>

President Ivins then spent the majority of his talk attempting to establish what he termed as “facts” regarding the geography of the Hill Cumorah. It appears that President Ivins was attempting to refocus Latter-day Saints on what had been previously taught about the Hill Cumorah by many of the prophets and apostles. Referring to a talk by Elder B.H. Roberts, President Ivins proclaimed that the hill Cumorah and the hill Ramah are identical, and that both Jaredites and Nephites had their last great struggle around this hill. He reiterated that Mormon deposited all the records from Ammaron in this hill except for the abridgment from the plates of Nephi. He then reminded the members that Moroni deposited Mormon's abridgment and his own abridgment of the Jaredite record in this hill, and testified that it was from this hill that Joseph Smith obtained possession of these plates. President Ivins also reaffirmed what previous leaders of the Church had taught about additional records being deposited in the Hill Cumorah stating that they “still lie in their repository, awaiting the time when the Lord shall see fit to bring them forth, that they may be published to the world.” However, he also quickly stated that, “Whether they have been removed from the spot where Mormon deposited them we cannot tell, but this we know, that they are safe under the guardianship of the Lord, and will be brought forth at the proper time.” Interestingly, President Ivins seemed to place particular emphasis on the future role he felt the Hill Cumorah would play in bringing forth records:

All of these incidents to which I have referred, . . . are very closely associated with this particular spot in the state of New York. Therefore, I feel . . . that the acquisition of that spot of ground is more than an incident in the history of the

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<sup>81</sup> Anthony W. Ivins, in Conference Report, 6 June 1928, 10-15, italics added. This talk was later reprinted in *The Improvement Era* 31, no. 8 (June 1928): 675-81.



Church; it is an epoch--an epoch which in my opinion is fraught with that which *may become of greater interest to the Latter-day Saints than that which has already occurred.* We know that all of these records, all the sacred records of the Nephite people, were deposited by Mormon in that hill. That incident alone is sufficient to make it the sacred and hallowed spot that it is to us.<sup>82</sup>

President Ivins concluded his talk by stating that the way the Church had come into possession of the hill "appears to have been providential."<sup>83</sup> Thus, the reaction of at least one Church leader was exuberance over the fact that the Church had obtained a property that was not only significant because of its past, but possibly because of its future.

#### Additional Purchases

While these purchases succeeded in obtaining the portions of the Hill Cumorah of primary significance, over the years since then, the Church has continued to increase its land holdings around the Hill Cumorah. According to the Church's Real Estate Department records, this was "To acquire additional land to provide protection against undesirable development near the Hill Cumorah."<sup>84</sup> By 1996 the Church not only owned the Hill Cumorah, but quite a bit of land surrounding it, as can be seen in the 1996 map of the surrounding acreage at Cumorah located in the Appendix, page 159.

Some of this land was near the highway and required farming in order to control the appearance. The Church, therefore, leased the land to local farmers. One of these, a man by the name of Roger E. Clark, wrote the Presiding Bishopric in order to renew his lease with the Church and had this to say: "As of Feb. 1, 1977 our lease expires for the property north of Cumorah Hill. I would very much like to continue. It has been a

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<sup>82</sup> Ivins, in Conference Report, 6 April 1928, 10-15.

<sup>83</sup> Ivins, in Conference Report, 6 April 1928, 10-15.

<sup>84</sup> LDS Real Estate Department records cite this as the reason for a 1970, 100-acre purchase of property northwest of the Hill Cumorah, see "Hill Cumorah," file 505-4907.

pleasure doing business with the Church these pass [sic] seven years.”<sup>85</sup> Thus, the Church obtained additional land surrounding the Hill Cumorah and maintained a symbiotic relationship with local lessees that took care of the property.

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<sup>85</sup> Letter, Roger E. Clark to the Presiding Bishopric, 20 January 1977, LDS Real Estate Department, “Hill Cumorah” file 505-4907.

## Chapter 5

### CUMORAH PROCLAIMS: BEAUTIFYING THE HILL

A key tenet of the Latter-day Saint faith is the obligation of spreading the message of the restored gospel of Jesus Christ. Interestingly, one byproduct of the Hill Cumorah becoming a sacred or hallowed location to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is that it became an effective tool in spreading this message. Since the Church acquired the Hill Cumorah, a great amount of energy and resources have been spent in order to make it a place where the message of the Restoration could be proclaimed in an impressive manner. These efforts began rather modestly, but grew to include major constructions and ultimately, an open-air pageant that is among the nation's top such productions.

#### **Flags and Signs**

Because of the amicable relationship between Pliny T. Sexton and Willard Bean, the former would allow special Church gatherings to take place on the Hill Cumorah.<sup>1</sup> In 1923, B. H. Roberts, then serving as both a member of the First Council of Seventy and the Eastern States Mission President, organized a mission conference that would include meetings in the Sacred Grove and on the Hill Cumorah on 21-23 September 1923, one hundred years after Joseph had first visited the hill. In preparation for the events at Cumorah, a flagpole was erected on its summit. A Rochester newspaper reported that despite rainy weather:

The flagraising [sic] at sunrise was carried out as planned, and after the Stars and Stripes and the purple and blue flag bearing the ancient names of Mormon Hill—Ramah and Cumorah—had been raised, the stalwart young elders of the church,

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<sup>1</sup> Pliny T. Sexton was the banker who owned the major portion of the Hill Cumorah with whom Willard Bean had become friends since moving to Manchester.

most of them former service men, stood at attention and pledged their allegiance again to their country's flag.<sup>2</sup>



Figure 13. 1923 Eastern States Mission Conference at Hill Cumorah, Palmyra Bean Packer Collection.

President Heber J. Grant spoke to an audience of between 2,000 to 3,000 people, including 200 missionaries, and on Sunday, the 23<sup>rd</sup>, he, with at least 1,250 individuals, participated in the Hosanna shout from the summit of the Hill Cumorah.<sup>3</sup>

In 1924, Bean, most likely using the flagpole erected for the 1923 conference, received permission from Sexton to continue to fly the United States flag from the summit of Cumorah.<sup>4</sup> He undoubtedly felt that the hill could be used to help change people's perception of the Latter-day Saints. Much of the anti-"Mormon" rhetoric being circulated around Palmyra in the early 1900's focused on whether or not Latter-day

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<sup>2</sup> Miscellaneous newspaper article found in the King's Daughter's Free Library, File Cabinet containing historic sites files. See also, Albert L. Zobell, Jr. "Lest We Forget: Early Cumorah Pageants," *The Improvement Era* 71, no. 6, June 1968, 25.

<sup>3</sup> Berrett, ed., "Sacred Places," 159.

<sup>4</sup> Letter, Willard Bean to the Presiding Bishopric, 17 September 1924.

Saints upheld the Constitution of the United States.<sup>5</sup> Bean's placing of a United States flag atop Cumorah was a clear demonstration to those who passed by that the Mormons were, indeed, a patriotic people.

After the Church came into possession of the Inglis farm which included a portion of the west side of the hill, Bean began the transformation of the image of the Hill Cumorah in a more positive fashion by removing the former owner's signboard, "MORMON HILL WHERE JOE SMITH DUG UP HIS GOLD BIBLE."<sup>6</sup> Above the driveway leading into the old Inglis farm, Bean hung a new sign that simply said "Cumorah Farm."

He also posted a sign on the roadside for travelers that declared, "CUMORAH (Mormon) Hill. September 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1827, the angel Moroni delivered to Joseph Smith the sacred record containing the pre-Columbian history of America. See—Book of Mormon."<sup>7</sup> In 1929, after the Church had purchased the rest of the Hill Cumorah from the Sexton estate, Bean took an even more aggressive approach to identifying the hill as Cumorah. In April of that year, Bean marked out the word C-U-M-O-R-A-H along the west side of the hill close to the top in 42 x 24 foot letters for a privet hedge sign shaped from the foliage.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> "Work of Director at Hill Cumorah Paved Way for Goodwill, Progress," *Church News*, 5 September 1959, 16.

<sup>6</sup> Willard W. Bean, unlabeled manuscript found in the Palmyra Bean Packer Collection, Provo, Utah.

<sup>7</sup> Letter, Willard W. Bean to the Presiding Bishopric, 28 June 1924.

<sup>8</sup> Letter, Willard W. Bean to the Presiding Bishopric, 22 April 1929.



Figure 14. Photograph of the privet hedge along the west side of Cumorah. The left side of the photograph is north, Palmyra Bean Packer Collection.

In planting this privet hedge, Bean knew that it would one day become obsolete due to the surrounding trees growing too tall. However, he envisioned an electric sign spelling out Cumorah running along the crest of the hill to take its place when it became invisible. He also placed a large sign identifying Cumorah along the side of highway 21 (also known as Canandaigua Road), and two 3' by 6' signs facing both north and south, farther away from the hill that invited visitors by reading, "HILL CUMORAH, (Mormon Hill) just ahead. Free Camping."<sup>9</sup> According to Bean, the big sign attracted much attention, causing many people to stop and ask questions, and even hike to the top of the hill.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Letter, Willard Bean to the Presiding Bishopric, 20 June 1929.

<sup>10</sup> Letter, Willard Bean to the Presiding Bishopric, 20 June 1929.



Figure 15. ca. 1930 photograph of the sign that faced Highway 21 identifying the Hill Cumorah, Palmyra  
 Bean Packer Collection.

This sign has long since been replaced with a large granite marker shaped as an opened Book of Mormon that lies close to highway 21. A brief explanation of the Book of Mormon can be read on the left side, and an excerpt from Moroni's promise on the right side.

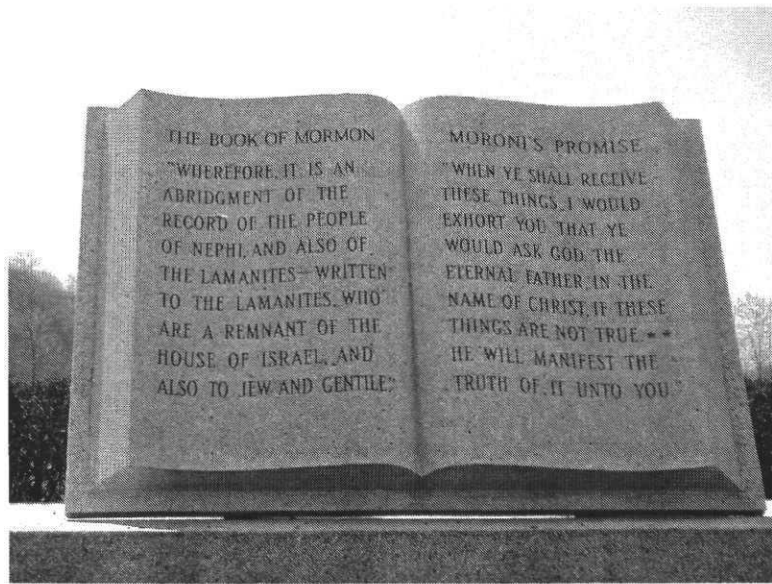


Figure 16. Granite marker to the northwest of the hill, near Highway 21.

## Reforestation

Whether it be Temple Square, the new Conference Center in Salt Lake City, or Church owned schools, it is easy to see that The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints places high priority on the physical appearance and beautification of their properties. The Hill Cumorah is no different. From the first inkling that the Church might be able to own even part of the Hill Cumorah, thought was given to the beautification of the place. One of the first methods considered for improving the appearance of the Hill Cumorah was that of restoring foliage to the Hill Cumorah.<sup>11</sup>

When the Church purchased the Hill Cumorah, its appearance was quite different than how it would have been at the time of Joseph Smith. A history of Wayne County, New York includes the following description of the region in the 1800's:

Everywhere all was new, fresh, and natural. It is difficult for any who did not see it to realize the condition of this country pending its occupation by settlers. Standing upon high vantage ground, the eye rested upon an extended view of forest. *Upon the hill and on the flat the trees showed no opening.*<sup>12</sup>

Oliver Cowdery also wrote a description of how the Hill Cumorah appeared in 1830, indicating that some of the natural habitat had been removed:

The north end rose suddenly from the plain, forming a promontory without timber, but covered with grass. As you passed to the south you soon came to scattering timber, the surface having been cleared by art or wind, and a short distance further left you surrounded with the common forest of the country. It is necessary to observe, that even the part cleared was only occupied for pasturage, its steep ascent and narrow summit not admitting the plow of the husbandman, with any degree of ease or profit.<sup>13</sup>

The earliest known drawing of the Hill Cumorah, published in 1841, shows the north end of the hill further deforested and fence lines erected for grazing animals.

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<sup>11</sup> Letter, Willard Bean to the Presiding Bishopric, 14 February 1925.

<sup>12</sup> *History of Wayne County* (Philadelphia: Everts, Ensign, and Everts, 1877), 28, (italics added).

<sup>13</sup> Cowdery, *The Latter-day Saints' Messenger and Advocate*, October 1835, 2:195-96.



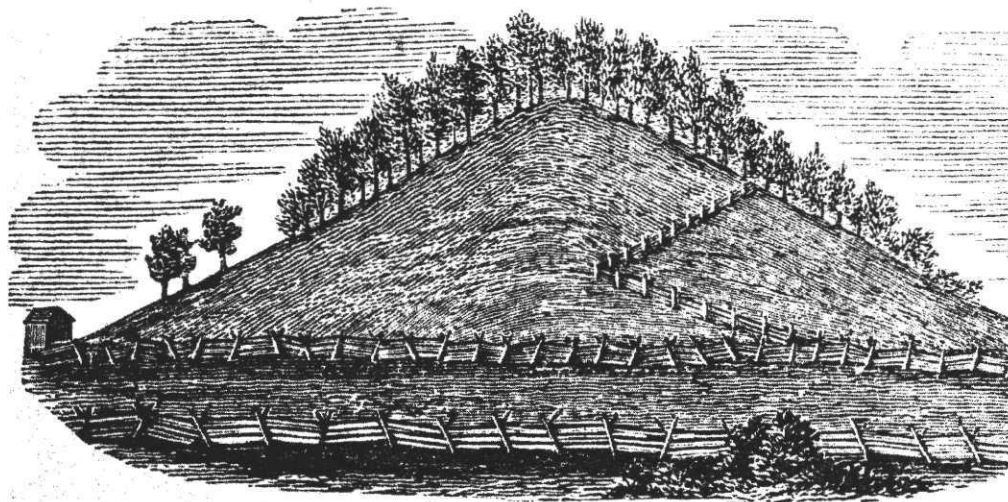


Figure 17. 1841 sketch of the Hill Cumorah as viewed from the north, Henry Howe, J. W. Barber, *Historical Collections of the State of New York* (1841). Also found in Milton Backman, *Joseph Smith's First Vision* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, Inc., 1971), 13.

In September 1878 Elders Orson Pratt and Joseph F. Smith visited several Church history sites including the Hill Cumorah. In a report to President John Taylor they give a detailed description of the hill as it appeared at that time:

The north end of the hill rises abruptly to the height of about 200 feet, and is plowed on the north end and east side nearly to the summit, which is very narrow for some distance along the ridge, on and near the highest points not over six or eight feet across. Here stand seven large trees, that seem to have escaped the destruction of the forest that once covered this part of the hill. The west side is rocky, and only plowed about half way up, the plowed ground mostly seeded to clover. About 100 yards south of the highest point the top begins to widen out and slope off to the south, from this point begins a forest with beautiful groves of hickory, elm, beach [sic], and other kinds of wood which extend to the base on the west side, and nearly to the base on the east, and about a quarter of a mile south. In this timber the top of the hill is quite flat, covered with thick underbrush and blackberry briar. South of the timber the hill becomes rounding and gradually declines southward for about two miles into the common level, all of which is under cultivation from base to summit.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>14</sup> "Report of Elders Orson Pratt and Joseph F. Smith," *Journal History*, 27 September 1878, 7. See also Letter, Joseph F. Smith to Emily and Edith Smith, 16 July 1916, LDS Church Archives.

This report illuminates the fact that although much of the native forest had been removed, as late as 1878, there were still at least “seven large trees” growing on the west side of the hill.

The Hill Cumorah was further stripped of any of its indigenous trees by the distant in-law of Pliny T. Sexton, John Sampson. According to Willard Bean, John Sampson was somewhat of a liability to his family. Placing him on the 170 acre farm was an effort to aid him in getting his life in order. The plan was for John to make a living milling the timber found in abundance on parts of the hill and surrounding property, but Bean reported that as soon as the timber ran out, “John spent much of his time loitering about the grog shops in the village. He finally died and the farm reverted back to the banker [Pliny T. Sexton] who held the mortgage.”<sup>15</sup> This milling of Cumorah’s timber by Sampson is the cause of the bald appearance of the hill as it appears in the following photographs.



Figure 18. West side of the Hill Cumorah, ca. 1920. Left side of photograph is north, Palmyra Bean Packer Collection.

<sup>15</sup> Bean, "How We Got the Hill Cumorah," 3.

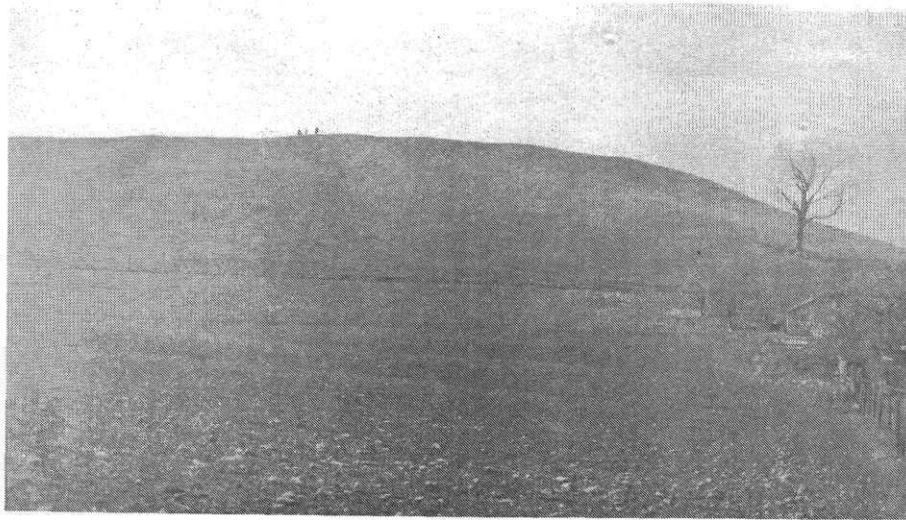


Figure 19. East side of the Hill Cumorah, ca. 1920. Right side of photograph is north, Palmyra Bean Packer Collection.

Realizing that the hill's current condition in no way represented its appearance in the days of Joseph Smith, and that the Church would probably want to improve the property, Bean wrote the Presiding Bishopric upon the purchase of the Sampson farm: "Of course we are ready at any time to begin to beautify the Hill Cumorah when you decide just what is to be done...Whatever plans you make we will endeavor to carry them out."<sup>16</sup> During the winter and spring of 1928, Bean did some research into reforestation and notified the Church leaders about what he had learned. After receiving permission to move forward, Bean wrote to the State Conservation Department at Albany, New York inquiring after the price of evergreens. They informed Bean that "the prices run from \$2.00 to \$5.00 per thousand," but since it was a church doing the purchasing, it fell under the "Church forest class"—the only expense would be the shipping costs.<sup>17</sup> Subsequently, 65,000 little evergreen trees consisting of seven different varieties were sent to the Beans who also

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<sup>16</sup> Letter, Willard Bean to the Presiding Bishopric, 16 February 1928.

<sup>17</sup> Rebecca Bean, "An Account of the Palmyra Missionary Experiences of Willard W. Bean and Rebecca P. Bean," 6-7; see also Bean "Willard Washington Bean Autobiography," 2:36, and Letter, Willard Bean to the Presiding Bishopric, 28 October 1928.

dug up 3,000 little hardwood trees to be planted all over the Hill. With all of these trees, the Beans, and as many of the local missionaries as could, commenced planting about 10,000 a year until they covered most of the Hill.<sup>18</sup>

Worth noting is the response that the local citizens of Palmyra and Manchester had to the planting activities taking place at the Hill Cumorah. When Bean and company planted the trees they first placed stakes where they would dig the holes for the seedlings, then set the seedlings beside the hole. However, the seedlings were so small that the only things that could be seen from the road were the stakes and holes. Bean reported that this made the townspeople curious and, "...now when they see us digging holes with a mattocks all over the hill setting out seedlings and transplants they are just sure we are hunting for gold." Bean notified the Presiding Bishopric that he would probably "put a piece in the local this week explaining."<sup>19</sup>

While the general presence of trees on the Hill Cumorah helped to restore the hill's appearance to a forested condition as in the days of Joseph Smith, the trees that were planted on the hill were not necessarily indigenous to that area. In studying the trees at the hill, geographer Klaus Gurgel wrote that the trees were chosen for their religious significance:

...of religious significance is the fact that instead of using indigenous hardwood varieties, such as sugar maple, American beech and white ash to name only a few species which may have decorated the hill in ancient times, an assemblage of the symbolic sacred fir and pine family was selected to dress up the most respected, northern portion of the hill. The planted 'sacred' evergreens, largely a mix of Norway spruce, Scotch pine and White pine, took well to the favorable climatic and soil conditions and quickly clothed the 'profane' and 'naked' landscape.

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<sup>18</sup> Bean, "An Account of the Missionary Experiences of Willard W. Bean and Rebecca P. Bean," 7. The varieties of trees provided by the Conservation Department were, "White Cedar, European Larch, Balsam, Spruce, Red Pine, Scotch Pine, White Pine, Black Locust, Carolina Poplars, etc." See Letter, Willard Bean to the Presiding Bishopric, 28 October 1928.

<sup>19</sup> Letter, Willard Bean to the Presiding Bishopric, 23 October 1928.

After forty years of almost undisturbed growth, the mature firs and pines emphasize and enhance the sacred symbolism of the place by projecting a feeling of peace, everlasting life, and fidelity to Mormon pilgrims and passers-by.<sup>20</sup>

The writer has recently visited the Hill Cumorah and walked through the trees that have now had over seventy years of growth since they were first planted and would certainly agree with Gurgel that the mature firs and pines add an increased sense of sacredness to the once bald hill. However, Bean, who oversaw the purchasing and planting of the trees, seems to imply that the main reason was because they received such a great quantity of evergreens for free.<sup>21</sup> However, that these evergreens contribute to the sacred ambiance of the hill is more important than whether or not they were planted for their symbolic sacredness. The case of the hardwood trees transplanted from the Sacred Grove to the Hill Cumorah, however, seems to be very religiously motivated. Gurgel wrote:

Away from the sanctum proper [the northern end of the hill including the area believed to have held the plates], landscaping efforts involved a reversal in the selection of the tree varieties. Instead of evergreens, a mix of indigenous hardwoods occupy the scene. Again, religious motive was the guiding force for this arrangement. The seedlings used are not of 'common' origin but were offsprings from parent trees located in the nearby Sacred Grove. Mormons believe that possibly the parent timber, estimated to be more than 200 years old, was a witness to Joseph Smith's First Vision. Hence both tree generations have sacred meaning attached to them and visitors to the site are reminded not to mar the trees.<sup>22</sup>

This seems to represent the Church's desire to bind together some of its early historical sites by sharing something in common. In 1943, *The Deseret News* reported that an extensive transplanting project was underway in the Palmyra-Manchester-Fayette

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<sup>20</sup> Klaus D. Gurgel, "God's Drumlin: Hill Cumorah in the Religious Geography of Mormonism" (paper presented at the 70th Annual Meeting of the Association of American Geographers, Special Session: Geography of Contemporary Religions, Seattle, April 28-May 1, 1974), 8.

<sup>21</sup> Letter, Willard Bean to the Presiding Bishopric, 28 October 1928.

<sup>22</sup> Gurgel, "God's Drumlin: Hill Cumorah in the Religious Geography of Mormonism," 9.

area. Part of this included over seventy evergreens, shrubs and rose bushes being taken from the Hill Cumorah grounds and transplanted at the Peter Whitmer Sr. farm in Fayette, New York. A number of Norway spruce, arbor vitae, and bitter sweet plants were also taken from Cumorah to the Joseph Smith Sr. farm. In return, Cumorah received a Red Maple to be planted on its slopes. While part of the reason was to “relieve overcrowding in some areas” on Cumorah, another reason was to symbolically “unite” these historical sites held sacred by the Church by sharing common foliage.<sup>23</sup>

Although most of the trees planted survived and formed a thick forest on the hill, Bean lamented that thousands died due to a poor watering system.<sup>24</sup> Later, he installed water pipes and a pump that brought water from a spring at the base of the hill to the very top, thereby keeping flowers and shrubs green.<sup>25</sup> In 1946, eighteen years after Bean’s initial planting, John D. Giles planned a survey in order to identify and count the trees on the Hill Cumorah. Under the direction of Elder Orval C. Stott, director of the Hill Cumorah Bureau of Information, and with the aid of local Boy Scout Troop 61, an official count was made. Their count found:

Scotch Pine.....	2,821
White Pine.....	1,534
Yellow (Ponderosa) Pine.....	2,766
Norway Spruce.....	1785
American Arbor Vitae.....	798
European Larch.....	335
Black Locust.....	150
Total.....	10,190

This count did not include the native timber that still existed towards the south end of the hill, which was used as a wood lot to provide firewood and other requirements for the

<sup>23</sup> "Trees from Hill Cumorah 'Unite' Historic Spots," *Church News*, 2 January 1943, 1.

<sup>24</sup> Willard Bean, unlabeled manuscript found in Palmyra Bean Packer Collection, Provo, UT.

<sup>25</sup> Bean, "Autobiography of Willard Washington Bean," 2:36.

Cumorah Farm to the west of the hill. The survey also stated that many of the trees planted in 1928 by Bean and company were, in 1946, about 20 feet tall.<sup>26</sup>

Today, keeping the evergreen variety of trees planted by Bean alive is not the problem. Quite to the contrary, the pine trees planted then have overgrown their bounds and have become somewhat of a nuisance due to their ability to thrive and perpetuate. In 1976, a thirty year project to replace these trees with hardwood varieties such as maple, ash and beech, indigenous to the area at the time Joseph Smith received the plates from the hill, was commenced.<sup>27</sup> Among the trees that were being planted all over the Hill Cumorah, in the spring and summer of 1929, two paths were made out of flagstones that led to the summit of the hill.<sup>28</sup> This made the summit of the hill, and therefore the general location of where Joseph Smith found the plates, more accessible to the ever-increasing number of visitors who desired to climb the hill and see for themselves.

### **A Monument for the Crest**

One of the boldest moves in using the Hill Cumorah to proclaim the message of the Restoration was the decision to place a monument on its summit. The first reference to the idea of placing a monument on Cumorah appears to have come in 1923, when the Church was in possession of only the western part of the hill. The *Rochester Democrat and Chronicle* reported in 1923, "It is possible that a discussion will be held on the possibility of erecting a \$100,000 monument on top of Mormon hill, as a memorial to Joseph Smith, founder of the religion."<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> "Survey Shows Kinds of Trees on Hill Cumorah," *Church News*, 16 February 1946, 4.

<sup>27</sup> Byron Warner, "Statue Makes a Left Turn," *Church News*, 17 April 1976, 3.

<sup>28</sup> Letter, Willard Bean to the Presiding Bishopric, 15 May 1929. See Appendix page 160, for sketch of these paths.

<sup>29</sup> "Mormons Plan Centennial at Farm," *Rochester Democrat and Chronicle*, 18 September 1923, 4.

In 1924, with the Church still only in possession of the western side of the hill, a slight twist in the idea of a monument on top of Cumorah was reported to the Presiding Bishopric. The lawyer of the Sexton estate (who owned the remaining portions of the Hill Cumorah) had jokingly commented that the heirs were thinking of charging Latter-day Saint visitors a dollar a piece for going all the way to the top of Cumorah, until the Church relented and paid their high price for the property. Bean responded:

I told him that we own enough of the hill now for all the 'Shrine' we need; and the best side of the hill at that. Told him we could park the grounds, plant shrubs, flowers etc. and dig out in the side of the hill and erect a monument (shrine, as they call it) instead of planting it on top where the wind would wreck it.<sup>30</sup>

Bean's statement was obviously an attempt to help bring down the price of the Sexton hill property, but more interestingly, it introduced the idea of a monument being placed somewhere besides the summit of Cumorah.

For the next few years, the topic of a monument on Cumorah seems to have become a secondary concern as reflected in the newspapers and the correspondence between Bean and the Presiding Bishopric. After the Church purchased the Pliny Sexton Hill Cumorah property in 1928 the immediate push was to improve the hill's appearance by reforestation. However, in 1929, Bean revisited the idea of a monument in a letter to the Presiding Bishopric. In an almost impatient tone Bean wrote:

Now if we had a bureau of information, a MONUMENT on top, part of the ground parked and set out to ornamental shrubs, flowers, lawn, etc. we could begin to divert tourist travel this way, and do more real missionary work than a dozen field missionaries.<sup>31</sup>

According to Bean, some of the Church leaders were somewhat skeptical about the idea of a monument because they thought vandalism might be a problem. However,

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<sup>30</sup> Letter, Willard Bean to the Presiding Bishopric, 14 February 1925.

<sup>31</sup> Letter, Willard Bean to the Presiding Bishopric, 22 April 1929 (original spelling and punctuation).



as time passed, Church leaders accepted the idea of a monument to top Cumorah, and by 1932 they had commissioned a Salt Lake City sculptor to begin designing a model of the monument. On 20 August 1932, *The Deseret News* reported that Norwegian born Torlief S. Knaphus was commissioned by the Church to design and construct the monument that would grace the Hill Cumorah. The article also included photographs of Knaphus' model.<sup>32</sup> Although announced in Utah in the summer of 1932, this news did not seem to be reported in the Palmyra-Manchester area until the summer of 1933 at a missionary conference held at the Joseph Smith farm. On 22 July 1933, the *Rochester Democrat and Chronicle* reported:

To designate the spot where the Mormons claim an angel showed their first prophet, Joseph Smith, the location of the golden plates, a 40-foot granite monument is now being prepared to be erected on top of Hill Cumorah. This hill, as well as the Joseph Smith farm, both located a short distance from Palmyra, are shrines to which thousands of Mormons and others visit annually.<sup>33</sup>

Because there was still some anxiety among Church leaders regarding vandalism to the monument, Bean was asked to measure the distance around the hill so that a 12-foot fence could be placed around it to deter vandals. According to Bean, however, he convinced them that this was not needed, and the Church saved the \$4,000 cost for the fence.<sup>34</sup>

Due to the belief that angelic ministrants were so closely associated with this hill, the monument now gracing its summit is a fitting symbol to all who visit. As with many of the events surrounding the Hill Cumorah, the conception of the monument is also one of divine intervention. After Mr. Knaphus learned that the Church owned the Hill

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<sup>32</sup> "Hill Cumorah to Be Topped by Monument," *Church News*, 20 August 1932, 1.

<sup>33</sup> "Mormons to Erect Shaft on Hill Cumorah near Palmyra," *Rochester Democrat and Chronicle*, 23 July 1933. Accompanying this article is a photograph showing a model of the future monument that resembles the actual monument later erected.

<sup>34</sup> Bean, "Willard Washington Bean Autobiography," 2:37.

Cumorah, he began making sketches of an angel Moroni monument. After making seven of them, he climbed Ensign Peak just north of Salt Lake City one night and laid out the seven sketches. Fearing he might not be doing the right thing, Mr. Knaphus began to pray. He asked the Lord which of the sketches he should take to the General Authorities and if he should even go to them at all. After he opened his eyes, he reported that a light shown around him and that a finger pointed out the right sketch accompanied with the words, "This is the right one." He was also told to go to the Church Office in the morning and that the Church Authorities would be waiting for him. The next morning, true to his revelation, he arrived at the Church Office and found some of the General Authorities awaiting his arrival. After spreading the seven sketches out, they, too, chose the sketch that was pointed out to Brother Knaphus the night before.<sup>35</sup> This sketch became the model for the angel Moroni monument that now sits on the summit of Cumorah.

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<sup>35</sup> Rebecca Bean, "An Account of the Palmyra Missionary Experiences of Willard W. Bean and Rebecca P. Bean," 9. See also Packer, "History of Four Mormon Landmarks," 31-2.

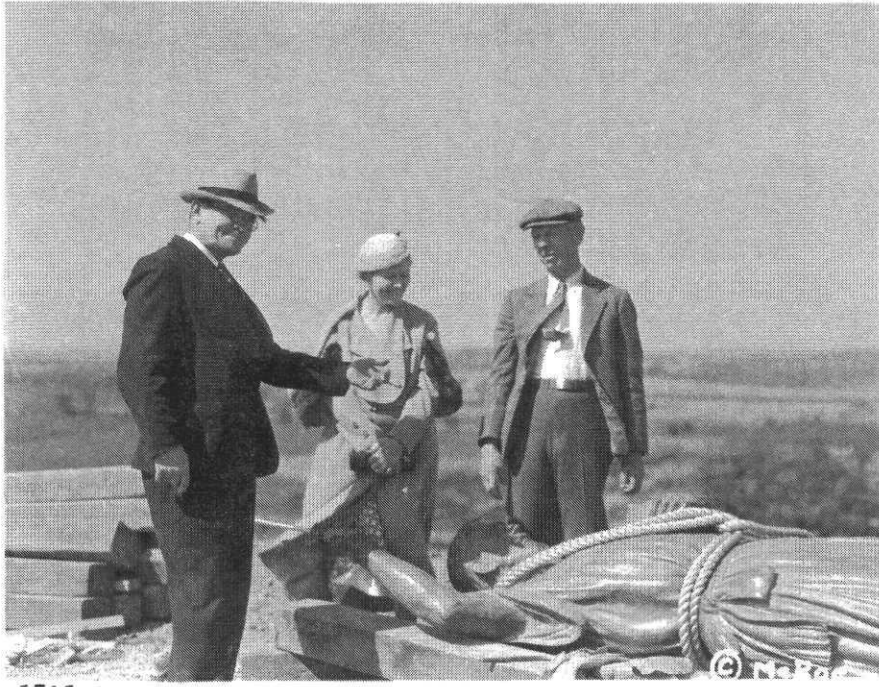


Figure 20. 1935 Photograph of Torliel S. Knaphus, Rebecca Bean, Willard Bean, and statue, Palmyra Bean Packer Collection.

After being commissioned by the Church to do the work of the monument, Knaphus began a search for an appropriate model for the angel Moroni. James H. Moyle, mission president of the Eastern States Mission from 1929-1933 matched Knaphus' vision of what Moroni ought to look like.<sup>36</sup> Moyle sat as a model for Knaphus on several occasions and the similarity prompted Elder Gordon B. Hinckley to write:

No one, knowing the two faces,—the one in the flesh and the other in bronze—could mistake the similarity, even to the stubby beard. The thousands of tourists who annually visit the Hill Cumorah, see the bronze figure of a great leader of ancient America, the features of a robust and loyal citizen of the America of our time.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> "Hill Cumorah Monument" Historic Sites file, located in the LDS Church History Library, Salt Lake City, Utah.

<sup>37</sup> Gordon B. Hinckley, *James Henry Moyle* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1951), 329.

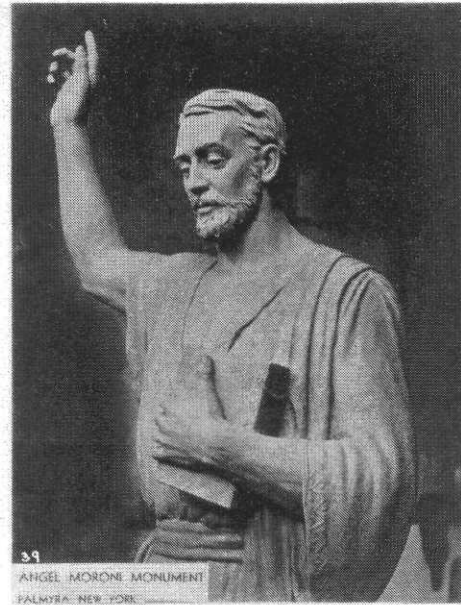
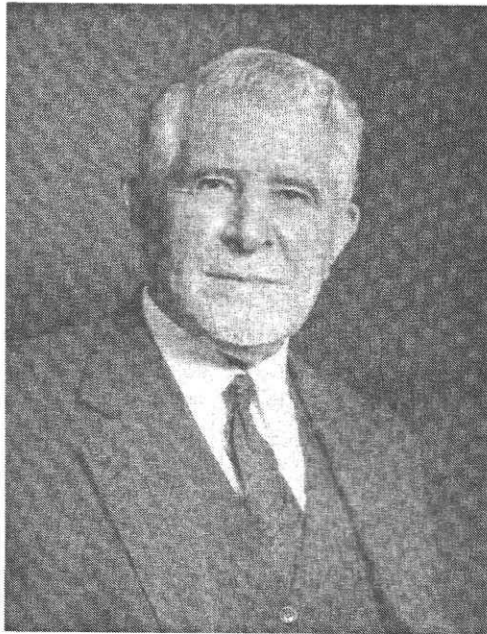


Figure 21. Photographs of James Henry Moyle and the Angel Moroni Statue, Hinckley, “James Henry Moyle,” forward, and Palmyra Bean Packer Collection.

It also appears that when Knaphus was in Utah he used other models besides Moyle. During the Depression, a man named Elwin Clark and his family rented a home from Torlief Knaphus. Looking for a well-muscled man for a model, and Elwin having been a bricklayer by trade, the arrangement was made for Elwin to model in exchange for his rent. Elwin’s face, however, was not what Knaphus was looking for so he began to walk the streets of Salt Lake City looking for another model. He found an older man with a short beard and appropriate cheekbones named Hyrum Don Carlos Clark, and convinced him to pose for him. When they arrived at the studio, Knaphus discovered that Hyrum was Elwin’s father, who was unaware that his son had been modeling for the torso of the statue.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Doris Wolf, "She Can See Her Father, Grandfather in Statue," *Rochester Democrat and Chronicle*, 21 January 1994. See also, "Hill Cumorah Monument," Historic Sites File, LDS Church History Library.

Knaphus worked on the statue from 1932 to 1935 and on 27 May 1935, the 10' 4" semi-gloss, bronze-copper statue was placed on the granite shaft portion of the monument.<sup>39</sup> An unforeseen problem arose, however, when they went to secure the statue to the granite shaft. The original design for connecting the two did not take into account the strong winds that are deflected up the west side of the hill, gaining enough force at times to almost knock a person over. There were fears that the statue would not stay in place long enough to be dedicated. Bean explained how they solved the problem: "We decided as a safety, to drive a steel rod in the lightning cable hole, fill up with liquid cement; then cut [a] small hole at [the] armpit on [the] statue, fill statue with liquid cement and place it over the rod." This gave the statue the ballast, anchorage and weight needed to be able to withstand the wind gusts.<sup>40</sup> When the Angel Moroni was first mounted on the granite shaft it faced north. However, in 1976, the statue was turned 90 degrees so that it would face Highway 21 and overlook the enlarged pageant seating area on the west side of the Hill Cumorah.<sup>41</sup>

The granite shaft portion of the monument may have come first as a suggestion from the local Palmyra residents. In 1934, Bean wrote to the Presiding Bishopric, "The natives here are much interested in the proposed monument on the Hill, and those who are familiar with materials are hoping that it will be made of the gray (light) Georgia marble, including the statue on top."<sup>42</sup> The gray granite idea obviously was agreed to, however, the granite actually used was quarried in Vermont and is known as Barre

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<sup>39</sup> Wolf, "She Can See Her Father, Grandfather in Statue," and Letter, Willard Bean to the Presiding Bishopric, 28 May 1935. See also Porter, "A Study of the Origins of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints in the States of New York and Pennsylvania, 1816-1831," 25.

<sup>40</sup> Letter, Willard Bean to the Presiding Bishopric, 20 May 1935.

<sup>41</sup> "Statue Makes a Left Turn," *Church News*, 17 April 1976, 3.

<sup>42</sup> Letter, Willard Bean to the Presiding Bishopric, 7 July 1934.

Vermont light granite.<sup>43</sup> Its height is measured at twenty-five feet, four inches high and it rests on steps that are one foot, three inches. This all rests on a two foot, four inch pedestal above the ground foundation. This, together with the bronze statue of Moroni, brings the entire monument to a height of thirty-nine feet, three inches.<sup>44</sup>

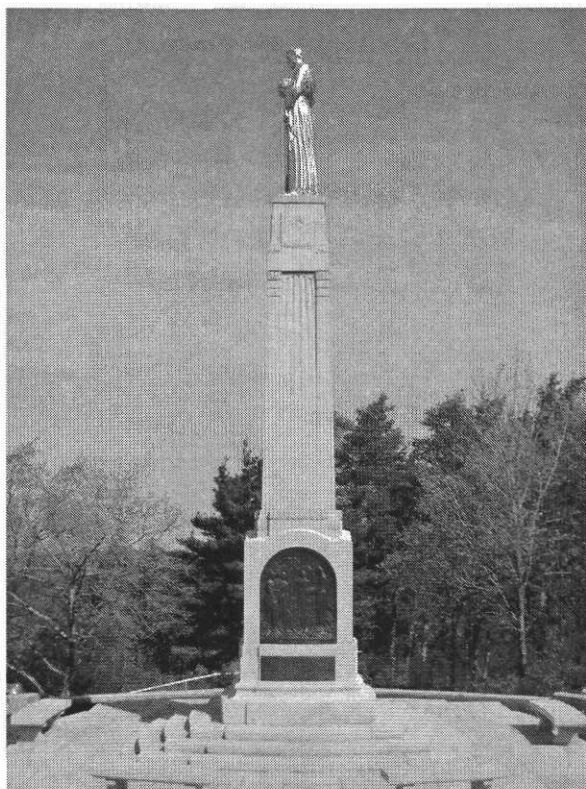


Figure 22. April 2002 photograph of the monument, taken from the south.

The granite portion of the monument, along with the statue of Moroni, is deeply symbolic in many ways and represents the foundation of prophets and apostles who lead the Church. Torlief Knaphus explained:

The Hill Cumorah Monument has an appearance of a symbolic pillar of light with upward leading lines so designated as to draw the thought of man toward Heaven and God and give heed to the gospel plan.

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<sup>43</sup> Bean, "Autobiography of Willard Washington Bean," 2:36.

<sup>44</sup> Porter, "A Study of the Origins of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints in the States of New York and Pennsylvania, 1816-1831," 25.

The large figure on the top of the shaft represents Moroni in a position as though calling the inhabitants of earth to reverence of the Gospel message. His right hand is pointed toward heaven and in his left hand he holds the record. On the west panel is shown Moroni delivering the plates to the young man Joseph, indeed one of the most remarkable dealings of God with man.<sup>45</sup>

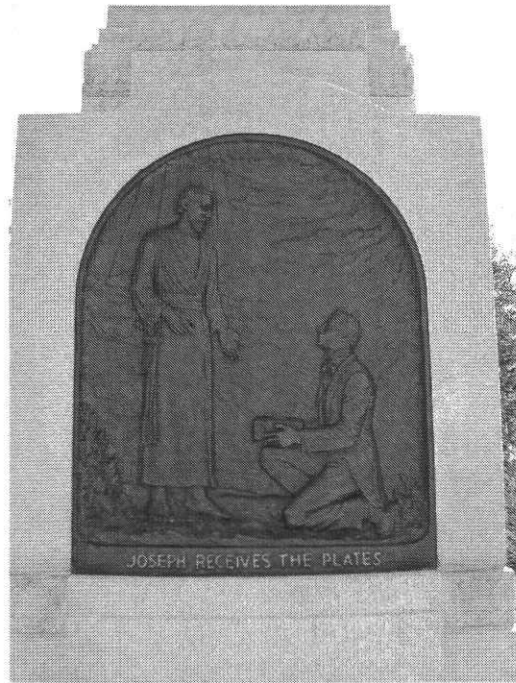


Figure 23. April 2002 photograph of the west panel of the monument.

God did not only reveal and speak to man but through His holy servant brought tangible material plates on which was written the Gospel plan as Jesus taught it to the people on this continent after His death and resurrection in Palestine. Not only did he reveal this to one man, but, as shown on the south panel, three others were permitted to see them by the power and glory of God.

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<sup>45</sup> The last of these four panels was placed in the granite shaft on 7 June 1935, see Letter, Willard Bean to the Presiding Bishopric, 8 June 1935.



Figure 24. April 2002 photograph of the south panel.

An angel of the Lord stood before them holding the plates in his hands and showed them the engravings thereon. He commanded them also to testify of the same and a voice was heard from above saying that this record was true and the translation is correct. In addition to these witnesses, Joseph was permitted to show the plates to eight other men who handled them and examined the inscription thereon. This is shown on the east panel.





Figure 25. April 2002 photograph of the east panel.

The inscription on the north panel is taken from the last book of this record called the “Book of Moroni,” which consists mostly of counsels and exhortations to the people of the time this record should come forth.

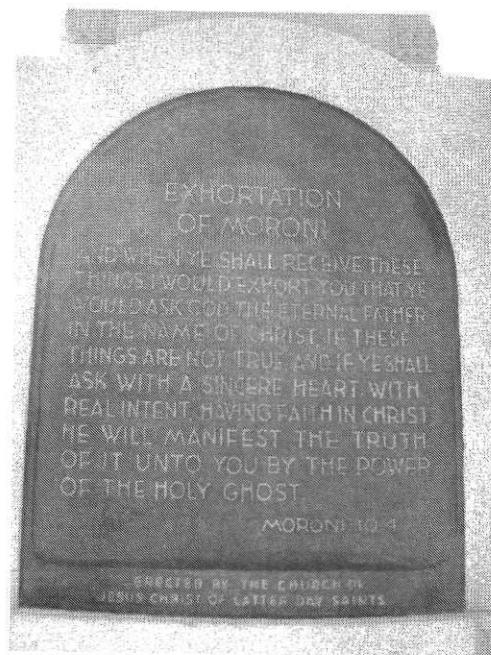


Figure 26. April 2002 photograph of the north panel.

The shaft and ornamentations thereon also have their symbol and meanings. The lines of light flowing down the center shaft symbolize the

President of the Church and the pillar on each side symbolizes his two counselors. The design above the panels consisting of twelve conventional lights represents the Twelve Apostles who are called to be special witnesses of Christ. The similar ornamentation on the corners symbolizes the Seven Presidents of Seventies who stand as light to the four corners of the earth. The ornamentation on the corners below the panels represents the Presiding Bishopric who officiate in temporal things.

The Hill Cumorah Monument is enduring bronze and granite, stands as a testimony to all nations, kindred, tongues and people, that the angel spoken of by John the Revelator has indeed come to earth. It also expressed our thanks to God for His kindness in revealing these things to us.

I trust that the imperfections of my work will not be in offense, but that whoever sees this monument will investigate and accept the Gospel message as I have done, as it is the most precious thing to receive.

Torlief S. Knaphus,  
Sculptor and Designer<sup>46</sup>

A granite marker that stands alone just south of the monument summarizes the details Knaphus explains above.

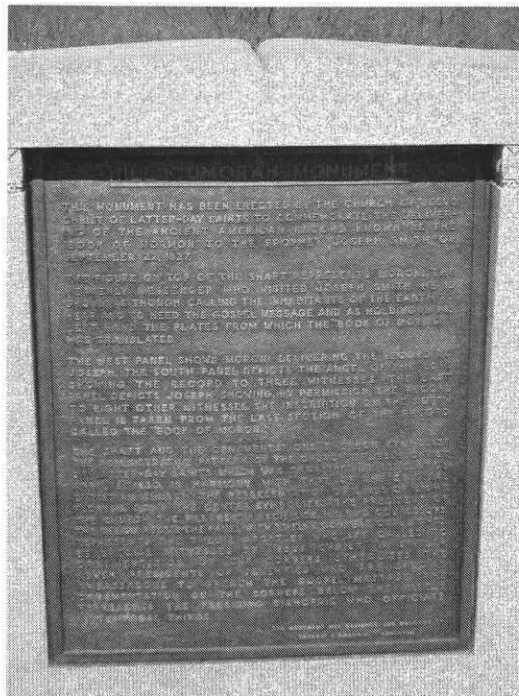


Figure 27. April 2002 photograph of the marker just south of the monument.

<sup>46</sup> Torlief S. Knaphus, "Description of the Hill Cumorah Monument," Historic Sites file labeled, "Hill Cumorah," found in the LDS Church Historical Library, Salt Lake City, Utah. See also, John D. Giles, "The Symbolism of the Angel Moroni Monument--Hill Cumorah," *The Instructor*, no. 86, (April 1951), 98-9.

To make this monument more accessible for up-close viewing, the Church paved a road leading to the top of Cumorah. Beginning on the west side of Cumorah, the road wraps around the north end and travels south along the east side arriving on the summit of Cumorah, just south of the monument.<sup>47</sup>

In addition to the monument in place and the road leading up to it, the decision was made to invest in a lighting system to illuminate the monument at night. However, due to problems in obtaining permission to extend power lines the needed distance, this project was held up until about the second week of June 1935. However, an influential man named Mr. Soderholm accompanied Willard Bean to Rochester Gas & Electricity and was finally able to obtain permission to extend a line out to the Hill Cumorah.<sup>48</sup>

With the monument dedicatory services scheduled for 21-23 July 1935, it was necessary for missionaries to work late into the night filling in trenches and covering the conduits for the lighting. They succeeded and the monument lights were turned on for the first time on 19 July 1935, just two days before the dedicatory program began.<sup>49</sup> The total cost of the monument and renovations to the hill came to \$35,000.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Bean, "Autobiography of Willard Washington Bean," 2:36.

<sup>48</sup> Letter, Willard Bean to the Presiding Bishopric, 18 June 1935.

<sup>49</sup> *Journal History*, 20 July 1935, 26, and 21 July 1935, 7-8.

<sup>50</sup> Rex C. Reeve, and Richard O. Cowan, "The Hill Called Cumorah," 79. See also, *Journal History*, 20 July 1935, 26.

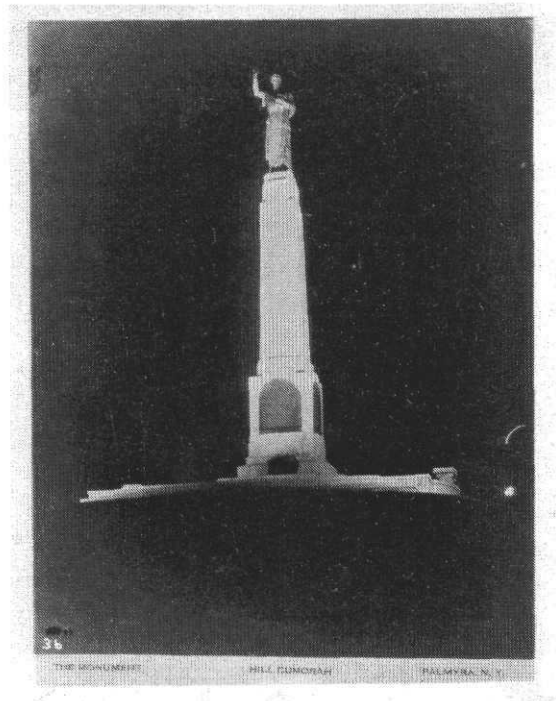


Figure 28. ca. 1935 photograph of monument at night, Palmyra Bean Packer Collection.

Elder Roscoe Grover, present at the dedication of the monument and witness to the initial lighting of the monument said, “The lighting of that great shaft at night is a soul-stirring experience to all who pass by, and will help to tell the story in a new way.”<sup>51</sup>

The day for the monument’s dedication came on 21 July 1935, and hundreds of visitors, Latter-day Saints and non-Latter-day Saints alike, made their way to Palmyra.

The *Rochester Sunday American* reported:

Two special trains from Salt Lake City and the West arrived in Rochester late last night bearing hundreds of Mormons, including a large delegation of Boy Scouts, en route to the dedicatory services to be held at the shrine of their religion near Palmyra today.

The visitors slept on the train last night and early this morning took breakfast in Rochester hotel. They were to return to the New York Central station in Rochester this morning at 5:30 a.m. to board special buses for the village [Palmyra], being expected here about 7:45....

The services will be opened at 9 a.m. with the playing of a sacred hymn by four trumpeters. A chorus of missionaries...will sing...

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<sup>51</sup> Roscoe A. Grover, "Moroni Lives Again," *The Improvement Era* 38, no. 9, September 1935, 544.

The church has rented every available room and bed in the village of Palmyra. Many visitors will take quarters in Rochester.<sup>52</sup>

A group of four hundred visitors were divided among the townspeople of Palmyra who volunteered to give them room and board at a reasonable price.<sup>53</sup> Along with the hundreds of visitors, came twenty newspaper reporters and photographers from Rochester, Buffalo, Syracuse, Palmyra, and other nearby communities as well as members of the Associated Press and United Press. Radio commentators broadcasted the event and television stations filmed President Heber J. Grant speaking at the base of the monument.<sup>54</sup> During one interview, he declared that no other monument in the world was associated with greater things than was this monument.<sup>55</sup>

On Sunday, 21 July, there was a flag raising ceremony at sunrise, and the first dedicatory session began at ten o'clock a.m. with a bugle call from the top of Cumorah. Four missionary trumpeters dressed in white pants and navy blue blazers, played "The Nephite Lamentation."



Figure 29. The four trumpeters, Palmyra Bean Packer Collection.

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<sup>52</sup> *Journal History*, 21 July 1935, 10.

<sup>53</sup> Grover, "Moroni Lives Again," 543.

<sup>54</sup> Grover, "Moroni Lives Again," 542.

<sup>55</sup> *Journal History*, 22 July 1935, 10.

Elder Roscoe A. Grover then read a scripture selection that included the passage: “And again, what do we hear? Glad tidings from Cumorah! Moroni, an angel from heaven declaring the fulfillment of the prophets—the book to be revealed” (D&C 128:20).

President Don B. Colton stood and welcomed the nearly 2,000 guests. In borrowing from Abraham Lincoln’s famous Gettysburg Address, President Colton paraphrased:

In a church sense we cannot consecrate, we cannot dedicate, we cannot hallow this ground. The great man who lived and acted here consecrated it more than our poor powers can add or detract. But it is altogether fitting that we should erect this monument, that those who live now may come here and catch the inspiration of the lessons of the past, and know more fully of the beginnings of the work in this day.<sup>56</sup>

President Colton’s remarks were followed by President Rudger Clawson of the Council of the Twelve who recounted many of the Prophet Joseph Smith’s accomplishments and said, “Among his achievements which I have mentioned is the translation of the Book of Mormon from the plates sealed and hidden from the eyes of the world for many centuries, and latterly taken from this sacred hill.”<sup>57</sup> Both President Colton and President Clawson seemed to be speaking to the non-Latter-day Saint portion of the audience as well as the Latter-day Saint contingency. President Clawson ended his remarks by saying, “I feel in my heart to invoke the blessing of God upon every man and woman who has received and obeyed the Gospel message, and upon every man and woman who will hereafter receive and obey this gospel message.”<sup>58</sup>

Next, President David O. McKay of the First Presidency related, perhaps, the most succinct declaration of the purpose of the Church in constructing a monument on

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<sup>56</sup> “Dedication of the Hill Cumorah Monument,” LDS Church Archives.

<sup>57</sup> “Dedication of the Hill Cumorah Monument,” LDS Church Archives.

<sup>58</sup> “Dedication of the Hill Cumorah Monument,” LDS Church Archives.

the Hill Cumorah in his address. After recounting how the Church had grown and prospered since the time of Joseph Smith, he said:

This monument is not erected as an expression of that wealth; it is not, I say, even to perpetuate the deeds, mighty as they were, that happened between the years 1820 and 1830 in this hallowed ground—from the time that the Prophet Joseph Smith had his first revelation in 1820 until the Church was organized in 1830.

This monument is built as an expression of gratitude for the restoration of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and as a manifestation to all the world of our faith in the personality and divine Fatherhood of God. In that sense it becomes a monument and the answer to the question of the ages: 'If a man die shall he live again?'<sup>59</sup>

After President McKay's remarks the canvas shroud that was covering the monument was removed and the congregations joined in the song "What Was Witnessed in the Heavens." In attendance at this session was a young Gordon B. Hinckley, on his way home from his mission to England. He later wrote an article for the *Deseret News* giving these details of that event:

On the summit of the hill was a canvas-draped monument. At an appointed signal four trumpeters raised their gleaming instruments. In sharp clear tones "An Angel From On High" echoed across the placid countryside. The flag--the Stars and Stripes--fluttered in the wind, and it never looked more beautiful than it did over that hill sacred and important to the history of America. Then the canvas shroud fell from the monument, and the figure of Moroni looked out across the quiet fields which in his day of life had been scenes of carnage and sorrow.<sup>60</sup>

It is interesting to note that Gordon B. Hinckley, present at the first dedication of the Hill Cumorah as a returning missionary, would also be present at the 50th anniversary of the dedication in 1985 as a member of the First Presidency.

Following the unveiling of the monument, President Heber J. Grant shared a few remarks followed by the dedicatory prayer. The prayer itself is interesting in that a great

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<sup>59</sup> "Dedication of the Hill Cumorah Monument," LDS Church Archives.

<sup>60</sup> Gordon B. Hinckley, "Religious Prejudice Allayed by Friendly Utah Mormon," *Church News*, 5 June 1949, 10C.

deal of it is dedicated to expressing gratitude for how many of the former attacks against the Book of Mormon's divinity had recently been discredited by scientific and archaeological discoveries.<sup>61</sup> He also recounted some of the most important events in the Church's history and expressed gratitude for each of them. President Grant then closed the prayer with the following:

We are thankful above all things for the restoration to the earth of the priesthood, the power to minister in the name of Thine only Begotten Son, which has been given to us of Thee, and by the authority of that priesthood, O, Father, and in the name of our Redeemer, we dedicate unto Thee at this time this monument that has been erected upon this sacred hill.

We dedicate the hill itself and the ground surrounding it and all of the materials that have been used in this monument; and we humbly pray unto Thee that it may be preserved from the elements, and that it may stand here as a testimony of God, of Jesus Christ, and of the dealings of Jesus Christ with the people that lived anciently upon this continent.<sup>62</sup>

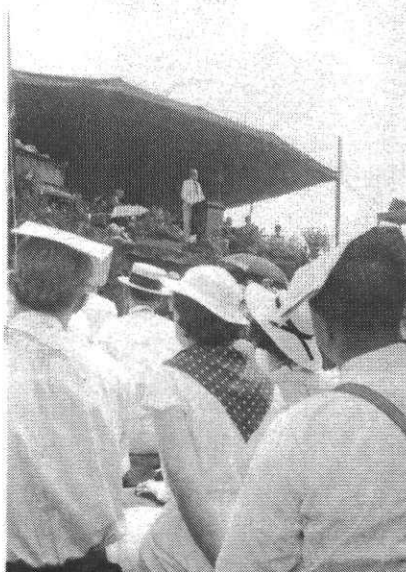


Figure 30. ca. 1935, President Heber J. Grant at dedication of monument, Palmyra Bean Packer Collection.

<sup>61</sup> "Dedication of the Hill Cumorah Monument," LDS Church Archives. See also Grover, "Moroni Lives Again," 544-5. Some of these discoveries included cement dwellings in Mexico, horse bones in the oil pits of California, and radio being able to broadcast a human voice far and wide.

<sup>62</sup> Grover, "Moroni Lives Again," 545. See Appendix pages 161-63, for the entire dedicatory prayer.



The second session held on Sunday, 21 July 1935 included speakers from the local Palmyra-Manchester area. Previous to the dedication, Bean had suggested to the Church leaders in Salt Lake City that one of the dedicatory sessions include one or two prominent local citizens as speakers. Some of the leaders hesitated at this idea fearing that the local speaker's remarks might be less than positive towards the Church. Willard, however, insisted that the sentiment of the local residents towards the Church was more lenient and assenting than supposed. After obtaining consent, Willard said:

I contacted Judge S. N. Sawyer, of Wayne County, one of the most influential men in Western New York, and he cheerfully consented if the Dr. would give his consent, and he was quite feeble at that time. But he promised even if the Doctor forbade him talking, he would dictate something to his secretary, and the Mayor would read it. It was his intention to make a short speech of welcome, even contrary to Doctor's orders. I introduced him to our Authorities and his daughter and I helped him onto the platform.<sup>63</sup>

President Don B. Colton introduced him as follows:

We have rejoiced in the fine spirit of cooperation that has characterized the last few years in this community between our own people and our friends, among whom we dwell. It is a source of great pleasure to me to know of the fine spirit of friendship that prevails. Among our very best friends we count the man who is to speak to us for a short time now. We regret that his health is not such that he feels able to talk long. He asked me to say that he would not occupy much time. I am sure that we shall be glad to hear whatever message he has to give to us.<sup>64</sup>

Judge Sawyer's talk turned out to be highly eulogistic of the Latter-day Saints and detailed how his, as well as the Palmyra-Manchester community's sentiment towards the Latter-day Saints, had changed over the past few years. According to Bean, the Church authorities wasted no time after their return to Salt Lake City in having Judge Sawyer's address printed up in the *Deseret News*.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Bean, "Autobiography of Willard Washington Bean," 2:37.

<sup>64</sup> "Dedication of the Hill Cumorah Monument," LDS Church Archives.

<sup>65</sup> Bean, "Autobiography of Willard Washington Bean," 2:37. See also, *Journal History*, 10 August 1935, 5.

The dedication ceremonies and festivities continued until 24 July 1935 with meetings being held in both the Sacred Grove and on the Hill Cumorah. From the viewpoint of the Church, it was deemed a success on all accounts, but perhaps especially as a public relations feat, and chance to proclaim the gospel in a manner completely new to the Church. Elder Joseph F. Merrill of the Council of the Twelve wrote:

The monument is perhaps one of the finest publicity achievements of the Church. Like a sentinel it crowns the noble hill on which it was erected and stands as an enduring challenge to all the world to examine the story of the Book of Mormon. It proclaims the confidence of the Church in the genuineness of the Book and, in effect, asserts the willingness of the Church to stand or fall on the question of genuineness. It will receive an increasing amount of attention with the passing of the years. Modest in proportions, its publicity will far outrank its size. It is one of the newer means that the Church is developing of proclaiming its message. Will it not also be one of the most effective? Is the Book of Mormon not destined to be one of the most widely read books of modern times? No one engaged in proclaiming the message of Mormonism should fail to call to his aid the help of this wonderful book.<sup>66</sup>

The effect of proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ that culminated with the dedication of the Hill Cumorah monument is perhaps best seen in a Rochester newspaper article. Published nearly one year after the dedication, one writer wrote:

Tolerance not only has the merit of virtue, but the practice of intolerance sometimes defeats the narrow purpose within the narrower minds harboring it. We have an illustration close to home. One hundred years ago Mormonism was banned from Western New York, the very region which was the birthplace of a religion that has since been accepted by thousands. What a change a century has brought! Not only has a beautiful monument been erected on the Hill of Cumorah at Palmyra where Joseph Smith is said to have been directed by the Angel Moroni to the golden plates on which were inscribed the tenets of the faith. But the whole site is being beautified. New improvements will cost \$90,000. More important is the changed attitude of which they are not only the physical manifestations. Because the hill has become a shrine for a great host of Mormons. During the past year 35,000 of them from all parts of the nation visited that shrine; there is an increase of membership at Palmyra, a new congregation at Canandaigua. Therefore, be intolerant if you must—If you have no light to learn better. But remember that the persons and the principles which feed your prejudice and

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<sup>66</sup> Joseph F. Merrill, "Cumorah Monument Significant," *The Improvement Era* 38, no. 9, October 1935, 619.

arouse your hate may endure, while you are CONDEMNED TO BE FORGOTTEN.<sup>67</sup>

In 1835, W.W. Phelps wrote that "Cumorah...is well calculated to stand in this generation, as a monument of marvelous works and wonders."<sup>68</sup> With the dedication of the monument, this dream was beginning to be realized. The Hill Cumorah had come a long way since it had been pejoratively named "Mormon Hill" by those who ridiculed and persecuted the Church.

### **The Bureau of Information**

Although the first official bureau of information at the Hill Cumorah was not completed until 1936, the concept had long existed of using the Hill Cumorah as a missionary tool and a means to proclaim the gospel and answer people's questions. The Mesoamerican style building that first bore the official title of "bureau of information" was actually preceded by other buildings and structures that first served the purpose of disseminating information about the Church. The first of these buildings to serve as a primitive bureau of information was the farmhouse that was part of the so-called "Cumorah Farm" or Inglis farm. Purchased by the Church in 1923, this farmhouse, according to Bean, was "Attractively located commanding a beautiful view of west side of hill where the Plates were obtained, and on the state road [highway 21] where could do a big missionary work with tourists and others who stop to view and snap the hill."<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> *Rochester Journal*, 10 July 1936; see *Journal History*, 10 July 1936, 7.

<sup>68</sup> Phelps, *Latter-day Saints' Messenger and Advocate*, November 1835, 2:221.

<sup>69</sup> Letter, Willard Bean to the Presiding Bishopric, 19 June 1923.



Figure 31. ca. 1930 photograph of Willard Bean speaking on Cumorah with the “Cumorah Farm” in background, Palmyra Bean Packer Collection.

After purchasing this farm, Bean put a tenant farmer on the property who was initially willing to hand out literature and answer questions regarding the Church.<sup>70</sup> However, this tenant farmer and his wife were not members of the Church and were soon influenced by their anti-“Mormon” family members and neighbors living on the Sampson farm to the extent that they began claiming to know nothing about the Hill Cumorah or the Church when asked by tourists.<sup>71</sup> This obviously necessitated a change in occupancy at the Cumorah Farm, and a Bishop Peacock and his family from Utah arrived in Manchester in the spring of 1925 and took over operations at the Hill Cumorah.<sup>72</sup> While they were much better at answering and handling questions of the tourists, they were not very adept at running the farm. This led to their being replaced by the Samuel Ferguson family from Erie, Pennsylvania in the spring of 1927.<sup>73</sup> Eventually, Willard Bean’s brother, Virginius Bean and his family, was called to move to the Cumorah Farm and run

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<sup>70</sup> Letter, Willard Bean to the Presiding Bishopric, 28 June 1924.

<sup>71</sup> Letter, Willard Bean to the Presiding Bishopric, 1 December 1924.

<sup>72</sup> Letter, Willard Bean to the Presiding Bishopric, 24 January 1925.

<sup>73</sup> Letter, Willard Bean to the Presiding Bishopric, 28 December 1926.

the farm from about 1932 to 1937 and serve as missionaries to answer the questions of those who visited the hill.<sup>74</sup>

While the Cumorah farmhouse was not initially constructed to serve as a bureau of information, perhaps the first constructed building to answer the need was a small stand. Bean explained that the nature of missionary work at that time at the hill was largely that of tracting. He, therefore, erected a small stand with copies of the Book of Mormon, pamphlets, tracts, etc. and a sign that read, “Book of Mormon 50 cts. tracts free.” Bean reported: “Many of them drop their half dollar and take a book. A few venture up to the house for further information.”<sup>75</sup> The Church, apparently, still sees the value of such a stand as it still maintains one on the Hill Cumorah property.



Figure 32. April 2002 photograph of the information booth to the southwest of the hill.

It appears that there was little mention of a bureau of information between the years of 1926 to 1928; however, with the purchase of the Sampson farm in 1928, the idea

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<sup>74</sup> Personal interview with Palmyra Bean Packer in consultation with Leah Bean Chandler, 19 September 2002.

<sup>75</sup> Letter, Willard Bean to the Presiding Bishopric, 28 December 1926.

was once again brought up and considered by the Presiding Bishopric. It is obvious that priority was placed on the monument due to its earlier completion date, but the fact that the first official Bureau of Information at the Hill Cumorah was completed in 1936, just a little over one year after the monument, shows that it, too, was a high priority.

The first bureau of information was a unique building intended to represent Mayan architecture. According to one article, this was “in keeping with the ancient American history as related in the Book of Mormon.”<sup>76</sup>

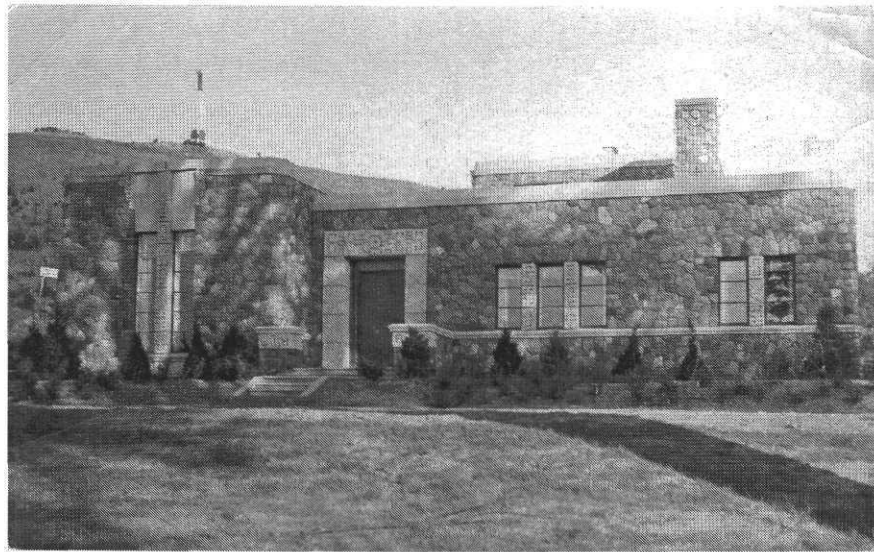


Figure 33. ca. 1936 photograph of the first Hill Cumorah Bureau of Information, Palmyra Bean Packer Collection.

Lorenzo S. Young of Salt Lake City was the architect and construction was under the general direction of Willard Bean. The building had a large information room where the director, with the aid of Eastern States missionaries gave information to tourists, held special meetings, and provided tracts and other literature. It also housed the electric control room that contained the controls for the lights which illuminated the monument and surrounding grounds. This building also served as the residence for the director of

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<sup>76</sup> "Dedicated," *Church News*, 4 September 1937, 2.

the bureau of information and included two bedrooms, a kitchen, breakfast nook, and garage. The cost for this building was approximately \$10,000.<sup>77</sup> While this was certainly a substantial amount of money at that time, the dedication of this building reveals its purpose as seen by the leaders of the Church at that time. On Sunday, 29 August 1937, John A. Widstoe of the Council of Twelve, assisted by Eastern States Mission President, Frank Evans, and Cumorah District President, Eugene J. Neff,<sup>78</sup> dedicated the Hill Cumorah Bureau of Information. In his remarks to those gathered at the dedication, Elder Widstoe explained that the reason for this building was, "The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints believes without any doubt that it holds a commission that it is under a responsibility to teach the message of this Gospel and the eternal truth of God to all the world."<sup>79</sup> With a reported average of 40,000 annual visitors to the Hill Cumorah and Joseph Smith farm at this time,<sup>80</sup> this investment of \$10,000 was an appropriate expenditure.

This building would serve admirably in its purpose to help proclaim the restored message of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints for the next twenty-three years. However, by 1959, it would stand in need of renovation due to the increased number of visitors to the Hill Cumorah each year. Plans were approved to add a second building made of the same stone as the first, just south of the 1936 building. These two buildings were separated by a forty-foot patio, and connected in the front by a majestic

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<sup>77</sup> "Church to Erect Bureau of Information at Hill Cumorah," *Church News*, 13 June 1936, 1.

<sup>78</sup> Coincidentally, Eugene J. Neff was called as the first Director of the Hill Cumorah Bureau of Information. In a letter to the Presiding Bishopric, Willard Bean wrote, "Your letter apprising us of Brother Neff as caretaker at Bureau of Information at hand. We were thrilled to learn that a man of Elder Neff's standing and experience, is to be in charge at the Hill Cumora [sic]. There is a real opportunity for effective missionary work at the hill, and under Elder Neff's direction it will not suffer." See Letter, Willard Bean to the Presiding Bishopric, 15 August 1936.

<sup>79</sup> "Dedicated," *Church News*, 4 September 1937, 1.

<sup>80</sup> "Church to Erect Bureau of Information at Hill Cumorah," *Church News*, 13 June 1936, 1.

colonnade. The old building was converted completely into residential living space and remodeled to include a reception hall, dining room, kitchen, three bedrooms, two bathrooms, and a double garage. The new building was dedicated to sharing and disseminating information about the Church. It included a commodious reception room, lecture room, general office and private office. The total cost for this renovation and addition was \$75,000, which was, again, appropriate, as according to one source, “the Hill Cumorah [was] the most visited Church historical site.”<sup>81</sup>



Figure 34. 1988 Hill Cumorah Visitors Center, Gareth W. Seastrand Collection. Although this is a later photograph, it shows the external changes that were made in the 1959 renovation. Subsequent renovations remodeled the interior only, and did not affect the exterior until 2001.

By the early 1980's, this bureau of information was once again insufficient to handle the increase of visitors and tourists to the Hill Cumorah. According to the *Deseret News*, there was an average of 100 visitors a day to the Hill Cumorah, and received a total of 472 missionary referrals in 1984. Plans for a new renovation to the interior of the center were submitted, and by June 1985 they were completed. This renovation included

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<sup>81</sup> "Church Plans for New Hill Cumorah Bureau," *Church News*, 5 September 1959, 9.



a new interview room, and an expanded exhibit area. A film presentation entitled "Christ in America" was shown and two slide presentations entitled, "Neighbors," and "If You Love Them, Tell Them" were available for those interested. The tours by the director and missionaries at the bureau focused mainly on the Book of Mormon and the restoration of the Church in this dispensation.<sup>82</sup> These renovations, according to Elder William S. Partridge, director of the Hill Cumorah Visitors Center, increased the average of visitors to the Hill Cumorah by fifty percent.<sup>83</sup>

The late 1980's brought an overall increase of visitors to the Church's visitors centers by twenty-nine percent. According to the *Deseret News*, "Among those showing greatest increases are centers at Mexico City, Hill Cumorah, New York City, and St. George, Utah."<sup>84</sup> Sherman M. Crump, a managing director of the Missionary Department, reiterated the mission and purpose of these buildings as declared by Elder John A. Widstoe in 1937, by stating, "The role of the visitors center is, first, to preach the message of the Savior."<sup>85</sup>

Through the decade of the 1990s, visits to the Hill Cumorah and other Palmyra-Manchester Church historical sites continued to increase. By 1998, 175,000 people were visiting these places with a number of them attending the Hill Cumorah Pageant as well.<sup>86</sup> In order to handle this increase in visitors, more renovations were made in 1998. These included putting a theater on the south side of the visitors center, new exhibits in the lobby, an ante room where visitors receive an introduction to the First Vision, and another theater in the existing space at the back of the center. These renovations did not

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<sup>82</sup> "Renovations Create More Visitor Interest," *Church News*, 23 June 1985, 11.

<sup>83</sup> "Renovations," *Church News*, 23 June 1985, 11.

<sup>84</sup> "6 Million Visitors Tour Centers in 1988," *Church News*, 11 February 1989, 3.

<sup>85</sup> "6 Million Visitors," *Church News*, 11 February 1989, 3.

<sup>86</sup> "Spiritual Renewal at Historic Sites," *Church News*, 3 July 1999, 8-9.

change the outside structure of the building, but rather the interior design and function of the building to incorporate newer technology. Also part of this 1998 renovation was the addition of a reproduction of the Christus statue by Bertel Thorvaldsen to the Hill Cumorah Visitors Center.<sup>87</sup> Visitors from various countries could now hear the message of the gospel in their own language sounding forth from the Christus.

The renovation in 1998, however, seemed only a temporary fix, because by 2001, the Church had decided to completely redo the Hill Cumorah Visitors Center. Just after the Pageant season in July 2001, the building that had started out as the Bureau of Information, and undergone several renovations to keep it functioning, was razed to the ground.<sup>88</sup> The building to take its place would reflect the value that the Church places on using this sacred place to proclaim the gospel. As one enters the new building the first exhibit he encounters is called "The Gateway Exhibit." This exhibit introduces and gives basic information about all of the nearby Church history sites. The next room the visitor will encounter is the Theme Room. The Christus from 1998 was retained and placed in this room where it continues to give the basic gospel message in at least forty languages. Visitors are then invited to the theater, which seats over 100 people, where they will view a film of the First Vision and Restoration. This film is currently in progress and is expected to be completed by January 2003.<sup>89</sup> Stephen B. Allen, managing director of the Missionary Department, said of this film:

We hope that in a beautiful and moving way, it will help people understand the young Prophet, Joseph Smith, and what motivated him to go into the Sacred

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<sup>87</sup> Telephone interview with Stacey Goodliff, Design Manager of Exhibits for the Missionary Department of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 10 October 2002. See also, "Christus Statue" in Daniel H. Ludlow, ed., *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 5 vols. [1992], 1:273.

<sup>88</sup> Stacey Goodliff, Telephone interview, 10 October 2002.

<sup>89</sup> Stacey Goodliff, Telephone interview, 10 October 2002. See also, "Visitors Center Nears Completion," *Church News*, 15 June 2002, 12.

Grove and ask the questions he asked, and what prompted the vision... We hope it will help them understand it in a way that helps them love and appreciate the Prophet.”<sup>90</sup>

At this point the official tour is ended and the visitors center missionaries ask the visitors for a referral. From this point, the visitors are free to peruse for themselves the various exhibits that help explain certain key tenets of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. The first exhibit they come to is a marble statue of the First Vision, which is followed by an exquisite stained glass window that portrays Moroni giving the gold plates to Joseph Smith accompanied by an audio presentation of Joseph Smith’s account. The next exhibit portrays the coming forth of the Book of Mormon, specifically the translation, preservation, and printing of the Book of Mormon. Following this is an exhibit that compares the Bible and the Book of Mormon and is accompanied by a video presentation. As one turns to the middle of this room they are met by an exhibit of copies of the Book of Mormon printed in various languages. Another exhibit shares three stories from the Book of Mormon: Helaman’s 2,000 stripling warriors, Lehi and company building a ship, and Moroni burying the gold plates. This exhibit is followed by one that explains the organization of the Church and the restoration of the Priesthood. The theme of the last exhibit is “Modern Day Prophets Speak.” The technology for many of the exhibits is cutting edge and consists of DVD driven, LCD panel interactive touch screens that allow a person to simply touch the screen and pull up the audio and visual information they desire.<sup>91</sup> From the organization of the exhibits in the Hill Cumorah Visitors Center, and the expense involved, it is obvious that Church leaders see the Hill Cumorah as a highly essential place to proclaim the message of the restored gospel of

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<sup>90</sup> "Visitors Center Nears Completion," *Church News*, 15 June 2002, 12.

<sup>91</sup> Stacey Goodliff, Telephone interview, 10 October 2002.

Jesus Christ. It is also interesting to note, that while there are numerous exhibits on various aspects of the Latter-day Saint faith, the most important aspect is what is visible to all who drive past the center on highway 21, that being the Savior Jesus Christ. As Elder Charles Didier of the Presidency of the Seventy and executive director of the Missionary Department explained, the message of the new Hill Cumorah center is “first and foremost that Jesus Christ is the Savior of the world and that we worship Him...It will be a Christ centered message.”<sup>92</sup> The construction of this building was completed on 1 July 2002, less than one year after it had started. President Gordon B. Hinckley dedicated it on 2 July 2002, which was just in time for the 2002 Pageant that ran 5-6 and 9-13 July 2002.<sup>93</sup>

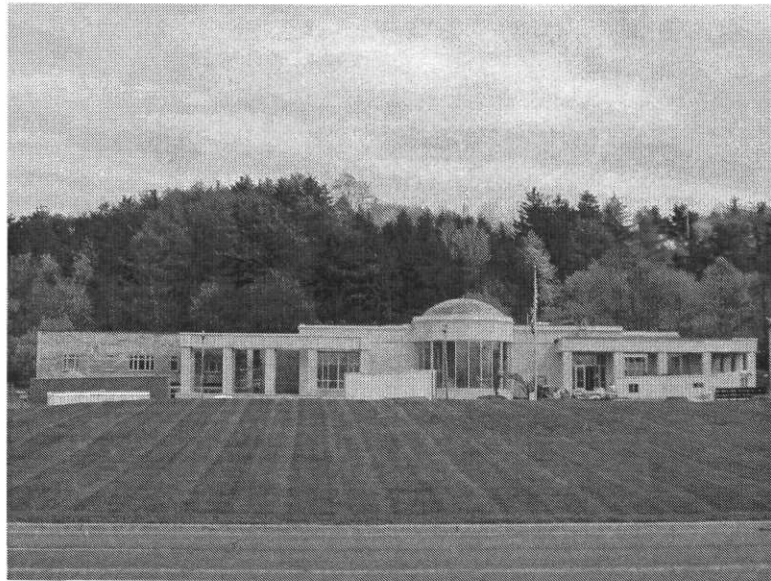


Figure 35. April 2002 photograph of the Hill Cumorah Visitors Center.

From 1936 when the bureau was first erected until now, the purpose for these buildings and this sacred space has been to proclaim the restored gospel of Jesus Christ.

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<sup>92</sup> "Visitors Center Nears Completion," *Church News*, 15 June 2002, 12.

<sup>93</sup> Elder Doug Grigg, currently serving at the Hill Cumorah visitors center, reported that they were still screwing in light bulbs the night before the dedication; Telephone interview, 9 October 2002.

Over the years, these places have fulfilled this purpose by inspiring many to investigate the Church. One local resident of Palmyra, New York, Chuck Collie, credits his exposure to these Church sites as a major key in his conversion to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. He said, "I found that I could ride my bike to the Sacred Grove and be alone. There was such a feeling of peace and love there. I also loved the Hill Cumorah. I loved being by the statue and walking through the trees. I was fortunate because the sites were so close." As he grew older he began to ask adults about the Latter-day Saint religion. He said their response was always, "Well, they're nice people, but it's not our religion." But in his heart Chuck knew that "there was something special there." Chuck reached adulthood and made friends with the director at the Hill Cumorah visitors center. He would even give the tours to visitors when the director had to step out for a moment. He also became friends with the missionaries stationed at the E. B. Grandin printing shop and was eventually baptized a member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. He later became the supervisor in charge of the grounds of the historic sites there in Palmyra and Manchester. He identified the main influence in his conversion by saying, "I consider my contact with the historical sites a factor that changed my entire life, and I am very fortunate. I used to watch the sun rise at the Sacred Grove and watch the sun set at Hill Cumorah."<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> "He Found Feelings of Peace, Love at Palmyra Church Sites," *Church News*, 4 January 1997, 11.

## Chapter 6

### CUMORAH PROCLAIMS: THE PAGEANT

One of the greatest examples of using a geographic location to proclaim a message is arguably the Hill Cumorah Pageant, officially known as “America’s Witness For Christ.” Elder John A. Widtsoe said: “The unfolding purpose of God is like a scroll of light in the heavens. Every discovery and invention may be used for the dissemination of gospel truth.”<sup>1</sup> The idea of using the Hill Cumorah as the backdrop of a pageant that declares the message of what was unearthed there, is an effective example of what Elder Widtsoe envisioned. As stated in one article, “The Hill Cumorah Pageant not only has established itself gradually as a significant commemorative observation in the Mormon culture, but, more importantly, has become central to the Mormon public relations and proselyting efforts in the northeastern United States.”<sup>2</sup> Indeed, one source stated that as many as one-third of those who joined The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in the state of New York were introduced to it by the Hill Cumorah Pageant.<sup>3</sup>

Today, this pageant utilizes high-tech equipment, hundreds of actors, and amazing special effects to proclaim its message to over 100,000 people a year; however, the history of this pageant reveals its humble origins. There is some speculation and discussion as to when the first pageants actually started taking place at Cumorah. According to one pageant historian, the first recorded forerunner of LDS pageantry to occur in the Palmyra-Manchester area was 24 July 1917 when LDS missionaries and members from Rochester, New York conducted a “picnic pilgrimage” to the Sacred

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<sup>1</sup> John A. Widtsoe, *The Improvement Era* 42, no. 8, August 1939, 480.

<sup>2</sup> Richard N. Armstrong and Gerald S. Argetsinger, “The Hill Cumorah Pageant: Religious Pageantry as Suasive Form,” *Text and Performance Quarterly* 9, no. 2 (April 1989), 153-54.

<sup>3</sup> Argetsinger, “The Hill Cumorah Pageant: Religious Pageantry as Suasive Form,” 162.

Grove.<sup>4</sup> A few years later, in 1922, Eastern States Mission President, B. H. Roberts, had his missionaries walk to the Hill Cumorah from the Joseph Smith, Sr. farm where they had a program at the hill. The next year, President Roberts renewed this conference; however, this time he required all the elders to travel from their assigned areas of labor to Cumorah by foot, preaching the gospel and tracting as they came. They also wore special pennants with the inscription "Cumorah 1823—September 21—1923." The sisters were allowed to travel by train and the missionaries were provided lodging at the Smith farm during the conference. President of the Church, Heber J. Grant, along with President Rudger Clawson, and Elders Joseph Fielding Smith and James E. Talmage, attended this conference. During the Sunday afternoon session that was held on the Hill Cumorah there were 200 missionaries, 50 members and about 1,000 nonmembers.<sup>5</sup>



Figure 36. Photograph of President B. H. Roberts at Cumorah Conference, 1923. Palmyra Bean Packer Collection.

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<sup>4</sup> Zobell, "Early Cumorah Pageants," 25.

<sup>5</sup> Zobell, "Early Cumorah Pageants," 25-6.

While the message of the restoration of the gospel was proclaimed at these conferences or pilgrimages at the Hill Cumorah, there was no attempt to do so by dramatizing the events in pageant format, and should therefore be considered somewhat as “forerunners” to the actual pageant held at Cumorah. However, by 1935, the idea of a dramatic representation of the gospel message to be performed at Cumorah was conceived. President Don B. Colton, of the Eastern States Mission, was fond of the idea, and after seeing a pageant in Brooklyn entitled “The Restoration,” he encouraged two missionaries, Oliver R. Smith and Meryl Dunn Jones, to prepare a script for a pageant. They did so, and on 25 July 1936, with a cast of 70 people, the pageant entitled, “Truth from the Earth” was presented behind the Bureau of Information to an audience of about 5,000 people who were seated on the side of the Hill Cumorah. This pageant began with seven trumpeters playing “Nephite Lamentation” spotlighted on the summit of the hill. The message of this first pageant was to tell the story of the Book of Mormon and the restoration. Its scenes included Joseph Smith’s First Vision, the appearances of Moroni, the translation of the gold plates, Lehi and his family in the wilderness, the ministry of Alma, Christ’s appearance to the Americas, the Nephites destruction by the Lamanites, Moroni’s closing of the record, and the organization of the Church of Jesus Christ in this dispensation.<sup>6</sup>

President Colton, apparently liked what he saw and commissioned another pageant for the next year.<sup>7</sup> It is this year, 1937, that the person largely responsible for the success of the pageant and making it a yearly event came on to the scene. Harold I. Hansen was a young college student who had planned to complete his sophomore year

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<sup>6</sup> Zobell, "Early Cumorah Pageants," 27.

<sup>7</sup> Zobell, "Early Cumorah Pageants," 27.



and then go on a mission. However, at the end of his sophomore year he failed to receive a mission call despite all his friends receiving theirs. The next year, for no apparent reason, he again failed to receive a mission call. This somewhat embittered him, and he resolved in his mind that he would not serve a mission.<sup>8</sup> The following year, after receiving a coveted graduate assistantship at the State University of Iowa, he received his mission call to the Eastern States Mission. This seemed to only add insult to injury due to the fact that Hansen spoke fluent Danish and had fully intended to serve a mission to Denmark if he served at all. Hansen, subsequently, visited with his stake president and informed him that he would not be accepting the mission call.<sup>9</sup> This prompted the stake president to arrange for Hansen to meet with President David O. McKay, who was then in charge of missions. Hansen outlined his situation and grievances to President McKay who listened quietly for a while. After Hansen finished, President McKay related the story of his brother, Thomas E. McKay, receiving his mission call. President McKay had received the envelope and knew his brother would not be happy about receiving a mission call so he hid it under his brother's plate. According to Harold Hansen, President McKay said Thomas picked up his plate, saw the letter, and said, "Oh, damn!" President McKay then said to Hansen: "He went on his mission and you're going on yours. I know why you are here. You want me to say it will be all right for you to stay home. Well,

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<sup>8</sup> Harold I. Hansen, "A Testimony," Speech delivered at the Southern California Leadership Week, 26 August 1958, 2, found in Harold Hansen Papers, BYU Special Collections, MSS 1701, Box 23, Folder 6. See also, Box 2, Folder 9, hereafter cited as Hansen Papers. One of the best sources of information on Harold Hansen and his involvement with the Hill Cumorah Pageant is Walter E. Boyden, Jr., "The Road to Hill Cumorah" (Dissertation, Brigham Young University, 1982). Another excellent treatment of Hansen and the Pageant, although it covers a shorter amount of time, is Charles W. Whitman, "A History of the Hill Cumorah Pageant (1937-1964) and an Examination of the Dramatic Development of the Text of America's Witness for Christ" (Dissertation, University of Minnesota, 1967).

<sup>9</sup> Boyden, "The Road to Hill Cumorah," 28.

you're not getting off the hook; you're going. I don't know if you'll ever get another day of schooling in your life, but you're going on that mission."<sup>10</sup>

Harold Hansen arrived in Rochester on 12 July 1937 and was greeted by President Don B. Colton who took him aside and said:

Elder Hansen, I know a little bit about your background. We're doing a pageant down at the Hill Cumorah, and there are fifty missionaries that have been assigned down there who are going out in the towns to the radio stations, the newspapers, and inviting people to come to the pageant. Then, late in the afternoon, they will be rehearsing the pageant to be presented, and there may be something you can do there, but the pageant is practically ready.<sup>11</sup>

Elder Hansen arrived in Palmyra exhausted from his journey and wanted nothing but to sleep. Hansen described the subsequent events as follows:

I...had been disturbed most of the night by the insistence of two elders that I listen to a pageant. I could not understand why I had to listen to it that night particularly.

The next morning I started discovering a little bit more. They had a pageant script, but there had never been a rehearsal and it was due to be given on July 23....All the people in the vicinity were being invited to a pageant, but there had been no pageant prepared.

As I watched the floundering attempts day by day, I found a spirit in me growing more and more antagonistic to the fact that I was in the mission field and particularly in that mission. I had resolved in my mind that this was the last pageant that I would have anything to do with. I had not come into the mission field for that purpose.

Then, too, I recall as we were going through the rehearsals in the heat of the day, I met a rather unique personality, an Elder Oldroyd. I had made him go up and down the hill many, many times that day. Things were not going right, and I kept sending the group back up to try again. All at once he walked up to me and said, 'I will tell you this, Elder Hansen, I am not complaining, but this is a hotter hell than I preach,' and with that he sailed down the hill again, starting another journey.

We reached the last day of rehearsal, and I was beside myself. I made many resolutions in those days concerning things I vowed I would never do again as long as I lived. I dug so many stakes, so deep, that it has taken me years to get them up.

Those of you who remember President Colton and his gentleness remember that his feet were always very painful to him....We were at the very top

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<sup>10</sup> Boyden, "The Road to Hill Cumorah," 28-30. See also, Hansen Papers, MSS 1701, Box 2, Folder 9.

<sup>11</sup> Boyden, "The Road to Hill Cumorah," 31-2.

of the hill rehearsing late in the afternoon when [the] President made his way slowly to the top. When he reached me, and with his warm personality said, 'Well, Elder Hansen, how is it going?'

That set me off. I said, 'All I can tell you, President Colton is, that if this thing ever comes off, I'll have a testimony of the gospel.'

I believe in twenty-one years on the Hill that it was the last facetious remark I have made about the Pageant.<sup>12</sup>

Hansen's animosity towards his mission call and the fact that he had to be part of a pageant that he, at the onset, despised, seems to have been completely erased by what occurred during that first performance on 23 July 1937. In his own words, Hansen explained:

I sat in the audience that night and watched what occurred. I saw things happen on that hill that were never touched by any of us there, and we knew it beyond a shadow of a doubt, because we had worked with it day by day. I saw things occur that, month after month for the twelve months after I left that hill, I kept saying to myself, in the practical sense, 'It could not be. It just could not be.' I heard individuals around me that night say certain things that I did not think could ever come from a human being who knew nothing about Mormonism.

President Frank Evans, who was to succeed Don B. Colton as Mission President, had arrived a week before the pageant. On Sunday as he took over the mission, he said to me, 'We will begin discussing the pageant for next year.' I had said to him previously that I wanted nothing to do with the Pageant anymore. He told me that when I said that to him, he had thought, 'While I am mission president, this Pageant will be off this hill and will never come back again, but after what I saw, this pageant is here as long as I am here.' We started working in an entirely different atmosphere from that time on.<sup>13</sup>

Hansen finished his mission and in 1939, President David O. McKay called J. Karl Wood to direct the pageant. Wood invited Harold Hansen to return after his mission to help with the pageant, and the two of them split the producing, technical, and directing responsibilities through 1941.<sup>14</sup> From 1942 to 1947 the pageant was canceled due to

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<sup>12</sup> Hansen, "A Testimony," 3-4. See also, Whitman, "A History of the Hill Cumorah Pageant (1937-1964) and an Examination of the Dramatic Development of the Text of America's Witness for Christ," 38-40.

<sup>13</sup> Hansen, "A Testimony," 4.

<sup>14</sup> Rex C. Reeve and Richard O. Cowan, "The Hill Called Cumorah," 82. Another excellent source for information on the Hill Cumorah Pageant, especially the more recent history of it, is Gerald S. Argetsinger,

World War II. However, in the summer of 1948, Eastern States Mission president, Roy W. Doxey, revived the pageant and invited Harold Hansen to be the pageant's artistic director which position he served in for the next thirty years.<sup>15</sup> Thus began and continued Harold I. Hansen's involvement with the pageant that would finally come to an end in 1977, after forty years of directing it. The pageant that he raised from ground level, "America's Witness For Christ," also known as "The Hill Cumorah Pageant" has run on a yearly basis for the past 65 years, and has come to be known as "one of the largest and most spectacular of all religious pageants."<sup>16</sup>

The original script, which lasted from 1937 until 1987 with occasional modifications was written by H. Wayne Driggs, an English professor at New York University.<sup>17</sup> Some of the modifications of this script included incorporating scenes that depicted King Mosiah, Alma, Ammon and King Lamoni, General Moroni and "an exciting Destruction Scene that preceded Christ's appearance at Bountiful."<sup>18</sup> The pageant, itself, under the direction of Harold Hansen, underwent several modifications, as well. Ever willing and anxious to incorporate the latest technology, Hansen instituted high-tech water curtains, stage lighting, and stereophonic sound systems developed by Harvey Fletcher.<sup>19</sup>

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"A Brief History of the Hill Cumorah Pageant," 2. Argetsinger was the Artistic Director for the pageant from 1990-97 and was asked to write this article in honor of the dedication of the Palmyra Temple, a copy of which was placed in the corner stone of said temple. This article can also be found on the internet at <http://www.nauvoo.com/cumorah-pageant-history.html>. The content of this article was confirmed by the writer in a telephone interview with Gerald S. Argetsinger, 7 October 2002.

<sup>15</sup> Hansen Papers, MSS 1701, Box 2, Folder 9. See also, Rex C. Reeve and Richard O. Cowan, "The Hill Called Cumorah," 82-3.

<sup>16</sup> Tom Henshaw, Associated Press, undated personal papers, cited in Walter E. Boyden, "The Road to Hill Cumorah," 283.

<sup>17</sup> Hansen Papers, MSS 1701, Box 2, Folder 9.

<sup>18</sup> Argetsinger, "Brief History," 2.

<sup>19</sup> Rex C. Reeve and Richard O. Cowan, "The Hill Called Cumorah," 85-6, also Argetsinger, "Brief History," 2.

One of the most significant modifications to the pageant was the composition of an original score by an Eastman School of Music graduate student named Crawford Gates. On a strict time frame that required several sleepless nights by Gates and others, they finally succeeded in putting together the music for the entire pageant.<sup>20</sup> This music was recorded by the Tabernacle Choir and Utah Symphony Orchestra and mixed with recorded vocal characterizations and sound effects. This master recording was used up until the final performance of the original pageant in 1987.<sup>21</sup>

In 1977, Harold Hansen was released from his calling of pageant producer and director. A retired television producer named Jack Dawson was called as the Pageant Producer and one of Hansen's assistants, Jack Sederholm, was called as the Artistic Director.<sup>22</sup> Together, these two men picked up where Hansen left off and continued to further develop the pageant. One of the major contributions of these two men included the improvement of the pageant costumes. Previous costumes consisted of whatever was available from the Brigham Young University theatre department or other organizations. In 1980, Gail Argetsinger was called to design and construct new costumes for the cast. For the next twenty years, she, along with wardrobe mistress Barbara Williams, would design and provide the costumes for the pageant.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Crawford Gates, "Spiritual Experiences in Preparing the Hill Cumorah Pageant Music," *BYU Leadership Week fireside*, 7 June 1959, 3, L. Tom Perry Special Collections. See also, Crawford Gates, "The Story Behind the Thrilling Music of the Great Hill Cumorah Pageant," 68-70, reprinted from *Music Journal*, February 1961, 3, L. Tom Perry Special Collections.

<sup>21</sup> Argetsinger, "Brief History," 2.

<sup>22</sup> Argetsinger, "Brief History," 3. Also, Rex C. Reeve and Richard O. Cowan, "The Hill Called Cumorah," 86.

<sup>23</sup> Gail Argetsinger, "Costumes and Small Miracles," *Ensign*, July 1985, 22-27. Argetsinger, "Brief History," 3.

The first major development came from a suggestion that President Harold B. Lee had given in 1973 to phase out the use of full time missionaries in the pageant itself.<sup>24</sup> Since 1953, volunteers from BYU and other locations had participated along with the full time missionaries, but the full time missionaries were at the forefront.<sup>25</sup> 1978 marked the last year that missionaries participated as cast members in the pageant.<sup>26</sup>

Lund Johnson was the Artistic Director from 1986-7, which turned out to be the last two years that the original “America’s Witness For Christ” pageant would run. Church leaders were concerned by reports that many of the non-“Mormons” attending the pageant experienced difficulty in understanding the pageant’s language and chronology. Elder Dallin H. Oaks attended the pageant and felt that a new pageant, specifically directed to nonmembers between the ages of 18 and thirty-four, should be produced.<sup>27</sup> In 1988, a Pageant Presidency consisting of President Roger Adams, and counselors Jerry Meiling and Gerald Argetsinger, all from the Cumorah region, took on the responsibilities of production, and Charles Metton was called as the Artistic Director. Orson Scott Card was assigned to write a new script that would target “the non-scripture reading, non-Mormon young adult.”<sup>28</sup> He accomplished this by presenting the Book of Mormon as a story with a beginning, middle, and end. The dialogue was modern English, and the only characters quoting scripture were angels or Jesus Christ. This new script shortened the new pageant by forty minutes compared to the original.<sup>29</sup> This new script also required a musical score of its own. Crawford Gates was once again called on

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<sup>24</sup> Argetsinger, “Brief History,” 3.

<sup>25</sup> Hansen Papers, Box 2, Folder 9.

<sup>26</sup> Rex C. Reeve and Richard O. Cowan, “The Hill Called Cumorah,” 86.

<sup>27</sup> Rex C. Reeve and Richard O. Cowan, “The Hill Called Cumorah,” 87-8. This age group is seen as “the group most often asking about the Book of Mormon and most likely to accept baptism.”

<sup>28</sup> Argetsinger, “Brief History,” 3.

<sup>29</sup> Argetsinger, “Brief History,” 3.

to compose the music. He retained much of the original music's themes and spirituality; however he also gave it a more contemporary sound. The Salt Lake Children's Chorus joined with the Mormon Tabernacle Choir and Utah Symphony to produce the musical score that has been used since 1988.<sup>30</sup>

The new pageant also required a different set. Eric Fielding designed a seven-stage set that resembled an ancient Mayan temple from the vantage of the audience. This set, however, required renovations to the hill that included level paths being cut into the west side of the Hill Cumorah.



Figure 37. 1988 photograph of pageant renovations at the hill, Gareth W. Seastrand Collection.

Charles Metton served as the Artistic Director until 1989, after which Gerald Argetsinger replaced him and served until 1997. Argetsinger worked closely with a motion picture special effects director named Rick Josephson, and together they continued to design and implement new special effects that enhanced the pageant's impressiveness. Roger Sorenson, a former assistant to Charles Metton, followed Argetsinger as director in 1998,

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<sup>30</sup> Rex C. Reeve and Richard O. Cowan, "The Hill Called Cumorah," 88.

after which Ray Crystal was called and is the current director of “America’s Witness For Christ.”<sup>31</sup>

The underlying reason and justification for all the effort and expense of the Hill Cumorah Pageant, as stated at the beginning of this section, is to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ. Perhaps, the more specific role that the pageant plays in proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ is that of first assuring people that Latter-day Saints are Christians, and secondly opening their minds to doctrines that are unique to the LDS Church. As Armstrong and Argetsinger wrote, “[pageant producers] have been hopeful of favorably impressing non-Mormon Pageant viewers with the idea that Mormons are not only Christians but actually embody *the* Christian religion, and that, consequently, Mormon doctrine is to be preferred above all other claims of ecclesiastical authority.”<sup>32</sup>

Interestingly, the way the pageant attempts to do this is by applying a tried and true method of proselyting—that of building on common beliefs.<sup>33</sup> Hence, since 1976, the pageant has begun with the unfurling of a huge 50 by 80 foot American flag being carried across the western slope of Cumorah by numbers of young cast members.<sup>34</sup> Other areas of common ground presented in the pageant include the LDS belief in the Bible, a number of scenes tied directly to the New Testament that focus on Christ’s ministry, and numerous references to Jesus Christ and His gospel. The uniquely LDS doctrines are interwoven or tied into these common ground areas. For example, one of the first scenes, known as the “Ezekiel Scene,” depicts a biblical prophecy that Latter-day Saints believe is referring to both the Bible and the Book of Mormon as forming a more complete

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<sup>31</sup> Argetsinger, “Brief History,” 5.

<sup>32</sup> Argetsinger, “The Hill Cumorah Pageant: Religious Pageantry as Suasive Form,” 156.

<sup>33</sup> Argetsinger, “The Hill Cumorah Pageant: Religious Pageantry as Suasive Form,” 156. Armstrong and Argetsinger refer to this approach as the “common ground” approach.

<sup>34</sup> Argetsinger, “The Hill Cumorah Pageant: Religious Pageantry as Suasive Form,” 156.



collection of God's word. The New Testament scenes of the Savior's ministry are also built upon by being told through the eyes of Nephi, an early Book of Mormon prophet.<sup>35</sup> As if to convince any who might still be wondering if Latter-day Saints are Christians, the climax of the entire pageant, the "Christ Scene," portrays the Savior descending to a waiting cast of 600 people gathered, adoring and worshipping Jesus Christ.<sup>36</sup> After masterfully building on common ground and introducing a Latter-day Saint perspective on Christianity, it is a fitting finale that ends the pageant. Moroni, whose image remains year round on the hill in the form of a monument, gives the gold plates to Joseph Smith, then turns to the audience and quotes:

And when ye shall receive these things, I would exhort you that ye would ask God, the Eternal Father, in the name of Christ, if these things are not true; and if ye shall ask with a sincere heart, with real intent, having faith in Christ, he will manifest the truth of it unto you, by the power of the Holy Ghost (Moroni 10:4).

As Armstrong and Argetsinger state, "It is no coincidence that the very last statement in the Pageant exhorts the audience not only to investigate, but to investigate in the name of Christ."<sup>37</sup>

The pageant not only proclaims its message to visitors but to the participants as well. Pageant participants are expected to behave like full time missionaries while they are there. As a result, many look back on this experience and regard it as one of the highlights of their life, and a major factor in their own conversion. Letters from two pageant participants illustrate this. One wrote, "I can truly say that participation in the Hill Cumorah Pageant has been one of the greatest highlights of my life."<sup>38</sup> Another

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<sup>35</sup> Argetsinger, "The Hill Cumorah Pageant: Religious Pageantry as Suasive Form," 157-58.

<sup>36</sup> Argetsinger, "The Hill Cumorah Pageant: Religious Pageantry as Suasive Form," 158, 161.

<sup>37</sup> Argetsinger, "The Hill Cumorah Pageant: Religious Pageantry as Suasive Form," 161.

<sup>38</sup> 1972 Hill Cumorah Pageant Reunion Newspaper, p. 5, found in, Hansen Papers, MSS 1701, Box 35, Folder 7.

participant noted, “My life has been changed because of those three weeks—I could never go back to what I was before and be happy—because I have found that happiness is only found near our Heavenly Father.”<sup>39</sup> Kenneth and Marlene Matheson, of Provo, Utah, have been participating in the pageant with their family for the past fifteen years. They view the pageant as a major influence for good in the lives of their children. According to Sister Matheson, the pageant provides an environment where youth are immersed in service and spreading the gospel. As a result, over the past fifteen years, Matheson says that she has seen many troubled youth “turn right around,” and make positive changes in their lives because of their participation in “America’s Witness For Christ.”<sup>40</sup> The Harold Hansen collection at Brigham Young University is filled with such correspondences, attesting to the fact that hundreds of volunteers were influenced for good by their two-week participation in the pageant.<sup>41</sup>

The pageant has also succeeded in helping to make the Hill Cumorah a special place in the minds of many of the citizens of the Palmyra-Manchester area. According to Harold Hansen, the local attitude towards the Church steadily improved over the forty years that he was there. In a letter to Elders Mark E. Petersen and Richard L. Evans, Hansen wrote:

During the quarter of a century that I have been associated with the Pageant, I have seen remarkable changes take place in the feelings and attitudes of the non-Mormons throughout western New York. There is every indication and every evidence that the Pageant has had a real effect in changing the attitudes of these people...As the Pageant was produced year after year, changes were occurring which made it evident that there was a softening of the attitude toward us, and that

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<sup>39</sup> Letter, volunteer to Harold Hansen, 26 August 1974, Hansen Papers, MSS 1701, Box 36, Folder 7.

<sup>40</sup> Telephone interview with Marlene Matheson, Provo, Utah, 30 October 2002. One example of a teenager that experienced a positive change in her life due to her participation in the pageant is Jennifer Scanlon, who says the pageant was the reason that “something inside me began to change.” Handwritten copy of Scanlon’s experience in writer’s possession.

<sup>41</sup> One example is a letter from a pageant participant to Harold Hansen, 12 September 1977, Harold Hansen Papers, MSS 1701, Box 39, Folder 1.

there was a feeling of wanting to welcome us into the area and to make us feel at home.<sup>42</sup>

One event, in particular, that had a positive effect on the local citizens, was the Church's decision in 1991 to allow local service organizations to provide snacks and meals to pageant visitors. As a result, the Rotary, Lions, and Kiwanis organizations have made the pageant their primary annual fundraiser.<sup>43</sup> Gareth W. Seastrand, former director of the Hill Cumorah visitors center, reported that a member of one of these organizations confided in him that their organization made over \$10,000 a year.<sup>44</sup>

In a more general economic vein, one writer summed up the impact of the pageant on the local communities:

Undeniably the economic advantages derived from the Pageant also influenced the merchants of Palmyra. The influx of three to four hundred cast members who are in and around the village for approximately two weeks and eat one or two meals a day in the village and live in the villager's homes; the approximately 100,000 audiences of the four or five nights of the performance, many of whom spend money for light refreshments, gas, and perhaps other items; and the approximate 10,000 audience members of each performance who have a full dinner or buy groceries for a picnic and stay overnight in a residence, hotel or motel in the area—all this has brought material advantage to the area. Anson B. Johnson, owner of Johnson's Palmyra Pharmacy said simply, 'Businesswise, the [Mormons] bring money into the community.' In 1962 the Palmyra Courier-Journal published 2,250 extra copies of their paper during the week of the Pageant to accommodate those visitors who wanted a copy relating to the Pageant.<sup>45</sup>

While this economic boost has certainly aided in helping many of the local residents view the Church, and by association, the Hill Cumorah, more favorably, perhaps even more of an influence was and is the Latter-day Saints themselves. This is aptly reflected in an advertisement paid for by a group of local merchants:

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<sup>42</sup> Letter, Harold I. Hansen to Elder Mark E. Petersen and Elder Richard L. Evans, 5 June 1962, Hansen papers, MSS 1701, Box 26, Folder 8. Dr. Larry C. Porter noted that in the past, some of the local religions were invited to raise funds by selling food to pageant attenders, Personal Interview, 14 November 2002.

<sup>43</sup> Argetsinger, "Brief History," 5.

<sup>44</sup> Personal interview with Gareth W. Seastrand, 30 September 2002.

<sup>45</sup> Whitman, "A History of the Hill Cumorah Pageant (1937-1964) and an Examination of the Dramatic Development of the Text of America's Witness for Christ," 195-97.

Pageant Time 1963, and with it comes the opportunity to express our 'thanks' to the hundreds of Mormons and their thousands of visitors who convene in our community to conduct and witness the annual spectacle.

Thank you for the dignity and prominence you have given Palmyra in carrying the message of your faith throughout the world, citing our community as the birthplace of the Mormon Movement.

And further, for the courtesy you show us individually in respecting our streets, our business establishments and our homes.

We admire your principles and your strict observance of church tenets. We're glad to see you here!<sup>46</sup>

In addition to benefiting the Palmyra-Manchester area economically, the pageant is likewise seen as a benefit religiously. Harold Hansen affirms that at least some of the local residents, like many Latter-day Saints, associate the Hill Cumorah with spiritual or sacred feelings. He received a letter written from a local resident to a missionary he had met while attending the pageant for the fifth time. It reads:

This year I went to the affair (meaning the pageant) with a much more critical eye, not so much to see a pageant as to see a religion. It seemed to me that what I found was something lost to the rest of the world. After all, the worth of a religion is its end product, and that is dedicated souls.

Never in my many years have I seen so many. For a really dedicated soul is a beautiful thing, and it is wonderful to look on it in men who are manly and in women who are womanly. Talk with the young men proved the spirit of God rested on them. To see the grace and charm and dignity with which these young people talk, move, and associate with one another proves that the light of God lights their way. The love of God is everywhere manifest and transcends all else. The Pageant alone is nothing but it is the spirit that actuates it.

I sometimes wonder, but yet I hope, that all these young people know how wonderously [sic] they do live and how fortunate they are that they have found such a beautiful manifestation of God.

The Pageant showed thousands of people how your religion started, but you and the hundreds of other young people showed me how it is lived today. You and the others showed me that God is here today as surely as he was two thousand years ago. You and the others proved that there is really an organized expression of God here today; that cannot be denied.

I shall be ever grateful and thankful for my talk with you, young man, (speaking of the missionary) and if you ever should return to Rochester, I should be humbly thankful if you would return to my home. (This man borders on

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<sup>46</sup> Palmyra Courier-Journal, 8 August 1963, B-1. See also, Whitman, "A History of the Hill Cumorah Pageant (1937-1964) and an Examination of the Dramatic Development of the Text of America's Witness For Christ," 197.

possessing staggering wealth yet he said “to my humble home.”) If it cannot be in the future, I pray that I may meet you or others like you at the Hill.<sup>47</sup>

Another visitor to the pageant had a similar experience that prompted her conversion to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. During the second year that she attended she said:

We sat up front and before the Pageant started an usher came over to me and I told him that I had been a Christian, but there was something more I was seeking. Something I didn't know how to go after or get. So, I sat there and was watching the Pageant and then they showed three crosses up on the hill and the Savior is up on the hill with his arms outstretched. I'd never seen anything like it in my life. It does something to you. That's when it struck me and right there and then I gave my heart to Christ. Not only my heart, I gave my whole self to Christ and I promised to follow him the rest of my life. At that moment I said, “Oh, my!” My grandson asked me if I was all right. I said, “Yes, I'm all right. I'm fine. Now I know what I want. I want to be a Mormon.”<sup>48</sup>

While the pageant has effectively proclaimed the message of the restored gospel, it is experiences like these that have encouraged some of the visitors to join the Church.

Klaus D. Gurgel, in a survey performed in Syracuse, New York, found that twenty percent of recent converts to the Latter-day Saint faith in the past ten years “were motivated to join The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints after they had seen the Hill Cumorah Pageant.”<sup>49</sup> One of the best summaries of how the pageant has influenced both Latter-day Saint and non-Latter-day Saint cultures can be seen in the letter Hansen received from the First Presidency, releasing him as the director of the pageant:

We are also aware of the impact the presentation [pageant] has had upon hundreds of thousands who have seen it. Large numbers of these have been nonmembers of the Church. Many have come into the Church as a result of an introduction to the Book of Mormon through the pageant. Many thousands of our young people have been blessed in their lives through participation in the production. No one can adequately measure the good that has been accomplished as the Pageant has been

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<sup>47</sup> Hansen, “A Testimony,” 7-8.

<sup>48</sup> Argetsinger, “The Hill Cumorah Pageant: Religious Pageantry as Suasive Form,” 163.

<sup>49</sup> Klaus D. Gurgel, “Salt City Saints: A Historical Geography of Mormonism in Syracuse,” unpublished seminar paper, Department of Geography, Syracuse University, May 1973.

presented annually over this extended period...Your efforts will go on bearing fruit in the lives of many for an indefinite period in the future.<sup>50</sup>

As perhaps foreseen by the John A. Widtsoes, the Don B. Coltons, and the Harold I. Hansens of the Church, it is apparent that the Hill Cumorah Pageant, or “America’s Witness For Christ,” has, indeed, been an effective tool for introducing the gospel message and facilitating an opportunity for visitors to feel the Spirit, gain some curiosity, and investigate the Church. This, in turn, has resulted in many people affiliating themselves with the Church that is intimately associated with the Hill Cumorah.

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<sup>50</sup> Letter, Spencer W. Kimball, N. Eldon Tanner, Marion G. Romney to Harold I. Hansen, 15 June 1977, Hansen Papers, MSS 1701, Box 39, Folder 1.

## CONCLUSION

In the Book of Mormon a group of people escape from a despot's tyranny and secret themselves by a secluded body of water called the "waters of Mormon" (Mosiah 18:30). Here they learn the true gospel of Jesus Christ, enter a covenant to follow Him, and join themselves together in a body of true followers of the Savior. Eventually they are forced to flee this geographical location in order to once again escape the tyrant's grasp. A later writer commented about how this group of people felt about this particular geographical location: "yea, the place of Mormon, the waters of Mormon, the forest of Mormon, how beautiful are they to the eyes of them who there came to the knowledge of their Redeemer; yea, and how blessed are they, for they shall sing to his praise forever" (Mosiah 18:30).

In a very similar way, the hill called Cumorah in western New York has become such a place to literally millions of people. In the hearts and minds of the membership of the Church, the hill has taken on an inherent sense of sacredness and is thought of as "beautiful" due to its role at the inception of the Restoration under the Prophet Joseph Smith. These events, in the eyes of Latter-day Saints, signify the opening of the heavens and the communication of God with man. Visions and the ministering of angels that took place at the Hill Cumorah effectively set apart the hill as sacred in the minds of Latter-day Saints. Perhaps even more important than this, however, is the fact that it was the repository of the primary book of scripture held sacred by the Church—the Book of Mormon. This fact alone allows the hill to occupy a very elevated station in the minds of Latter-day Saints. The Hill Cumorah has also enjoyed additional significance due to the

teachings of many of the early Church leaders who identified it as the same hill spoken of in the Book of Mormon where records were kept, and two great nations were destroyed.

As the body of the Church moved west to avoid persecution, they became separated from lands of their religion's birth. Some of the sermons and writings of Church leaders and members reflected a desire to not let certain specific sites slip into obscurity. Subsequently, many of these particular locations—one of the foremost being the Hill Cumorah—have become the destination of visits or pilgrimages of Church members in the nineteenth, twentieth and twenty-first centuries. In effect, although the Hill Cumorah is far away from the main body of the Church, it has retained its sacredness in the minds of Latter-day Saints due to its role in their history.

One aspect of the hill's history, that is rather mysterious in nature, found its way into some of the writings and teachings of the mid nineteenth century Church leaders. The experience of Joseph Smith and others returning the gold plates to a divine messenger in the Hill Cumorah has piqued the interest and curiosity of not only members, but some of the Palmyra-Manchester local residents as well. Originating with Oliver Cowdery, it seems, this experience is related in a number of Church leaders' sermons, and members' journals during the second half of the nineteenth century. To the membership of the Church, it appears that one of the main reasons this experience was shared was to impress upon the minds of the impoverished Great Basin Saints that God was in charge of the earth's treasures, and, if deemed prudent, would share them with the Church if the Saints would humble themselves and consecrate their lives. Another prevalent theme of the cave experience seems to be the importance of additional scripture to come forth at a future date. Again, it is implied that these would become available to



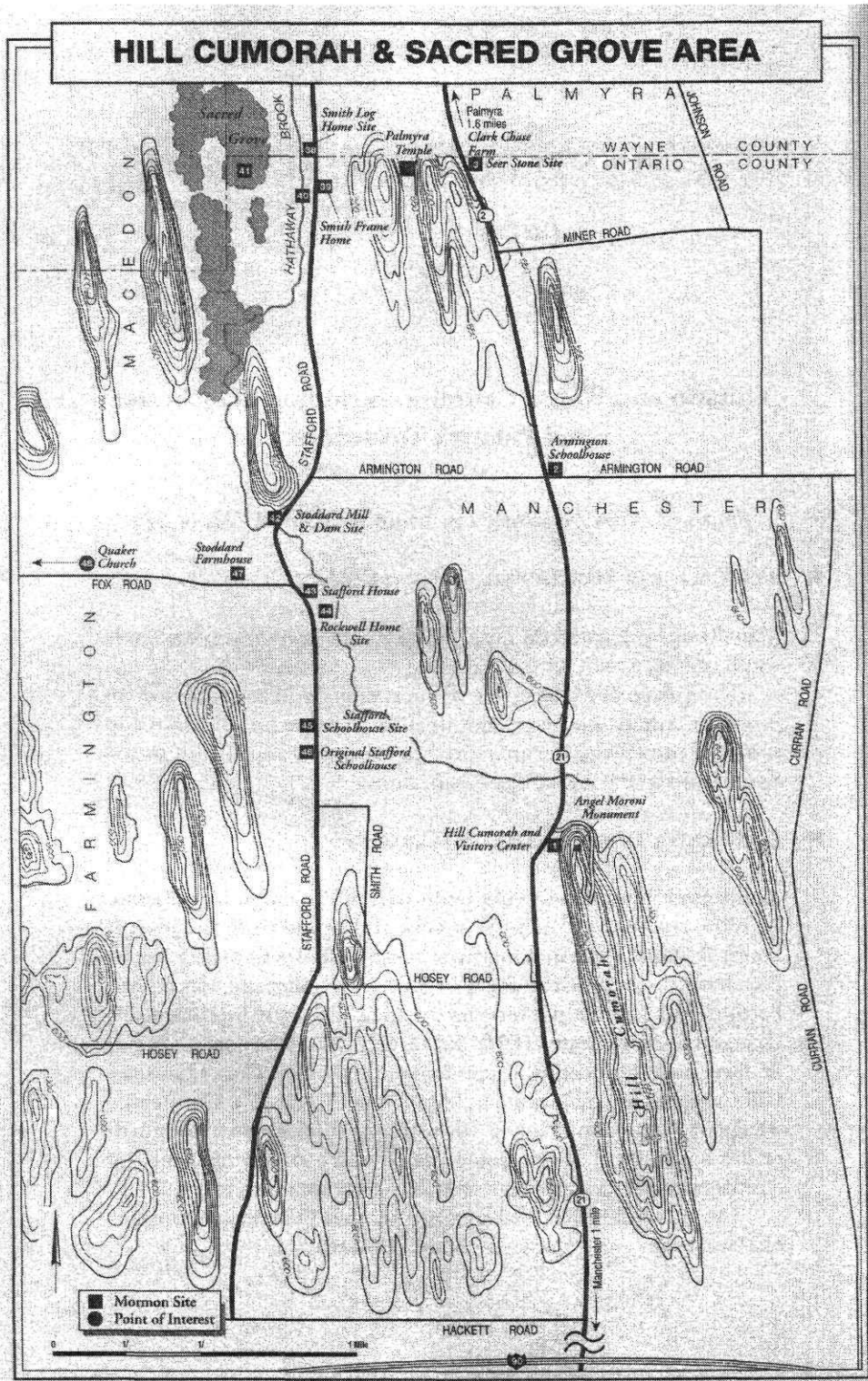
the Saints based on their worthiness and diligence in using the records already received. While for the present, unanswerable questions arise about the metaphysical nature of the cave, the context of the cave accounts illuminates some of the interests and perhaps concerns of the nineteenth century Church.

In the early part of the twentieth century, the Church was able to purchase most of the Hill Cumorah. The events that allowed this to happen were considered miraculous to many at that time. An understanding of how the Church was able to come into possession of this valued piece of property has further set it apart as an object of divine intervention. Once in the possession of the Church, it has been beautified in order to make it more attractive to both member and nonmember alike. An extensive reforestation project, that is still underway, was begun shortly after the Church purchased most of the hill. While some of the trees originally planted were not indigenous to the area, they nevertheless contribute to the overall beauty of the hill, which gives it a deeper sense of sacredness to many who visit. Several additions, such as a monument and a bureau of information, have been added to this property in recognition of the fact that the site is one of the most effective places to proclaim the message of the sacred record—the Book of Mormon.

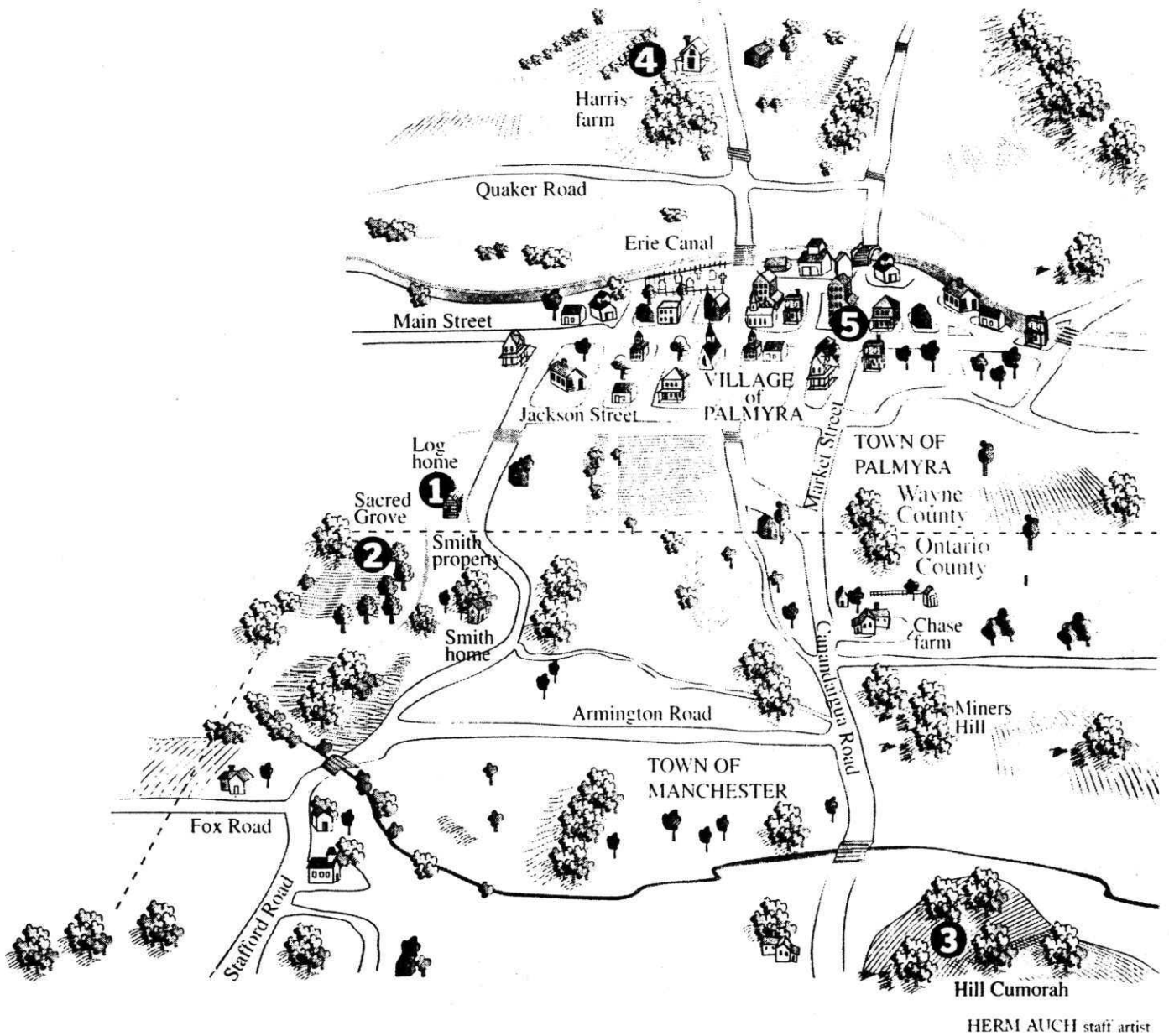
Today, these additions along with the spectacular Hill Cumorah Pageant effectively continue to proclaim the gospel message to hundreds of thousands. The Hill Cumorah, as a result of the pageant, is seen as a hallowed place because of what many people, members and non-members alike, experience there. This, together with the rich history of this particular geographic location, ensure that the Hill Cumorah will continue

to be revered as sacred ground to members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day  
Saints.

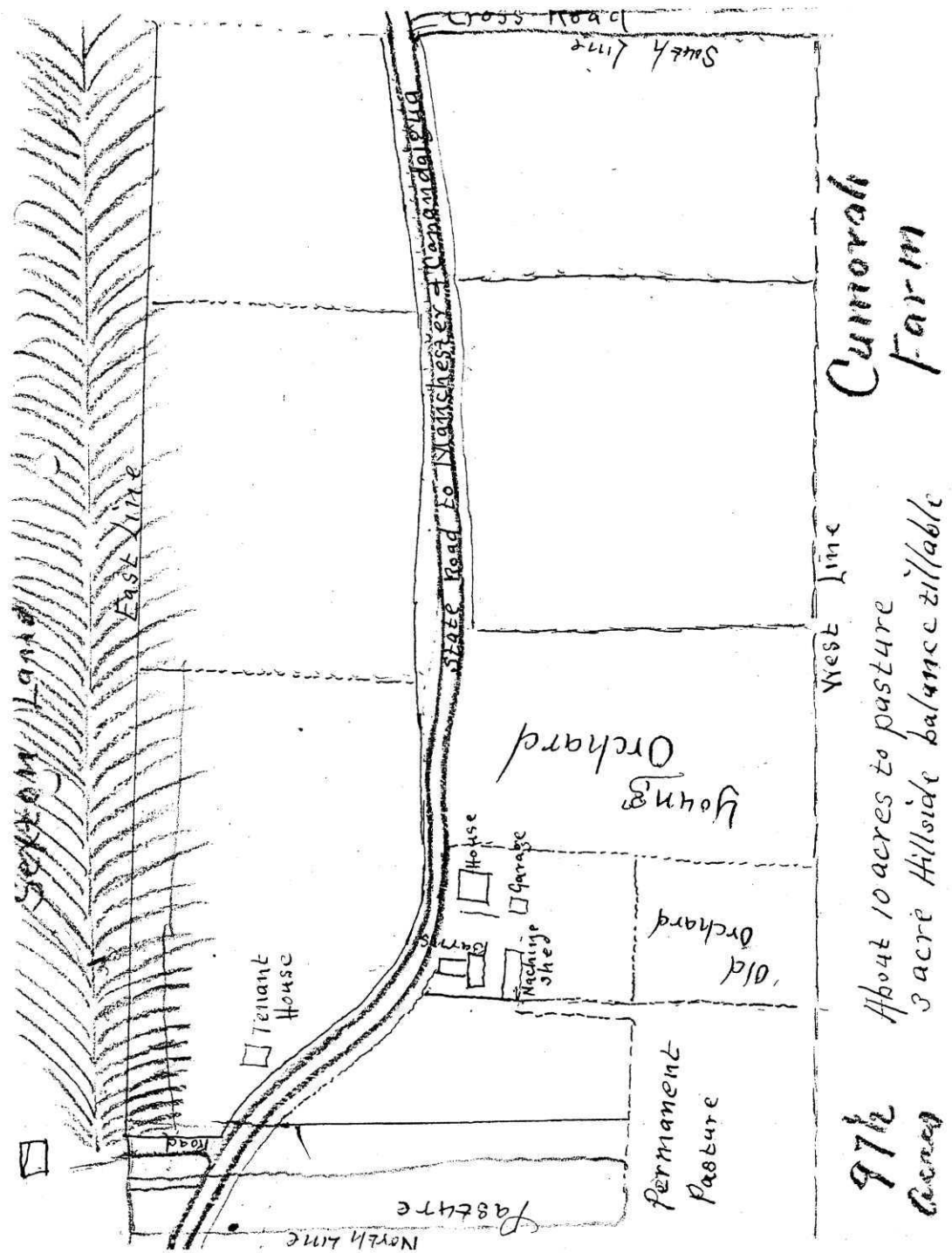
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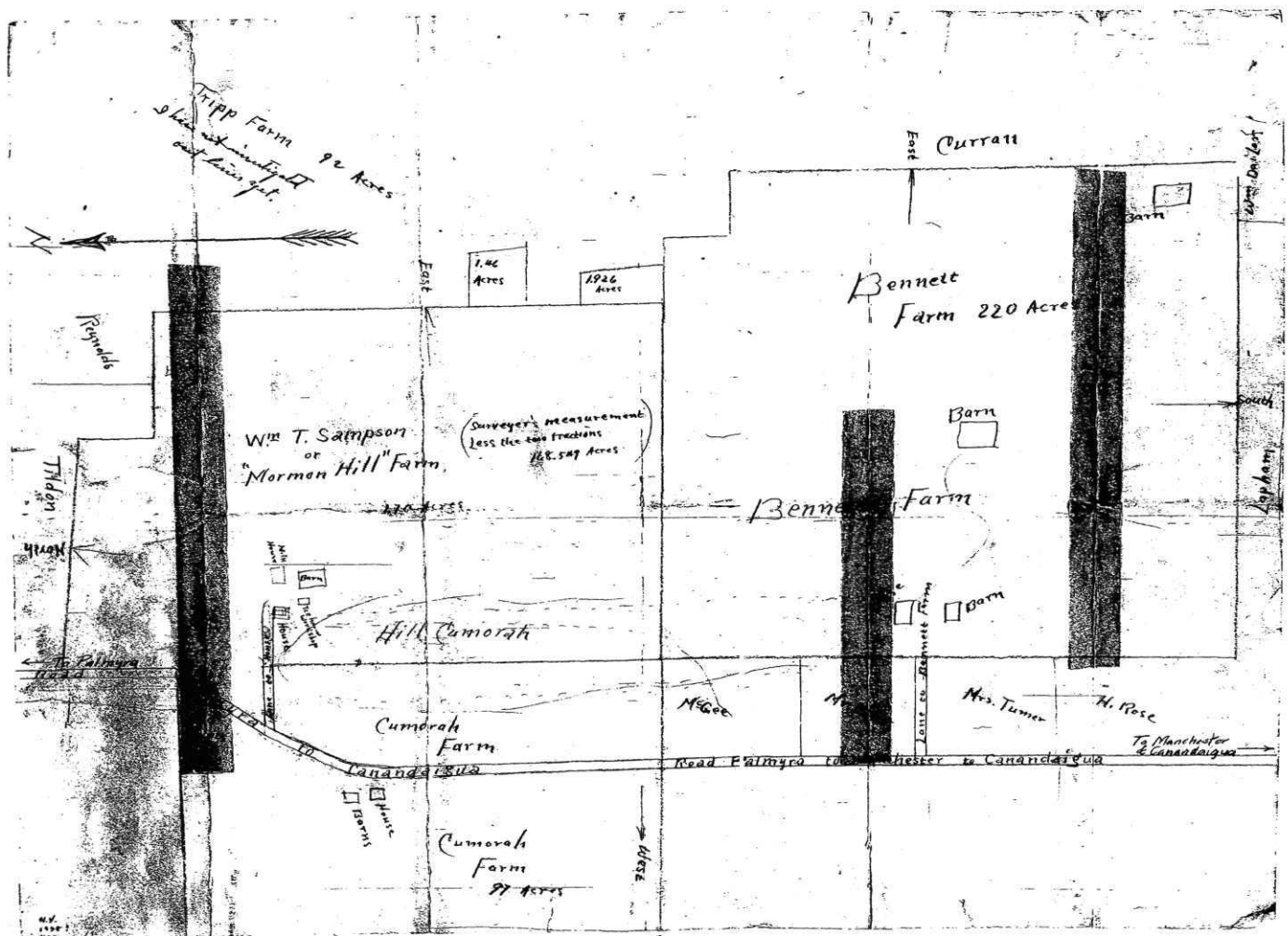
Lamar C. Berrett, ed., *Sacred Places: A Comprehensive Guide to Early LDS Historical Sites, vol. 2, New York and Pennsylvania*, (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 2000), 154.



Map of Palmyra-Manchester area showing Miner's Hill. Taken from *Rochester Democrat and Chronicle*, 21 March 1998, Palmyra Bean Packer Collection.



ca. 1923 sketch of the Inglis Farm, also known as the “Cumorah Farm,” by Willard Bean. The Hill Cumorah is at the top of the sketch (holding the drawing horizontally) running left to right. Courtesy LDS Church Archives.



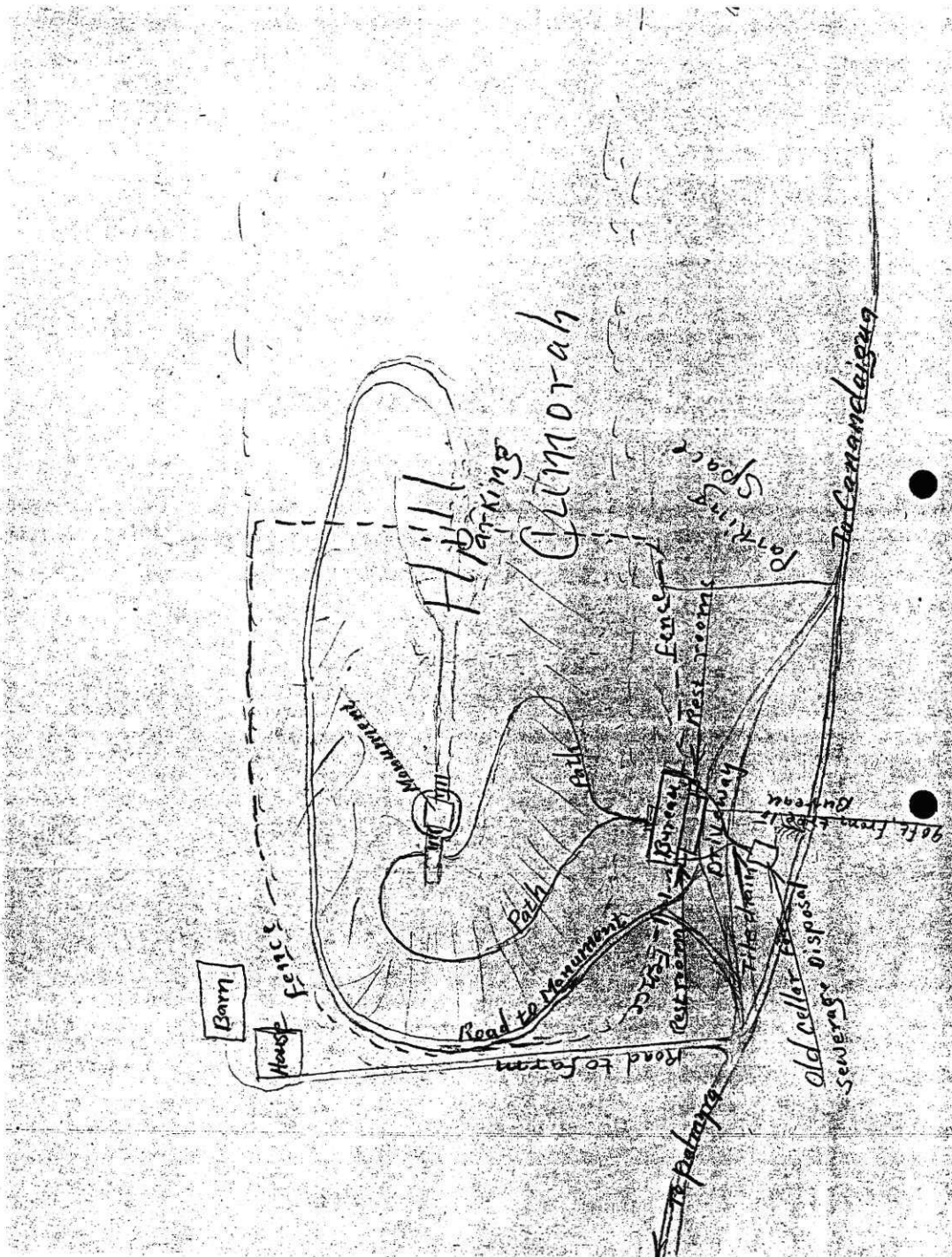
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ca. 1935 sketch of the properties surrounding the Hill Cumorah. Courtesy LDS Church Archives.



1996 map of Church holdings at the Hill Cumorah. Courtesy LDS Real Estate department





ca. 1939 sketch of the Hill Cumorah with paths leading from the rear of the bureau of information to the monument on the top of the hill. Courtesy LDS Church Archives.

Angel Moroni Monument dedicatory prayer delivered by President Heber J. Grant on top of the Hill Cumorah, 21 July 1935. Taken from Grover, "Moroni Lives Again," 544-545.

"God, our heavenly and eternal Father, the Maker of heaven and earth, the Father of Jesus Christ, the Redeemer of the world, the Savior of mankind, we thank Thee that Thou hast again seen fit to restore to the earth the plan of life and salvation, whereby men and women, through obedience to the laws that Thou has revealed, can come back into Thy presence and dwell with Thee forever.

O Father, we thank Thee from the bottom of our hearts that Thou didst see fit to reveal Thyself and Thy Son to the boy, Joseph Smith. We thank Thee that we have no doubt in our minds regarding Thy personality, that in very deed Thou didst declare to all the world by Thy personal visitation and the visitation of Thy Son, that man was created in the image of his Maker.

We thank Thee, oh Father, in heaven, that Thou didst allow Thy devoted and faithful prophet, Moroni, to visit the boy Joseph Smith, that Thou didst allow him for four long years to meet the prophet on this hill and instruct him regarding the principles of the gospel, and fit and prepare him to stand at the head of Thy Church, again established upon the earth, the Church of Thy Son, Jesus Christ.

We are grateful, Father, for the delivery unto him of the plates, and that he was inspired of Thee through the instrumentality of the urim and thummim that was placed in his hands, to translate the holy scripture as recorded in the Book of Mormon.

We are thankful, Heavenly Father, that as the years come and go Thou has seen fit to uncover evidences regarding the divinity of the works in which we are engaged. We thank Thee, Father, that the claims that were made against the Book of Mormon, that it was false because there were no dwellings that had been erected of cement to be found upon this land and that therefore the book was false have been disproved. We are grateful that such dwellings have been discovered, that mounds are being uncovered, and that under those mounds, not far from the city of Mexico, splendid cement dwellings have been found.

We are grateful for the radio, whereby the ridicule of the statement in the Book of Mormon that the voice of Jesus was heard all over the land, can be successfully met. This statement was ridiculed because it was thought that the human voice carried only a few hundred feet, but today through the discovery of the radio the voice can be heard around the world.

We are grateful that the ridicule of that part of the Book of Mormon which says that there were horses upon this continent has been satisfactorily answered. It was thought that because there were no horses to be found here when Columbus arrived, that statement was untrue, but skeletons of horses and other animals have been dug out of the oil wells in California.

We are thankful for the hundreds and thousands of special manifestations that have been given to individuals, yes even millions of manifestations, as to the divinity of the Book of Mormon.

We are grateful oh Father, that Thou didst allow John the Baptist, who held the Aaronic Priesthood, the power and authority to baptize the Savior, to appear to Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery, and that he did bestow upon them this priesthood, and this

power. Our hearts go out in gratitude that the apostles of the Lord Jesus Christ, Peter, James, and John, came to the earth, laid their hands upon the heads of the Prophet Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery and restored the higher or Melchizedek Priesthood, and the apostleship that was not upon the earth.

We humbly pray unto Thee that those of us who have received the ordinance of baptism, those of us who have been ordained to the higher priesthood, and all of those that have received a testimony of the divinity of the work that has been established—we humbly pray that Thou wilt help us to so live that our lives may proclaim the divinity of the work in which we are engaged.

We are thankful for the organization of Thy Church and for its wonderful growth. We are grateful beyond expression that notwithstanding the opposition and the lying statements that were sent out here in the state of New York and the persecutions of the people which made it necessary to move to Ohio, the then frontier, that yet Thy people prospered and that the numbers grew in the Church.

We are thankful that notwithstanding the opposition that was so great in Ohio that the people moved to Missouri, still Thou didst see fit to prosper the people, and that Thou didst touch the hearts of people and they embraced the gospel notwithstanding these persecutions.

We are thankful beyond all the power which Thou hast given us with which to express our thoughts that notwithstanding an exterminating order of the governor of the state of Missouri, that notwithstanding Joseph Smith and others had been sentenced to be shot the following morning, Thou didst preserve the lives of these men, and that one of the greatest of all the great revelations that have come to Thy people was given to the Prophet Joseph Smith in Liberty jail shortly after this decree of his death had been made.

We pray that whenever we read that marvelous and wonderful revelation the inspiration of the living God may be given to us, that we may keep the commandments of the Lord.

We are grateful, Father, that notwithstanding the expulsion of our people from Missouri Thou didst bless and prosper them, and that they built a magnificent temple in Nauvoo, and that a great city was established there, one of most prosperous and in fact the largest city, if I am not in error, in the entire state of Illinois.

But through the animosity and the hatred and the falsehoods of people, again the Latter-day Saints were driven, and they traveled 1500 miles out into the desert country to the Salt Lake Valley.

We are grateful for the preservation of the people. We are grateful that a prophecy has been fulfilled which was uttered just before his martyrdom by the Prophet Joseph Smith, on the west bank of the Missouri river.

‘I prophecy,’ he said, ‘that the saints will continue to suffer much persecution, that many will be put to death by our persecutors, others will lose their lives in consequence of exposure and disease, but, some of you shall live to go and build cities and settlements, and see the Saints become a mighty people in the midst of the Rocky Mountains.’

We are grateful that they have become a mighty people. From Canada on the north to Mexico on the south. We have 112 stakes of Zion, and Thy spirit and Thy blessing have attended the men and the women who have been appointed to preside in these stakes and who have been called to preside over the various quorums of the

priesthood, and over the Relief Society, the Sunday Schools, the Primaries, and the Young Men's and Young Women's Associations.

We are grateful that in the far-off land of Hawaii a stake of Zion has been organized. Thy people have in every way become a great and a mighty people, fulfilling the prophecy of the Prophet Joseph Smith on the west bank of the Mississippi river.

We are truly grateful unto Thee, our Heavenly Father, for the hospitality of the people in this section of the country. We are grateful that the spirit of opposition has disappeared. We are thankful that the reputation of Thy people has changed and that today from New York to San Francisco, from Canada to Mexico, to be known as a Latter-day Saint living the gospel, is of great value.

The reputation of the Savior was such that He was crucified but after He has been dead for nearly 2,000 years men are beginning to find that His teachings were for the benefit of every living soul, not only in this life, but if lived, will bring exaltation in the life to come.

We are grateful that no one can find fault with the teachings of the Latter-day Saints, that our religion is in absolute harmony with the teachings of the Bible. We are thankful O Father, for these things and we humbly pray unto Thee that our minds may never become darkened, that we may never depart from the truth, that we may never break any of the covenants that we have made with Thee; but that as we grow in years and increase in understanding we may grow in the light, knowledge, and testimony of the Divinity of the Gospel of Jesus Christ that we have espoused.

May we ever be faithful to the commandments in Holy Writ. May we ever remember the teachings of the Savior while here upon the earth among the Nephites, after His resurrection, and His teachings to His followers and apostles upon the other continent. We humbly pray, O Father, that Thy spirit shall ever abide with us.

We are thankful above all things for the restoration to the earth of the priesthood, the power to minister in the name of Thine only Begotten Son, which has been given to us of Thee, and by the authority of that priesthood, O, Father, and in the name of our Redeemer, we dedicate unto Thee at this time this monument that has been erected upon this sacred hill.

We dedicate the hill itself and the ground surrounding it and all of the materials that have been used in this monument; and we humbly pray unto Thee that it may be preserved from the elements, and that it may stand here as a testimony of God, of Jesus Christ, and of the dealings of Jesus Christ with the people that lived anciently upon this continent.

These things we do in humility, in gratitude, and in thanksgiving to Thee, by the authority of the Priesthood of God, and in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

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