

Testimony of Eight Witnesses.

The Book of Mormon is an early century edition of the Book of Mormon, as in which draws a parallel and out of the videnes of

A Plain Matter-of-Fact Exhibition?

An Investigative Analysis of the
Book of Mormon's Eight Witnesses

The Official Statement

Be it known unto all nations, kindreds, tongues, and people, unto whom this work shall come: That Joseph Smith, Jr., the translator of this work, has shown unto us the plates of which hath been spoken, which have the appearance of gold; and as many of the leaves as the said Smith has translated we did handle with our hands; and we also saw the engravings thereon, all of which has the appearance of ancient work, and of curious workmanship. And this we bear record with words of soberness, that the said Smith has shown unto us, for we have seen and hefted, and know of a surety that the said Smith has got the plates of which we have spoken. And we give our names unto the world, to witness unto the world that which we have seen. And we lie not, God bearing witness of it.

Christian Whitmer
Jacob Whitmer
Peter Whitmer, Jr.
John Whitmer

Hiram Page
Joseph Smith, Sr.
Hyrum Smith
Samuel H. Smith

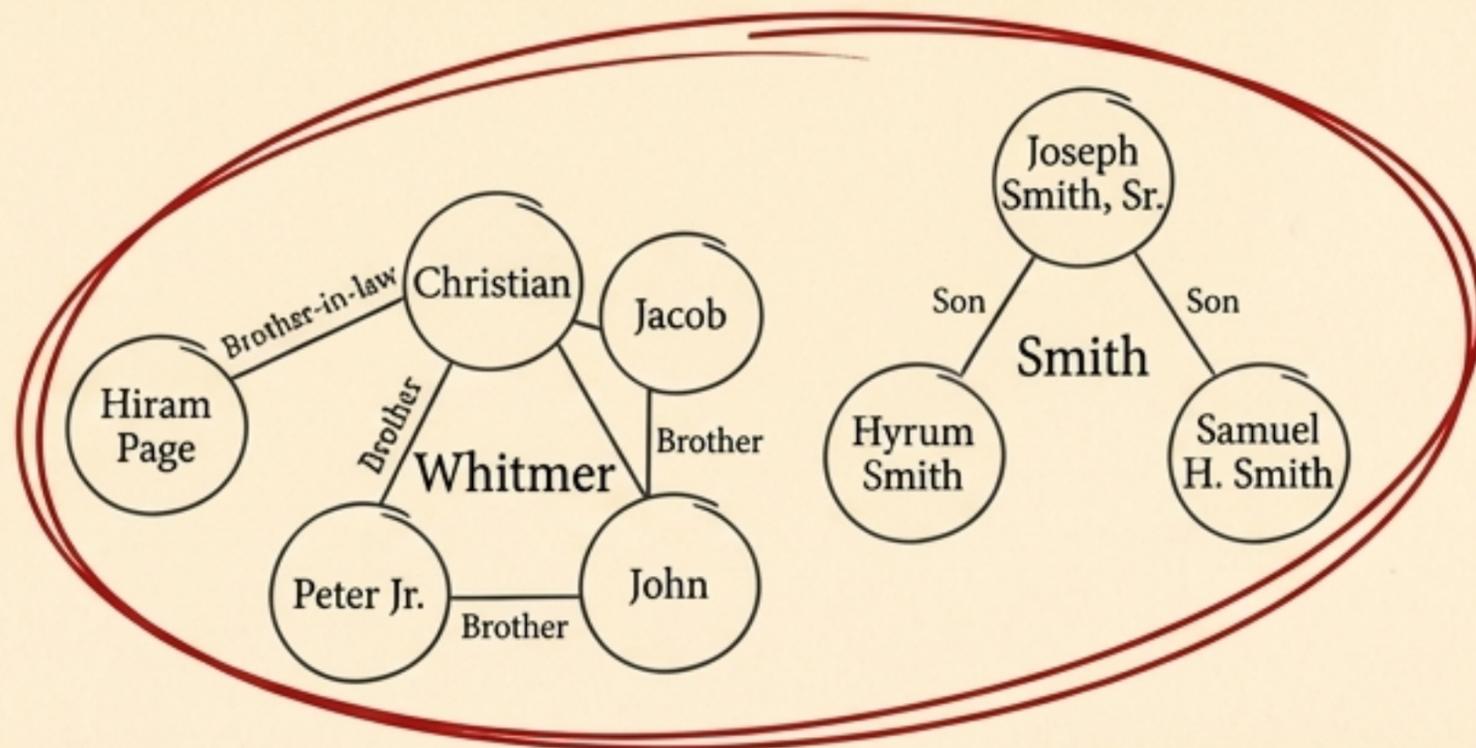
The Bedrock of Physical Evidence

“The difference between the testimony given the three witnesses and that given to the eight is that the former was attended by a splendid display of glory and power of God... while the latter was attended by no such display, but was a plain matter of fact exhibition of the plates by the prophet to his friends.”

—B.H. Roberts, *History of the Church*, Volume 1

The Church has consistently presented the Eight Witnesses as the definitive proof of the plates' physical reality, distinct from a purely spiritual or visionary event.

Who Were the Witnesses? An Insular Circle



Just two families.

The Whitmer Family:

- Christian Whitmer
- Jacob Whitmer
- Peter Whitmer, Jr.
- John Whitmer
- Hiram Page (Married to Catherine Whitmer)

The Smith Family:

- Joseph Smith, Sr. (Father)
- Hyrum Smith (Brother)
- Samuel H. Smith (Brother)

KEY TAKEAWAY

All eight witnesses were members of just two families, the Smiths and the Whitmers, deeply intertwined by blood and marriage.

A Shared “Magic Worldview”

The Smith and Whitmer families were deeply embedded in a 19th-century folk magic culture, shaping how they interpreted events.

Seer Stones



Used for receiving revelations. David Whitmer owned two, Jacob Whitmer had one, and Hiram Page famously had his own.

Divining Rods



Common tools within their cultural milieu.

Treasure Digging



The Smith family was actively involved in treasure-seeking ventures using supernatural means.

Context: This shared worldview meant they were already believers in the type of supernaturalism Joseph Smith was proposing, rather than skeptical outsiders.

A Challenge From Within: The Hiram Page Seer Stone

The Incident (September 1830)

Hiram Page, one of the Eight Witnesses, began receiving “revelations” for the church through his own black seer stone.

The Believers

Oliver Cowdery and the entire Whitmer family accepted Page’s revelations as legitimate communications from God.

*Includes 4
of the 8
witnesses!*



Joseph Smith’s Reaction

Smith received a counter-revelation (now D&C 28) declaring Page’s stone was a tool of the Devil.

Satan hath blinded his eyes, and is seeking to deceive him.

Implication

If the Whitmers and Cowdery could be so easily deceived by a ‘Satanic’ stone, it calls into question their ability to reliably discern the source of any supernatural experience, including the one involving the plates.

“They Hesitated to Sign”

A 1838 letter from Stephen Burnett, a disillusioned member, recounting a public statement by Martin Harris.

“When I came to hear Martin Harris state in public that he never saw the plates with his natural eyes, only in vision or imagination, neither Oliver nor David; and also that the eight witnesses never saw them and hesitated to sign that instrument for that reason, but were persuaded to do it.”

Burnett adds that Harris, after being confronted, said he “never should have told that the testimony of the eight was false if it had not been picked out of him but should have let it passed as it was.”

Analysis

This is not a denial of what he said, but regret for revealing it. It suggests coercion and a knowingly false or misleading statement.

Where Did The “Exhibition” Happen?

Account 1: A Sacred Grove

Source: Lucy Mack Smith, *Biographical Sketches* (1844)

“They all... repaired to a little grove where it was customary for the family to offer up their secret prayers... Here it was that those eight witnesses... looked upon the plates and handled them.”

- **Supernatural Element:** Lucy adds that after the viewing, “the angel again made his appearance to Joseph and received the plates from his hands.”

An angel?
Contradicts
Roberts.

Account 2: Inside the House, In Two Groups

Source: John Whitmer, interview in *The Deseret News* (1878)

“In what place did you see the plates?”
“In Joseph Smith’s house.”

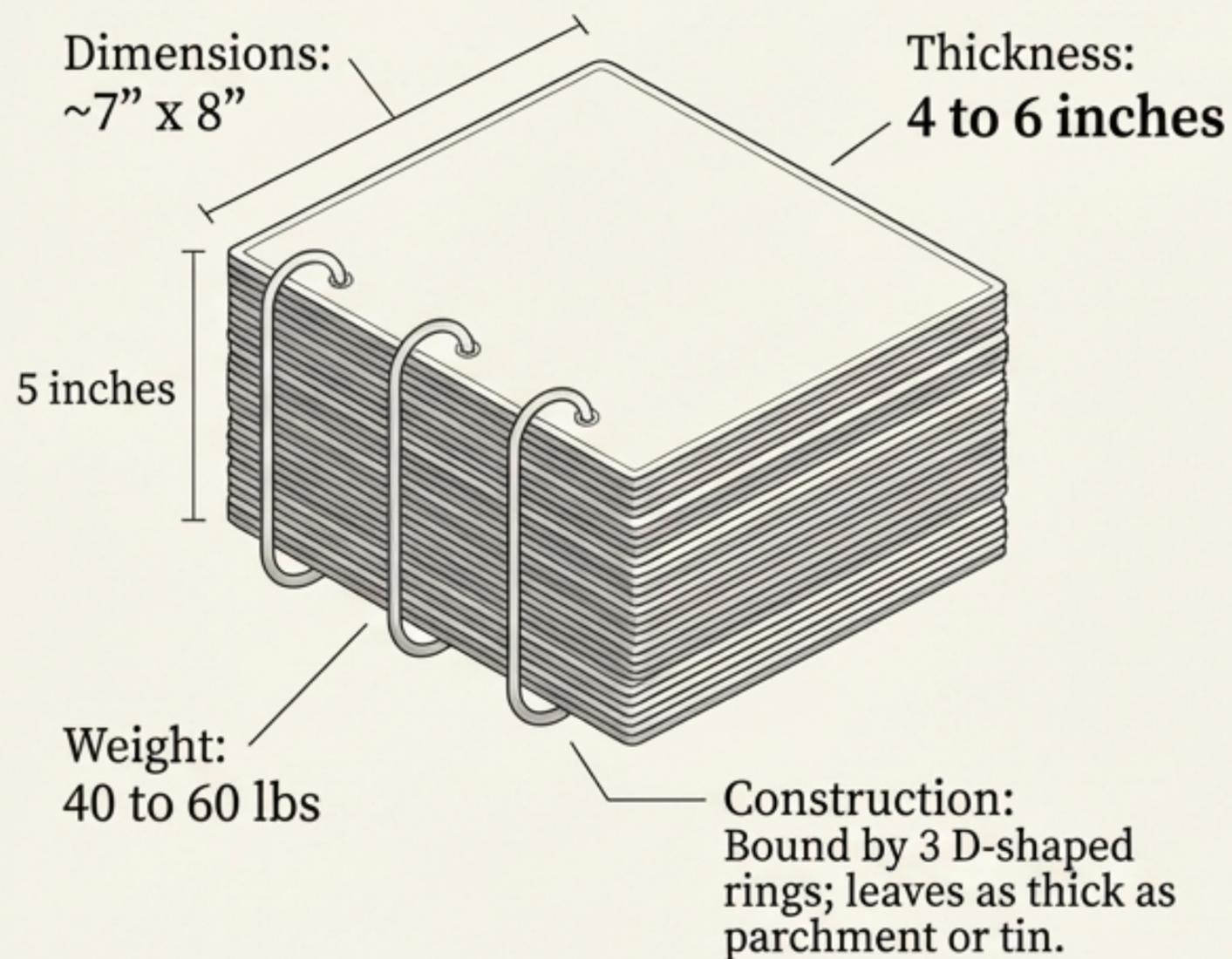
- **Key Detail:** “Were you all eight witnesses present at the same time?”
“No. At that time Joseph showed the plates to us, we were four persons present in the room and at another time he showed them to four persons more.”

Two separate
events?

What Did They See? A Tale of Two Plates

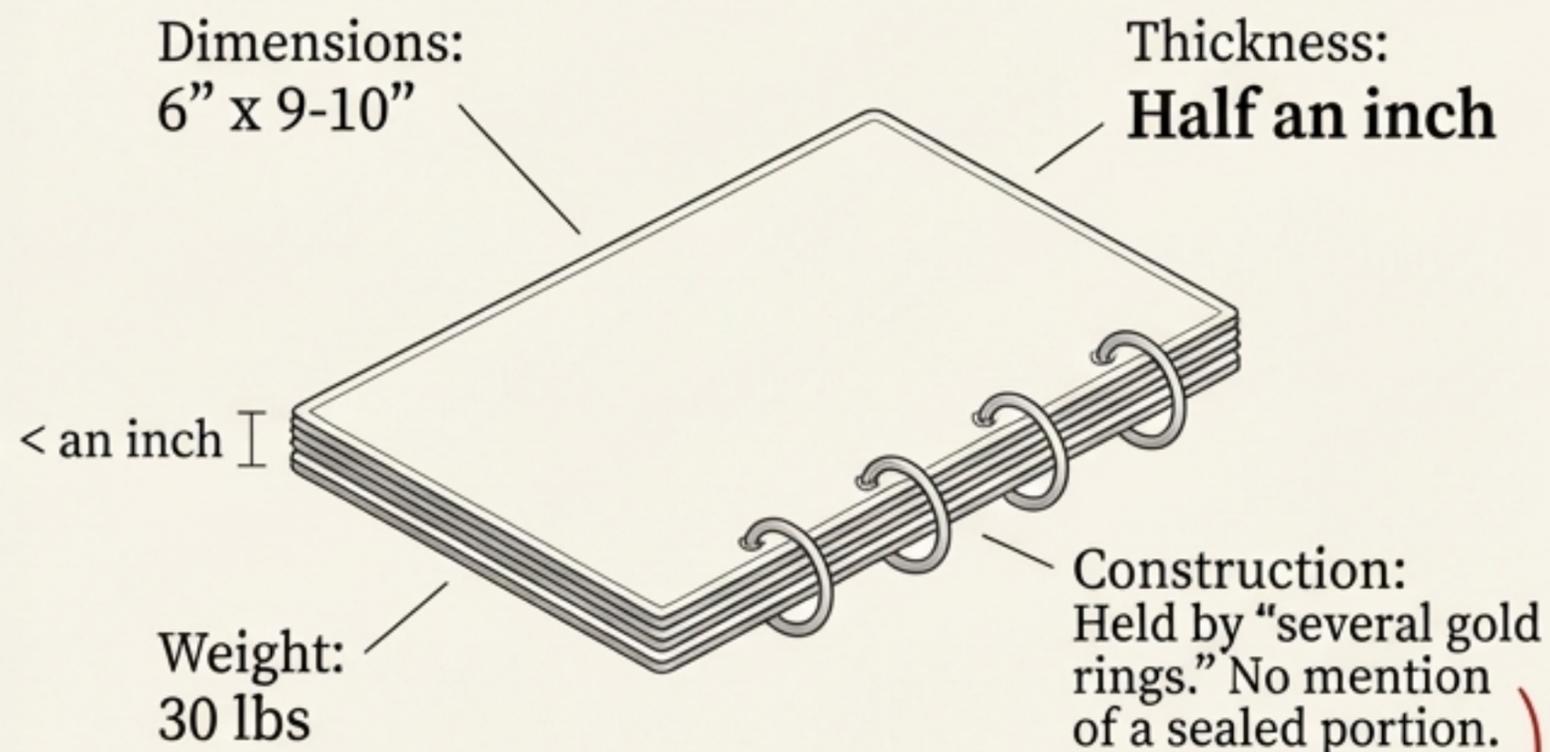
The Consensus Description

Sources: Martin Harris, David Whitmer, Lucy Mack Smith



The Joseph Smith Sr. Description

Source: Fayette Lapham interview (published 1870)



Shocking Detail: *"On the next page were representations of all the Masonic implements as used by the Masons at the present day."*



Physical Object or Supernatural Vision?

Was it a simple physical viewing, or an experience mediated by supernatural power? The witnesses' own words blur the line.

“...they were shown to me
by a supernatural power.”
— John Whitmer (1839)

He makes only a “veiled reference to
‘what I saw,’” then immediately pivots
to a different spiritual confirmation:
“...to say that those Holy Angels who
came and showed themselves to me as
I was walking through the field to
confirm me in the work...”

— Hiram Page (1847)

Conclusion: “Key witnesses did not describe a purely matter-of-fact event, instead attributing the experience to supernatural forces, much like the Three Witnesses.”

A Fading Testimony

Outside of the collective statement, most of the Eight Witnesses provided very few, if any, detailed personal accounts of their experience.

Examples of Limited Testimony

Christian & Peter Whitmer Jr.:

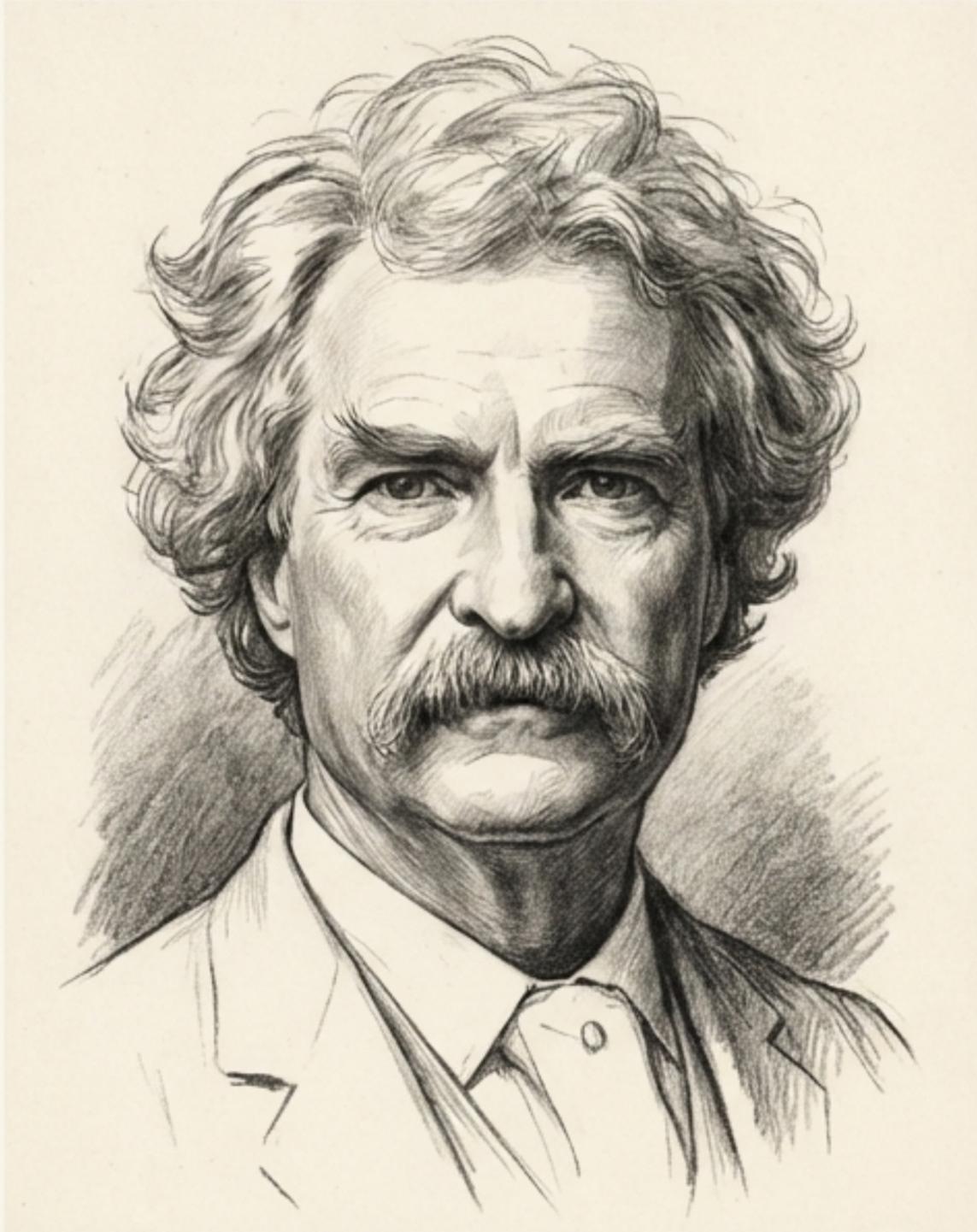
NO PERSONAL ACCOUNTS FOUND

Samuel Smith: In an 1832 account, his focus was on testifying that the *book* was a “revelation from God,” not on the details of seeing and handling the physical plates.

Jacob Whitmer: His only other testimonies come from his children, who repeated nearly identical, rehearsed-sounding phrases:

“My father... was always faithful and true to his testimony... and confirmed it on his deathbed.”

An Outsider's View



“And when I am far on the road to conviction, and eight men—be they grammatical or otherwise—come forward and tell me that they have seen the plates too, and not only seen those plates but hefted them, I am convinced. **I could not feel more satisfied and at rest if the entire Whitmer family had testified.**”

—Mark Twain, *Roughing It* (1871)

Reconstructing the Event: Plausible Scenarios

1. Outright Conspiracy

Unlikely. The witnesses maintained their belief even after being excommunicated by Joseph Smith. Had it been a conscious fraud, they would have likely exposed him.

2. A Prop Artifact

Plausible. Joseph Smith could have created a physical object that they handled. This explains the "hefting" and touching but fails to account for the detailed "engravings" and the radically different physical descriptions.

3. A Purely Visionary Experience

Possible. A psychologically-induced group hallucination, similar to the Three Witnesses. This explains the conflicting memories and supernatural elements, but conflicts with the consistent claims of physical handling.

4. A Hybrid: Prop-Induced Vision

Most likely scenario. Joseph Smith used a simple prop (e.g., a set of tin plates, a weighted box) to ground the experience physically. He then used suggestion, prayer, and the group's shared "magic worldview" to induce a spiritual or visionary state where they "saw" the engravings and sacredness with their "spiritual eyes."

The Dilemma of a Physical Artifact

If the plates were a genuine, physical artifact that could withstand scrutiny, why limit the viewing to a small circle of family and believers?

- Joseph Smith desperately needed credible, outside validation to silence his critics. A mayor, a governor, or a newspaper editor's testimony would have been invaluable.
- He showed the Egyptian papyri (the source for the Book of Abraham) to many visitors because they were real, physical objects.
- His choice to restrict access to the plates to a group of pre-disposed believers suggests a profound lack of confidence in the object itself.

“The strategy employed for the Eight Witnesses was not that of someone presenting a ‘plain matter-of-fact exhibition,’ but of a man carefully managing a delicate spiritual experience he knew could not pass objective, physical inspection.”