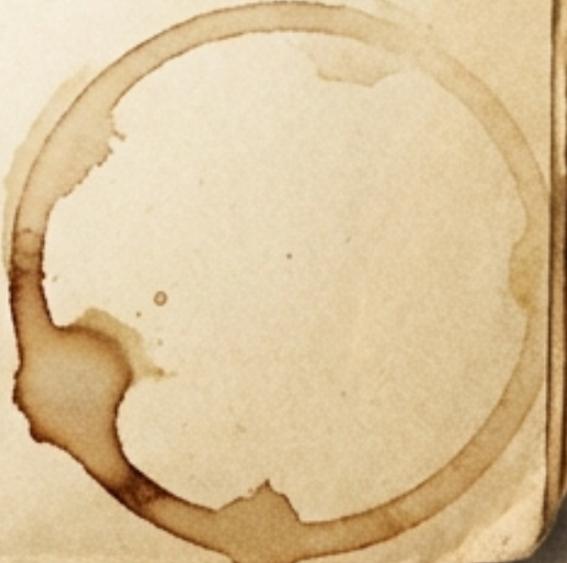




CASE FILE: THE 'OTHER' WITNESSES

An independent analysis of the unofficial testimonies for the Book of Mormon plates.

FILE REF: LDS.Discussions.54 // Date Compiled: 2024



Beyond the Three and the Eight

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints presents the testimony of the Three and Eight Witnesses as primary evidence for the Book of Mormon. However, official church sources often refer to a broader group, suggesting up to 17 people “saw and experienced” the plates.

“None of these 17 people ever denied what they saw and experienced.”

- Official Church Website, “Who Saw the Golden Plates”

**CRITICAL
TESTIMONY**

Investigative Question

This case file examines the accounts of these “other” witnesses—family members and associates—to assess the nature and reliability of their testimonies.



The First Man to See the Plates?

A letter from Martha Campbell to Joseph Smith, dated December 19, 1843.

If I understood him right he [Josiah Stole] was the first person that took the plates out of your hands the morning you brought them in and he observed blessed is he that seeth and believeth..."

If I understood him him right he [Josiah Stole] was the first took the the plates out of your hands

ANALYST'S NOTE: Josiah Stole was a treasure-digging associate who had previously hired Joseph Smith for his services as a "glass looker".

in the observed blessed is he that ave andieveth...

A Contradictory Court Record

Source: Testimony from an 1830 court trial, published in the *New England Christian Herald*, November 7, 1832.

- **Description:** “Witness saw a corner of it... resembled a stone of a greenish cast.”
- **Dimensions:** “should judge it to have been about one foot square and six inches thick.”
- **Circumstance:** “It was unknown to Smith that the witness saw a corner of the Bible so-called by Smith.”

Key Problems Highlighted

- The “greenish cast” and 1’x1’x6’ dimensions are inconsistent with all other witness accounts.
- Stole’s “secret” glimpse contradicts the divine command that Joseph would be “destroyed” if the plates were seen by an unauthorized person.



Testimony by Feel

Source: Interview published in the *Saints' Herald*, October 1, 1879 (5 months after her death).

“I once felt the plates as they thus lay on the table, tracing their outline and shape.”

“They seemed to be pliable like thick paper, and would rustle with a metallic sound when the edges were moved by the thumb...”

“Joseph Smith could neither write nor dictate a coherent and well-worded letter, let alone dictating a book like the Book of Mormon.”

INTERVIEW NOTE: Emma stated she was “not specially curious” about the plates and moved them from place to place on the table “as it was necessary in doing my work”.

Analyzing the Account

Key Problems Highlighted

- **Physical Inconsistency:** The description “pliable like thick paper” is difficult to reconcile with a heavy set of engraved metal plates.
- **Joseph’s Literacy:** The claim that Joseph could not dictate a “coherent and well-worded letter” is directly contradicted by surviving letters he wrote in his own hand, such as those to Emma herself.
- **Lack of Curiosity:** The casual handling of what were claimed to be sacred, angelic artifacts—while never attempting to look—strains credulity.



The Angel in the Barn

Source: Interview with David Whitmer,
published in the *Deseret News*, November 1878.

Overburdened with the work of hosting Joseph, Emma, and Oliver, Mary Whitmer felt tried. While going to milk the cows, she was met by an “old man” who said, “You have been very faithful... it is proper therefore that you should receive a witness.” The man then showed her the plates.



Analyst's Note: David Whitmer identified this “old man” as the angel Moroni, whom he claimed to have passed on the road earlier. However, David notes that his mother, Mary, always called the personage “Brother Nephi”.

An Evolving Miracle

1878 - David Whitmer

An "old man" shows her the plates.

1888 - John C. Whitmer,
Grandson

The stranger "untied his knapsack," showed her a "bundle of plates," turned the leaves "leaf after leaf," showed her the engravings, and then **"suddenly vanished."**

1958 - Granddaughter

Mary was "about to order them out of her home." The man explicitly states, **"My name is Moroni."** He turns the **"gold leaves one by one."**

Key Takeaway: The story becomes more detailed and dramatic over time, long after the primary witness is deceased.

Special Elite: A Posthumous Testimony

- **Timing:** The first published account of this significant miracle appears in **1878**, 49 years after the event was said to have occurred and 20 years after Mary Whitmer's death.
- **Lack of Primary Source:** The story is never told by Mary herself in any known record. It is exclusively a secondhand account relayed by her son and grandchildren decades later.
- **Inconsistencies:** The identity of the angel ('Nephi' vs. 'Moroni') and the escalating, folkloric details suggest embellishment over time.



Mary Whitmer
(d. 1858)



First
Account.

20-YEAR GAP

The “Hefted But Unseen” Paradox

Several of Joseph Smith’s own family members—his mother, younger brother, and younger sister—claimed to have handled or lifted the plates while they were concealed in a cloth or box. Their testimonies focus on the physical sensation of the object without visual confirmation.



Lucy:
“I hefted and handled them.”



William:
“Weighed about 60 lbs... could raise the leaves.”



Catherine:
“Allowed her to heft the package... they were very, very heavy.”

Conflicting Statements of Lucy Mack Smith

CLAIM: She Saw Them

Source: Henry Caswell, *City of the Mormons* (1842)

"I have myself seen and handled the golden plates... they are about 8 inches long and six wide..."

"I fixed my eyes steadily upon her. She faltered and seemed unwilling to meet my glance..."

"I have myself seen and handled the row of the golden plates... they are about 8 inches long and six wide... the golden plates. I had seen, them even the iron-wooden one of the golden plates of the icon also bore plates. in one of an stiesty until the radar shut, there are, no foren and six wide.. The golden innovations made poro deaws, and nothing choud taken between some them, of the only faltered and seeme unwilling to meeting alone to unimproved suggest, in the way maining

RECORD: She Did Not See Them

Source: Letter from Sally Parker (1838)

"I asked her Lucy Smith if she saw the plates she said no it was not for her to see them but she hefted and handled them."

- Lucy's own published autobiography (1853) makes no claim of seeing the plates.

Testimony from a Distance

1827

1883

1945

The Event.

Joseph Smith was use
the Utah Territory
narrated the virus
anniver of line praset.

WILLIAM SMITH

56 years after the event.

- Handled plates in a pillowcase; could feel the leaves shift; mixture of gold and copper.

CATHERINE SMITH

118 years after the event.

Source: A recollection from her grandson, 45 years after her death.

Inconsistencies

- Her story has at least three mutually exclusive versions:
 - 1) Joseph collapsed on a couch,
 - 2) she found them while dusting,
 - 3) Joseph thrust them at her while fleeing a mob.

A Vision of Belief?

Source: Lucy Mack Smith's *Autobiography* (1853) – *Note: No account from Lucy Harris herself exists.*

Lucy Harris, wife of Martin Harris, had a dream where “a personage appeared to her” and showed her the plates, telling her to “look upon them and believe.”



Analyst's Note: This account is told by Lucy Mack Smith, whose family was financially dependent on Martin Harris. It serves to neutralize Lucy Harris, who was skeptical of the enterprise and was responsible for the loss of the 116 manuscript pages. The Church does not formally count her as a witness.

The Evidence Board: Recurring Patterns

PATTERN: LATE TESTIMONY

Mary Whitmer (49 years)
William Smith (56 years)
Emma Smith (52 years)
Catherine Smith (118 years, Posthumous)

PATTERN: CONTRADICTORY DESCRIPTIONS

"Greenish cast" (Stole)
"Pliable like thick paper" (Emma)
"Heard the tinkle of sound" (Catherine's grandson)
"Mixture of gold and copper" (William)

PATTERN: THE "HEFTED BUT UNSEEN" PARADOX

Lists: Emma, Lucy Mack, William, Catherine.
Question: Why was tactile evidence permitted while visual evidence was forbidden?

PATTERN: CONTRADICTORY NARRATIVES

Who got the plates first: Josiah Stole or Catherine Smith?
Was the handoff calm (William's account) or chaotic (Catherine's mob account)?

Conclusion of the Investigation

The church presents the “other witnesses” as a simple, monolithic block of corroborating evidence. However, a detailed examination of the case files reveals a collection of accounts that are:

- **Late:** Recorded decades, and in one case over a century, after the fact.
- **Contradictory:** Both in physical descriptions and in the narrative of events.
- **Secondhand:** Often told by others long after the witness had died, with details evolving over time.

When subjected to standard historical analysis, these testimonies do not form a coherent body of evidence. Instead, they represent a dataset of inconsistent, folkloric, and highly problematic claims. The investigation reveals that the foundation of these “other witnesses” is far less stable than is commonly portrayed.

CASE CLOSED