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## "...publish it upon the mountains": The Story of Martin Harris, Conclusion: Martin Harris Goes to Utah

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**Abstract:** Reviews Martin Harris's role in bringing forth the Book of Mormon, and discusses Harris's testimony of the Book of Mormon.

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(Conclusion)

NEARLY thirty years ago THE IMPROVEMENT ERA featured in its March 1926 issue an article on William Harrison Homer and Martin Harris, written by the author's father. We quote extensively from that article. The first paragraph is an editors' note.

Brother William Harrison Homer, who has written the following testimony concerning Martin Harris, one of the three witnesses to the Book of Mormon, was born in 1845. He filled a mission in Great Britain in 1867-69. He has lived an honorable life of great activity. He and his good wife, who celebrated their golden wedding anniversary several years ago, are still living in fair health on Provo Bench (1925). It was the privilege of Brother Homer to hear the testimony of Martin Harris under the unique conditions here described. "To hear Brother Homer relate the testimony of Martin Harris," says Dr. John A. Widtsoe of the Council of the Twelve, "is a thrilling experience. The witnesses to the divine authenticity of the Book of Mormon have passed into the spirit world, and not many remain who have heard their testimony. The unusual experience of Brother Homer is of great historical interest and is faith-promoting. Brother Homer's testimony is of itself convincing for, as he speaks, the fire of full knowledge touches all who listen; and he delights to repeat Martin Harris' testimony, and to bear his own to the truth of the Book of Mormon." THE IMPROVEMENT ERA takes pleasure in reproducing the testimony herewith.

EDITORS

STATEMENT OF WILLIAM H. HOMER

I first saw Martin Harris in Kirtland, Ohio, about the last of December 1869. On my return from a mission to England, I stopped to visit some of my relatives in Pennsylvania. On resuming my journey, one of my cousins, James A. Crockett, who was not a member of the Church, came as far as Kirtland, Ohio, with me. We remained in Kirtland overnight and the next morning after breakfast, we asked the landlord who was custodian of the Mormon Temple at Kirtland, and he informed us that Martin Harris was the custodian and pointed out to us where we would find the old gentleman. Accordingly we went to

JULY 1955

"...publish it upon the mountains"

## THE STORY OF MARTIN HARRIS

by William H. Homer, Jr.

### Martin Harris Goes to Utah

the door and knocked. In answer to our knock there came to the door of the cottage a poorly clad, emaciated little man, on whom the winter of life was weighing heavily. It was Martin Harris. In his face might be read the story of his life. There were the marks of spiritual upliftment. There were the marks of keen disappointment. There was the hungry strain for peace—the contentment, the divine calm, that it seemed could come no more into his life. It was a pathetic figure, and yet it was a figure of strength. For with it all there was something about the little man which revealed the fact that he had lived richly, that into his life had entered such noble experiences as come to the lives of but few.

I introduced myself modestly as a brother-in-law of Martin Harris, Jr.,—as he had married my eldest sister—and as an elder of the Church who was returning from a foreign mission. The effect of the introduction was electric. But the fact of relationship was overwhelmed by the fact of Utah citizenship. . . .

[After expressing bitterness toward the then present leadership of the Church, the eighty-six-year-old man said,] "You want to see the temple, do you?" "Yes, indeed," I exclaimed, "if we may."

"Well, I'll get the key," he answered. From that moment Martin Harris, in spite of occasional outbursts, radiated interest. He led us through the rooms of the temple and explained how they were used. He pointed out the place of the School of the Prophets. He showed us where the temple curtain had at one time hung. He related thrilling experiences in connection with the history of the sacred building. In the basement, as elsewhere, there were many signs of dilapidation; the plaster had fallen off the ceilings and walls; windows were broken; the woodwork was stained and marred.

When the old man was somewhat exhausted, I asked, "Is it not true that you were once very prominent in the Church, that you gave liberally of your means and that you were active in the performance of your duties?" "That is very true," replied Martin. "Things were all right then. I was honored while the people were here, but now that I am old and poor it is all different." "Really," I replied, "how can that be? What about your testimony to the Book of Mormon? Do you still believe the Book of Mormon is true and that Joseph Smith was a Prophet?" Again the effect was electric. A changed old man stood before me. He was no longer a man with an imagined grievance. He was a man with a message.

"Young man," answered Martin Harris with impressiveness, "do I believe it? Do I see the sun shining? Just as surely as the sun is shining on us and gives us light, and the moon and stars give us light by night, so surely do I know that Joseph Smith was a true prophet of God, chosen of God to open the last Dispensation of the Fulness of Times; so surely do I know that the Book of Mormon was divinely translated. I saw the plates; I saw the Angel; I heard the voice of God. I know that the Book of Mormon is true and that Joseph Smith was a true prophet of God. I might as well doubt my own existence as to doubt the divine authenticity of the Book of Mormon, or the divine calling of Joseph Smith." It was a sublime moment. It was a wonderful testimony. We were thrilled to the very roots of our hair. The shabby, emaciated little man before us was transformed as he stood with hand outstretched towards the sun of heaven.

I asked Martin Harris how he could bear such a wonderful testimony after having left the Church. He said, "Young man, I never did leave the Church; the Church left me."

(Continued on following page)

# The Story of Martin Harris

(Continued from preceding page)

Martin Harris was now in a softer mood. He turned to me and asked, "Who are you," I again explained our relationship. "So my son, Martin, married your sister," repeated the old man, shaking my hand. "You know my family then?" "Yes," I replied; "wouldn't you like to see your family again?" "I should like to see Caroline and the children," mused Martin, naming over the children, "but I cannot. I am too poor." "That need not stand in the way," I answered. "President Young would be only too glad to furnish means to convey you to Utah." [After he had hesitated, Martin said:] "You call on Brigham Young. Tell him about our visit. Tell him that Martin Harris is an old, old man, living on charity, with his relatives. Tell him I should like to visit Utah, my family and children. I would be glad to accept help from the Church, but I want no personal favors. Wait! Tell him that if he sends money, he must send enough for the round trip. I should not want to remain in Utah." For twenty-five years he had nursed the old grudge against the leaders of the Church, probably because nobody had had the patience with him that I had shown.

After we had bidden Martin Harris good-bye, and had taken a few steps from the temple, my cousin placed his hands on my shoulders and said, "Wait a minute." Looking me squarely in the eye, he said, "I can testify that the Book of Mormon is true. There is something within me that tells me the old man told the truth. I know the Book of Mormon is true."

In due time I reached my home in the Seventh Ward in Salt Lake City. I recounted to my father my experiences with Martin Harris, and we two set out to report immediately at the office of President Young. The Presi-

dent received us very graciously. He listened attentively to my recital of my visit to Martin Harris. President Young asked questions now and again to make clear certain points. Then, when the story was told, he said—and it seemed to me he beamed with pleasure—"I want to say this: I was never more gratified over any message in my life. Send for him? Yes! Even if it were to take the last dollar of my own. Martin Harris spent his time and money freely when one dollar was worth more than one thousand dollars are now. Send for him? Yes, indeed I shall send. Rest assured, Martin Harris will be here in time. It was Martin Harris who gave the Prophet Joseph Smith the first money to assist in the translation of the Book of Mormon. Martin Harris was the first scribe to assist in the translation of the Book of Mormon from the original plates, as dictated by the Prophet, who was led by the Holy Ghost. It was Martin Harris who was called, by revelation, to assist in the selection and ordination of the first Council of the Twelve Apostles of the newly organized Church. It was Martin Harris who was called upon to accompany the Prophet to Missouri to assist in the selection of the land of consecration. Martin Harris also aided in the selec-

tion of the first high council of the Church, and he was a member of said council. . . ."

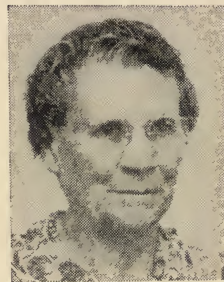
During the next few months Edward Stevenson was authorized to collect money by subscription to bring Martin Harris to Utah. About two hundred dollars was raised. . . .<sup>1</sup> Brigham Young's personal contribution of twenty-five dollars is said to have headed the list.

When the weather became propitious for the aged Martin Harris to travel, in the spring of 1870, Brigham Young assigned to his counselor in the presidency, George A. Smith, the task of making all necessary arrangements for bringing Martin Harris to Utah. The choice of a man to conduct this project was the uppermost consideration. The logical choice was Elder Edward Stevenson, who had first been impressed with the testimony he had heard Martin Harris bear in Oakland County, Michigan (then a territory) in 1833. He also had visited Martin Harris at Kirtland in 1869 during the course of his missionary travels, and impressed the old gentleman that the work of the Lord was prospering in Utah in fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy, "the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established in the top of the mountains, . . . and nations shall flow unto it." (Isaiah 2:2.)

The day following Elder Stevenson's arrival in Kirtland was a Sunday. The temple was made available for a religious meeting, and after the morning meetings, the audience voted to come back for a second meeting that day. Both meetings were well attended.

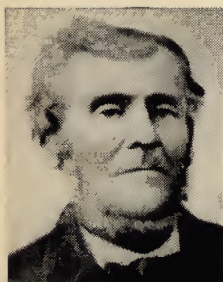
In Chicago, on their way west, Martin Harris was delighted to find crowds that would listen to him. All seemed astonished to hear him relate

(Continued on following page)



Sariah Harris Steele, only living granddaughter, of Martin Harris, now in her 84th year.

Martin Harris and One Direct Line of Descendants.



Martin Harris, Witness to the Book of Mormon.



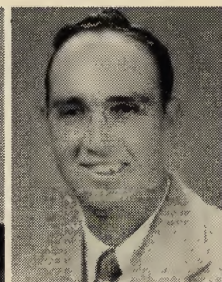
Martin Harris, Jr.



Russell King Harris



Walker Harris



Russell Martin Harris



Martin David Harris

<sup>1</sup>THE IMPROVEMENT ERA (Salt Lake City, Utah, March 1926) xxix; 468-471.

the story of his part in the bringing forth of the Book of Mormon.

On his arrival at Des Moines, Iowa, members of the branch of the Church there took up a collection and bought him a new suit. That act made Martin feel like a new man. He rested in this Iowa city for several days and was interviewed by the local newspaper. Here he attended a baptismal service, and it was here that Elder Stevenson more particularly began to teach Martin Harris about the necessity of his being rebaptized.<sup>2</sup>

Elder Stevenson and Martin Harris arrived in Salt Lake City August 30, 1870. President Brigham Young was out of the city, but they saw each other and were reconciled on President Young's return.

From Elder George Q. Cannon's editorial in the *Deseret News* after Martin Harris arrived in the valley, we quote:

Martin Harris is in his eighty-eighth year. He is remarkably vigorous for one of his years, and still retains the use of his faculties, his memory being very good, and his sight, though his eyes appear to have failed, being so acute that he can see to pick a pin off the ground. He has experienced many changes and vicissitudes; but to one point, so far as we have heard, he has never changed:—he has never failed to bear testimony to the divine authenticity of the Book of Mormon. He says it is not a matter of belief on his part, but of knowledge. He, with the other two witnesses, declared—and their testimony has accompanied every copy of the book—"that an angel of God came down from heaven, and he brought and laid before our eyes, that we beheld and saw the plates and the engravings thereon." This declaration he has not varied from in forty-one years; and it is a remarkable fact that, though away from the Church, and not maintaining their connection with the Prophet Joseph Smith, not one of the three witnesses have ever failed, so far as known, to bear testimony to the truth of their united declaration contained in the preface of the Book of Mormon! Deny whatever they might of other points of doctrine, of Joseph's authority or of his management, they have never denied the testimony which they have given to the world concerning the Book of Mormon.

We are glad to see Martin Harris once more in the midst of the Saints. He feels that this people are led by God, that they are a happy and a blessed people and have the appearance of enjoying God's favor. They are doing the very work which the Book of Mormon said should be done, and are the only people, who as a people, believe in the Book.<sup>3</sup>

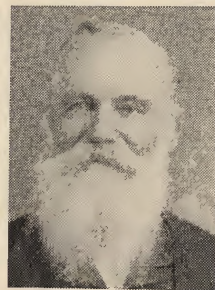
Then on Saturday, September 17, 1870, Martin Harris rejoined the Church. The record states:

<sup>2</sup>Edward Stevenson, "The Three Witnesses to the Book of Mormon," *The Latter-day Saints' Millennial Star* (Liverpool, England, 1866) XLVIII: 366-367.  
<sup>3</sup>*Deseret News* (weekly) September 7, 1870.

Martin Harris, one of the three witnesses of the Book of Mormon, was rebaptized today at the Endowment House by Elder Edward Stevenson and confirmed by Elder Orson Pratt (mouth), John Taylor, Wilford Woodruff, and Joseph F. Smith. President George A. Smith and Elders John D. T. McAllister, John Lyon, .....Davis, and Martin's sister, Mrs. Naomi H. Bent were also present. Martin Harris and his sister were also baptized by Brother Stevenson for a number of their dead relatives, and were confirmed by the same brethren, Joseph F. Smith being mouth, all the above named brethren being present.<sup>4</sup>

What a time of rejoicing! What a notable gathering of General Authorities, distinguished associates, and friends of the witness, now assembled to welcome his return to the fold. The prodigal son had returned and great was the joy. How appropriate that Martin Harris should be confirmed by Orson Pratt—a member of the first quorum of the Twelve Apostles in this dispensation, who had been selected and ordained by Martin and the two other special witnesses thirty-five years previously.

Martin was invited to speak in the Tabernacle in Salt Lake City, and later in Ogden, bearing the same testimony, unchanged and with renewed vigor and earnestness, confirming his early experiences while



Edward Stevenson, who was authorized by Brigham Young to collect money to bring Martin Harris to Utah.

associated with Joseph Smith during the period of the coming forth of the Book of Mormon and the organization of the Church.

He was then conducted by Elder Stevenson on a tour of many of the established wards throughout the territory, where he always received a hearty welcome, and rejoiced at every opportunity to repeat his testimony.

When President George A. Smith and others were being driven by John Henry Smith in a carriage to take a bath in the Warm Springs, near Salt Lake City, while passing over a high hill, President Smith directed the curtains of the carriage to be raised, giving a magnificent view of the city below. The Tabernacle and the Tem-

<sup>4</sup>*Journal History*, September 17, 1870.

ple—and in fact the beautiful city in full view—looked wonderful to Brother Harris, who seemed wrapped in admiration and exclaimed, "Who



Nancy Homer Harris, wife of Martin Harris, Jr., in whose home the aged witness spent his declining years.

would have thought that the Book of Mormon would have done all this?"<sup>5</sup>

On his way to Cache Valley, he stopped at Harrisville, near Ogden, to visit his nephew, Martin H. Harris. He then proceeded on to Smithfield to the home of his eldest son, Martin Harris, Jr. While living at Smithfield and later at Clarkston, Martin Harris was visited by his sons, John and Solomon, and his daughter, Ida May, who was born in Iowa after Caroline had left Martin at Kirtland and started West. Martin had never seen this daughter until he came to Utah and found her a lass of fourteen. Julia, Martin's eldest daughter, died in Echo, Utah, the year before her father arrived. Emer Harris, Martin's brother, also passed away in Logan the year before Martin came to Utah. Caroline, Martin's former wife, was now married and sealed to John Catley Davis.

Shortly after the arrival of his father in Smithfield, Martin, Jr., moved west across the valley to Clarkston. Here the aged witness spent the remaining years of his life in the quietude and serenity of his son's home, affectionately cared for by Martin, Jr., and his wife, Nancy Ann.

This Clarkston home soon became a center with a beaten path leading to its door, a constant stream of visitors from far and near coming to pay their respects to Martin Harris, the witness, and to hear his ever-ready testimony. He was literally and in great humility complying with that divine command, given him more than forty years before:

And thou shall declare glad tidings, yea, publish it upon the mountains, and upon every high place, and among every people that thou shall be permitted to see. (D & C 19:29.)

(Continued on page 524)

<sup>5</sup>Edward Stevenson, *op. cit.*, page 390.



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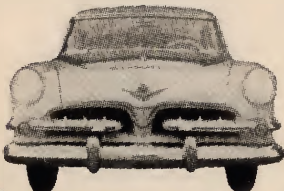
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## STORY OF MARTIN HARRIS

(Continued from page 507)

One of the prominent Church leaders who visited Martin Harris two years before the witness died at Clarkston, Utah, was Charles W. Nibley, later the Presiding Bishop and then a member of the First Presidency whose report of the incident, as related to me by his son Preston Nibley, is a

typical example of the impressions that Martin's numerous visitors received. Brother Nibley found "a little, old man, shriveled and dried up in appearance, but when he spoke, his hearers were thrilled with earnestness and the fiery, animated tone of his voice, the bright, keen expression in his eyes, but withal a deep humility

## On Relying on Laws and Locks

Richard L. Evans

ON THIS question again of being safe with someone: After all other considerations are taken into account and given their proper appraisal, we had just as well, first and always, face this fact: that the only things we can count on ultimately are honesty, integrity, and high qualities of character. There is no such thing as being permanently safe simply with laws or with locks. No lock was ever made that gives full and lasting protection against a cunning and determined dishonesty—because the same kind of brains that can make a so-called safe lock can outsmart a so-called safe lock. The same kind of brains that can make a code can break a code. The same kind of mind that can devise a so-called "fool-proof" system, can, if determined to do so, outsmart a "fool-proof" system. Laws and locks retard dishonest people, but they don't stop dishonesty. Only honesty can stop dishonesty—only integrity, only high qualities of character. And whenever we have to put ourselves in someone else's hands, as we often do, whenever we have to trust people in any occupation, in any profession, in any relationship in life, we should look beyond skill, beyond talent, beyond personality, beyond appearance, beyond ability—beyond all these (but including them also if we can) we should look for qualities of character. And if we can't count on character, there is very little that we can count on. No man has reason to sleep very well if his whole trust is placed in locks and alarms, for people have proved repeatedly, with boldness and craftiness and cunning, that they can invade the most safely guarded precincts; that they can perpetrate multi-million dollar frauds upon the public; that they can circumvent accounting systems, audits and rules and regulations. And with more laws and locks than we have ever had before, and with more men checking on other men, there is more and ever more violation of laws and of locks. Too often, in too many places, too many of us have too much put our trust in mere physical factors, in the arm of flesh, and have too much forgotten the inner make-up of the man. But when we have found someone with high qualities of character, someone without evil intent, someone who knows the difference between what is his and what isn't, what is honorable and what isn't, we have found a possession beyond price—for one of the greatest blessings of life is someone to trust, someone to be safe with.

"The Spoken Word"

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when he repeated his unwavering testimony. 'I saw the angel, I saw the plates. I heard the voice of God declare that the plates were revealed by the power of God and that they were translated by the power of God, and I was commanded henceforth to bear witness of what I saw and heard.'

Early in July 1875, nearly five years after he had come to Utah, Martin Harris was stricken with a kind of paralysis. It was the venerable witness's last illness.

A few hours before his death, when prostrated with great weakness, Martin Harris was visited by his ward bishop, Bishop Simon Smith of Clarkston Ward. Martin stretched forth his hands to salute him and said, "Bishop, I am going." In the words of his son, Martin Harris, Jr., "The bishop told Father that he had something of importance to tell him in relation to the publication of the Book of Mormon in the Spanish language by the request of the Indians in Central America. Upon hearing this, Father brightened up, and his pulsation improved, and although very weak, he began to talk as he had formerly before his sickness, and I think he spoke about two hours, so that you may see by this that the mere mention of the Book of Mormon put new life into him."<sup>6</sup>

Elder William Harrison Homer, Sr., has written concerning this time:

"At that time I and my family lived in Clarkston. With other members of the Clarkston Ward, I called at the Harris home to relieve them in the care of the old man. We began to think that he had borne his last testimony. The last audible words he had spoken had been something about the Book of Mormon, but we could not understand what it was. However, these were not his last words.

"The next day—July 10, 1875—marked the end. It was in the evening—milking time—and Martin Harris, Jr., and his wife Nancy Homer Harris, had gone out to milk and do the evening chores. In the house with the stricken man were left my mother, Eliza Williamson Homer, and myself, who had had so interesting a day with Martin Harris in Kirtland. I stood by the bedside, holding the patient's right hand, and my mother was at the foot of the bed. Martin had been unconscious for a number of days. When we first entered the

(Concluded on following page)

<sup>6</sup>Journal History, July 10, 1870.



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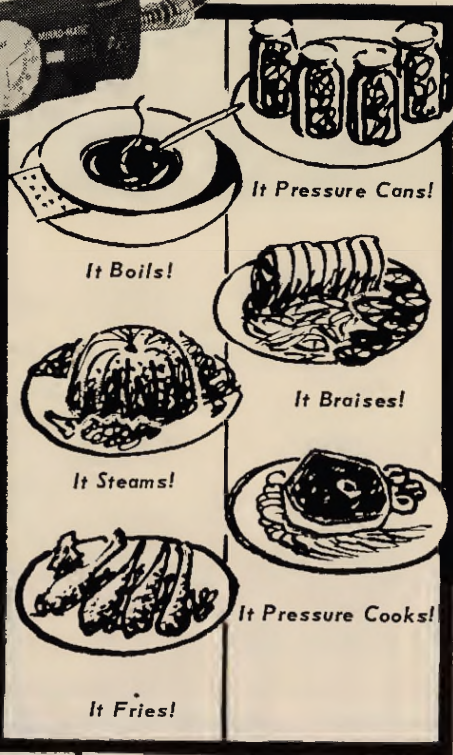
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## Story of Martin Harris

(Concluded from preceding page)

room, the old gentleman appeared to be sleeping. He soon awoke and asked for a drink of water. I put my arm under the old gentleman, raised him, and my mother held the glass to his lips. He drank freely and then looked at me and recognized me. He said, 'I know you. You are my friend.' He said, 'Yes, I did see the plates on which the Book of Mormon was written: I did see the angel; I did hear the voice of God; and I do know that Joseph Smith is a Prophet of God, holding the keys of the Holy Priesthood.'

"This was the end. Martin Harris, divinely chosen witness of the work of God, relaxed, gave up my hand. He lay back on his pillow, and just as the sun went down behind the Clarkston mountains, the spirit of Martin Harris passed on. When Martin Harris, Jr., and wife returned to the house, they found that their father had passed away. But in passing, Martin Harris, favored of God, repeated an irrefutable testimony of the divine inspiration and prophetic genius of the great Prophet, Joseph Smith."<sup>7</sup>

Friends came from far and wide to attend the services for their old friend, the witness of the Book of Mormon. And when he was buried, they placed a copy of the Book of Mormon in his right hand, and copy of the Doctrine and Covenants in his left hand.

<sup>7</sup>THE IMPROVEMENT ERA, *op. cit.* (March 1926) XXIX: 472.

(The end)

## Edna's Misapprehension

(Continued from page 501)

Edna smiled sadly and fought hard with the lump in her throat. I must get out! I must get out! The people seemed to be closing around her, tightly and mockingly. Late members pushed closer together. Right after this song, she consoled herself. Any excuse will do. I should have stayed home. She thought of the long week she had fought, trying to convince herself that there was a good reason for not being included with the ones that were called.

It had been Saturday morning, and Edna was making the usual rounds with the vacuum cleaner. She slipped the switch off, and a quiet hush fell over the room. She just remembered.

THE IMPROVEMENT ERA