

INTRODUCTION

by DAN WEES

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints reached its 150 year anniversary in 1980. The Deseret Book Company joined in the celebration by producing a beautifully bound, exact replica of the original 1830 edition Book of Mormon. Having never accessed this text, I immediately purchased a copy. I'd heard rumors about the *original* being quite different from the *current* version, and this sparked my curiosity to discover more. Armed with a fine-tipped red marker, I opened the book and began comparing it to my 1977 triple combination; carefully making notes in the margins of the replica about each difference. I soon discovered this task to be larger than expected, and lost interest after several pages...at least, for the moment.

These familiar feelings resurfaced when I heard about the release of *The Joseph Smith Papers – Revelations and Translations, Volume 3*; a large facsimile edition, with transcriptions of the *Printer's Manuscript* (PM); a handwritten copy of the *Original Manuscript* (OM), penned directly from Joseph Smith's dictation.

The eighth *Article of Faith* came to mind: "We believe the Bible to be the word of God as far as it is translated correctly" followed by the words of Joseph Smith, "I believe the Bible as it read when it came from the pen of the original writers" (*Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, edited by Joseph Fielding Smith, Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1938, page 327).

Since the original writings from the hands of the authors of the Bible are important, shouldn't the writings from the pens of Book of Mormon scribes likewise represent the closest model of the original words as they fell from the lips of the Prophet?

A new path became clear to me. In 1980 I attempted to identify all of the differences of the 1830 publication to the 1977 version. Thirty-six years later, I would compare the two original handwritten manuscripts to the Church's 'Current' web version, and catalog the changes.

The goal in producing the *Book of Mormon Comparative* is two-fold: 1) to give an accurate typographical transcription of the handwritten *Original Manuscript combined* with the typographical transcription of the handwritten *Printer's Manuscript* (found in the *left* columns), and 2) to indicate the modifications to this text in the *Current Edition* (found in the *right* columns).

Every attempt has been made to maintain the integrity of both versions: The *left* for its originality and historical value, the *right* for modifications and ease of 21st century reading. The symbols in the *right* columns are meant to be as unobtrusive as possible, yet apparent enough so the reader will not miss the opportunity to reference the *left* columns for insight.

Only original inscriptions will be represented on the OM/PM side. No revisions will be indicated herein, except for those which appear to be *immediate*, and by the original scribe. This is particularly true of the PM, and less obvious on the OM. This representation attempts to show the OM/PM in its pure form; as close to how it appeared in late 1829, when Oliver Cowdery ended his writing.

The text on the *Current Edition* side can be used in study, or simply as reference.

The entire volume is designed in a way to be useful to scholar, student, critic, and skeptic alike. My greatest hope lies in this unification of the minds, and the discovery of the Book of Mormon from a new perspective.