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## The Engraving of the Three Witnesses

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**Abstract:** This article discusses the process of making a duplication of the engravings of the Three Witnesses of the Book of Mormon.

# THE ENGRAVING OF THE THREE WITNESSES

BY JUNIUS F. WELLS

(See Frontispiece)

When it was proposed to devote much space of the September number of the *Improvement Era* this year to the Book of Mormon, it occurred to me that a suitable frontispiece for the number would be a reproduction of the steel engraving, which I had made to accompany the narrative, "History of the Book of Mormon," by Elder George Reynolds, published in *The Contributor*, volume five, year 1883-4. The photo-engraving copy here used is two-thirds the size of the original steel engraving. The editorial description of the engraving and interesting account of its production, more than forty years ago, ran about as follows:

When we first thought of procuring an engraving of The Three Witnesses of the Book of Mormon for publication in *The Contributor*, little difficulty was anticipated. It was supposed that their likenesses could be readily obtained and that their autographs and biographical information would be in possession of old-time friends and relatives then living. It was not long, however, before we discovered that such was not the case; and that so far from the materials, necessary to form the interesting group, being readily at hand, we would succeed in procuring them only after the most careful inquiry and persistent effort should be made.

There was no delay or trouble in getting David Whitmer's portrait, for a very fine one had been made in 1877 for publication in a county history of Missouri, a copy of which had been brought to Utah, in 1878, by President Joseph F. Smith and photographed. Martin Harris, after coming to Utah and locating here with his family, had a photograph taken, in 1871, by C. R. Savage, copies of which were kindly furnished by Martin Harris, Jr., of Smithfield, Cache county, and Edward Stevenson, of Salt Lake City, who was chiefly instrumental in bringing Martin Harris, the witness, to Utah.

Oliver Cowdery's sister living in Utah, we learned, knew nothing of his later life; had no letter or portraits, and was not in correspondence with any of his family. She, however, remembered that an oil painting had been made of her brother when he was in Missouri, about 1837. This clew we followed up by a series of correspondence with relatives of the Whitmer's, and through them learned that Oliver Cowdery's widow, David Whitmer's sister, was living with her daughter, Mrs. Charles Johnson, somewhere in the southwestern part of Missouri.

Through the correspondence of Elder John Morgan, with some

friends of Mrs. Cowdery, it was ascertained that a daguerreotype had been taken of Oliver four years before his death, 1846, and that it, as well as the oil painting, was in possession of his daughter. These friends undertook to procure either one or the other of the likenesses for us to use, and were sure of success. Mrs. Johnson was approached upon the matter, and quite readily consented to loan the daguerreotype, which is much the better portrait; her mother was also agreeable, and we received the encouraging information from Elder Morgan that the picture would be at our command in a few days.

In the meantime, to make sure of getting it, and hearing from a relative of the Whitmer family, Mr. Vancleave, of Chicago, that Dr. Charles Johnson, who controlled the likenesses, was opposed to letting them go to Utah, we solicited, by courtesy of President Joseph F. Smith, that gentleman's aid, and felt sure that success would soon reward our efforts. These too sanguine hopes were soon shattered; the Doctor set his foot down upon the project and absolutely refused to permit either of the portraits to be used, especially by a Utah "Mormon," as he in his politest moods called us. His wife wrote that "the Doctor has set himself against it, and that is the end of the matter."

By this time the mere desire to procure a plate of the Three Witnesses for a frontispiece to the magazine was supplanted by a sense of religious duty to rescue from oblivion and possible destruction the only portraits of those honored men, whose early history is so wonderfully interesting to every member of the Church now, and will be forever. The difficulties presented to the accomplishment of this purpose only intensified our determination to succeed.

The assistance of Elder James H. Hart, father of President Charles H. Hart, was therefore secured, and he proceeded in his characteristically cool and vigorous manner to the successful issue which crowned his labors, and which he narrates in highly interesting correspondence to the Territorial press. The following is extracted from letters received from him:

"I went first to Richmond under the impression that Dr. Johnson might have returned there from Seneca where he had been living. On arriving I learned that he had moved to South West City, twenty-eight miles south of Seneca, with no railroad communication. I therefore returned to Kansas City, thence to the extreme south-west corner of Missouri, passing through the north-east corner of the Indian Territory via Vinita. Knowing the determined opposition of Dr. Johnson, David Whitmer assured me, before leaving, that my journey would be in vain.

"The doctor was at first quite hostile, but after laboring with him several hours, during which his wife and Mrs. Cowdery warmly seconded my pleading, some kind spirit came upon him and he gave me the choice between the oil painting and the daguerreotype. I chose the latter, and placed it in the hands of the engravers. Before I left, the same spirit led the doctor to say he thought perhaps he would go west and locate in the Rocky Mountains. Mrs. Johnson also gave me her father's autograph."

The likeness procured was taken when Oliver was about forty-two years of age. It has been submitted to the inspection of several

old acquaintances, and is uniformly pronounced by them to be an excellent portrait. Some of these at once recognized the face, though they had not seen the original for over forty years, and remarked that the striking features of his countenance were vividly and accurately preserved.

The only portraits now in existence of Oliver Cowdery are copied from this engraving, as Dr. Johnson's house was burned and the originals were then lost, soon after Elder Hart was there. The best of these copies is an oil painting, made by the artist, Will Clawson. It is hung in the Joseph Smith Memorial Cottage in Vermont. A photograph of the painting may be seen among the historical portraits of the Church Historian's office.

The resemblance of the portraits of David Whitmer and Martin Harris was readily recognized and applauded by all who knew them. They agreed in testifying to the excellent portraits and superb workmanship of the engraving.

The Hill Cumorah is a reproduction of a fine photograph which Apostle Franklin D. Richards had taken during his visit there in 1876. It will be observed that there were six or seven large trees standing on the hill at that time. They disappeared a few years afterwards, leaving the headland of the hill quite bare. The group seen upon the hillside consists of Elder Richards, his wife, sons, Lorenzo and Charles, and Joseph A. West, besides the owner of the ground. The owner stated to them that they were standing around the spot indicated by Joseph Smith to his father, as the place from which the plates were taken. It is on the west side of the hill, near the north end, not far from the top; exactly corresponding to the written statement of the Prophet, upon the subject, and the repeated testimony of the witnesses.

The figures selected as embellishment of this historic engraving were drawn to illustrate Scriptural texts by the artist, Dan Weggeland. The one on the left represents the angel of the restoration, agreeable to the words of John the Revelator: "And I saw another angel fly in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth." The drapery of the figure, so far as the garment is concerned, is drawn according to the description of the costume of the angel that visited Joseph Smith on the night of September 21, 1823. The group on the right is intended as a reminder of the appearance of Moroni, the custodian of the plates, to the Witnesses, at the time they had retired to the woods near Waterloo, New York, and besought the Lord for that wonderful vision, which, being granted, has distinguished them for all time to come. The expression of their faces is designed to illustrate the text from the Testimony which reads as follows: "And it is marvelous in our eyes."

The union of the sticks of Joseph and Judah is fully predicted in the writings of the prophets. (Ezekiel 37:16-20.)

The engraving, it thus appears, was procured after much labor and expense in getting the portraits and drawings. The work was done

by Hall & Son's, New York, and the original is as fine as could be executed by the best engravers on steel. The picture was intended as a souvenir of the glorious events attending the restoration of the gospel to the earth, and more especially the bringing forth of the sacred records that testify of God's dealings which his children upon this continent in early times. As such it was respectfully dedicated to the Latter-day Saints in all the world.\*

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\*And as such it is reproduced as a most fitting frontispiece in this number of the *Improvement Era*, devoted to the celebration of the one hundredth anniversary of the delivery of the plates, containing the untranslated text of the Book of Mormon, to the Prophet Joseph Smith.—*Editors.*

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## Memories of Cumorah

O little hill, thy name scarce known, Tell of Moroni on thy crest.  
 Had'st thou but tongue to tell Mourning for friend and foe;  
     How on thy slopes, Custodian great.  
     'Midst forlorn hopes, Of inscribed plate,  
 The Jaredites in thousands fell, He brought, and there did bury low  
 Till none were left to mourn. And hide within thy breast.

Thou could'st recount the story true, Of all the scenes thou could'st unfold  
 That sad and awful end, To us, we'd like this best:  
     Of Nephi's race, When thou did'st yield,  
     Upon thy face; To guard and shield,  
 With prophet, relative, and friend, To Joseph Smith, at God's behest,  
 All slain within thy view. Those treasured plates of gold.

One hundred years have passed away  
 And gone beyond recall;  
     Yet our bosoms swell,  
     When'er we tell  
 Of TRUTH restored for one and all  
 In God's appointed way.

Ogden, Utah

ROGER HOWEY.