

# Spaulding Manuscript

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The Spaulding Manuscript is a fictional story about a group of Romans who, while sailing to England early in the fourth century A.D., were blown off course and landed in eastern North America. One of them kept a record of their experiences among eastern and midwestern American Indian tribes. The 175-page manuscript was first published as a 115-page monograph in 1885, some seventy years after the death of its author, Solomon Spaulding (sometimes spelled Spalding). The only known manuscript was lost from 1839 until its discovery in Honolulu, Hawaii, in 1884. It was promptly published by both the Latter-day Saints and Reorganized Latter Day Saint churches to refute the theory of some critics that it had served as an original source document for the Book of Mormon, supposedly supplied to Joseph Smith by Sidney Rigdon.

Spaulding was born in Ashford, Connecticut, on February 21, 1761. He served in the American Revolution, later graduated from Dartmouth College, and became a clergyman. He subsequently lost his faith in the Bible, left the ministry, and worked unsuccessfully at a variety of occupations in New York, Ohio, and Pennsylvania until his death near Pittsburgh in 1816. About 1812 he wrote Manuscript Found, which he attempted to publish to relieve pressing debts.

There are similarities in the explanation for the origins of both Manuscript Found and the Book of Mormon. The introduction to the Spaulding work claims that its author was walking near Conneaut, Ohio (about 150 miles west of the place in New York where Joseph Smith obtained the gold plates), when he discovered an inscribed, flat stone. This he raised with a lever, uncovering a cave in which lay a stone box containing twenty-eight rolls of parchment. The writing was in Latin. The story is primarily a secular one, having virtually no religious content. A character in the novel possessed a seerstone, similar to objects used by Joseph Smith. However, none of the many names found in either volume matches any of those in the other, nor is there the remotest similarity in literary styles.

The first to assert that a direct connection existed between the Book of Mormon and Manuscript Found was Doctor Philastus Hurlbut, who was excommunicated from the Church in June 1833. Desiring to discredit his former coreligionists, Hurlbut set out in the ensuing months to refute Joseph Smith's claims for the origins of the Book of Mormon. He interviewed members of Spaulding's family, who swore that there were precise similarities between Spaulding's work and the Book of Mormon. He also located the neglected manuscript, but must have been disappointed to discover that it had no demonstrable connection with the Book of Mormon.

In 1834, Hurlbut was involved with Eber D. Howe in preparing a significant anti-Mormon publication, *Mormonism Unveiled*. Its final chapter dealt with the Spaulding theory of the origin of the Book of Mormon. Howe admitted in the book that the only document known to have been authored by Spaulding had been found, but he asserted that this was not Manuscript Found. The title penciled on the brown paper cover was *Manuscript Story -Conneaut Creek*. Howe speculated that Spaulding must have composed another manuscript that served as the source of the Book of Mormon, but no additional writings of Spaulding have ever surfaced. By the 1840s, the so-called Spaulding theory had become the main anti-Mormon explanation for the Book of Mormon.

Spaulding's manuscript, lost for forty-five years, was among items shipped from the office of the Ohio Painesville Telegraph, owned by Eber D. Howe, when that office was purchased in 1839 by L. L. Rice, who subsequently moved to Honolulu. Rice discovered the manuscript in 1884 while searching his collection for abolitionist materials for his friend James H. Fairchild, president of Oberlin College. Believers in the Book of Mormon felt vindicated by this discovery, and they published Spaulding's work to show the world it was not the source for the Book of Mormon.

Since 1946, no serious student of Mormonism has given the Spaulding Manuscript theory much credibility. In that year, Fawn Brodie published *No Man Knows My History*. This biography of Joseph Smith, hostile to his prophetic claims, dismissed the idea of any connection between Spaulding and Smith or their writings. Rigdon first met Joseph Smith in December 1830 after the Book of Mormon was published.

Nevertheless, some have continued to promote the Spaulding theory (e.g., see Holley). In 1977, graphologists claimed to have detected similarities between the handwriting of Spaulding and of one of the scribes who transcribed some of the Book of Mormon from Joseph Smith's dictation. After considerable media attention and further scrutiny, anti-Mormon spokespersons acknowledged that they had been too hasty. The handwriting evidence did not support a connection between Solomon Spaulding and Joseph Smith.

## Bibliography

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[http://eom.byu.edu/index.php/Spaulding\\_Manuscript](http://eom.byu.edu/index.php/Spaulding_Manuscript)

## Spaulding Manuscript

Source:

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day, website

In the early 1800s, a man named Solomon Spaulding wrote a fictional story about ancient Romans who came to North America. Some critics of the Church have claimed that Joseph Smith used the manuscript to write the Book of Mormon. This claim has been discredited many times by people inside and outside of the Church. The Book of Mormon was translated from ancient records by the gift and power of God. It has no connection with the Spaulding manuscript.

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Those who do not accept the Book of Mormon as scripture offer many theories about its origin. One of the earliest theories was that the Book of Mormon was based on a manuscript by Solomon Spaulding (also spelled "Spalding"), a fictional story about early inhabitants of America.

Spaulding was born in 1761. He studied at Dartmouth College in New Hampshire and was ordained a minister. Later, he left the ministry and lived in New York, Ohio, and Pennsylvania until his death in 1816. In his later years, he wrote a novel, which he never published. Spaulding's manuscript is considerably shorter than the Book of Mormon.

Similarities between his manuscript and the Book of Mormon are general and superficial. Spaulding's fiction is about a group of Romans blown off course on a journey to Britain who arrive instead in America. One of the Romans narrates the adventures of the group and the history and culture of the people they find in America. A major portion of the manuscript describes two nations near the Ohio River. After a long era of peace between the two nations, a prince of one nation elopes with a princess of the other nation. Because of political intrigue, the elopement results in a great war between the two nations and the loss of much life but the ultimate vindication of the prince and his princess.

In 1833, Philastus Hurlbut, who had been excommunicated from the Church, tried to collect derogatory information about Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon. As part of his efforts, Hurlbut spoke with several people from Ohio who were familiar with the Spaulding Manuscript. These people signed affidavits claiming that the Book of Mormon was based on Spaulding's story. In spite of these claims, neither Hurlbut nor other critics of the Church published the Spaulding Manuscript at that time even though it was in their possession. Eventually, the manuscript was lost. In 1884, a man named L. L. Rice found the manuscript among some papers he had purchased, and he turned it over to Oberlin College in Ohio. Rice and James H. Fairchild, president of Oberlin College examined the manuscript and both certified that it could not have been the source of the Book of Mormon. The Church published the story in 1886.

Like other attempts to discredit the Book of Mormon, the theory of the Spaulding manuscript is based on the belief that an unlearned man such as Joseph Smith could not have created a book as detailed and rich as the Book of Mormon and that he therefore must have obtained the content from some other source. In fact, Joseph Smith did not create the Book of Mormon. He translated it from ancient records by the gift and power of God. Eleven witnesses saw the plates from which the Book of Mormon was translated. Though some of these people left the Church, they never denied their testimony that the Book of Mormon was the word of God.

Those who want to know if the Book of Mormon is true can gain this knowledge from the Holy Ghost, which is promised to all who sincerely seek: "When ye shall receive these things, I would exhort you that ye would ask God, the Eternal Father, in the name of Christ, if these things are not true; and if ye shall ask with a sincere heart, with real intent, having faith in Christ, he will manifest the truth of it unto you, by the power of the Holy Ghost" (Moroni 10:4).

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<https://www.lds.org/topics/spaulding-manuscript?lang=eng>