

## SECTION 3: JOSEPH SMITH

What Joseph Smith knew or understood about the [B]ook [of Mormon] ought to be research questions rather than presumptions.<sup>1</sup>

—John. E. Clark

**Editor’s Note:** *This paper is the full version of the executive summary available at [http://www.fairlds.org/DNA\\_Evidence\\_for\\_Book\\_of\\_Mormon\\_Geography/](http://www.fairlds.org/DNA_Evidence_for_Book_of_Mormon_Geography/). This paper was last updated 3 September 2008.*

This document is an analysis of the scholarly merits of the evidence and research used by Rodney Meldrum<sup>2</sup> in his firesides and DVD presentation, *DNA Evidence for Book of Mormon Geography*.<sup>3</sup> Neither FAIR nor this document take any position on the geographic location of Book of Mormon events.<sup>4</sup> It is important, however, that Meldrum’s theories be analyzed according to the same standards by which other Book of Mormon geography theories are evaluated. To avoid confusion, this paper refers to Meldrum’s geographic model as the Limited North American Model, or LNAM.<sup>5</sup> This document is just one in a series of such analytical documents.

In this document we examine the use to which Meldrum puts the statements of Joseph Smith. This examination addresses, specifically, Part 3 of the DVD presentation, which is

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<sup>1</sup> John E. Clark, “Archaeological Trends and Book of Mormon Origins,” *Brigham Young University Studies* 44/4 (2005): 85.

<sup>2</sup> This paper follows the scholarly custom of referring to an individual, at first reference, by full name and then subsequently referring to the individual by last name only. We fully recognize Rodney as a brother in the gospel, but in discussing secular issues (such as scholarly research and geographic models) it was felt that continually prefacing his name or the name of any other referenced scholar or individual with “Brother” or “Sister,” while accurate, would distract from the readability of the paper.

<sup>3</sup> Rodney Meldrum, *DNA Evidence for Book of Mormon Geography: New scientific support for the truthfulness of the Book of Mormon; Correlation and Verification through DNA, Prophetic, Scriptural, Historical, Climatological, Archaeological, Social, and Cultural Evidence* (Rodney Meldrum, 2008). The DVD is in sections; citations in this paper reference the DVD’s section number and title, followed by an approximate time stamp from the DVD.

<sup>4</sup> FAIR recognizes that faithful individuals and scholars can honestly disagree on where Book of Mormon events took place; there is no revealed or officially accepted geography. FAIR provides an online reference to over 60 different geographic models at [http://en.fairmormon.org/Book\\_of\\_Mormon\\_geography](http://en.fairmormon.org/Book_of_Mormon_geography) (click on Book of Mormon Geographical Models). That being said, this paper may occasionally make reference to a Mesoamerican model for Book of Mormon geography. Such reference is not made to argue for that particular geographical model, but because (1) the presentation often criticizes Mesoamerican models through misrepresentation and (2) the presentation often makes a claim that is equally true of the Mesoamerican model. If both models make the same claims and meet the criteria necessary for those claims, it stands to reason that both models would be equally viable relative to such claims.

<sup>5</sup> Meldrum’s model places Book of Mormon peoples in an area roughly covering the Atlantic seaboard to the Rocky Mountains. This name was chosen as descriptive of the general model. We recognize that Meldrum may pick a different name at some point and would invite him to do so.

entitled “Joseph Smith: What did Joseph Know about Book of Mormon Geography?” It is a fair summarization of the presentation to say that it claims Joseph Smith not only taught that the Book of Mormon happened in a specific location, but that this was based upon revelation to Joseph Smith.

Unfortunately, the historical record is not as clear as the presentation makes it appear. Several pieces of evidence are relied upon to establish a position that Joseph Smith knew the geography of the Book of Mormon. These are the items, in the order they are used in the presentation:

- The Wentworth letter
- The *American Revivalist* account
- Lucy Mack Smith’s statement
- Letter to Emma Smith
- The Zelph mound incident

This paper examines each of these evidentiary items, in turn, and then analyzes information not covered in the presentation.

## THE WENTWORTH LETTER

The presentation relies heavily upon the supposed geographic references within the Wentworth letter. This letter was written in early 1842 by Joseph Smith to John Wentworth, editor of the *Chicago Democrat* newspaper. The letter was first published on March 1, 1842, in the *Times and Seasons*. The letter covers many matters relative to the history of the young LDS Church, but only this portion is used as evidence in the presentation:

I was also informed concerning the aboriginal inhabitants of this country, and shown who they were, and from whence they came; a brief sketch of their origin, progress, civilization, laws, governments, of their righteousness and iniquity, and the blessings of God being finally withdrawn from them as a people was made known unto me: I was also told where there was deposited some plates on which were engraven an abridgement [abridgment] of the records of the ancient prophets that had existed on this continent.

The remnant are the Indians that now inhabit this country. This book also tells us that our Saviour [Savior] made his appearance upon this continent after his resurrection, . . . <sup>6</sup>

The key portions stressed in the presentation are the references to “this continent” and “this country.”

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<sup>6</sup> Joseph Smith, “Church History,” *Times and Seasons* 3:9 (March 1, 1842): 707. See also *History of the Church* 4:535-541. The underlining is not in the original; it is in the visual aid used in the presentation. Meldrum refers to these as “profound statements” relative to geography. (Meldrum, *DNA Evidence*, Joseph Smith, 3:35-4:45.)

## PEOPLES OF THIS CONTINENT

In the presentation it is asserted that “this continent” could only mean North America, since that is where Joseph was living when the statement was made. Such an assertion is based on a common logical fallacy called *presentism*. This means that the researcher or author reads into the historical record a modern understanding of a term or phrase. Granted, today we commonly refer to North America as a continent, but the more important question is how the people of Joseph’s day understood the term.

Meldrum apparently recognizes the potential problem, as he marshals an early copy of Webster’s dictionary to help make the point:

Now, I went back and looked in Noah Webster’s dictionary of the 1850s, when Joseph Smith was around. When it said “continent,” they’re not talking about North and South America. There’s a North American continent and a South American continent in Noah Webster’s dictionary, which would be what would be currently used at Joseph Smith’s time.<sup>7</sup>

There is a problem with this claim: Joseph was killed in 1844, well before the only Webster’s revision of the 1850s appeared (1859).<sup>8</sup> It is actually better to look at a dictionary that was in use when Joseph was living and nearer to when the Book of Mormon was written, such as Webster’s 1828 edition. This edition defines *continent* as “a great extent of land, not disjoined or interrupted by a sea; a connected tract of land of great extent; as the Eastern and Western continent. It differs from an isle only in extent.”<sup>9</sup>

It is telling that Webster refers to both the Eastern and Western continents. The Western continent, of course, would be what we today refer to as the Western hemisphere, comprised of North, Central, and South America. This usage is consistent with Joseph’s reference in the Wentworth letter, which the presentation does not quote fully:

The remnant are the Indians that now inhabit this country. This book also tells us that our Saviour [Savior] made his appearance upon this continent after his resurrection, that he planted the gospel here in all its fulness [fullness], and richness, and power, and blessing; that they had apostles, prophets, pastors, teachers and evangelists; the same order, the same priesthood, the same ordinances, gifts, powers, and blessing, as was enjoyed on the eastern continent, that the people were cut off in consequence of their transgressions...<sup>10</sup>

Note that Joseph contrasts the events of “this continent” with the events of the “eastern continent.” In Joseph’s day, in other words, “this continent” didn’t refer solely to North America as the presentation asserts.

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<sup>7</sup> Meldrum, *DNA Evidence*, Joseph Smith, 4:37-5:00.

<sup>8</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Webster's\\_Dictionary#19th-\\_and\\_early\\_20th-century\\_editions](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Webster's_Dictionary#19th-_and_early_20th-century_editions) (last accessed August 28, 2008).

<sup>9</sup> Noah Webster, *An American Dictionary of the English Language*, 2 volumes (New York: S. Converse, 1828), s.v., “continent.”

<sup>10</sup> Joseph Smith, “Church History,” *Times and Seasons* 3:9 (March 1, 1842): 707-708. See also *History of the Church* 4:535-541.

This understanding of “continent” in Joseph’s day cannot be doubted, since the same dictionary considers America a continent, and says that from Panama to the north “the continent is called North America, and to the South, it [the continent] is called South America.”<sup>11</sup>

This usage was followed by John Taylor’s placement of the Book of Mormon geography in Mesoamerica. Writing less than a year after Joseph’s death, Taylor called him

...one of the greatest men that ever lived on the earth; emphatically proved so, by being inspired by God to bring forth the Book of Mormon, which gives the true history of the natives of this continent; their ancient glory and cities:—which cities have been discovered by Mr Ste[ph]ens in Central America, exactly where the Book of Mormon left them.<sup>12</sup>

In short, it is improper—an instance of presentism—to use quotes that mention “this continent” as a reason to choose a North American model of Book of Mormon geography over a model that may place the geography elsewhere in the Western hemisphere. The term “continent,” as used by Joseph and his contemporaries, is synonymous with our usage of “hemisphere” today.

#### ***INHABITANTS OF THIS COUNTRY***

The Wentworth letter also uses the term “this country,” which Meldrum claims means that Joseph is situating the Book of Mormon in “the United States.”<sup>13</sup> Here is the relevant passage from the Wentworth letter:

I was also informed concerning the aboriginal inhabitants of this country and shown who they were, and from whence they came....The principal nation of the second race fell in battle towards the close of the fourth century. The remnant are the Indians that now inhabit this country....<sup>14</sup>

To claim that such a statement supports a North American geography for the Book of Mormon is to, once again, engage in presentism and to ignore other equally plausible readings of the wording. While the word “country” can refer to a kingdom or nation, in Joseph’s day it could also refer to “any tract of land, or inhabited land; any region, as distinguished from other regions.”<sup>15</sup> It is possible that Joseph is using the term generically rather than specifically.

Even if we grant that it refers to a nation, it does little to help situate the Book of Mormon. The letter says only that “the remnant” of the Nephites and Lamanites “*now* inhabit this country.” This would be true wherever the Book of Mormon took place, since if Lehi left

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<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, s.v. “America.”

<sup>12</sup> John Taylor (editor), “From the Christian Reflector, The Mormon Prophet,” *Times and Seasons* 6/1 (1 April 1845): 855.

<sup>13</sup> Meldrum, *DNA Evidence*, Joseph Smith, 4:27.

<sup>14</sup> Joseph Smith, “Church History,” *Times and Seasons* 3/9 (1 March 1842): 706–710. Reproduced in *History of the Church* 4:537–538.

<sup>15</sup> Webster, *An American Dictionary of the English Language*, s.v., “country.”

any descendants at all, *all* Amerindians would share a relation to the remnant he left behind by Joseph Smith's day, fifteen hundred years later.<sup>16</sup>

Further, equating "country" with "nation" doesn't take into account presentism. Today when we say "this country" it means everything from the 49th parallel to the Rio Grande River and everything from the Atlantic to the Pacific. When Joseph Smith made his statement, however, the country was much smaller, covering only the area from the Atlantic to approximately the Missouri River. There were only 26 states at the time, and much of what the LNAM notes as "Lamanite lands" up to the Rocky Mountains were simply not part of the country in early 1842. So, to which "country" would Joseph have been referring? That country with which he and Wentworth were familiar or the larger country to which Meldrum applies Joseph's words?

Regardless of which reading is correct, Joseph Smith did not canonize the Wentworth letter, nor did he claim that it was revelation—only the Articles of Faith were placed in LDS scripture.<sup>17</sup> As you will see, Joseph made other remarks after the Wentworth letter's publication in March 1842 that do not support the LNAM.

## THE AMERICAN REVIVALIST ACCOUNT

As a "second witness"<sup>18</sup> for Joseph's understanding of Book of Mormon geography, the presentation uses a statement that appeared in early 1833 in *The American Revivalist and Rochester Observer*. Here are the words used in the presentation:

The Book of Mormon is a record of the forefathers of our western tribes of Indians... By it, we learn that our western tribes of Indians, are descendants from that Joseph that was sold into Egypt, and that the land of America is a promised land unto them.<sup>19</sup>

Since Joseph Smith was living in Kirtland at the time the statement was made, the presentation uses it as support for placing the Nephites in areas east of the Mississippi River and the Lamanites at all points between the Mississippi River and the Rocky Mountains. After all, we assume that the "western tribes of Indians" could only apply to Native Americans in that area.

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<sup>16</sup> This point, which is often over-looked by members and critics alike, follows from modern studies of population genetics. This concept is explored in detail on the FAIR wiki, "Amerindians as Lamanites," at [http://en.fairmormon.org/Amerindians\\_as\\_Lamanites](http://en.fairmormon.org/Amerindians_as_Lamanites) (last accessed August 29, 2008).

<sup>17</sup> Dean Jessee notes that Joseph likely used Orson Pratt's tract, *An Interesting Account of Several Remarkable Visions* (1840) as a basis for the Wentworth letter [Dean C. Jessee, *Personal Writings of Joseph Smith*, (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1984), 667]. Canonization of the Articles of Faith occurred in 1880 [John W. Welch and David J. Whittaker, "'We Believe. . .': Development of the Articles of Faith," *Ensign* (September 1979): 51]. James Talmage notes that the Articles of Faith were reconfirmed by the Church membership on October 6, 1890 [James Talmage, *The Articles of Faith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1984), 5].

<sup>18</sup> Meldrum, *DNA Evidence*, Joseph Smith, 5:02.

<sup>19</sup> Joseph Smith, "Mormonism," *The American Revivalist and Rochester Observer* 7/6 (February 2, 1833). Only the last two paragraphs of Joseph's letter to the newspaper were printed. The entire letter appeared eleven years later in the November 15, 1844 issue of the *Times and Seasons*.

Is such an analysis correct? There is ambiguity in the statement, as there were hundreds of tribes living west of Kirtland in 1833, but Joseph makes no definition as to which of those tribes he refers to.<sup>20</sup> Does such a statement, early in 1833, indicate that Joseph believed at the time that the Book of Mormon geography was situated in Western America, or do we learn that Joseph believed that the Native Americans in that area were descendants of Book of Mormon peoples? The latter reading is just as likely as the former, focusing on genealogy, birthright, and blessings rather than on geography.

It is interesting in presenting this evidence that Meldrum makes a point of stating that the *American Revivalist* letter was “written by commandment from God to Joseph.”<sup>21</sup> This is, apparently, an attempt to drive home the point the letter carries the imprimatur of God. The God-commanded importance of the purported geographic statement is not evident, however, in the entire letter. B.H. Roberts had this to say about the commanded nature of the letter:

The Prophet states subsequently that he wrote this communication by commandment of the Lord. The general condition of the world as noted by the Prophet at the commencement of this chapter, was doubtless the occasion of the Lord sending forth such a note of warning to the inhabitants of the earth as is here presented.<sup>22</sup>

In other words, the commandment was to warn the world and call them to repentance, not to imply authoritatively where Book of Mormon events took place.

## LUCY MACK SMITH’S STATEMENT

The next piece of evidence marshaled in support of the LNAM is a statement by Lucy Mack Smith, mother of Joseph Smith:

From this time forth, Joseph continued to receive instructions from the Lord, and we continued to get the children together every evening, for the purpose of listening while he gave us a relation of the same...

He would describe the ancient inhabitants of this continent, their dress, mode of traveling, and the animals upon which they rode; their cities, their buildings, with every particular; their mode of warfare; and also their religious worship.

This he would do with as much ease, seemingly, as if he had spent his whole life with them.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Even the LNAM proposed by Meldrum doesn’t presume that Joseph Smith was talking about all of the tribes since the model doesn’t include tribes west of the Rockies among the presumed Lamanites.

<sup>21</sup> Meldrum, *DNA Evidence*, Joseph Smith, 6:02.

<sup>22</sup> Joseph Smith, *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, edited by B.H. Roberts, volume 1 (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1972), 312.

<sup>23</sup> Lucy Mack Smith, *History of Joseph Smith by His Mother*, edited by Preston Nibley (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1956), 82-83. See Meldrum, *DNA Evidence*, Joseph Smith, 6:13-7:00.

Meldrum reads this passage with just as much presentism as he read the passages from the Wentworth letter, discussed earlier. Lucy states that Joseph talked about the “inhabitants of this continent,” which in contemporary usage included more than just North America. And, unless Joseph was shown a map that indicated where the events he was seeing took place, “this continent” is a very indeterminate location—it is just as plausible that they took place in South America or Central America as in North America.

## LETTER TO EMMA SMITH

The next piece of evidence used in the presentation to suggest that Joseph revealed a North American setting for the Book of Mormon is a letter he wrote to Emma on June 4, 1834, while on the Zion’s Camp march. Joseph discussed their journey “wandering over the plains of the Nephites, recounting occasionally the history of the Book of Mormon, roving over the mounds...of that once-beloved people of the Lord, picking up their skulls and their bones as proof of its divine authenticity.”<sup>24</sup>

This is, obviously, an important clue about Joseph’s views on geography at the time. However, it is unclear if Joseph meant such statements to be definitive, geographically, for the placement of Book of Mormon events. This statement was not consistent with earlier statements (it was more limited in nature than earlier statements which alluded to an entire hemisphere) or later statements (which referenced Nephites in Central America).

The easiest way to account for the differing statements by Joseph over time is to simply acknowledge that his feelings relative to Book of Mormon geography changed over time—as in most things, Joseph was open to further knowledge. (See the discussion of the Bernhisel letter later in this paper.) As one scholar notes,

In 1834...Joseph believed that the portion of America over which they had just traveled was “the plains of the Nephites” and that their bones were “proof” of the Book of Mormon’s authenticity. By 1842 he evidently believed that the events in most of Nephite history took place in Central America.<sup>25</sup>

## THE ZELPH MOUND INCIDENT

During the Zion’s Camp march Joseph Smith and others stumbled across a mound with stone altars on top of it. They dug down and found a human skeleton with an arrow in the ribcage. The *History of the Church* combined several diary entries and accounts about the incident and then wrote the story as if Joseph was speaking.<sup>26</sup> These are not his words, but an amalgamation of several accounts into one:

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<sup>24</sup> Meldrum, *DNA Evidence*, Joseph Smith, 8:45-9:25. For the full letter, see Dean C. Jessee, *Personal Writings of Joseph Smith*, Revised Edition (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 2002), 344-346.

<sup>25</sup> Kenneth W. Godfrey, “The Zelfh Story,” *Brigham Young University Studies* 29/2 (Spring 1989): 48.

<sup>26</sup> Such recasting of accounts and putting words into another’s voice was common when writing nineteenth-century history.

The contemplation of the scenery around us produced peculiar sensations in our bosoms: and subsequently the visions of the past being opened to my [Joseph Smith's] understanding by the Spirit of the Almighty, I discovered that the person whose skeleton was before us was a white Lamanite, a large, thick-set man, and a man of God. His name was Zelph. He was a warrior and chieftain under the great prophet Onandagus, who was known from the Hill Cumorah, or eastern sea to the Rocky mountains. The curse was taken from Zelph, or, at least, in part—one of his thigh bones was broken by a stone flung from a sling, while in battle, years before his death. He was killed in battle by the arrow found among his ribs, during the last great struggle of the Lamanites and Nephites.<sup>27</sup>

LDS scholars have long noted several problems with this story as presented by the *History of the Church*.<sup>28</sup> The accounts were published after the death of Joseph Smith, and the text has a convoluted history:

In 1842 Willard Richards, then church historian, was assigned the task of compiling a large number of documents and producing a history of the church from them. He worked on this material between 21 December 1842 and 27 March 1843. Richards, who had not joined the church until 1836, relied on the writings or recollections of Heber C. Kimball, Wilford Woodruff, and perhaps others for his information regarding the discovery of Zelph. Blending the sources available to him, and perhaps using oral accounts from some of the members of Zion's Camp, but writing as if he were Joseph Smith, historian Richards drafted the story of Zelph as it appears in the "Manuscript History of the Church, Book A-1." With respect to points relative to Book of Mormon geography, Richards wrote that "Zelph was a white Lamanite, a man of God who was a warrior and chieftain under the great prophet Onandagus who was known from the [*hill Cumorah* is crossed out in the manuscript] eastern Sea, to the Rocky Mountains. He was killed in battle, by the arrow found among his ribs, during a [*last* crossed out] great struggle with the Lamanites" [*and Nephites* crossed out].

Following the death of Joseph Smith, the *Times and Seasons* published serially the "History of Joseph Smith." When the story of finding Zelph appeared in the 1 January 1846 issue, most of the words crossed out in the Richards manuscript were, for some unknown reason, included, along with the point that the prophet's name was Omandagus. The reference to the hill Cumorah from the unemended Wilford Woodruff journal was still included in the narrative, as was the phrase "during the last great struggle of the Lamanites and Nephites."

The 1904 first edition of the seven-volume *History of the Church*, edited by B.H. Roberts, repeats the manuscript version of Richards's account.

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<sup>27</sup> Joseph Smith, *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints*, edited by Brigham H. Roberts, 7 volumes (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1980), 2:79–80; for 3 June 1834.

<sup>28</sup> An excellent discussion can be found in Kenneth W. Godfrey, "What Is the Significance of Zelph in the Study of Book of Mormon Geography?," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 8/2 (1999): 70–79 and Kenneth W. Godfrey, "The Zelph Story," *Brigham Young University Studies* 29/2 (Spring 1989): 31–49.



However, in 1948, after Joseph Fielding Smith had become church historian, explicit references to the hill Cumorah and the Nephites were reintroduced. That phrasing has continued to the present in all reprintings.<sup>29</sup>

William Hamblin described some of the difficulties in identifying the roots of this story:

Many significant qualifiers were left out of the printed version [of this account]. Thus, whereas Wilford Woodruff's journal account mentions that the ruins and bones were "probably [related to] the Nephites and Lamanites," the printed version left out the "probably," and implied that it was a certainty. [There are] several similar shifts in meaning from the original manuscripts to the printed version. "The mere 'arrow' of the three earliest accounts became an 'Indian Arrow' (as in Kimball), and finally a 'Lamanitish Arrow.' The phrase 'known from the Atlantic to the Rocky Mountain,' as in the [Reuben] McBride diary, became 'known from the Hill Cumorah' (stricken out) or 'eastern sea to the Rocky Mountains.' The point here is that there are many difficulties that make it nearly impossible for us to know exactly what Joseph Smith said in 1834 as he reflected on the ruins his group encountered in Illinois.<sup>30</sup>

Even if we presume that the *History of the Church* account is completely accurate—a dubious assumption—this does little to help us with Book of Mormon geography. The Book of Mormon speaks of several migrations of people "northward." Alma 63:4–9 recounts the migration of "five thousand and four hundred men, with their wives and their children, departed out of the land of Zarahemla into the land which was northward". In that same year, Hagoth built a "large ship" and sailed "into the land northward." That ship returned and was filled again, as well as many "other" ships that were built and again sailed "northward." In the thirty-ninth year, another ship sailed northward carrying provisions to those who had previously left, and did not return.

Thus, we have tens of thousands of people migrating "northward." And, if one wishes to entertain a Mesoamerican geography, it is also interesting to note a diffusion of Mesoamerican artifacts, buildings, and beliefs "northward" of Mesoamerica.<sup>31</sup> As described by the Smithsonian Institute:

The Maya forged strong political and commercial alliances with the civilizations of central Mexico. Through long-distance trade, luxury goods as well as pan-Mesoamerican beliefs eventually reached the Anasazi people of the American Southwest and Native American tribes living east of the

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<sup>29</sup> Godfrey, "What Is the Significance of Zeph?," 74-75. Meldrum is familiar with this discussion, since he quotes the article on his webpage. However, he does not mention that versions prior to the 1948 edition contain significant differences. See "What did The Prophet, Joseph Smith, know about Book of Mormon geography?" Frequently Asked Questions <http://www.bookofmormonevidence.org/FAQ.php> (last accessed 28 August 2008)

<sup>30</sup> William J. Hamblin, "Basic Methodological Problems with the Anti-Mormon Approach to the Geography and Archaeology of the Book of Mormon," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 2/1 (1993): 161–197.

<sup>31</sup> See "Mesoamericans in Pre-Spanish South America" and "Mesoamericans in Pre-Columbian North America" in John W. Welch, *Reexploring the Book of Mormon: The F.A.R.M.S. Updates* (Salt Lake City and Provo, Utah: Deseret Book Company and the Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 1992), 215–217, 218–220.

Mississippi River...For a thousand years, Mesoamerican merchants traded ritual objects like macaw feathers and copper bells for precious turquoise mined by the Anasazi and Hohokam of the American Southwest...Social and religious ideas from Mesoamerica eventually reached Native American cultures east of the Mississippi River.<sup>32</sup>

Thus, finding Nephite or Lamanite remnants north of Mesoamerica does nothing to help us decide between a North American or Mesoamerican model, since both allow for Lehites further north. Zelph could very well have been a descendant of Lehi and served under the Prophet Ondandugus, if we remember to keep all the northward migrations in mind.

Elder John A. Widtsoe gave advice that those positing a North American model would do well to consider: "This [Zelph] is not of much value in Book of Mormon geographical studies, since Zelph probably dated from a later time when Nephites and Lamanites had been somewhat dispersed and had wandered over the country."<sup>33</sup>

## OTHER GEOGRAPHIC VIEWS

From available information, there was very little unity of thought among early Church leaders relative to Book of Mormon geography. According to one scholar,

It is likely that the thinking of the early Church leaders regarding Book of Mormon geography was subject to modification, indicating that they themselves did not see the issue as settled.<sup>34</sup>

In November 1830 some of the first missionaries sent out to preach to the world, having been taught by Joseph Smith himself, discussed the landing site of Lehi's party. A reporter was at this meeting and recorded

This new Revelation [the Book of Mormon], they say is especially designed for the benefit, or rather for the christianizing [*sic*] of the Aborigines of America; who, as they affirm, are a part of the tribe of Manasseh, and whose ancestors landed on the coast of Chili [*sic*] 600 years before the coming of Christ, and from them descended *all the Indians of America*.<sup>35</sup>

Another article printed two years later provides a few more details of what was being taught by missionaries at that time. It mentions Lehi and his party landing in South

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<sup>32</sup> "Unmasking the Maya: The Story of Sna Jtz'ibajom," Smithsonian Institution, National Museum of Natural History, Department of Anthropology. On-line at <http://anthropology.si.edu/maya/mayaprint.html> (last accessed 30 May 2008).

<sup>33</sup> John A. Widtsoe, "Is Book of Mormon Geography Known?," *Improvement Era* (July 1950): 547.

<sup>34</sup> Godfrey, "What Is the Significance of Zelph?," 76.

<sup>35</sup> A.S., "The Golden Bible, or, Campbellism Improved," *Observer and Telegraph. Religious, Political, and Literary*, Hudson, Ohio (18 November 1830): 3; emphasis added.

America in 600 BC, but also says that the Nephite final battles were “fought nigh to the straits of Darien [i.e., in Panama], and the last at a hill called Comoro.”<sup>36</sup>

Fredrick G. Williams also recorded similar remarks, adding the direction of travel that Lehi took while sailing to the Americas. He states that Lehi “sailed in a south east direction and landed on the continent of South America in Chile” at thirty degrees south latitude.<sup>37</sup> This not only confirms what Church members had been saying from at least 1830, but also suggests that Lehi sailed eastward towards the Americas.

None of these leaders—contemporary with Joseph Smith—understood a geography consistent with a LNAM. Other contemporaries like Wilford Woodruff, Orson Pratt, and Parley P. Pratt were happy to entertain geographic theories outside of a LNAM. Are all of these apostles confused in understanding the Book of Mormon and Joseph’s attitude toward its physical setting?<sup>38</sup>

References to Mesoamerica as the location for Book of Mormon events start to appear as early as 1832. In the Church publication *The Evening and Morning Star*, in an article titled “Discovery of Ancient Ruins in Central America,” there is a reprint of a story describing Guatemalan ruins. The editor of the paper, W.W. Phelps, said of the ruins that

We are glad to see the proof begin to come, of the original or ancient inhabitants of this continent. It is good testimony in favor of the book of Mormon, and the book of Mormon is good testimony that such things as cities and civilization, ‘prior to the fourteenth century,’ existed in America.<sup>39</sup>

It is interesting to note that Phelps associated Guatemala, which is clearly in Central America, with “this continent” and “America,” as did many other early leaders. Phelps had earlier written of the American west that “I know no farther than we have revelation,” what God had planned for that region. Had Joseph taught a revealed geography, Phelps would have probably said more with more certainty.<sup>40</sup>

In 1842 an article in the *Times and Seasons* stated that “Lehi went down by the Red Sea to the great Southern Ocean, and crossed over to this land and landed a little south of the Isthmus of Darien, and improved the country according to the word of the Lord.”<sup>41</sup> It is unclear whether the author of the unsigned article is Joseph Smith or John Taylor,

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<sup>36</sup> *The Fredonia Censor*, Fredonia, New York 11 (7 March 1832): [4], on-line at <http://sidneyrigdon.com/dbroadhu/NY/miscNYS2.htm#030732> (last accessed August 28, 2008).

<sup>37</sup> Robert J. Matthews, “Notes on ‘Lehi’s Travels,’” *Brigham Young University Studies* 12/3 (Spring 1972): 312.

<sup>38</sup> Orson’s Pratt’s *An Interesting Account of Several Remarkable Visions* (1840), for example, opined that Lehi and family “were safely brought across the great Pacific ocean, and landed upon the western coast of South America,” whereupon they eventually “emigrated to the northern parts of South America, leaving the wicked nation in possession of the middle and southern parts of the same.” If Joseph was giving revelation about Zelph, why did Orson not understand the Book of Mormon events to have taken place in North America?

<sup>39</sup> *The Evening and Morning Star* (Independence, Missouri) 1/9 (February, 1833).

<sup>40</sup> W[illiam] W[ines] Phelps to O[liver] Cowdery, “Dear Brother,” June 2, 1836; reproduced in *The Latter-Day Saints’ Messenger and Advocate* 2/10 (July 1836): 341.

<sup>41</sup> “Facts are Stubborn Things,” *Times and Seasons* 3/22 (September 15, 1842), 922. The Isthmus of Darien is today called the Isthmus of Panama.

respectively editor and assistant editor of the newspaper.<sup>42</sup> Either way, the reference shows that at the time at least one or two leaders of the Church entertained a geography that wasn't limited to North America.

Other articles were also published in Church periodicals supporting a Central American location. Parley P. Pratt wrote of "ruins in Central America" providing Book of Mormon evidence in the *Millennial Star*.<sup>43</sup> Wilford Woodruff wrote of the Stephens volume (discussed in the next section) in his journal:

I felt truly interested in this work for it brought to light a flood of testimony in proof of the book of mormon in the discovery & survey of the city Copan in Central America...<sup>44</sup>

Woodruff also reported Orson Pratt's views on the matter:

[Orson Pratt] spoke in an edifying manner concerning the Book of Mormon its history what it was &c. That it was a History of nearly one half of the globe & the people that inhabited it, that it gave a history of all those cities that have been of late discovered by Catherwood & Stephens, that it named those cities.<sup>45</sup>

It is also interesting that William McBride stated that he heard Joseph Smith speak about the geography of the Book of Mormon and even claimed that he saw Joseph draw a map of Mesoamerica as the area of the Book of Mormon.<sup>46</sup> McBride believed for the rest of his life that the Book of Mormon was an ancient Mesoamerican record. Even at the age of 77 years he was still preaching that Joseph Smith taught and believed that the Book of Mormon had taken place in Mesoamerica.<sup>47</sup> No prophet or apostle chastised him for preaching against a revelation given to Joseph Smith.

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<sup>42</sup> Meldrum informs us that Joseph was in hiding on September 15, 1842, when this issue of the *Times and Seasons* was published: "I did some more research on this. Joseph Smith was in hiding at the time that these came out... He was in hiding for two weeks before September 15th. He didn't come out of hiding until October 20th." (See Meldrum, *DNA Evidence*, Joseph Smith, 27:45-28:26.) He does not provide his sources for such an assertion, but a quick examination of Joseph Smith's chronology (see <http://josephsmith.byu.edu/year.aspx?year=1842>) indicates that he was not in non-communicative hiding at the time but was tending to business in and about Nauvoo. Further, the quote offered is in an article that speaks in Joseph's voice, providing even a revelation concerning baptism for the dead which later became D&C 127.

<sup>43</sup> Parley P. Pratt, "Ruins in Central America," *Millennial Star* 2/11 (March 1842): 165.

<sup>44</sup> Wilford Woodruff, *Wilford Woodruff's Journal, 1833-1898*, Typescript, edited by Scott G. Kenney, 9 volumes (Midvale, Utah: Signature Books, 1983), 2:126; citing September 13, 1841, underlining in original.

<sup>45</sup> Woodruff, *Wilford Woodruff's Journal*, 2:282, citing August 27, 1843.

<sup>46</sup> Ross T. Christensen, "Old Diary Suggests Joseph Smith Alluded to a River of Nephi in Mesoamerica: What did Joseph Smith Really Know of Book of Mormon Geography," on-line at <http://www.ancientamerica.org/library/media/HTML/xviin3we/28.%20OLD%20DIARY%20SUGGESTS%20JOSEPH%20SMITH%20ALLUDED%20TO%20A%20RIVER.htm?n=0> (last accessed August 29, 2008). Note that Christensen mistakenly attributes the diary to Rueben McBride, not William.

<sup>47</sup> Charles L. Walker *et al.*, editors, *The Diary of Charles Lowell Walker*, 2 vols. (Logan, Utah: Utah State University Press, 1980), 2:524-525. The original is Charles L. Walker, "Diary" (Harold B. Lee Library, BYU, 1855-1902).

## THE BERNHISEL LETTER

John Bernhisel joined the LDS Church in 1837 while practicing medicine in New York City. In 1841 he was ordained bishop of the congregation in New York City. Bernhisel was a well-educated man, and in 1841 read *Incidents of Travel in Central America, Chiapas, and Yucatan* by John L. Stephens.

Impressed by the book, Bernhisel gave the two-volume work to Wilford Woodruff in September 1841 with instructions to make sure it was given to Joseph Smith. Woodruff, who was on his way back from England to Nauvoo, delivered the book, as requested.

It would appear that Joseph appreciated receiving the book, as he wrote a letter to Bernhisel acknowledging the gift. Dated November 16, 1841, the first paragraph of the letter is as follows:<sup>48</sup>

I received your kind present by the hand of Er Woodruff & feel myself under many obligations for this mark of your esteem & friendship which to me is the more interesting as it unfolds & developes many things that are of great importance to this generation & corresponds with & supports the testimony of the Book of Mormon; I have read the volumes with the greatest interest & pleasure & must say that of all histories that have been written pertaining to the antiquities of this country it is the most correct luminous & comprihensive.<sup>49</sup>

The Bernhisel letter presents a difficult challenge to anyone trying to place Book of Mormon events in North America. Meldrum knows that he needs to deal with the letter, as it is written by Joseph Smith and directly contradicts the LNAM. In effect, the Bernhisel letter becomes “the elephant in the room” that cannot be ignored.

How is he going to get the elephant out of the room with no one noticing? When Meldrum takes on the Bernhisel letter he—consciously or subconsciously—engages in a stratagem that magicians sometimes call “the naked lady gambit.”<sup>50</sup> Simply put, if you want to make an elephant disappear, first you bring out the naked lady. While all eyes are fixed on the lady, the elephant is slipped quietly off stage, with the audience none the wiser.

### THE ELEPHANT AND THE NAKED LADY

Meldrum first makes much of the fact that he is being fair and balanced by presenting both sides of the story. This is like the magician who first assures us that “there’s nothing up my sleeve”:

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<sup>48</sup> Meldrum breaks this single paragraph into two paragraphs. (Meldrum, *DNA Evidence*, Joseph Smith, 30:30.)

<sup>49</sup> Jessee, *Personal Writings of Joseph Smith*, Revised Edition, 533.

<sup>50</sup> It is unknown whether Meldrum engages in this technique knowingly or not. Either way, it is important to examine how he uses the technique, as it bears directly on how he deals with evidence that doesn’t support his LNAM.

But there is some confusion because there have been several things attributed to Joseph Smith that he believed that it [the Book of Mormon geography] was in Central America.

Now, I bring this up because I've had several people say, "Well, Brother Meldrum, you're only showing one side of the story and that's not good research." I had already done the research, so I already knew the answer, but I left it out originally because it's a little on the negative side and so forth. But people do have a lot of questions about this and so I decided to go ahead and put it back in.<sup>51</sup>

This portion of the presentation seems to downplay the importance of what can be seen as disconfirming evidence—he's only added it to his presentation because people have asked about it, and even implies that bringing it up might be slightly unworthy: "it's a little on the negative side." He has thus set the stage and prepared his audience—faithful Latter-day Saints who do not like contention or negativity—to brush the matter off quickly. And, he's conditioned us to think that this is "no big deal"—he's only bringing it up because of nitpickers.

Meldrum is choosing to present the Bernhisel letter in a way that will minimize its impact and allow *him* to control how the audience will interpret it. As you read this, remember that it is being *spoken* to an audience, who will be focused on the presenter, even though a slide with text is in front of them:

Anyway, [Joseph] says, "I received..." This is one sentence, by the way. "I received your kind present by the hand of Elder Woodruff and feel myself under many obligations for this mark of your esteem and friendship, which to me is the more interesting as it unfolds and develops many things that have great importance to this generation and corresponds with and supports the testimony of the Book of Mormon." Breath... OK [laughs].<sup>52</sup>

Letter writers in the nineteenth century tended to have drawn-out, complex sentences. Notice how Meldrum skims through what is, in reality, just the first portion of the sentence in one breath. He even calls attention to this by saying "breath" and then laughing.

It is difficult to get much meaning when someone reads a long sentence out loud. Even if the listener has the text in front of him, his focus will be on the reader and how he reads the material. To allow his audience to understand and evaluate the text, the reader must take care to speak slowly, pause appropriately, and let them digest. He may even need to call attention to certain points.

Meldrum does none of these things with this portion of the sentence. He skims through quickly, not pausing for breath. He precedes the reading by saying "This is one sentence by the way," and then giggles—this makes the audience think, "Uh oh, this is going to be hard to understand," so many will simply let the words wash over them and wait for it to be

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<sup>51</sup> Meldrum, *DNA Evidence*, Joseph Smith, 22:50-23:05.

<sup>52</sup> Meldrum, *DNA Evidence*, Joseph Smith, 30:59-31:22.

over. If someone is inclined to complain that he has read it in a manner that is difficult to understand, Meldrum can merely reply that he's reading it just as written—as one long run-on sentence.

Meldrum then ends the reading with a joke—he says “breath!”, pauses for breath, and laughs. This immediately draws the listener away from the text that has been read, and focuses him on the length and complexity of the sentence. We notice the style (and laugh with the presenter because it is a difficult style), but don't notice the substance of the words. Laughter feels good, but it also distracts us.

Having begun to ease the elephant off stage (even though we do not realize it) Meldrum is ready to complete the illusion. He now reads the second portion of the sentence—the naked lady:

“I have read the volumes with the greatest interest and pleasure and must say that of all the histories that have been written pertaining to the antiquities of this country.” Now, what country were these books written about? They're called “Incidents of Travel in Central America,” right? OK?

“It is the most correct, luminous and comprehensive at the time.” What was Joseph Smith saying there? Did he just make a direct connection between the Book of Mormon and Central America?<sup>53</sup>

In reading the second portion of the sentence, Meldrum does all the things that he did *not* do the first time. He pauses and rephrases what has been said. He asks questions about specific statements made in the material he has just read. He asks us to reflect on what Joseph may have meant. The first part of the sentence (59 words) he reads through in about 23 seconds and the second part (38 words) he spends 38 seconds with—almost twice as long for fewer words. The slide he uses reinforces the focus on the naked lady instead of on the elephant, since the latter part is separated from the first part and highlighted with underlining.

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<sup>53</sup> Meldrum, *DNA Evidence*, Joseph Smith, 31:23-32:01.

## 2. John M. Bernhisel a. letter of Nov. 16, 1841

On November 16th, Joseph acknowledged the gift.

"Dear Sir

I received your kind present by the hand of Er Woodruff & feel myself under many obligations for this mark of your esteem & friendship which to me is the more interesting as it unfolds & developes (sic) many things that are of great importance to this generation & corresponds with & supports the testimony of the Book of Mormon;

I have read the volumes with the greatest interest & pleasure & must say that of all the histories that have been written pertaining to the antiquities of this country it is the most correct luminous & comprehensive."

*The Personal Writings of Joseph Smith, 1984 p 501*

Original Source letter, unknown.

It is the first part of the sentence that reveals Joseph's interest in the book because of its relevance to the Book of Mormon. It is this first portion of the sentence—skimmed over and laughed about—in which we discover that Joseph felt the volumes contain many important things “to this generation.” Why? Because the volumes correspond with and support “the testimony of the Book of Mormon.”

The audience never understands that; it is the elephant that Meldrum has hustled off stage. He is busy focusing their attention on the second part of the sentence. The magician's gambit has been played.

To cement the illusion Meldrum asks his listeners “Did [Joseph] just make a direct connection between the Book of Mormon and Central America?”<sup>54</sup> Of course he did—in the first part of the sentence. The DVD presentation then cuts away and we see Meldrum shaking his head. He says:

I don't see it. He's talking about his friendship up here and how wonderful it is to have a friend such as Brother Bernheisel. And then he tried to change gears and he says, “Well, this is a very correct book for that area.” He didn't make the connection that I can see.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Meldrum, *DNA Evidence*, Joseph Smith, 32:02.

<sup>55</sup> Meldrum, *DNA Evidence*, Joseph Smith, 32:08-32:24.



Meldrum may claim not see the connection, but you can now see it—now that you understand how he deals with evidence that doesn't fit with the LNAM.

If you have not seen the DVD presentation or attended one of Meldrum's presentations, you may be skeptical that such a tactic (the naked lady gambit) could really work. We assure you that it can work, and *has* worked on hundreds. During the preparation of the final draft of this paper, we showed the presentation slide about the Bernhisel letter to a conscientious, university-trained Latter-day Saint. We asked her to read it carefully. She did so, taking twice as long as the slide is displayed during the DVD presentation.

We then played the presentation on the Bernhisel letter for this individual and asked her what the letter said. "It was just a thank-you letter about an interesting book," she replied. When asked to reread the first slide, she was astonished and chagrined to see that the Book of Mormon and its links to Central America were clearly a major theme of the letter. She missed the elephant because of how expertly the naked lady was displayed.

If you didn't catch him moving the elephant out of the room, don't feel bad. FAIR is not aware of anyone who has seen the video and caught it the first time. Like most illusions, the trick is obvious once someone explains it and it becomes easier to see the elephant.

Honestly, though—has the evidence been successfully dealt with? Not really; the elephant is still there, just out of sight. Despite LNAM advocates not wanting us to notice the elephant, it still exists. The question, then, is if Joseph knows by revelation that the Book of Mormon is geographically situated in North America, why would he write in 1841 that a book on Central American ruins corresponds with the Book of Mormon and supports its testimony?<sup>56</sup>

#### **DEALING WITH AN UNKNOWN SOURCE**

The presentation provides the source of the Bernhisel letter as "The Personal Writings of Joseph Smith, 1984 p 501. Original Source letter, unknown."<sup>57</sup> This citation is a bit troublesome, for reasons that will soon be apparent. A quick check of the source used in the presentation shows us that the source is known: the letter is in the Joseph Smith Papers in the LDS Church archives. Further, we find that the letter was not written in Joseph's hand, but dictated to John Taylor, who acted as scribe.<sup>58</sup>

This begs the question of why the presentation shows the letter source as "unknown." "Nobody's questioning the validity of this letter," he says of the letter to Emma during Zion's Camp.<sup>59</sup> Nobody questions the validity of the Bernhisel letter either, but we are perhaps meant to think they do.

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<sup>56</sup> An interesting side question is how Joseph would know that an illustrated book about Central America corresponded with the Book of Mormon, unless he had some appreciation of what Nephite settlements may have looked like—even if he didn't know exactly *where* they were?

<sup>57</sup> Meldrum, *DNA Evidence*, Joseph Smith, 30:30, capitalization and underlining in original.

<sup>58</sup> Jessee, *Personal Writings of Joseph Smith*, 688. Also see Jessee, *Personal Writings of Joseph Smith*, Revised Edition, 533.

<sup>59</sup> Meldrum, *DNA Evidence*, Joseph Smith, 8:15.

## **MORE ELEPHANTS**

What becomes clear from the Bernhisel letter, particularly when it is compared to earlier statements such as his 1834 letter to Emma, is that Joseph knew no revelatory geography. Instead he was intensely interested in the matter. When new material appeared, he enthusiastically tried to fit it together with what he did know.

After Joseph received the volumes of *Incidents of Travel* and he wrote the Bernhisel letter, several articles and references to the book appeared in the *Times and Seasons*. The presentation actually deals with these articles prior to dealing with the Bernhisel letter, even though they chronologically appeared after the letter.

The other thing is, is that although Joseph had taken over editorship responsibilities as the Chief Editor, Joseph Smith also declared the following in his first edition of the *Times & Seasons*, which came out in March of 1842. So, this was still many months before these other two articles. It says, “This paper commences my editorial career. I alone stand for it and shall do so for all papers having my signature hence forward.”

Guess what, brothers and sisters. Neither one of these articles were signed by Joseph Smith.<sup>60</sup>

The two articles referenced refer favorably to Stephens’ book, provide quotes from it, and argue that it supports the Book of Mormon. As you have seen, that support is consistent with what Joseph Smith expressed in the Bernhisel letter. However, the question remains of who wrote the *Times and Seasons* articles. It is possible that the writing was done either by John Taylor, who was assistant editor, or by Joseph Smith as editor.<sup>61</sup>

The presentation obviously asserts that it wasn’t Joseph who wrote the articles. We need one more piece of the puzzle, which the presentation does not provide. Remember that the Bernhisel letter was dictated by Joseph Smith to John Taylor; the letter was in Taylor’s handwriting.

This helps the picture become a bit clearer. Joseph received the book from Bernhisel, found it corresponded to the Book of Mormon, and dictated a letter about it with Taylor as scribe. Taylor understood how Joseph felt about the book and the support it provided for the Book of Mormon. It makes little difference, then, if Joseph was the actual author of the *Times and Seasons* articles or not—even if Taylor were the author, he knew how Joseph felt. Elder Taylor was fiercely loyal to Joseph and a future president of the Church; it is doubtful he would have done anything of which he knew Joseph would disapprove.

## **WHY DIDN’T JOSEPH DO ANYTHING?**

If Joseph had had a revelation about geography, why did apostles feel free to speculate about it and why didn’t Joseph put a stop to it? As John Sorenson noted, “Whether the Prophet Joseph personally believed that the Nephite lands were in Central America or not,

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<sup>60</sup> Meldrum, *DNA Evidence*, Joseph Smith, 27:05-27:40.

<sup>61</sup> Ken Godfrey argues that Wilford Woodruff likely wrote at least some of the reviews of Stephens. See Godfrey, “What Is the Significance of Zeph?,” 75.

leaders in daily association with him felt that this was the best answer to the question ‘where?’”<sup>62</sup>

Of course, the claim could be made that Joseph didn’t put a stop to speculations about Central America because he was in hiding when articles appeared in the *Times and Seasons*.<sup>63</sup> Such an argument avoids the fact that geographical references started being made many years earlier and that Joseph still conducted business all during the time that the *Times and Seasons* articles were printed.<sup>64</sup> Joseph even met with John Taylor, assistant editor of the *Times and Seasons*, during this period.<sup>65</sup> One of these visits lasted three days as they traveled together.<sup>66</sup> During one visit, Joseph Smith specifically “counseled Elder Taylor concerning the printing office.”<sup>67</sup> Joseph Smith even arranged to print an article of his own in the *Times and Seasons*.<sup>68</sup>

The presentation insists that we should only accept “articles [that] were signed by Joseph Smith” because of Joseph’s announcement that “This paper commences my editorial career. I alone stand for it and shall do so for all papers having my signature hence forward.”<sup>69</sup> Even if one dismisses the *Times and Seasons* articles of September 15 and October 1, 1842, because the articles are not signed, there is evidence that cannot be ignored:

If men, in their researches into the history of this country, in noticing the mounds, fortifications, statues, architecture, implements of war, of husbandry, and ornaments of silver, brass, &c. were to examine the Book of Mormon, their conjectures would be removed, and their opinions altered...Stephens’s and Catherwood’s researches in Central America abundantly testify of this thing [i.e., that a great civilization existed on the American continent]. The stupendous ruins, the elegant sculpture, and the magnificence of the ruins of Guatemala, and other cities, corroborate this statement, and show that a great and mighty people—men of great minds, clear intellect, bright genius, and comprehensive designs inhabited this continent. Their ruins speak of their greatness; the Book of Mormon unfolds their history.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> John L. Sorenson, *An Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1985), 3.

<sup>63</sup> This argument is, indeed, made in the presentation. See Meldrum, *DNA Evidence*, Joseph Smith, 27:45-28:26.

<sup>64</sup> See <http://josephsmith.byu.edu/year.aspx?year=1842> (last accessed August 29, 2008). *History of the Church* also makes it abundantly clear that Joseph was not out of communication during the time in question.

<sup>65</sup> Smith, *History of the Church*, 5:165, September 21 and 23, 1842.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 5:169, October 7-10, 1842.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 5:165.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 5:169, October 11, 1842.

<sup>69</sup> Meldrum, *DNA Evidence*, Joseph Smith, 26:32-27:30.

<sup>70</sup> Joseph Smith, “American Antiquities,” *Times and Seasons* 3/18 (July 15, 1842): 860; see identification of the author (signed “Ed.”) in Stan Larson, *Quest for the Gold Plates: Thomas Stuart Ferguson’s Archaeological Search for the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Freethinker Press in association with Smith Research Associates, 1996), 21 note 94.

This article, published in the *Times and Seasons* for July 15, 1842, is signed by Joseph as editor. It would seem impossible to argue that Taylor was acting on his own authority if he wrote the September and October articles. Joseph had already published praise of Stephens' book in July and identified it as having to do with Book of Mormon peoples. In addition, a June 1842 *Times and Seasons* article, also signed by the editor (Joseph Smith), appealed to Mosaic traits among the Aztec as evidence for the Book of Mormon.<sup>71</sup>

The reasonable conclusion is that Joseph was aware of what was being printed in his newspaper and he had plenty of time to correct it, if he thought it incorrect. Joseph would also place the Stephens book and copies of the *Times and Seasons* in the Nauvoo Library and Literary Institute—strange indeed if he disapproved of the sentiments therein, or the use being made of Stephens by Taylor.<sup>72</sup>

The website for the DVD of the presentation emphasizes that future prophets heard Joseph's remarks about Zelph while on Zion's Camp. Wilford Woodruff was on Zion's Camp and his journal entry is one of the variant sources for the Zelph story. Yet, the website also notes that one of the *Times and Seasons* articles about Stephens' book was potentially written by Woodruff.<sup>73</sup>

This creates a problem—if Joseph had a defining revelation about Nephite geography on Zion's Camp and Woodruff was one who wrote it down, why does Woodruff later think that a book about Central American ruins sheds light on and is supportive of the Book of Mormon? Clearly, Woodruff saw no conflict between what Joseph said on Zion's Camp and what Stephens' book could add to Book of Mormon studies—he knew Joseph had made no prophetic comment about geography and knew Joseph was interested in further information.

In sum, it appears—like many scholars have concluded—that by 1842 Joseph Smith and many other Church leaders were comfortable with a Book of Mormon geography that, if not fully centered in Central America, at least included Central America within its scope. The LNAM does not embrace such a venue, and trying to claim revelatory approval for the LNAM or prophetic acceptance of such is not evidenced in the historical record.

## CONCLUSION

Throughout its history the Church has repeatedly indicated that the Lord “had not yet revealed” where the Book of Mormon has taken place.<sup>74</sup> In fact, when the First Presidency was asked to come up with a map regarding Book of Mormon geography they replied:

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<sup>71</sup> Joseph Smith, “Traits of the Mosaic History, Found Among the Azteca Nations,” *Times and Seasons* 3/16 (15 June 1842): 818–820.

<sup>72</sup> Kenneth W. Godfrey, “A Note on the Nauvoo Library and Literary Institute,” *Brigham Young University Studies* 14/3 (Spring 1974): 388.

<sup>73</sup> “What did The Prophet, Joseph Smith, know about Book of Mormon geography?” Frequently Asked Questions, <http://www.bookofmormonevidence.org/FAQ.php> (last accessed 28 August 2008).

<sup>74</sup> Joseph F. Smith and George D. Pyper, “The Book of Mormon Geography,” 73 *The Instructor* (April 1938).

The First Presidency has often been asked to prepare some suggestive map illustrative of Nephite geography, but have never consented to do so. *Nor are we acquainted with any of the Twelve Apostles who would undertake such a task.* The reason is, that without further information they are not prepared even to suggest [a map]. The word of the Lord or the translation of other ancient records is required to clear up many points now so obscure.<sup>75</sup>

If Joseph Smith had been as clear about the location of the Book of Mormon as advocates of the LNAM assert, it would be incredible if the succeeding presidents of the Church had not embraced the doctrine and protected it, as they have with other revelations that Joseph received. But they did not. They have, in fact, done just the opposite and stated that the Lord has not revealed it. This message has been constant to the present day. Anyone who tries to say different is not dealing honestly with the evidence available.

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<sup>75</sup> George Q. Cannon, "Editorial Thoughts: The Book of Mormon Geography," 25/1 *The Juvenile Instructor* (1 January 1890): 18–19.