

Spaulding Manuscript

The following is taken from a letter by Azariah Smith Root, Oberlin College Librarian, written May 12, 1927.

THE SPAULDING MANUSCRIPT in the Oberlin College Library

This library possesses a manuscript which apparently is in the handwriting of Solomon Spaulding, since it seems to agree with fragments of account books which I have seen, and its genuineness is certified by a number of people who apparently examined it about the year 1839. It is not, however, the manuscript that was said by witnesses to resemble the Book of Mormon, since that manuscript was always spoken of as having been written in the style of the sacred scriptures, whereas this is a plain narrative containing accounts of the wars between the Kentucks and the Sciotos—Indian tribes ascribed to this country.

The manuscript which we have was apparently obtained from Spaulding's effects at West Amity, Pennsylvania, at some time after the publication of the Book of Mormon, and seems to have been found as a result of a search to find whatever remained of Spaulding's writings in order to throw light on the question of whether he was the author of the Book of Mormon, or not. The manuscript which we have was copied under our supervision and a typewritten copy furnished to the Shepherd Book Company, Salt Lake City, Utah, and also to the Reorganized Church of Christ of Latter Day Saints, then located at Lamoni, Iowa. It was printed and sold by both branches of the Mormon Church, who gave it the title "The Manuscript Found"—a title which does not appear in any way on the manuscript, which simply had penciled upon the papers in which it was wrapped, "Manuscript story, Conneaut Creek."

It seems to have been taken from West Amity, Pennsylvania, to Painesville, Ohio, and there to have come into the possession of a Mr. Hulbert, owner of the "Painesville Telegraph," in whose office had been printed the first book against Mormonism, in 1836. Apparently the manuscript, after being examined and found not to be a manuscript connected with the Book of Mormon, was laid aside and passed with the files of the office of the "Painesville Telegraph" when it came into the possession of Mr. Rice, a man who owned and edited at one time various anti-slavery papers in northern Ohio. When this Mr. Rice became an elderly man he removed to Honolulu to live with his daughter, a graduate of this institution, Mrs. Doctor Whitney. When President Fairchild visited Honolulu in 1885 he asked this old Mr. Rice if he did not have some anti-slavery literature which he could give to the Oberlin College Library for its anti-slavery collection. This set Mr. Rice to looking over his old papers, and among them this manuscript of Spaulding's was found. It was given to President Fairchild and added to the Oberlin College Library.

It seems pretty clearly not to have been the manuscript from which the Book of Mormon was written, as it deals with scenes taking place in America among Indians, possibly of the Mound Builders period. Spaulding is known to have been interested in the Indians, particularly of that period, because of certain mounds which were in his home lot in Conneaut. The manuscript is thought by some to have a certain very general resemblance to the outline of the Book of Mormon, but is not at all written in phraseology resembling the phraseology of the Bible, which is the characteristic of the Book of Mormon. The theory of those who believe in Spaulding's having written a manuscript which furnished the basis of the Book of Mormon, is that he wrote another manuscript in biblical phraseology, which he read to many of his Conneaut friends and thereby came to be known among the young people of the town as "And-it-came-to-pass" Spaulding. The theory of those who accept this explanation is that he subsequently took this

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manuscript written in biblical phraseology to Pittsburg, where it fell into the hands of a Mr. Patterson, in whose office Sidney Rigdon worked, and that through Sidney Rigdon it came into the possession of Joseph Smith and was made the basis of the Book of Mormon. In regard to that question, our manuscript does not seem to throw very much light.