

Anthon Transcript

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[\(Click here for full size picture of the Anthon Transcript\)](#)

What is the Anthon Transcript? Excerpt from the *Encyclopedia of Mormonism* Vol. 1, explains:

The Anthon Transcript was a sheet of paper, thought to be lost, upon which Joseph SMITH copied sample "reformed Egyptian" characters from the plates of the Book of Mormon. In the winter of 1828, Martin HARRIS showed these characters to Dr. Charles Anthon of Columbia College (now Columbia University), and hence the name.

In February 1828, Martin Harris, a farmer from Palmyra, New York, visited the Prophet Joseph Smith, who was then residing in Harmony, Pennsylvania, where he had just begun to translate the Book of Mormon. Smith had earlier turned to Harris for financial backing for the translation; now Harris came to Harmony to take samples of the reformed Egyptian characters from the Gold Plates (cf. Morm. 9:32), thereafter to obtain scholarly opinion about their authenticity. Smith gave Harris a copy of some of the characters, along with a translation, which Harris then presented to at least three scholars in the eastern United States. The most important of these, given the nature of the inquiry, was Charles Anthon, an acclaimed classicist at Columbia College.

The two men's accounts of the meeting differ. Harris said that Professor Anthon gave him a certificate verifying the authenticity of the characters but that when Anthon learned that Joseph Smith claimed to have received the plates from an angel, he took the certificate back and destroyed it. Anthon, for his part, left written accounts in 1834 and 1841 in which he contradicted himself on whether he had given Harris a written opinion about the document. In both accounts, apparently to dissociate himself from appearing to promote the book, he maintained that he told Harris that he (Harris) was a victim of a fraud. Modern research suggests that, given the state of knowledge of Egyptian in 1828, Anthon's views would have been little more than opinion. Whatever the case may be

about a written statement from Anthon, Harris returned to Harmony ready to assist Joseph Smith with the translation.

The Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints possesses a handwritten text known as the Anthon Transcript that contains seven horizontal lines of characters apparently copied from the plates. David Whitmer, who once owned the document, said it was this text that Martin Harris showed to Charles Anthon. However, this claim remains uncertain because the transcript does not correspond with Anthon's assertion that the manuscript he saw was arranged in vertical columns. Even if the document is not the original, it almost certainly represents characters either copied from the plates in Joseph Smith's possession or copied from the document carried by Harris. Twice in late 1844, after the Prophet's martyrdom, portions of these symbols were published as characters that Joseph Smith had copied from the gold plates - once as a broadside and once in the December 21 issue of the Mormon newspaper *The Prophet* (see MAGAZINES). In 1980 a document surfaced that seemed to match Anthon's description and appeared to be the original Anthon Transcript. But in 1987, Mark W. Hofmann admitted that he had forged it.

Harris's visit with scholars was more than just an interesting sidelight in the history of Mormonism. By his own report, Harris returned to Harmony convinced that the characters were genuine. Thereafter, he willingly invested his time and resources to see the Book of Mormon published. Moreover, the Prophet, Harris himself, and later generations of Latter-day Saints have viewed his visit as a fulfillment of Isaiah 29:11-12, which speaks of "a book that is sealed" being delivered to "one that is learned" who could not read it (*PJS* 1:9; cf. 2 Ne. 27:6-24). His efforts apparently encouraged Joseph Smith in the initial stages of the translation. The Anthon Transcript is also important to subsequent generations as an authentic sample of characters that were inscribed on the gold plates and thus one of the few tangible evidences of their existence.

Professor Charles Anthon directly contradicts this representation of events in a [letter he wrote](#), as quoted from *Mormonism Unveiled* by E. D. Howe:

"The whole story about my pronouncing the Mormon inscription to be reformed Egyptian hieroglyphics is perfectly false. Some years ago, a plain, apparently simple-hearted farmer called on me with a note from Dr. Mitchell, of our city, now dead, requesting me to decipher, if possible, the paper which the farmer would hand me. Upon examining the paper in question, I soon came to the conclusion that it was all a trick—perhaps a hoax.... I have frequently conversed with friends on the subject since the Mormon excitement began, and well remember that the paper contained anything else

but Egyptian hieroglyphics." [For the complete letter by Professor Charles Anthon click here.](#)



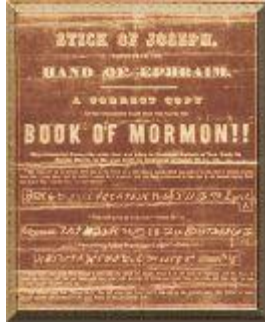
[Sample of Egyptian Hieroglyphs](#)

An example of hieroglyphic writing is pictured on the left side of the above image. A cursive form of hieroglyphs known as *hieratic* is on the right side of the image. A good resource for more information on Egyptian hieroglyphs and its derivatives is *Reading the Past: Egyptian Hieroglyphs* by W.V. Davies.

David Whitmer received the printer's manuscript of the Book of Mormon from Oliver Cowdery, his brother-in-law. This may be how he acquired the Anthon transcript, but these items were later turned over to the RLDS Church. Cowdery died at Whitmer's home. B. H. Roberts wrote:

"In 1850 Oliver Cowdery, a little before his death, which occurred at Richmond, Ray county, Missouri, on the 3rd of March of that year- gave into the possession of David Whitmer, his brother-in-law and fellow witness of the truth of the Book of Mormon, his printer's manuscript of that book, and the descendants of David Whitmer have it in their possession to this day (1903)..." (B. H. Roberts, *New Witnesses for God*, Vol.2, Ch.8, p.126).

The Anthon transcript is the oldest copy of the supposed Book of Mormon writing. It may not be the actual copy taken to Anthon as Whitmer wouldn't have been on the scene at that time to have seen just what was taken to Anthon. Anthon describes the text as being in long columns (See his letter in *Mormonism Unveiled* by E.D. Howe, pp. 269-272). It may be that Smith or someone made another copy and copied the lines horizontally. So this copy must have been given to Whitmer by Smith, or shown to Whitmer by Smith, when Whitmer got involved in the Book of Mormon and Whitmer assumed it was the same one that was shown to Anthon.



[Broadside "Stick of Joseph"](#)

In 1844 the Latter-day Saints published a broadside with the title "[Stick of Joseph](#)" which contained supposed characters copied from the plates. (See article in *BYU Studies*, vol.20, no.4, p.325) These are somewhat different from the Anthon transcript. We don't know who prepared this 1844 sheet. A photo of the broadside is printed in *The Story of the Latter-day Saints*, by James B. Allen and Glen M. Leonard, Deseret Book, 1992, p.57.

According to archeologists the only written language developed by the American Indians was the [Mayan script](#), which bears absolutely no similarity to the Anthon script.



[Sample of Mayan Writing](#)

Professor Michael D. Coe, Yale University, wrote:

"Of all the peoples of the pre-Columbian New World, only the ancient Maya had a complete script: they could write down anything they wanted to, in their own language." (*Breaking the Maya Code*, by Michael D. Coe, Thames and Hudson, 1992, preface)

No sample of the Anthon type of writing has ever been found in the Americas.

For more information regarding the Maya and their civilization, see the book *The Maya* by Michael D. Coe.

<http://www.utlm.org/onlineresources/anthon.htm>. Retrieved: March 1, 2021.