

CHAPTER 3

THE PASSING OF MARTIN HARRIS

By William Harrison Homer

William Harrison Homer wrote this account which appeared later in the Improvement Era. W.H. was brother-in-law to Martin Harris Jr. Another son, Joseph Harris, who was named after the prophet, married Mary Ann Pons. So the old witness was a frequent visitor to the home of Lydia Pons and Winthrop Farley before his death in 1875.

I first saw Martin Harris in Kirtland, Ohio about the last of December, 1869. On my return from a mission in England I stopped to visit some of my relatives in Pennsylvania. On resuming my journey, one of my cousins, James A Crockett, who was not a member of the Church, came as far as Kirtland, Ohio with me. We remained in Kirtland overnight and the next morning after breakfast, we asked the landlord who was custodian of the Mormon temple at Kirtland. He informed us that Martin Harris was custodian and pointed out to us where we would find the old gentleman. Accordingly we went to the door and knocked. In answer to our knock there came to the door of the cottage a poorly clad, emaciated little man, on whom the winter of life was weighing heavily. It was Martin Harris. In his face might be read the story of his life. There were the marks of spiritual upliftment. There were the marks of keen disappointment. There was the hunger strain for the peace, the contentment, the divine calm that it seemed could come no more into his life. It was a pathetic figure, and yet it was a figure of strength. For with it all there was something about the little man which revealed the fact that he had lived richly, that into his life had entered such noble experiences as come to the lives of but few.

I introduced myself modestly as a brother-in-law of Martin Harris, Jr.—as he had married my eldest sister—and as an Elder of the Church who was returning from a foreign mission. The effect of the introduction was electric. The fact of relationship was overwhelmed by the fact of Utah citizenship. The old man bristled with vindictiveness. “One of those Brighamite ‘Mormon,’ are you?” he snapped. Then he railed impatiently against Utah and the founder of the “Mormon” commonwealth. It was in vain that I tried to turn the old man’s attention to his family. Martin Harris seemed to be obsessed. He would not understand that there stood before him a man who knew his wife and children, who had followed the Church to Utah.

After some time, however, the old man said, “You want to see the Temple, do you?” “Yes, indeed,” I exclaimed, “if we may.” “Well I’ll get the key.” From that moment, Martin Harris, in spite of occasional outbursts, radiated with interest. He led us through the rooms of the Temple and explained how they were used. He pointed out the place of the School of the

Prophets. He showed where the Temple curtain had at one time hung. He related thrilling experiences in connection with the history of the sacred building. In the basement, as elsewhere, there were many signs of dilapidation; the plaster had fallen off the ceiling and the walls; windows were broken; the woodwork was stained and marred. Whether it was the influence of these conditions or not, it is difficult to tell, but here again, Martin Harris was moved to speak against the Utah "Mormons." An injustice, a gross injustice had been done to him. He should have been chosen President of the Church.

When the old man was somewhat exhausted, I asked, "Is it not true that you were once very prominent in the Church, that you gave liberally of your means, and that you were active in the performance of your duties?" "That is very true," replied Martin Harris, "Things were alright then. I was honored while the people were here, but now that I am old and poor it is all different."

"Really," I replied, "how can that be?" "What about your testimony to the Book of Mormon? Do you still believe that the Book of Mormon is true and that Joseph Smith was a Prophet?" Again the effect was electric. A changed old man stood before me. It was no longer a man with an imagined grievance. It was a man with a message, a man with a noble conviction in his heart, a man inspired of God and endowed with divine knowledge. Through the broken window of the Temple shone the winter sun, clear and radiant

"Young man," answered Martin Harris with impressiveness, "Do I believe it! Do you see the sun shining? Just as surely as the sun is shining on us and giving us light, and the moon and the stars give us light by night, just as surely as the breath of life sustains us, so surely do I know that Joseph Smith was a true prophet of God, chosen of God to open the last dispensation of the fullness of times; so surely do I know that the Book of Mormon was divinely translated. I saw the plates; I saw the Angel; I heard the voice of God. I know that the Book of Mormon is true and that Joseph Smith was a true prophet of God, I might as well doubt my own existence as to doubt the divine authenticity of the Book of Mormon or the divine calling of Joseph Smith." It was a sublime moment. It was a wonderful testimony. We were thrilled to the very roots of our hair. The shabby, emaciated little man before us was transformed as he stood with hand outstretched toward the sun of heaven. A halo seemed to encircle him. A divine fire glowed in his eyes. His voice throbbed with the sincerity and the conviction of his message. It was the real Martin Harris whose burning testimony no power on earth could quench. It was the most thrilling moment of my life.

I asked Martin Harris how he could bear so wonderful a testimony after having left the Church. He said "Young man, I never did leave the Church, the Church left me."

Martin Harris was now in a softer mood. He turned to me and asked “Who are you?” I explained again our relationship. “So, my son Martin married your sister,” repeated the old man, shaking my hand. “You know my family then?” “Yes,” I replied, “wouldn’t you like to see your family again?” “I should like to see Caroline and the children,” mused Martin, naming over the children, “But I cannot, I am too poor.” “That need not stand in the way,” I answered. “President Young would be only too glad to furnish means to convey you to Utah.” “Don’t talk Brigham You,” warned Harris; “he would not do anything that was right.” “Send him a message by me” I persisted, now deeply concerned in the project. “No.” declared Harris emphatically, “yet I should like to see my family.” “Then entrust me with the message,” I pleaded. Martin Harris paused. “Well,” he said slowly, “I believe I will. You call on Brigham Young. Tell him about our visit. Tell him that Martin Harris is an old, old man, living on charity with his relatives. Tell him I should like to visit Utah, my family, my children—I would be glad to accept help from the Church but I want no personal favor. Wait! Tell him that if he sends money he must send enough for the round trip. I should not want to remain in Utah.” For 25 years he had nursed the old grudge against the leader of the Church, probably because nobody had had the patience with him that I had shown.

After we had bidden Martin Harris goodbye, and had taken a few steps from the Temple, my cousin placed his hands on my shoulders and said, “Wait a minute.” Looking me squarely in the eyes he said, “I can testify that the Book of Mormon is true. There is something within me that tells me that the old man told the truth. I know the Book of Mormon is true.”

In due time I reached my home in the Seventh ward in Salt Lake City, I recounted to my father the experience with Martin Harris, and we two set out immediately to report at the office of President Young. The President received us very graciously. He listened attentively to my recital of my visit with Martin Harris. President Young asked questions now and again, to make clear on certain points. Then, when the story was told, he said, and it seemed to me that he beamed with pleasure “I want to say this: I was never more gratified over any message in my life. Send for him! Yes, even if it were to take the last dollar of my own. Martin Harris spent his time and money freely when one dollar was worth more than one thousand dollars are worth now. Send for him! Yes indeed I shall send! Rest assured, Martin Harris will be here in time. It was Martin Harris who gave the Prophet Joseph Smith the first money to assist in the translation of the Book of Mormon. Martin Harris was the first scribe to assist in the translation of the Book from the original plates as dictated by the prophet who was led by the Holy Ghost. It was Martin Harris who was called by revelation to assist in the selection and ordination of the first Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, of the newly organized Church. It was Martin Harris who was called upon to accompany the prophet to Missouri to assist in the selection of the land of consecration. Martin Harris also aided in the selection of the First High Council in the Church, and he was a member of said Council. When the new presidency of the Church was chosen

Martin Harris felt greatly disappointed, that he was not called to leadership, but Martin Harris never denied the faith, never affiliated with any other sect or denomination, but when the Church came West, Martin Harris remained behind. It is true that Martin Harris did not apostatize; he was never tried for his fellowship; he was never excommunicated”

During the summer of 1870, Elder Edward Stevenson was authorized to collect money by subscription to bring Martin Harris to Utah. About two hundred dollars were raised; and on August 30, 1870, Martin Harris arrived in Salt Lake City, in the company of Elder Stevenson.

When Martin Harris reached Salt Lake City, he visited Brigham Young at his home. They became reconciled, and Martin Harris was invited to speak in the Tabernacle, and he bore a faithful testimony. He went to Smithfield, and later to Clarkston and made his home with his son Martin Harris Jr. and in course of time he returned to full fellowship and communion with the Saints.

Early in July, 1875, five years after he had come to Utah, Martin Harris was stricken with a kind of paralysis. It was the venerable witness’ last illness, but through it all he remained true to his faith. At that time I and my small family lived in Clarkston. With other members of the Clarkston ward, I called at the Harris home to relieve them in the care of the old man.

We began to think that he had born his last testimony. The last audible words he had spoken were something about the Book of Mormon but we could not understand what it was, but these were not the aged witness’ last words.

The next day, July 10, 1875, marked the end. It was in the evening. It was milking time, and Martin Harris, Jr., and his wife Nancy Homer Harris, had gone out to milk and to do the evening’s chores. In the house with the stricken man were left my mother, Eliza Williamson Home, and myself, who had had so interesting a day with Martin Harris at Kirtland. I stood by the bedside holding the patient’s right hand and my mother at the foot of the bed. Martin Harris had been unconscious for a number of days. When we first entered the room the old gentleman appeared to be sleeping. He soon woke up and asked for a drink of water. I put my arm under the old gentleman, raised him, and my mother held the glass to his lips. He drank freely, then he looked up at me and recognized me. He said, “I know you. You are my friend.” He said, “Yes, I did see the plates of which the Book of Mormon was written; I did see the angel; I did hear the voice of God; and I do know that Joseph Smith is a Prophet of God, holding the keys of the Holy Priesthood.” This was the end. Martin Harris, divinely-chosen witness of the work of God, relaxed, gave up my hand. He lay back on his pillow and just as the sun went down behind the Clarkston mountains, the soul of Martin Harris passed on. When Martin Harris Jr., and his wife returned to the house they found that their father had passed away, but in the

passing, Martin Harris, favored of God, repeated an irrefutable testimony of the divine inspiration and the prophetic genius of the great Prophet, Joseph Smith.

Signed in the presence of Mrs. W.H. (Leah) Homer, Joseph Homer, William Harrison Homer, John A. Widtsoe. Two signatures appear at the bottom of the page, **“Witness Theo Farley Jr.”** and **“WH Homer.”**



REMEMBERING MARTIN HARRIS

Transcribed from short-hand notes taken by Lucille Farley of a talk given by grandpa Farley at the priesthood session of Quarterly Stake Conference on March 23, 1940. Lucille notes her grandfather knew Brother Martin when he was 12 to 18 years old.

I am certainly pleased to be home [from Mesa] with you once more, and I feel the responsibility that rest upon me on occasions of this kind, but I am proud , and have been proud all my life, for the privilege of knowing Martin Harris, who in a measure, is a relative of mine. One of Martin Harris' sons', Joseph Harris, lived near my father's shop in Ogden. When he came down from Cache Valley to visit him and my Aunt Mary Ann, my mother's sister, he would stop by my father's black smith shop and they would discuss the early history of the Church. When father was too busy to listen to his stories he would say to me, "Take Brother Martin up to the house" (about block and a half from the shop) "and tell your mother to prepare dinner and I will be home and have dinner with the family."

It was a privilege to walk arm in arm with Martin Harris that short distance. As we had a little incline to go up on the bench of Washington Avenue, he would always put his arm under my arm and lean on me as we walked up the hill. He never used two canes to walk, but he was just a little careful about how he walked so as not to stumble. He used one cane and leaned on me for support.



Young Theodore with sister Adell

My mother has prepared, I don't know how many meals for him, the conversation of the early rise of the Church would be the main subject discussed at our table. Often he would relate what he had formally stated and knew about Joseph Smith and [about] the work that he had done, and the assistance that he had given to Joseph the Prophet. He became miffed with the Prophet Joseph because he thought that he should have been one of the Leading men in the Church. He had helped Joseph with the means to publish the Book of Mormon and had assisted him in many other ways and for that reason he became miffed. He nearly always wound up with the testimony that we find recorded in the Book of Mormon.

He stated that he stood in broad daylight when an angel from Heaven came down with the plates in his arms. He stood side by side with the angel when the angel did turn over leaf after leaf of the book that had been translated into our language—the English language—until he was perfectly satisfied that he had seen enough. Further, that after the angel had shown him the plates and disappeared he heard a voice from Heaven that thrilled every fiber of his body stating that the book had been translated by the gift and power of God, and not of man. He was commanded by the Lord to make that statement to the world and he did. Now it was my privilege to hear Martin Harris relate that time and time again at our dinner table. . .

Brother LeSuer, president of the Mesa Temple, put on a program concerning the Book of Mormon that was very effective. He had a Book of Mormon that stood about five feet high—perhaps four and a half feet and maybe between four and a half and five feet wide made up. On the front was written in large letters, “The Book of Mormon.” When the lid was opened up there was the testimony of Martin Harris concerning the truthfulness of the book. Also the testimony of the eight witnesses. . . magnified and when the light was on them they could be read. In addition to that he had the eight witnesses standing in the rear, something like this (indicating) one above the other, and their names, as recorded in the Book of Mormon, were present there. One man memorized the words recorded and quoted them to the audience. Also the three witnesses were represented. And after that was done [each was called forth.] They had arranged that these men, the eight and the three were costumed similarly to what was worn in that day and they wore sashes with the names pinned on. In addition to that it was arranged that two men and a women were there who represented people who knew Brother Martin during his life time. They stated who they were and what they saw before he passed.

When it was discovered that I was one who had actually seen him, I was asked to take part in the drama. As I stated my mother’s sister married one of Brother Martin’s sons and that is how we first became acquainted . That is how I was so intimate with him and had assisted him in walking up to our house on the hill many times.

There was one thing I did not approve of and I guess I was right. There were only two of us who were present to testify that they had seen Martin Harris alive. The third was a lady who testified that Martin Harris told her--she claimed he did—that he handled the plates when the angel came down from Heaven and showed them. But Martin Harris never made such a statement in our house that I heard of; he did say that he saw in broad day light the angel come down from Heaven with those records and stood beside him. According to what’s written in the Book of Mormon you will see that the eight witnesses did not see the angel. They did not hear the voice of God, but the plates were shown to them by Joseph Smith. The eight witnesses did have the privilege of handling the plates and examining the characters and the privilege of hefting them to see that they were real. What Martin Harris had seen is what is written in [the introduction to] the Book of Mormon.

When I stood by his side and heard his testimony I was thrilled in every part of my body. I can’t explain it but it caused me to make up my mind that the things he said and what he saw were actually true, and that testimony has never left me from that day until this. Which is one of the reasons I have been engaged in this vicarious work [for the dead] doing the work for those who haven’t had the privilege I have had in hearing the wonderful words contained in the

forward of the Book of Mormon. I don't feel that I want to occupy any more time. Perhaps some other time I can give other evidence concerning the Book of Mormon. I thank you.



Theodore Sr. with grandchildren Therin and Louise, the children of Min (Mrs. Reginald) Johnson

My Grandfather by Lucille Farley Collins

Grandpa Farley was the most lovable grandfather any child could ever have. He made each one of us feel his love, and always he could reach in his pocket and bring out something special; a ring, some trinket, a nickel, candy, always something.

I can remember as a small child, how we would sit on his lap and comb and braid the long, black curly beard. Then he cut the beard and wore only that cute little mustache with the curled ends, and then I remember the day out home when he came out of the bathroom with the mustache shaved off. I said, "Oh, Grandpa, please may I have it?", and he replied, "It's too late. I just flushed it down the toilet."

He was such a gay, distinguished, immaculate grandpa, with such twinkling brown eyes. He always wore a clean white shirt, even when working. And at work he wore the black armlets to protect the sleeves. Never did I hear Grandma complain, and it must not have been easy to have a white shirt ready for him through all those years.

The stories he'd tell, in dialect, Scandinavian, I suppose, and the one's he'd tell on Grandma. I remember particularly the time when Grandma had been blaming him for taking more than his share of the bed. So, he bought a board, and when she went to bed that night, there was a division right down the middle between the sheets. And another time he used a sack of flour for a divider. And there was the story about the big overalls she made him, and how he used them for storing the fish he caught while off on a camping trip, and then Grandma wouldn't eat the fish because he'd been in the pants at the same time. He tied strings around

his ankles at the bottom of the pants and then dropped the fish in!

I remember the joy of anticipated and actual visits out to Roosevelt to visit them, and what a thrill it was to go down to the Mercantile store where he worked and have him take us around. There were Indians, with papooses in cradle boards...

Then when they moved to Provo, they'd have different groups of us cousins down to stay overnight. We'd listen to his stories, and to the phonograph. "Pony Boy" was a favorite record, and along with the lyrics was the sound of galloping or trotting hooves. I can remember looking intently through the wooden slats of the speaker in the front of the record player, trying so hard to get a glimpse of the pony inside. Grandma would cook such good food. . . we had the time of our lives.

Then when we were older, we'd visit him in Salt Lake while he was working in the Temple, and write to him in St. George, Manti, and Mesa. Jess and I had such a good time choosing his Christmas present one year, a music box, for keeping his cuff links in. Then, because he knew I treasured it, he gave it back to me when he was finished with it. And Larry loved so to lift the lid and listen to the tinkling notes of "The Blue Danube".

I loved to be around when he was carpentering, and the long curls of fresh scented wood would fall from his plane as he smoothed the wood. The little cupboards he made for his grandchildren are still sturdy and treasured, and still delight the little folks. Comb cases and sewing baskets he made in later years for those he loved. The blue bed lamp he gave me and Fram for a wedding gift... The diaries he kept while on his mission, he'd re-read, and from them recall such interesting tales.

My testimony, I think, must have been born with me, and then was nurtured and strengthened by my parents and my grandparents, particularly Grandpa Farley. He is my personal link to the early beginnings of the Church; he knew Martin Harris. Many times he heard Brother Harris tell of his close association with Joseph Smith, heard him testify to the authenticity of the Book of Mormon. Martin Harris had seen the Golden Plates and had heard a voice from Heaven telling him to bear witness to the world. I grew up never doubting that it was so. We grew up on the stories Grandpa told, stories of faith and the answering of prayers, of his mission to Great Britain, and of family experiences we knew to be real. Grandpa lived the Gospel, and he never wavered in his devotion. **KNOWING HIM, I COULD NOT DOUBT THE THINGS HE BELIEVED AND KNEW TO BE TRUE.** I know I sometimes appear to be irreverent and lightly endowed with spirituality, but all the time, I want you to know, this testimony is right here inside me. It has grown, and is still growing.



(Signed) Lucille Farley Collins