



ON FAMOUS SITE—This cobblestone house on hill in Maple Road, short distance north of Palmyra, was built in 1849 after original Martin Harris house burned.

ed. Harris mortgaged his farm to finance printing of first Book of Mormon. Mormon Church now owns the property, church missionaries act as custodians.

Farm Kept as Memorial to 'Disciple'

Its Owner Mortgaged It to Finance Book of Mormon

By ARCH MERRILL
THE BIG COBBLESTONE HOUSE stands on a hill on Maple Road, less than two miles north of Palmyra. It is one of the most imposing examples of cobblestone architecture in this area.

But this story is mostly about the land on which it stands and about the men who owned that land—long before the handsome stone house was built.

Arch Merrill's History

A sign in front of the place tells the traveler that this is the Martin Harris Farm, one of the several historic sites preserved by the Mormon Church in the region of its nativity.

One hundred and thirty years ago, strong-minded, chin-bearded Martin Harris mortgaged that farm to finance the printing of the first Book of Mormon. This Bible contained the "revelations," which were on the golden plates which, the young prophet, Joseph Smith, said, he dug from a nearby hill in 1827 and from which sprang the now mighty Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, commonly known as Mormons.

Joseph Smith was only 22 years old then and was known in the Palmyra neighborhood as a mystic and digger for buried treasure.

Harris was one of Smith's earliest and most helpful disciples, at a time when most of his neighbors derided the prophet's story.

When Harris proposed to mortgage his property to publish the Mormon Bible, his wife objected so strongly that the couple parted. Harris gave his wife the north 80 acres of the original 320-acre farm and built a house for her there. Prior to their rift, they had lived in a white frame dwelling where the big stone house stands today.

HARRIS and the wife of Joseph Smith were the first scribes who, without seeing the plates, wrote down at Smith's dictation the story he read from the strange characters on the plates, according to Mormon history. Later on, Oliver Cowdery, a faster writer, took over the transcription. Most of this work was done in Mrs. Smith's family home in at what is now Oakland, Pa., south-east of Binghamton.

Late in the Spring of 1829, the 275,000-word manuscript was completed. Harris began looking for a publisher and found one in E. B. Gradin of Palmyra. The farmer mortgaged 150 acres of his land to raise the \$3,000 needed to print the first 5,000 copies of the Book of Mormon. It went



MARTIN HARRIS
... one of the "Witnesses"

on sale March 26, 1830. Mormon literature cites Harris as one of "the Three Witnesses," in addition to Smith, who were allowed to view the plates and the appearance of an angel who told them they were "Divinely restored and translated."

This spectacular event took place, according to Mormon annals, in a grove near the Whitmer cabin near Fayette in Seneca County, where in April, 1830, the church was formally organized. The other witnesses were Cowdery and David Whitmer.

HARRIS was one of the Western New York Saints who followed the prophet, Smith, to the Mormons' first colony in Kirtland, Ohio, after disposing of his remaining Palmyra acres. In Kirtland, at the age of 53, he married a 20-year-old niece of Brigham Young, the great Mormon leader. In the meantime Harris' first wife had died and was buried in Palmyra.

Harris became disaffected with the church and remained in Ohio after the Mormons moved west to Missouri, to Illinois and eventually to Utah. His second wife left him some years after his break with the church, declaring she put her faith "ahead of a stubborn husband."

Martin Harris remained in Ohio until 1870 when he joined the Mormon hosts in Utah. There he died at the age of 88, back in the fold of the church he had helped to found.

THE ORIGINAL Harris house in Maple Road burned in 1849 and its owner, William Chapman, immediately began building the cobblestone residence on the same site. His two sons, 12 and 14, daily drove an ox cart to Lake Ontario a dozen miles away, where they picked up lake-washed stones, sizing them

through a hole in a board. The next day they carted the uniformly sized and shaped stones back to the new house.

It took two years to build the cobblestone mansion. It is said the mason, one Johnson, forbade anyone to watch him at work, so jealously did the cobblestone masons guard the secret of their craft.

The Mormon church acquired the property in 1937. The land is worked by neighboring farmers under a cash lease and church missionaries serve as custodians of the house to which visitors are heartily welcomed.

Elder Stephen R. Boswell and his wife have cared for the Harris Farm since December, 1958. Boswell, who retired after 40 years as a county agricultural agent in Utah, knows the story of Martin Harris and the historic farm by heart.

"I should," he said in his quiet way, "I have told it to some 7,700 people in less than two years." The majority of the visitors come during the summer pageant held on the Hill Cumorah on the Palmyra-Manchester Road, where Smith reported unearthing the golden plates.

The sacred hill has been church property for nearly 60 years. And on its summit in 1936 the tall statue of the angel Moroni was dedicated. It is a world shrine of the church.

The pageant portraying the principal events in the Book of Mormon and spectacular in its lighting and sound effects, draws thousands to the sacred hill for five August evenings each year.

NEARBY on a side road is the Joseph Smith Farm where the Prophet lived as a boy and first saw his vision. The well-kept 138-year-old, white, two-story house with peaked gables, was purchased, along with the surrounding farm, by the Mormons in 1905. On the farm is the Sacred Grove where the young Joseph went to pray and commune with angels.

The Mormons have a fine brick church in Palmyra and a brand new edifice in Rochester at the western fringe of Highland Park. They also own and maintain the Whitmer farm near Fayette where the church was formally organized.

The representatives of the church whom I have met in this region are friendly, straightforward, likeable people who courteously welcome the visitors