

The Book of Mormon as it was first presented to the world by Joseph Smith

Joseph Smith, *The Book of Mormon*. Palmyra: E.B. Grandin [for the author], 1830. 7 1/2 inches x 4 9/16 inches (191 x 116 mm), 592 pages.

The Book of Mormon has always been larger than its text, a symbol of the nature of the Latter-day Saints. Its very existence proclaimed that there was a prophet on earth who could speak for God, answer crucial questions, and rally the people in a final dispensation of the Fullness of Times. It stood as proof of divine authority and acceptance. It served as the ultimate proselytizing tool. Here was substance in the face of derision, recourse in times of shocking persecution. Mormonism in all its denominations still reveres the book that provided its unofficial designation.

The Book of Mormon has generally come to most people as a surprise: to the farm boy beckoned from his sleep by an angel in the 1820s, to critics astonished that anyone would take the work seriously, and to millions of readers professing a personal witness that the book is not only authentic, but divine. It is unavoidably controversial and enigmatic, and if hundreds of millions of people have heard of this text, relatively few have examined it long enough to form an original opinion of what it may actually be. There are more than ten million Mormons worldwide, nearly half of them in the United States. Most of them have never seen this cornerstone of their religion as it was first published to the world.

When a text serves as a foundation stone of faith, it will always be more than a mere collector's item. As with many other famous books, this volume's relatively nondescript mien (undecorated American tree calf) belies the prominence that it would shortly attain. Unpretentious in appearance, *The Book of Mormon* sits modestly on the shelf between other books of similar time and place until some unsuspecting browser turns the front board to reveal its famous title.

This rare copy (from Bridwell Library, Southern Methodist University) of *The Book of Mormon* is exceptional in its inclusion of the later "index," as it

is generally called. Entitled “References to The Book of Mormon,” this is essentially a table of contents, comprising topics beneath individual “book” headings, listed in order of appearance. This is seldom seen and offers valuable insights into the early history of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints.

Octavo code: smimrm