Researchers say

Book of Mormon

based on novel

Saturday, July 16, 1977

Houston Chronicle
only be "positive" if they examine the original manuscripts and not the copies. Mormon press spokesmen, below, Lefere issued the following statement about the findings: "The authenticity of the Book of Mormon has been challenged by many during the past 147 years. The so-called Spaulding story was long ago laid to rest by even the most credible of critics. The book has held up under other attacks over the years and will withstand the latest allegations as well. Truth is unchanging, and the truth of the matter is that the Book of Mormon is precisely what the church has always maintained it is. It is divinely revealed scriptural record of ancient American people. More specifically, it joins with the Bible as a witness of the divinity of Jesus Christ."

Dean Jessee, a church historian who categorized the various manuscript remnants, said, "Any competent handwriting analyst will easily spot numerous differences in the two hands. In fact, even the untrained eye can see the basic differences."

Plowman asked a Mormon leader if the Church would submit the manuscript for handwriting analysis: "We don't need to," Plowman quoted the "spokesman" as saying. "We know where the manuscript came from." But he quotes Lefere as saying it would be okay for the three handwriting experts to examine the original manuscripts.

Plowman says he went to Salt Lake City and was shown the original manuscripts by Mormon historian-editor Leonard J. Arrington. He says each page of the manuscript is now laminated.

"The Krimball-acquisition pages, ragged at the edges, are a little over six inches wide by 16 inches long. The paper seems to be uniform in stock and age," says Plowman. "They are written on both sides in black ink, and appear to be in sequence, although the handwriting seems to differ from section to section."

"Jessee has tentatively assigned two of the sections to John Whipler and Oliver Cowdery, close associates of Smith who were among the 'witnesses' to the authenticity of the Book of Mormon. The other section is the one that Jessee says was written by an unidentified scribe — but which the handwriting experts have identified as the work of Solomon Spaulding. The experts have not examined the other two sections."

"After observing all three sections, Plowman says about the current charges: "Since Spaulding wrote at least 14 years or so before Smith began dictating, the casual observer is left wondering how there can be so much similarity in paper and ink quality throughout the Krimball acquisition."

Plowman says "The Book of Mormon is basically the story of two migrations of people from the Middle East to the Americas, the first from the Tower of Babel about 2250 B.C. the second from Jerusalem about 600 B.C. American Indians are portrayed as descendents of one of the immigrant families, the Lamanites, who were cursed with a dark skin because of sin."

Morel, the last survivor of another family, the Nephitons, who alone used the 'reformed Egyptian' language and who was prayed to by Christ after his resurrection, in 411 A.D., buried a set of plates on which his father Mormon had inscribed a record of the migrations and struggles. Fourteen hundred years later, Morel delivered the plates to Smith, according to Mormon teaching.

"Large chunks of the Book of Mormon are passages from the King James version of the Bible. Anthropologists and archeologists have generally scoffed at the historical sections of the book, and they say there have never been such a written or verbal language as "reformed Egyptian," says Plowman."

He says, "no one but Smith ever saw the gold plates (Morel took them away after making sure the translation was correct), and he usually dictated from behind a curtain."

Plowman says the Spaulding writings are not the only ones sometimes alleged to have been pirated by Smith.

"Some critics cite similarities between what Smith produced and what James Adam wrote in his History of the American People (1778)."

Plowman says "those who believe Smith made use of a Spaulding manuscript usually implicate a Baptist-turned-Campbellite preacher named Sidney Rigdon, who officially converted to Smith's new faith shortly after it was founded in 1830. Several sources indicate that both Spaulding and Rigdon moved to the Pitts- burgh area about 1815. Spaulding left a manuscript of a novel known as "Manuscript Found" at a Pittsburgh printer. It subsequently disappeared. The novel reportedly attempted to portray a biblical origin of American Indians."

"Friends of Rigdon are on record saying he showed them such a novel," says Plowman. "And they say that Rigdon had a close friend who worked at the print shop where Spaulding's novel had been left."

"Rigdon served as pastor of a small Baptist church in Pittsburgh from about 1810 to 1812, when he was ousted in a controversy over doctrine. He drifted back to Ohio where he became identified with the Campbellite movement and its emphasis on 'restoration' of the true church, a prominent theme in the Mormon faith. Anti-Mormon researchers believe Rigdon met Joseph Smith in his travels in the late 1820s. Several sightings of Rigdon and Smith together are reported in documents, but so far no hard evidence of such a link has been uncover-
ed."

Plowman reports that in 1884 a Spauld-
ing manuscript was found. Its title was "Manuscript Story." He says it contained some parallels to the Book of Mormon but no verbatim passages.

Plowman says, "Mormon leaders later announced that "Manuscript Story" and "Manuscript Found" were the same manuscript, thus dismissing the alleged Spaulding link to Mormonism. Anti-Mor-

mon students, claimed, however, that they were two different works. Spauld-
ing's daughter, Matilda, claimed there were two different manuscripts. She said she had heard her father read from "Manuscript Found" and that it contained many of the names and references men-
tioned in the Book of Mormon."

"One question remains: 'If the Californi-a handwriting experts are correct and the part of "Manuscript Found" has indeed been found - incorporated in the Book of Mormon and safely stored by the Mormon Church - why would a scribe insert the Spaulding pages themselves into the manuscript instead of rewriting them?'

Plowman tells of another problem with a Mormon document."

He says in 1968 one of the Mormon's respected scholars, Egyptologist Dee Jay Nelson, was asked to translate the recently discovered Joseph Smith Fapyri frag-
ments, which had been the basis for the Book of Abraham in Smith's Pearl of Great Price. The fragments dated to 100 A.D. or earlier and are glued to heavy paper bearing handwritten notations by Smith.

Nelson discovered, according to Plow-
man, that the text was part of an ancient pagan ritual of death and not what Smith had "translated" in the Book of Abraham.

The church refused to publish Nelson's translation (which was corroborated by other Egyptologists), and in 1975 Nelson resigned from the Mormon Church."

It is not my fault that the papyri did not say what Joseph Smith claimed they did," Nelson says.