

Hiding the Book of Mormon

By Janet S. Porter

The Life and History of Phineas Wolcott Cook
pp. 32-33, using his own words

CHARACTERS (5 – 3 men and 2 women)

Phineas Wolcott Cook (PWC)

Ann Eliza (his wife)

Phineas Cook (his father)

Irene Cook (his mother)

Darius Cook (his brother)

(PWC comes to the stage and sits on a chair, reading. Ann Eliza comes in and stands next to him.)

Ann Eliza: My dear Phineas, what are you doing? Do you know it's 3 o'clock in the morning?

PWC: If it weren't 3 o'clock in the morning, I wouldn't be here. I would be in my bed sleeping.

Ann Eliza: But you're just reading. Couldn't you do that some other time? You'll be tired all day, and you work so hard already, I'll worry about you.

PWC: You can go in the bedroom and read The Book of Mormon any time you want. You just sit on the bed and read, and no one notices. But every time I pick up the Book of Mormon my father falls into a fit.

Ann Eliza: Why does he hate the Mormons so much? At first he believed the church and tried to get you to listen to the missionaries.

PWC: Something happened, and he rejected it all. If I even look like I might want to read he yells at me and tells me to stop wasting my time.

Ann Eliza: Moving back with your parents has been hard for you. Your father needs help, so I know we need to be here, but I can see it's a struggle.

PWC: Pa will be up in an hour or so. I'll come back to bed and finish this chapter this afternoon.

Ann Eliza: I thought you said he wouldn't let you read during the day.

PWC: He won't. But the oxen are so old they need a rest, and I just happen to give them a rest out by that old dead tree across the field. With a Book of Mormon hidden inside the tree, I'm forced to rest out there with them. And I rest with the book in my hands.

Ann Eliza: That's my Phineas. Thank goodness you've found a way to read in spite of your father's determination to keep you from it.

PWC: I think I'm ready to become a Mormon. I hardly even dare speak the words in this house. If my parents heard it they would tie me up in the barn.

Ann Eliza: I'm ready too. We know it's true. There's a meeting next month on September 7 at Comstock. If we work it right, we could be baptized at the conference.

PWC: I've already spoken to my sister Eliza. I think she'll help us.

Ann Eliza: Then good night--again. At least you can get another hour or two of sleep before you have to get up.

(They leave the stage. Irene, Phineas Sr. and their son Darius come to the stage.)

Irene: Why, Darius, what are you doing here from Barry County?

Darius: I heard my brother Phineas has gone crazy.

Irene: Is this about the Mormons?

Darius: Yes. Several people I know from Barry County went to the meeting in Comstock over the weekend, and they congratulated me on my brother's baptism. What are they talking about?

Phineas Sr. I know they went to the meeting with your sister Eliza and her husband Salmon Hall, but they took nothing with them. I watched them go. They took nothing but a few pieces of bread to eat.

Irene: I watched too. I knew if they took clothes it would mean they were planning to be baptized because those Mormons baptize right down in the water. But they took nothing. Phin, come here. Your brother wants to talk to you.

(PWC comes in)

PWC: Why hello, Darius. It's good to have you here. I haven't seen you since this summer.

Irene: And tell him what you told us, Darius.

Darius: Phin, I have friends who went to the Mormon meeting at Comstock this weekend. They say you were baptized.

Irene: But we know you would never do that. Tell him, Phin. Tell him you were not baptized into the Mormon Church.

Phineas Sr. Yes, tell all of us. We're waiting.

PWC: Since we came home from Comstock the whole family seems to have made a great inquiry about what we did there. My sister Mary Ann was here yesterday. We chose to be silent about it because we knew there would be no end to the family display of tact and talents in refuting the principles of the Mormon Church.

Irene: Well, are you going to answer the question? Were you baptized?

PWC: Yes, we were. We know it is the Restored Gospel of Jesus Christ on the earth, and we were baptized on Sunday.

Darius: See, I told you. He is a Mormon.

Irene: I knew it all along. I could see something about him which had changed the minute he came home Sunday afternoon.

Phineas Sr. Son, there is nothing about that church you want to get tangled up in. Why don't you just content yourself with the Methodists or the Congregationalists? That would be a good, safe choice.

PWC: I knew you would be against it. But I have to do what my conscience tells me to do. I can't just stay in a nice safe church when I know God is speaking to his prophet someplace else. I know the Book of Mormon was translated by Joseph Smith, and I know it is the word of God.

Phineas Sr. Why, you haven't even read it.

PWC: Yes I have, Pa. I read the whole thing while no one was watching. And I read the book *Voice of Warning*.

Irene: Well, I see you have made up your mind, but I guarantee I'll take every opportunity to prove you wrong.

PWC: You can try, but I'm not so different from you. Once I know something is right, I can't leave it. I will be faithful to my testimony, and I'll do whatever the Lord asks me to do. I'm completely committed.

Phineas Sr. I will not hear another word. Before we know it you'll be off with them Mormons, and leave us without help. Believe me, I'll steal everything you own before I let you do that.

PWC: My dear family, I love you more than you know. I'm sorry you all feel so bad about this. But you should know that the more you say, the stronger I feel and the more I feel to maintain it.

Irene: Oh, he'll change. I'll see to it.

Phineas Sr. We'll make sure he changes.

(Everyone leaves the stage except PWC)

PWC: No, they can't change my mind. I'll never give up my testimony of the true church of Jesus Christ. The angel asked me many years ago if I knew the right way, would I serve the Lord. Well, now I know the right way, and I have committed to serve the Lord.

Family Discussion

Phineas Wolcott Cook's family reacted as most families did at the time when they heard a loved one had joined the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. At first they tried to persuade, and finally resorted to strong pressure to get him to change his mind. Many families disowned loved ones who chose to become members of the Mormon Church, and never spoke to them again.

How did Phineas stand up to their anger and their threats?

What gave him the strength to stand by his beliefs when he hardly had the experience or language to defend himself?

When we're baptized we covenant with the Lord to be faithful to our knowledge of the true church. The Holy Ghost is given to us to help us stay worthy and faithful.

2 Nephi: 31:16

"...for the gate by which ye should enter is repentance and baptism by water; and then cometh a remission of your sins by fire and by the Holy Ghost."

As a new member of the church, Phineas knew he had been blessed and cleansed from sin. But he also knew the gift of the Holy Ghost was the key to remain clean and pure as long as he stayed true to the knowledge he had received. With that understanding, he refused to be diverted, even by his loved ones, knowing his precious new gift of the Holy Ghost would be lost.

"We need only to keep feasting and not heed those who would make fun of our beliefs or those who delight to create doubts or those who find fault with Church leaders and doctrine. It is a choice we make daily—to choose faith over doubt."¹

Throughout his whole life Phineas made that choice. He retained his commitment to the truth he had learned in Kalamazoo County, Michigan in 1845.

¹ "Do I Believe?" Bonnie L. Oscarson, Ensign, May, 2016, p. 89.