



Conversion in Kirtland

By Hilary Watkins Lemon

(Based on the life of Mary Elizabeth Rollins Lightner)

*Part 1: This story begins in 1830,
the year the Church was organized.*

Crunch, crunch, crunch. Mary Elizabeth Rollins loved the noise of the crisp, dry leaves under her shoes. Fall had arrived in Kirtland, Ohio. Mary Elizabeth bounded up the steps of the big white mercantile store where her uncle Sidney Gilbert worked. She loved the store with its kegs of molasses, bundles of herbs, and other interesting things for sale.

Mary Elizabeth entered the store just in time to hear a man telling Uncle Sidney of a new religion somewhere in New York.

"I've heard that a man claims to be a prophet and that he translated a book written in an ancient language from golden plates. It is called the Book of Mormon," said the man.

Soon the whole town was buzzing with news of the Book of Mormon and its translator, the Prophet Joseph Smith.

It wasn't long before Mary Elizabeth and her family were taught the gospel. She and her mother were among the first Kirtland residents to be baptized. Soon a branch was organized, with Brother Isaac Morley presiding over it.

Even though Mary Elizabeth had a testimony of the gospel, she had never read the Book of Mormon.

It had only been printed

a few months before. So when Brother Morley finally received a copy, Mary Elizabeth was excited to see the book.

One night, before a few members of the Church met at Brother Morley's home, Mary Elizabeth gathered her courage and knocked on his door.

"Yes, Mary Elizabeth?" Brother Morley asked as he opened the door.

"Brother Morley, may I please see the Book of Mormon?"

He let her in and carefully handed her the small brown book. Mary Elizabeth felt a great desire to read it.

"May I please borrow the book?" she asked.

"My child," Brother Morley said, "I have not read one chapter in it myself, and the brethren will want to see the book tonight at the meeting."

Then, seeing Mary Elizabeth's disappointment, Brother Morley said, "Well, if you bring the book back before breakfast tomorrow, you may take it. Do not let any harm come to it."

That night Mary Elizabeth and her family took turns reading in the Book of Mormon until very late. Early the next day, Mary Elizabeth memorized 1 Nephi 1:1 before bringing the book back to Brother Morley.

"Well, you are here early. I guess you did not

read much," Brother Morley said.

Mary Elizabeth showed him how much she had read.

Brother Morley smiled, but said, "I do not believe you could even tell me a word of it."

Mary Elizabeth recited the verse she had memorized and explained the story of Nephi and his family.

Brother Morley opened his mouth in surprise. "Child, you take this book back and finish it," he said. "I can wait."

Early in the year 1831, the Prophet Joseph Smith and his family moved to Kirtland. The first person Joseph visited was Brother Whitney, Uncle Sidney's business partner, at their store. When Brother Whitney promptly introduced Joseph to Uncle Sidney's family, Joseph was surprised to see the Book of Mormon.

"How did you get this book?" Joseph asked. "I sent it to Brother Morley several weeks ago."

"My niece was bold enough to ask him to lend it to her," Uncle Sidney explained.

"Where is your niece?" the Prophet asked.

Mary Elizabeth was called into the room. The Prophet looked at her closely, then walked up to her, laid his hands on her head, and gave her a blessing. It was the first blessing Mary Elizabeth ever received.

When he finished, Joseph said, "You may keep this book, Mary Elizabeth. I will get another for Brother Morley." ♦

(To be continued.)



Years later, Mary Elizabeth's Book of Mormon was stolen from her house when she and her husband fled from a mob. Joseph Smith gave her another copy, which he signed, along with a lock of his hair.