

The Liahona

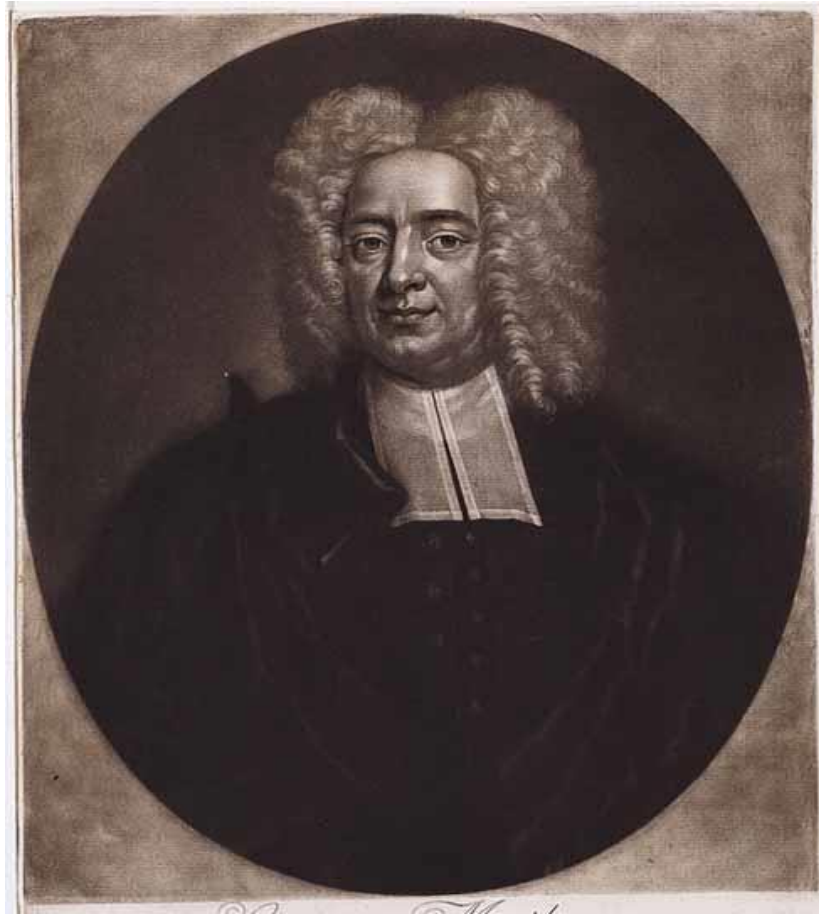
Miracles by Small Means

Chapter 10

CHAPTER 10

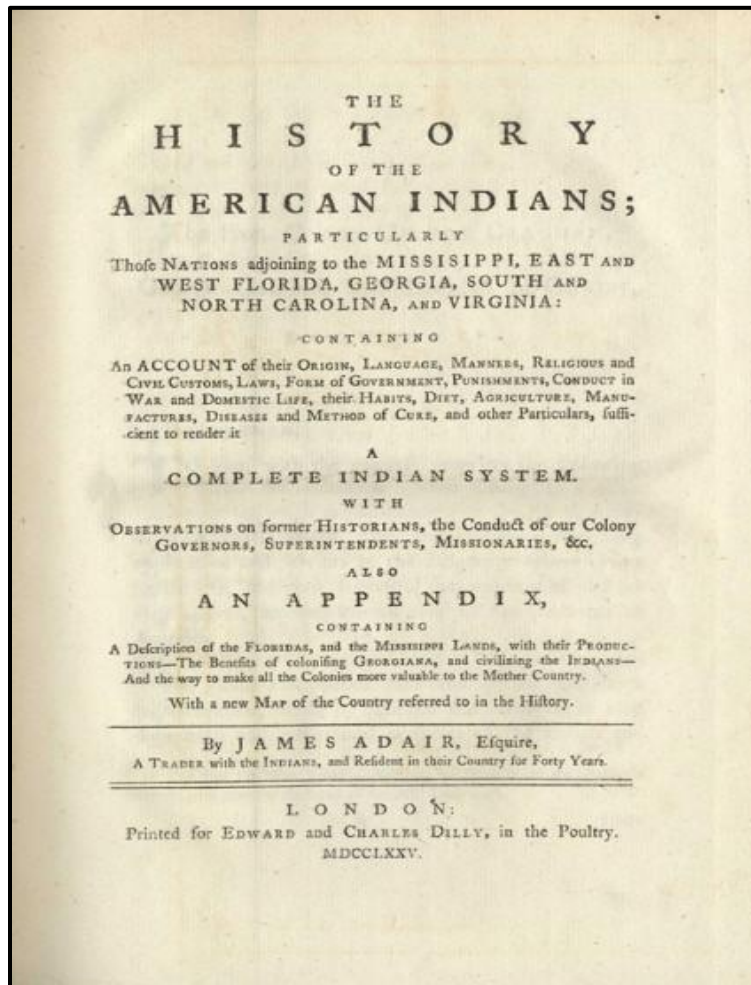
Pre-1830 North-American Writers

Chapter 10: Pre-1830 North-American writers. In the late 1700s and early 1800s, most North-American writers claimed that at least some of the American Indians descended from peoples in the Old World. However, these writers tended to focus on the more recent origin stories obtained from the Indian tribes located in what is now the United States. Some of these newer origin stories linked the Indian mounds to the Lost Tribes of Israel. A good number of these writers brought up the subject of the magnetic compass, but only to deny that it was used in ancient times. I will try to review a few of the more pertinent writers.



Samuel Mather 1733

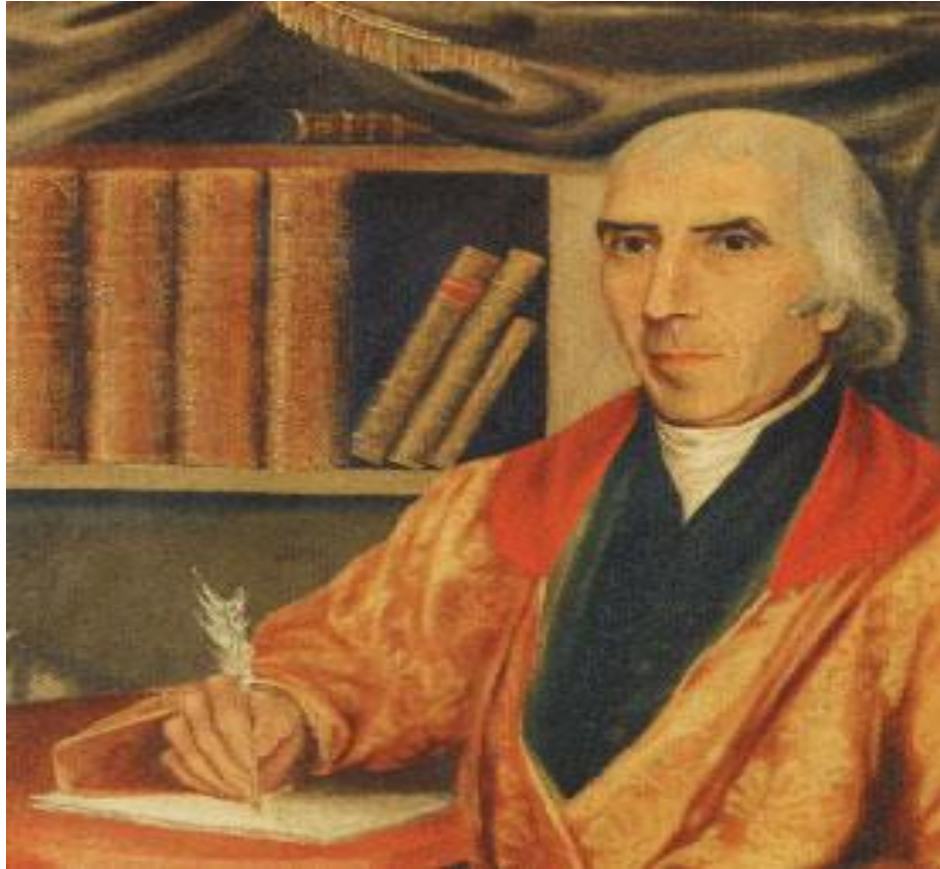
In 1773 Samuel Mather, a Boston clergyman wrote that navigation was ancient, and that the Phoenicians traveled to far distant places, even America. Nevertheless, Mather accepted the fable that the magnetic compass was not invented until 1300 AD by a man called John Goia from the port town of Amalphi in southern Italy.



James Adair 1775

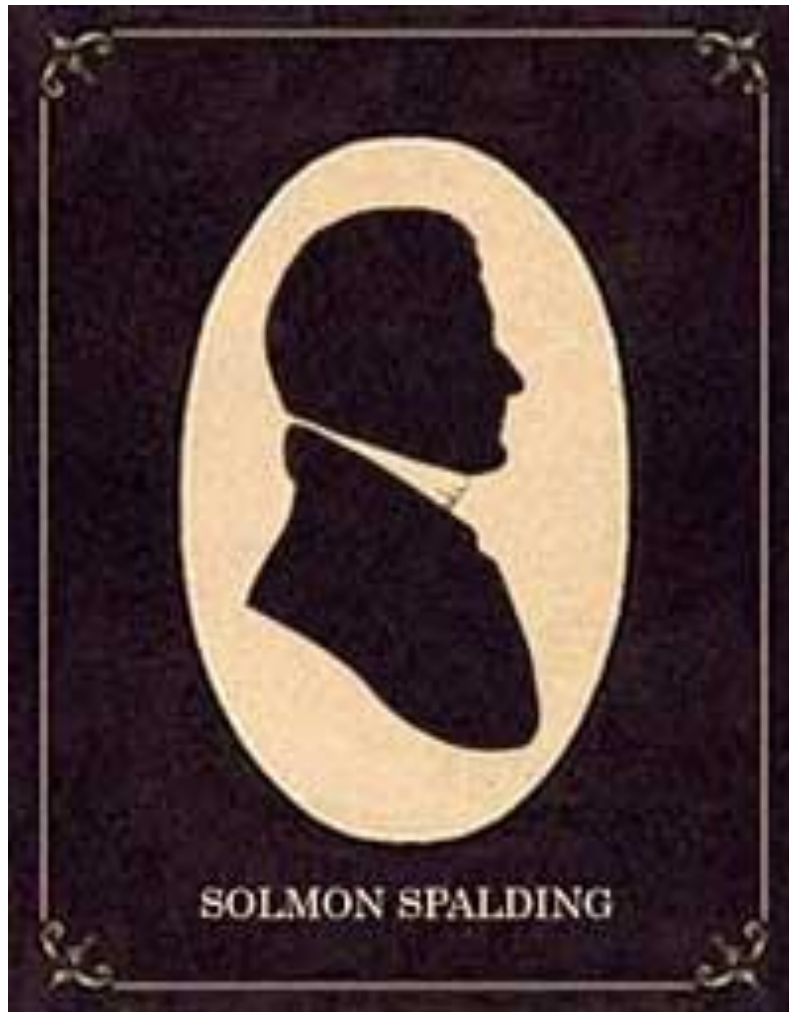
In 1775, James Adair, who had spent 40 years among the Indians of the United States, published his book entitled *The History of the American Indians*. In his book, while he claimed that the Indians descended from Israelites, he made no mention of their having a magnetic compass. Intriguingly, in view of what we have previously discussed on the Chinese knowledge of lodestone, Adair rejected the idea that the Chinese ever came to America because they were unacquainted with the magnetic properties of lodestone.

It might be interesting to note here that recently, almost 300 markings found on pottery, jade and stone at unspecified ancient native sites in central America closely resemble 3,000-year-old Shang dynasty characters for the sun, sky, rain, water, crops, trees and stars.

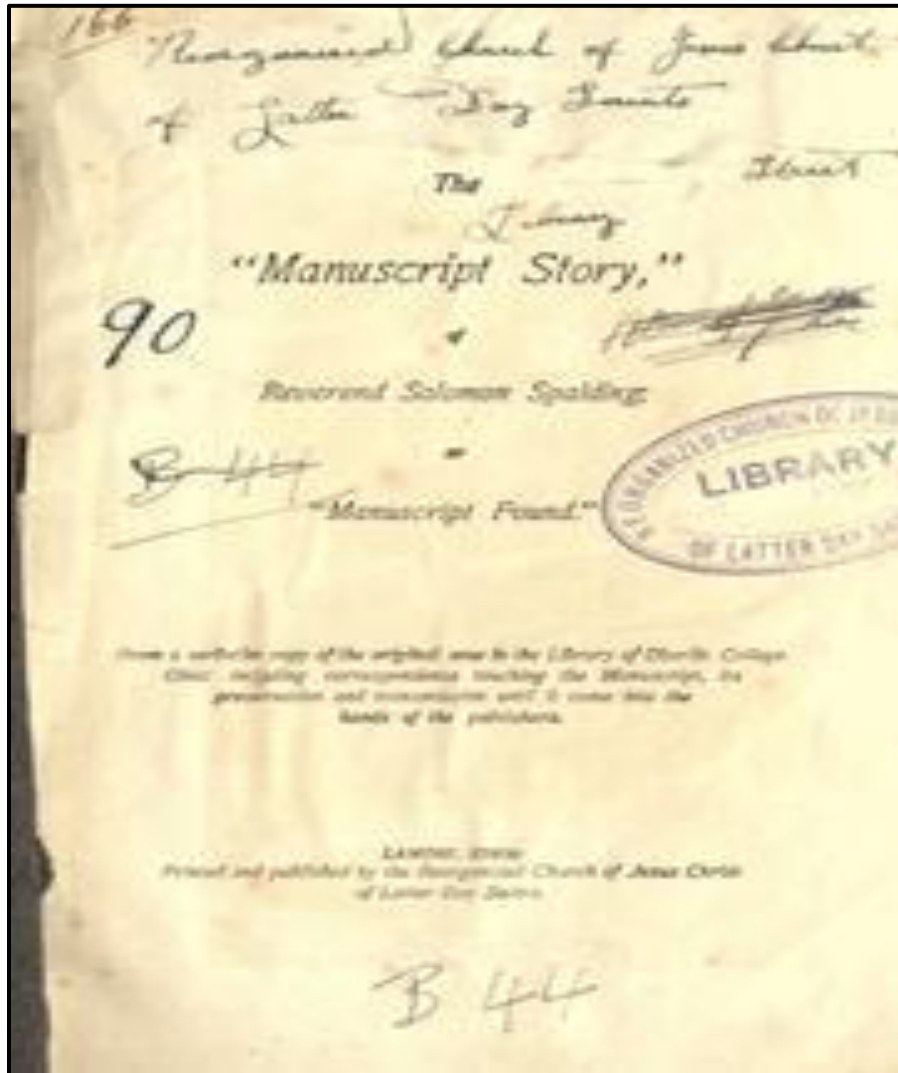


Jedidiah Morse 1802

In 1802 Jedidiah Morse, a Massachusetts pastor, published his book *"Geography Made Easy."* Interestingly, he noted that in Arabia caravans were guided by the magnetic compass, but he gives no date for the origin of such a practice.



This is a silhouette of Solomon Spalding. I am discussing him and his writings because it has been claimed that Joseph Smith used Spalding's writings in producing the Book of Mormon.



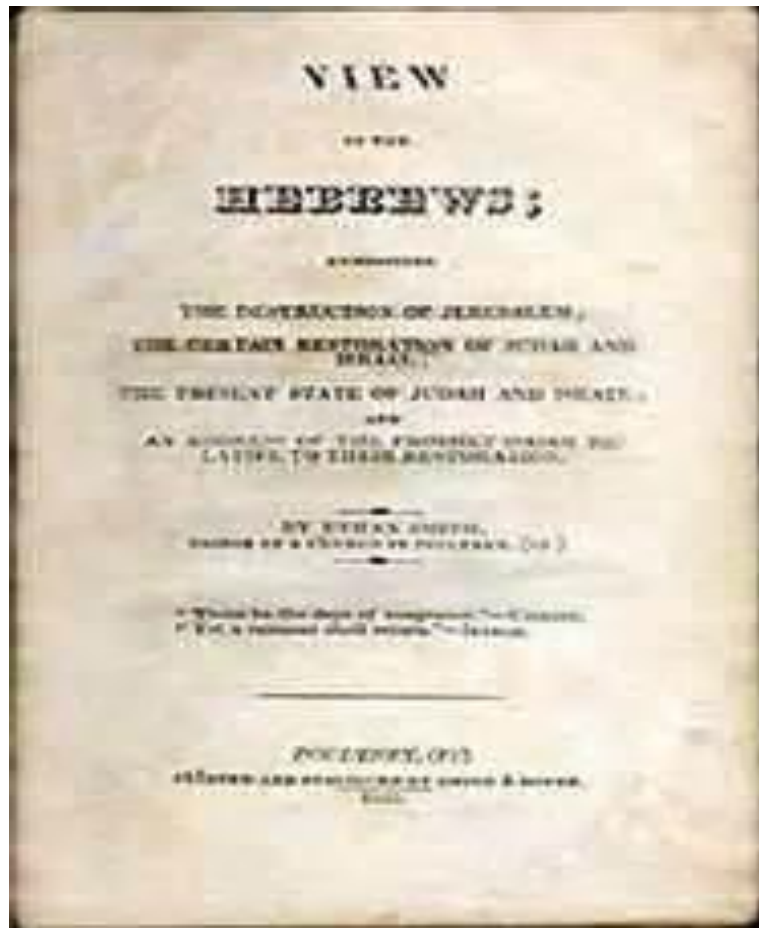
No Mention of a Compass

Solomon Spalding originally wrote a manuscript about 1812, a few years before he died. This manuscript was apparently lost for a number of decades but was eventually found. Within the contents of the existing manuscript, I found no mention of a magnetic compass. Anti-Mormons claim, however, that Solomon Spalding wrote more than one manuscript, and that the main one that correlated with the Book of Mormon narrative was lost.



Ethan Smith 1823

Ethan Smith was a Vermont preacher in the 1820s.



In 1823 Ethan Smith published a book titled *View of the Hebrews or the Tribes of Israel in America*. His book has also been linked with the Book of Mormon. In his book he examined a multitude of similarities between Hebrew culture and the cultural practices among the various Indian tribes. The magnetic compass was not discussed.

1830 Writers

Did Not Mention
Navigational Instrument of Indian ancestors

They Discounted
a Magnetic Compass

In summary, many theories were proposed by pre-1830 North-American writers as to who the ancestors of the North-American Indians were. The idea that these ancestors used a magnetic compass to navigate to the Americas was discussed by some, but only to dismiss the idea. It also seems as though the original Native American origin stories from Mexico and Central America concerning their coming across the sea with a special navigating instrument were generally not mentioned or not given credence by the North-American writers. It is possible that Joseph Smith was acquainted with some of the writers of his time relative to native American Indian origins, but just how many, and when, before 1830 is hard to say. Nevertheless, Joseph certainly would have been acquainted with local lore concerning the Indians.