

# The angel, the gold — and Jose Davila M.

JOSE OCTAVIO DAVILA MORALES owned an onyx shop in Puebla, Mexico, before he married a Bountiful girl and moved to Salt Lake City in the early 1960s.

He's claimed, at various times, to have found gold artifacts and said there are gold plates located in a mountain near Fillmore, Millard County.

Davila hadn't been in Utah long before he heard of a rock in Fillmore, up Chalk Creek, which had a scratched inscription on it. He hastened to the scene and "translated" the inscription, partly with the aid of an outdated 1927 Gardner's Egyptian Grammar found missing from the Brigham Young University library, one BYU source said.

His "translation" told of a secret chamber in the hill containing gold plates and other riches. He claimed the rock had been inscribed by Moroni, one of the last Book of Mormon prophets living in the Americas.

Madeleine Wilson, editor of The Progress, Fillmore's newspaper, said Davila interested "at least 100 people who helped him dig in the mountain" and others who donated money during the excavation from 1963 to 1969.

Local people were partially excited about Davila because the inscription had been there for years, and now it had apparent importance.

"It may have been done in the late 19th century," said BYU's Dr. Hugh Nibley, an expert in ancient languages, "but it is not of ancient origin like Davila suggested."

Nibley said the translation was false.

While in Utah creating excitement over the Fillmore inscription, Davila attempted to raise money for his newly founded "Moroni Archaeological Society."

He and others, over a six-year period, succeeded in sinking a vertical shaft through more than 100 feet of solid rock near the inscribed stone. They found nothing.

In November 1966, after the

owner of the land, Harold Huntsman, had won a court injunction restraining Davila and others from working there, two men were killed.

Soon after the incident, Davila disappeared.

"The next thing we knew," said Matheny, "was that Jose Davila was on national television reading petroglyphs down in Cedar City."

Under the guise that he was working for the BYU Department of Archaeology, Davila had been bulldozing area sites.

Davila returned to Mexico. Dr. Ross Christensen of BYU said Davila was arrested in Puebla on July 6, 1971, for tomb-robbing and other violations of the Mexican antiquities act.

It could not be determined if he is still in jail.

A former Fillmore partner of his, who "doesn't believe in newspapers," maintains that Davila "translated" the inscription correctly. "As far as I'm concerned, it's still no hoax and there are others who believe that, too," he said.

Twice before coming to Utah, Davila had been involved in "gold plate finds."

Two former LDS missionaries told Matheny they'd gone on a one-day expedition with Davila while on their Mexican mission. Davila led them to a mountain where he claimed to have found a cave filled with gold, lowered himself over a ledge by rope, and disappeared into an opening in the cliff face. A few minutes later, the two heard a shot and pulled Davila up. One foot was bleeding. He said an angel had shot him for trying to touch the sacred gold.

In the late 1950s, Matheny said, Davila acquired five of 12 fraudulent "gold plates" that a Mexican medical doctor, Dr. Jesus Padilla, apparently engraved in 1957.

Matheny, who says the plates have sold for several thousand dollars, called these plates a fraud — "recently manufactured" — in a 19-page unpublished report on the subject.



The symbols Jose Davila says he can read.