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# Starting a Pioneer Newspaper : The Deseret News

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# PIONEER

Features

TRUTH WILL PREVAIL: Latter-day Saint Newspapers in Independence, Kirtland, and Nauvoo, by Tiffany Taylor 2 STARTING A PIONEER NEWSPAPER: 8 The Deseret News, by J. Michael Hunter 14 History of the Ramage Press THERE MUST NEEDS BE OPPOSITION IN ALL THINGS: The Salt Lake Tribune, by Jennifer Weiler 20 HEBER VALLEY: 2006 National Encampment 26 chartments 1 President's Message: by Grant E. Barton Pioneer Spotlights: Thomas B. H. Stenhouse, Edward W. Tullidge, by Megan Johnson 28 31 Guest Editorial: by Mary A. Johnson

Letters to the Editor

Legacy Trust Fund Contributors



**COVER PHOTO:** Courtesy Tiffany Taylor. Replica of the Latter-day Saint printing press, currently housed in the restored printing complex in Nauvoo, Illinois (pictured left, courtesy Kenneth R. Mays). 32

33

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#### MISSION STATEMENT

The mission of the National Society of the Sons of Utah Pioneers is to preserve the memory and heritage of the early pioneers of the Utah Territory We honor the pioneers for their faith in God, devotion to family, loyalty to church and country, hard work and service to others, courage in adversity, personal integrity, and unyielding determination.

The society also honors present-day pioneers worldwide in many walks of life who exemplify these same qualities of character. It is further intended to teach these same qualities to the youth who will be tomorrow's pioneers.

# Starting a Pioneer Newspaper:

# THE DESERET NEWS.

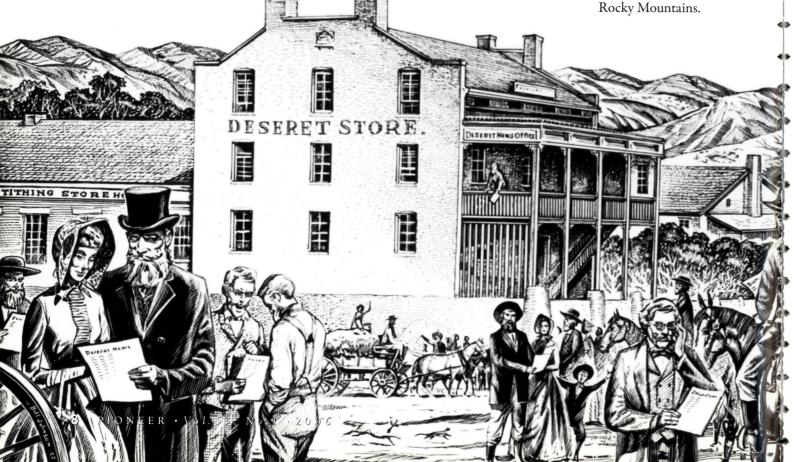
#### By J. Michael Hunter

he Mormon pioneers who arrived in the Salt Lake Valley in 1847 were community builders. Establishing a community of believers was a long-established practice that provided the Latter-day Saints with unity, cooperation, and mutual assistance. Key to any community-building effort was communication, and in nineteenth-century America, the newspaper was an essential means of communication.

In September 1831, Joseph Smith commissioned the first Mormon newspaper in Independence, Missouri. From that day, the Mormons have seldom been without their own newspaper. Even while struggling to cross the plains to the Salt Lake Valley, the Latter-day Saints published the Frontier Guardian in Kanesville, Iowa. Mormon newspapers provided the Saints with religious articles, letters from missionaries, conference

reports, and notices of marriages, births, and deaths as well as local and national news. It is no wonder that even before they arrived, establishing a newspaper in the Salt Lake Valley became a priority for Mormon leaders.

In late March 1847, Brigham Young and other Church leaders held a series of meetings in Winter Quarters, Nebraska. Their purpose was to plan an orderly exodus from Winter Quarters to the settlement of the area around the Great Salt Lake. Discussions concerning the presidents of divisions and captains of companies were followed by a meeting in which William W. Phelps was "authorized to go east and procure a printing press and type" to be taken to the Salt Lake Valley.1 Joseph Smith had commissioned Phelps to start the first Mormon newspaper in Independence, Missouri, in 1831, and now Smith's successor, Brigham Young, was calling on Phelps to establish the first Mormon newspaper in the



Phelps left Winter Quarters for the East in May with two letters signed by Brigham Young and Willard Richards. One letter was addressed to the Latter-day Saints in the United States and Canada, and the other letter was addressed to the trustees of the Church left behind in Nauvoo to dispose of Church property. Both letters encouraged the recipients to assist Phelps in any way possible with securing printing equipment because the Saints who would settle in the Rocky Mountains "cannot live without intelligence, for it is through obedience to that principle they are to receive their exaltation."2

Within a few months, Phelps had enough money to purchase a press in Boston. He returned to Winter Quarters with the press on November 12, 1847. Brigham Young himself had returned from his first trip to the Salt Lake Valley twelve days earlier. The day after arriving, Phelps reported to the Council of the Twelve that he had "obtained a press, type, and paper to take over the mountains."3 The press was described as "a small wrought-iron

📕 📕 illiam W. Phelps, after starting the first Mormon newspaper in Independence, Missouri, in 1831, was now asked by Brigham Young "to go east and procure a printing press and type" to be taken to the Salt Lake Valley to establish the first Mormon newspaper in the **Rocky Mountains.** 

affair, known as the Ramage handpress, and the quantity of type which accompanied it was but small."4

When Brigham Young and a group of Saints left Winter Quarters for the Salt Lake Valley in the spring of 1848, the printing equipment remained behind. Brigham Young wrote, "I am disappointed in not bringing the presses, but I can not avoid it." He explained that he "fully calculated" to bring the press, but decided instead to bring the poor Saints because "their cry was urgent to go to the mountains, and I could neither close my ears nor harden my heart against their earnest appeals."5

By December 1848, the Saints in the Salt Lake Valley were still without a newspaper, and in a letter to Orson Pratt, George A. Smith and Ezra T. Benson wrote, "The brethren are calling loudly for the printing presses."6 Speaking to the Saints in Kanesville, Iowa, Orson Hyde said, "There are about five tons; it will take two wagons



of five or six yoke of cattle to carry the carding machine and printing press, which we want to go with Brother Egan who starts about the 15th of this month. Now we want the man that has money, oxen or wagons that can go, to come forward and let us know his name." Several came forward to volunteer their time and means. After facing numerous difficulties in crossing streams and rivers, Howard Egan's company arrived in the Salt Lake Valley on August 7, 1848. They had the printing press and "872 bundles of paper."7

Even with the printing equipment in the Valley, it took awhile to get a newspaper started. Church leaders were busy getting people to the Valley, building homes, planting crops, organizing government, and providing for the basic needs of life. Few people had the means to subscribe to a newspaper in those early years. Gathering news was also a problem in the remote Rocky Mountains. Even local news was difficult to gather as the Saints spread out across the valleys of the Wasatch Front.

Nonetheless, a printing shop was established in a little gabled-roofed adobe building on the north side of South Temple Street just east of Main Street. The building was known as "the mint" or "Bullock's Money Mill," since Thomas Bullock had been minting gold coins there since the fall of 1849.8

The Latter-day Saints had set up a provisional government which they called "The State of Deseret" while they attempted to obtain official statehood status from the United States. When the first newspaper in the Rocky Mountains came off the press on June 15, 1850, it was called the Deseret News. It was a modest weekly publication of eight pages, each measuring seven and one-fourth by nine and three-fourths inches. Each page had three columns, and the twenty-four columns in the first issue were devoted almost exclusively to news of the United States Congress. Representatives for the Church were back in Washington trying to secure statehood, and the Saints waited anxiously for news of their political future.9

Willard Richards, the first editor, did his best to gather news. Most of it came from other newspapers,

particularly from the New York Tribune. Salt Lake City was isolated from the rest of the country by rocky roads. swollen rivers, deep snows, burning deserts, and slow travel. It took about thirty-nine days to reach the Valley by wagon train from Kanesville, Iowa, and Kanesville itself was a long way from news centers back East.

Typesetting was also a challenge. Horace K. Whitney lifted each metal letter for each word from a type box and placed it in a stick at a rate of about ten words a minute. Whitney had learned this trade at the Times and Seasons shop back in Nauvoo. Thomas Bullock proofread every word in every column. Brigham H. Young, President Young's nephew, pumped the press and was able to print about two papers per minute. Fourteen-year-old Ellen Richards, an adopted daughter of Willard Richards, folded the papers.

She also ran copy from the editor's home to the printing office.10

It was a team effort, and the Saints in the Salt Lake Valley were grateful to get some news. At first the staff produced only a little over two hundred papers, with papers being distributed at the post office and through a few agents to the outlying areas. Eventually there were enough subscribers to employ a carrier in Salt Lake City. Subscriptions were \$2.50 for six months, but the second issue ran the following notice: "Wanted, at our office, flour, corn meal, butter, cheese, tallow and pork in exchange for the News."11

The editorial policy of the Deseret News championed the United States Constitution and "truth and liberty." It promoted free enterprise, the work ethic, and high moral values. Among its advertising the early News had talks by Church leaders, letters from the mission field, news DESERET NJ about local social and cultural organiza-

tions, as well as obitu-

aries and poetry. Brigham Young took a keen interest in the News. Ed Howe, a non-Mormon who later became a noted newspaperman in Kansas, worked several months as a typesetter for the Deseret News. He wrote: "One day [Brigham Young] came into the News office, the occasion being publication of some sort of Church report, and he called at the composing

Deseret News presented to the people the Deseret Alphabet. They reported that "the more it is practised . . . the more useful and beneficial it will appear."

## The first "Deseret News" in the Rocky Mountains came off the press on June 15, 1850. It was a modest weekly publication of eight pages with Willard Richards as the first editor.

room with the business manager looking up some detail. I had worked on the report, and produced the copy they were looking for. The prophet seemed to question some of the figures, and wanted to see whether I had followed copy. It turned out that I had, and there was no correction. 'You're right, and I'm wrong,' he said, patting my shoulder, which I thought a good deal from the head of the Mormon Church."12

GREAT SALT LAKE CITY. WEDNESDAY. FEBRUARY 23, 1859.

Left: On June 29, 1859, the



Keeping the Deseret News going was a constant struggle. One of the first big challenges was the lack of paper. Transporting paper from St. Louis to Salt Lake City was so expensive it threatened the profitability of the newspaper. Due to high freight rates, paper which could be purchased back East for \$3.00 or \$4.00 a ream was from \$18.00 to \$20.00 in Salt Lake City.13 Church leaders decided that the only way the newspaper could be saved was to produce their own paper in the Valley. In November 1850, Richards printed an urgent plea in the News: "RAGS! RAGS!! RAGS!!! Save your rags, everybody in Deseret save your rags; old wagon covers, tents, quilts, shirts, etc., etc., are wanted for paper. The most efficient measures are in progress to put a paper mill in operation the coming season, in the valley, and all your rags will be wanted."14

In 1850, Thomas Howard, a skilled papermaker from England joined the Church. He was rushed to Utah in 1851,

where Brigham Young appointed him to supervise the construction of a paper mill in Big Cottonwood Canyon. Sidney Roberts, a man who had some experience in constructing sawmills, was appointed to assist him.<sup>15</sup>

In the meantime, Willard Richards kept the paper going with irregular issues and then stretching to threeweek intervals. Richards pleaded for cash "to purchase paper" or for "such articles as will sustain the office." He

### NOTIONS

WOODMANSEE & BROTHER. Suitable for the Season, in addition to DEALERS IN DRY GOODS, GROCERIES and GENERAL MERCI ANDISE. our Stock of STORAGE AND COMMISSION MERCHANTS. wif Fire-Proof Building, Main Street MERCHANDISE **GENHHAL** A. C. BECKWITH, ECHO CITY. Which we have also Opposite the Depot. Dealer in GROCERIES, PROVISIONS, LIQUORS, Largely Replenished. DRY GOODS, CLOTHING, BOOTS, SHOES, HATS, CAPS, Etc. Highest price paidfor FURS. w42-3m WE WILL SIXTH QUORUM OF SEVEN-EXCHANGE FOR RAILROAD PAPER. DRIED TIES. A LL Members of said Quorum residing out-side of this City, desirous of retaining their membership, are requested to report them-serves immediately to the clerk. G. D. KEATON, PEACHES, GRAIN AND FLOUR. Woodmansee & Bro. Salt Lake City, Dec 9th, 1869. w 15-4 BUCK'S PATENT FURNITURE

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Admission, 25c. Children, 10c. TRIENDE OF POTENCE and of the PRO-GIRSH of the TERRITORY will oblige me by PERSEEVING ANIMALS and BIEDS indigenous to the Rocky Mountains, as I will gad W PURCHASS them. If any prefer to OONTRIBUTE rather than sell, they will not be related. FORELGN and DOMESTIC OU-BIGGITIES of overy kind that will add to the INTELLST and UNKF ULN EST of the WOBSUM WILL, HE RECEVEND and POOPETY cared, for and the DONOR'S name INSOLUBED on procimans CONTRIBUTED. AG The Public are especially requested to preserve LIVE SPECIMENS of MOUNTAIN HIERP, PANTHER and BLACK FOX, they being so rately met with. For further particulars inquire of G. G. R.

For further particulars inquire of G. G. R. RANGIOVANNI, at MUHEUM, or at my real-dence, opposite the City Hall. w/MI - JOHN W. YOUNG.

began to openly question whether the News would survive. To his readers, Richards wrote, "We are ever ready and willing to do all we can to comfort, bless, edify, and instruct and do good to the Saints but we are not sufficiently versed in chemistry to convert the earth into gold.... The Saints can have the News again, if they wish, by making cash payments in advance, with which to purchase paper."16 In the midst of all of this, Richards oversaw the moving of the News from the old mint shack to the Deseret Store Building, a three-story adobe structure on the northeast corner of South Temple and Main streets.<sup>17</sup>

By October 1851, Howard and Roberts had prepared a draft of the machinery and commenced construction of the mill. Church leaders started a campaign to collect rags for Howard's use. In December 1851, the News had a notice asking for "ropes made of hemp, or flax, or paper hangings, or waste paper of all descriptions, and rags of all colors, of every name and denomination, either cotton, linen or woolen." Any contribution to the cause would be accepted as tithing. Bishops were designated as rag agents to help facilitate the cause.<sup>18</sup>

The process of producing paper in the Salt Lake Valley was slow and arduous. For months, Howard and Roberts tried to construct a paper plant using makeshift materials, which proved unsatisfactory. The dismal situation finally turned around in 1853, when the Church purchased a paper machine for \$8,500. Howard also obtained permission to use some of the machinery that had been brought to the Valley for sugar manufacturing to set up a papermaking operation on Temple Square.<sup>19</sup>

Unfortunately, Willard Richards, a sick man, would not live to see the first homemade paper in the Valley. Richards had worn himself out with all of his responsibilities as a Church leader. He died in March 1854. The first News issue containing homemade paper was produced on 22 June 1854. However,

Richards was spared the frustration that his successor, Albert Carrington, faced. The paper was dark gray and thick. "Readers could almost see the buttonholes in the shirts that went into the paper."20 The shades varied from page to page.

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Carrington was unapologetic. "Dark gray is better than

no paper," he told News readers, and he then went about carrying on the work started by Richards.<sup>21</sup> He explained, "We design facing the music under the same banner, pursuing the same policy."22 In June 1854, the News offices moved from the Deseret Store Building to the Tithing Office Building, a low adobe structure on the east side of Main Street just north of South Temple Street.<sup>23</sup> In November, Carrington had a cut of a beehive placed over the editorial column. Other than a few simple symbols used in business advertising, this was the only illustration that appeared in the News in the 1850s.

Thousands of emigrants from Great Britain came to Utah in the 1850s, and Carrington made sure that the News covered happenings in Britain. The News also began to carry more reports from the growing communities spreading throughout the Territory of Utah. Its pages were full of useful information like crop conditions, civic improvements, local manufacturing, and church activities. In 1856, the News found a new home in the Council House, a square, two-story structure with red sandstone and adobe walls on the southwest corner of Main and South Temple streets.<sup>24</sup>

By 1858, there were Deseret News agents in thirtyeight settlements in Utah, and there were agents in San Francisco and San Bernardino, California. Also, agents were in Genoa, Nevada; Fort Malad, Idaho; St. Louis; New York City; and Liverpool, England. The newspaper was appearing every week with eight pages to each issue.<sup>25</sup>

Just as things were looking up a little, national events threatened not only the Deseret News, but the entire Utah Territory. In April 1857, U.S. President Buchanan mobilized an army of 2,500 infantry, artillery, and dragoons under the eventual command of General Albert Sidney Johnston to replace Brigham Young with Alfred Cumming as territorial governor and to reestablish law

ELIAS SMITH .... EDITOR AND PUBLISHER

and southern Utah.<sup>26</sup> George Q. Cannon took the Deseret News printing equipment 148 miles south of Salt Lake City to Fillmore, which had once served as the territorial capital. The News operation was set up in the northeast room of the old statehouse basement. Only one wing, a red sandstone, twostory building, was ever completed of the statehouse before the capital was moved back to Salt Lake City. The first Fillmore edition of the News came out on May 5, 1858.27 Meanwhile, Thomas L. Kane, an influential Pennsylvanian and friend of the Mormons, offered to serve as mediator between the U.S. government and the Mormons. Kane persuaded Cumming to come to Salt Lake City without the army. Church leaders agreed to accept Cumming and a permanent army garrison in exchange for peace and amnesty. Johnston's army marched through a largely deserted Salt Lake City on June 26, 1858, and went on to build Camp Floyd forty miles to the southwest.

Residents returned to Salt Lake City. In September 1858, George Q. Cannon packed up the press equipment and headed back to the city. The News returned to its home in the Council House and began operations again. The water-powered paper mill that had been working on the temple block was not replaced. The plant had been dismantled, and the engine and some of the machinery sent to Cedar City for use in the iron works.

Four Doors South of Jennings' Old Stand. MAIN STREET.

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and order in Utah Territory. A series of miscommunications and false statements by federally appointed Utah officials led Buchanan to believe that Utah was in open rebellion against the United States.

Brigham Young declared martial law in September 1857 and mobilized the Nauvoo Legion (the local

militia) to counter the approaching force. On March 23, 1858, Govenor Young announced that all settlements in northern Utah must be abandoned and prepared for burning if the army came in. The evacuation started immediately. Approximately 30,000 Latter-Saints moved fifty miles or more to Provo and other towns in central

However, the Church had not given up on papermaking. Two paper engines and a 36-inch Gravite

cylinder machine, valued at approximately \$25,000, were carried to the Valley in 1860. After the completion of the new paper mill in 1861, George Goddard was called on a "Rag Mission." President Young asked Goddard to visit every settlement in the Valley "for the purpose of gathering up whatever might be obtained convertible into printing paper." Goddard wrote: "[This calling] was a severe blow to my native pride. . . . But after being known in the community for years, as a merchant and auctioneer, and then to be seen on the streets going from door to door with a basket on one arm and an empty sack on the other, enquiring for rags at every house. Oh, what a change in the aspect of affairs.... When President Young first made the proposition, the humiliating prospect almost stunned me, but a few moments' reflection reminded me that I came to the valleys of the mountains from my native country, England, for the purpose of doing the will of my Heavenly Father, my time and means must be at His disposal. I therefore answered President Young in the affirmative, and for over three years, from Franklin, Idaho, in the north, and Sanpete in the south, my labors extended, not only visiting many hundreds of houses during the week days, but preaching rag sermons on Sunday. The first time I ever spoke in the Tabernacle, Salt Lake City, ... was a rag discourse and Presidents Brigham Young and Heber C. Kimball backed it up with their testimony and enlarged upon it."28

At the end of his three-year mission, Goddard had collected more than 100,000 pounds of rags. In 1862, the *News* returned to the Deseret Store Building. It would remain here until 1903.<sup>29</sup> By 1867, the *News* office was not only producing a weekly newspaper but had added a daily called the *Deseret Evening News.* That same year, the task of rag collection was assigned to the Relief Society.

On May 10, 1869, the *News* covered one of the biggest stories of the century, occurring in its

Left: The Ramage press that printed the first edition of the Deseret News was hauled across the plains by wagon and is now on permanent display on the fourth floor of the Deseret News Building. The Deseret News Building was finished in 1851 on the northwest corner of Main Street and South Temple. It was originally used as the Presiding Bishop's office and the tithing storehouse. The Deseret News resided at this location from 1861–1901.

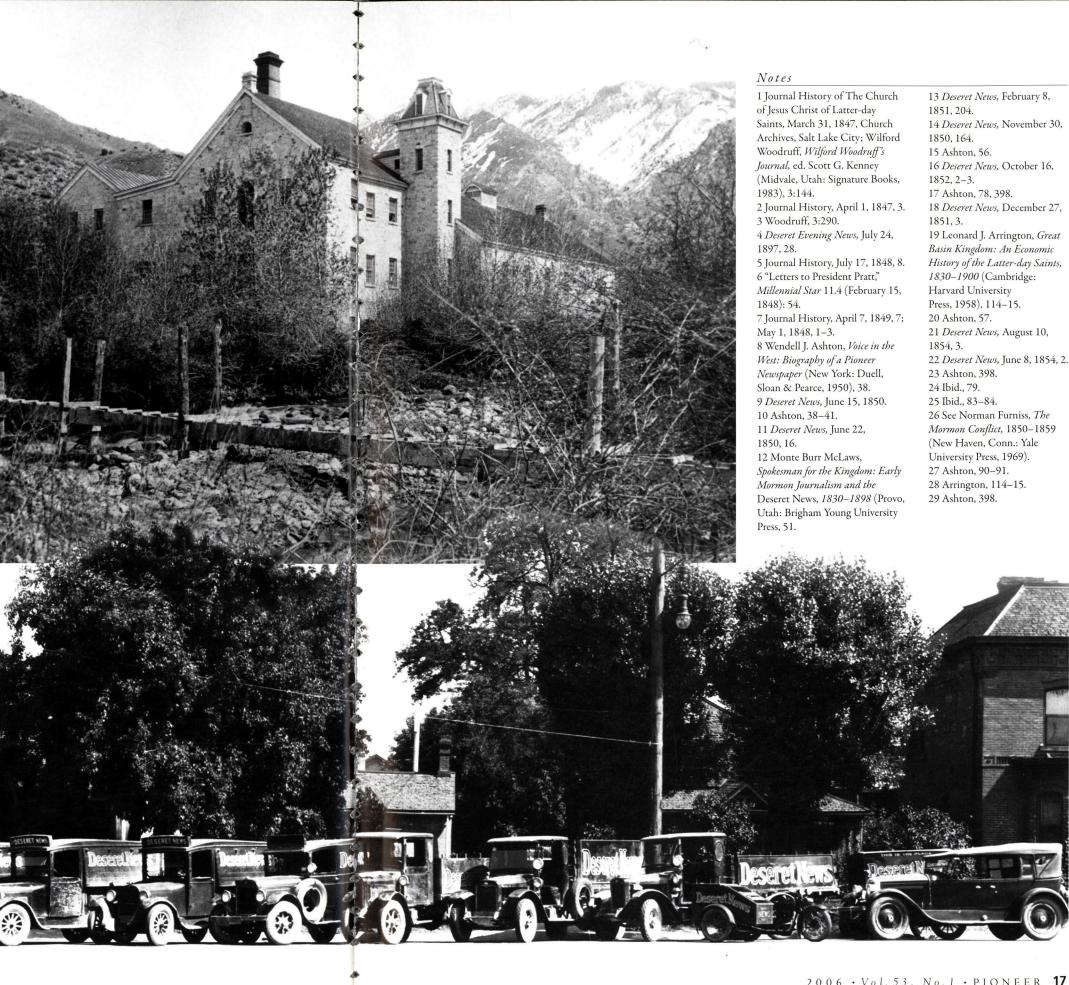
**THE RAMAGE:** a wooden handpress with iron platen, was built in 1820 by Scottish-born Adam Ramage (1772–1850), who sought, in his own words, "to render the hand press efficient, simple in construction, and moderate in price." Ramage "became widely known as the maker of inexpensive, durable, well-made wooden presses that were ideally suited for smaller country newspaper offices." Improvements on his wooden press eventually made it the most popular press in the early years of the nineteenth century. He built presses in three sizes, a full-size common press, a mid-sized "screw press," and a table-top foolscap press. Eventually making presses completely of iron, Ramage, by 1837, was reported to have manufactured over 1250 presses of all kinds and continued manufacturing them until his death at the age of seventy-eight. —*http://www.oneart.com/briarpress/index.shtml* 



own backyard—the completion of the transcontinental railway at Promontory Summit, Utah. The date of this event is used by historians to mark the end of Utah's pioneer era. Immigrants no longer had to walk across the plains; they could ride a train to Utah. For the Deseret News, the pioneer era had perhaps ended eight years earlier when the Transcontinental Telegraph line converged in Salt Lake City in October 1861. News that had once taken months to reach the Deseret News editors was now reaching the editors in lighting time. While many obstacles would confront the News in the years ahead, the two main pioneer obstacles—shortages of paper and slow news-gathering resources-had pretty much been overcome by the end of the 1860s.

Having overcome great obstacles to survive, the Deseret News grew to be a major news source in the Rocky Mountain West and made significant contributions to community-building along the Wasatch Front. As one of the first twenty newspapers founded west of the Missouri River, the News is one of only two that still exists. 🗖

Upper center: The old paper mill at the mouth of Big Cottonwood Canyon was erected in 1882-83 by the Church in order to supply paper for the Deseret News. The machinery for the mill came from the sugar mill in Sugar House. Below: By the 1920s Deseret News trucks lined-up waiting for the papers to roll off the press to deliver copies to outlying areas.



Visuals: Deseret Store engraving (8); old paper mill (16–17); 1902 Deseret News Building (18); newsboys (18); Tribune newsstand (20–21); Godbe and Harrison portraits (22); early miner (23); Union Vedette and Connor photo (24); 1924 Tribune Building (25); Stenhouse and Tullidge photos (28–29); small newsstand (28); Snow and Gates portraits (30–31), © courtesy Utah State Historical Society. Photo of 1859 Deseret News (10); first edition of Deseret News painting by Paul Clowes (11); newspaper ads and engraving (12–13); Ramage printing press photo (14); and 1920 Deseret News trucks (16–17), © courtesy Deseret News. W. W. Phelps photo (9); early magazines (30–31), courtesy Church Archives, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Main Street, ca. 1900 (14–15), © by Ken Baxter. Mine at Mammoth, Utah, 1932 (22–23), by B. F. Larsen, courtesy Springville Museum of Art.

Right: The Deseret News moved across the street to the southwest corner of Main Street and South Temple in 1902 (later known as the Union Pacific Building) and resided there for a quarter of a century. During the 1900s most downtown papers were sold by newsboys (pictured below). About fifty newsboys sold papers on Salt Lake's street corners for 5 cents a piece—making a profit of 75 cents or more on really good days.