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## The Deseret Alphabet Experiment

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# Y A J S O I L L J L P J B J L.

<i>Long Sounds.</i>			Letter.	Name.	Sound.
Letter.	Name.	Sound.	T	.....	p
Ə	e.....as in	eat.	B	.....	b
E	a	ate.	T	.....	t
Ə	ah	art.	D	.....	d
Ə	aw	aught.	C	.....che..as in..	cheese.
O	o	oat.	G	.....	g
Ō	oo	ooze.	K	.....	k
<i>Short Sounds of the above.</i>			G	.....ga...as in...	gate.
†	.....as in.....	it.	F	.....	f
↓	"	et.	V	.....	v
↓	"	at.	L	.....eth...as in..	thigh.
↓	"	ot.	Y	.....the	" thy.
↓	"	ut.	S	.....	s
q	"	book.	Z	.....	z
đ	i.....as in	ice.	D	.....esh...as in..	flesh.
Ə	ow	owl.	S	.....zhe	" vision.
W	woo		F	.....ur	" burn.
Y	ye		L	.....	l
Y	h		J	.....	m
			H	.....	n
			W	.....eng.as in..	length.

Published throughout the 1860s, the Deseret Alphabet contained thirty-eight characters, one for each sound in the English language.

# The Deseret Alphabet Experiment

*Richard G. Moore*

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Elder George Q. Cannon wrote, “The Kingdom of God is a separate organization from the Church of God.”<sup>1</sup> To the Prophet Joseph Smith and the early Saints, the Restoration of the gospel was more than just the creation of another Christian church. It was the return of God’s kingdom to the earth. This kingdom not only was to be religious in nature but was to influence and improve virtually all aspects of life—political, economic, social, and educational. Because the Lord instructed that “it is not meet that I should command in all things” and “men should be anxiously engaged in a good cause, and do many things of their own free will” (D&C 58:26–27), we can find in Church history a number of movements or experiments designed to improve society as part of building the kingdom of God. Some of these ideas were directly revealed from God, while others were ideas Church leaders came up with “of their own free will.” The layout of city plans, the United Order, and the minting of their own money were all part of the bigger picture of building a Zion society.

As Church president and governor of the Territory of Utah, Brigham Young was involved with numerous projects calculated to develop all areas of God’s kingdom on the earth. He once said, “We will continue to improve the whole science of truth; for that is our business; our religion circumscribes all things, and we should be prepared to take hold of whatever will be a benefit and blessing to us.”<sup>2</sup> President Young was the driving force behind Mormonism’s experiment in alphabet reform and the creation of the Deseret Alphabet.

The Mormon pioneers began to arrive in the Great Basin during the summer of 1847. Over the next several years, the struggle for survival overshadowed all other concerns. Yet in the midst of that struggle, when the first settlers were not five years in the valley, Church leaders were considering an ambitious idea for orthographic reform—renovating the written English language.

The concept of revising language symbols was not original with the Latter-day Saints but was fairly common during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.<sup>3</sup> In Great Britain, a man named Isaac Pitman developed a shorthand system that he published and began to teach in 1837. Pitman designed a phonetic system that consisted of having a character for every sound in the English language, thus doing away with spelling inconsistencies.

Considered the father of modern orthographic reform, Pitman generated numerous followers, as well as many imitators with their own systems of alphabet revision. George D. Watt was an avid student of the shorthand system devised by Pitman. Watt was born in Manchester, England, where he was raised by his mother, his father having immigrated to America. He moved to Preston, England, as an adult. In Preston he met and married Mollie Gregson and came in contact with missionaries from The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. On Sunday, July 30, 1837, George and his wife, along with some others, were baptized into the Church. George outran another man to win the honor of being baptized first, thus becoming the first Latter-day Saint convert in Great Britain.<sup>4</sup>

Watt immigrated to the United States and settled in Nauvoo, Illinois, where he used his shorthand skills to report discourses given by Church leaders. Watt also taught phonography (shorthand) classes in Nauvoo. He was referred to in the Nauvoo newspaper *Times and Seasons* as a professor of phonography.<sup>5</sup> Among those who studied shorthand under his direction were Brigham Young, Heber C. Kimball, Orson Pratt, and Wilford Woodruff.<sup>6</sup>

George Watt was sent back to England in 1846 to serve as a missionary and to further his study of phonography. During the hectic time when Brigham Young was preparing for the difficult trek to the Great Basin, Young sent a letter to Watt indicative of the Church leader's strong interest in a new orthographic system. Brigham Young wrote, "It is the wish of the council, that you procure 200 lbs. of phonotype, or thereabouts, as you may find necessary, to print a small book for the benefit of the saints . . . and cause same to be forwarded to Winter Quarters before navigation closes, by some trusty brother on his return so that we may have the type to use next winter."<sup>7</sup>

Although this particular plan was never completed, it is apparent that the intention of Church leaders, particularly Brigham Young, was to create and use a new alphabet to simplify the English language. The determination to develop a new form of English would continue with President Young and others into the valleys of Utah and would pave the way for an alphabet unique to the Saints.

After arriving in the Salt Lake Valley, the Saints immediately began to build homes, establish farms and ranches, and face the challenge of surviving in this new, sometimes hostile, environment. However unsettled or unstable their society may have been at that time, education was still a high priority in the minds of the Saints and their leaders. On February 28, 1850, the legislature of the provisional state passed an ordinance incorporating the University of Deseret. During that session, the legislature elected the university's first chancellor, Orson Spencer, a board of regents, and a treasurer.<sup>8</sup>

The University of Deseret Board of Regents began meeting in March 1850. At the second meeting, held at the home of board member Parley P. Pratt, on March 20, the regents discussed reforming English so "that spelling and Pronunciation should be the same." Brigham Young "gave his views upon the subject and placed it upon the Regency to do and act by the spirit of Wisdom."

It is obvious from early discourses by President Young that he had a tremendous interest in "correcting" the written form of the English language. He may have been considering the possibility of altering the spoken word as well by simplifying certain aspects of the language. Brigham Young felt that there were too many words to express the same idea, and he was in favor of standardizing word usage. Following an apparently difficult-to-understand speech given by Orson Spencer on April 8, 1852, President Young expressed his views:

Brother Spencer has used language quite beyond your reach. Well, I have the foundation, and he can make the building. When he commences the building, I have asked the Board of Regents to cast out from their system of education, the present orthography and written form of our language, that when my children are taught the graphic sign for A, it may always represent that individual sound only. But as it now is, the child is perplexed that the sign A should have one sound in *mate*, a second sound in *father*, a third sound in *fall*, and a fourth sound in *man*, and a fifth sound in *many*, and, in other combinations, sounding different from these, while, in others, A is not sounded at all. I say, let it have one sound all the time. And when P is introduced into a word, let it not be silent as in *Phthisic*, or sound like F in *Physic*, and let two not be placed instead of one in apple.

I ask, have the great and learned men completed their education? No, they are ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth. Let the Board of Regents commence on the proper foundation, that when we have learned a great while, we may find to our satisfaction, we have at last come to the knowledge of the truth.

The English language, in its *written* and *printed* form, is one of the most prominent now in use for absurdity, yet as a vehicle in which to convey our ideas *verbally*, it is one of the best, for extent and variety it goes before, and far beyond, any other. Its variety is what I dislike. The schools in the Southern, New England, and Eastern States, all teach the English language, yet the same ideas are conveyed with entirely different classes of words, by these separate communities. If there were one set of words to convey one set of ideas, it would put an end to the ambiguity which often mystifies the ideas given in the languages now spoken. Then when a great man delivered a learned lecture on any subject, we could understand his words, for there would be only one word with the same meaning, instead of a multiplicity of words all meaning the same thing, as is the case now. For instance, there are men in this house so technical in their feelings with regard to their choice of words, that when their ideas are formed, and they commence to convey them, they will stop in the middle of a sentence, and introduce another set of words to convey the same idea. If I can speak so that you can get my meaning, I care not so much what words I use to convey that meaning.<sup>10</sup>

In a message delivered to the members of the council and the house of representatives of the Utah legislature on December 13, 1853, Governor Brigham Young stated:

While the world is progressing with steam engine power, and lightning speed, in the accumulation of wealth, extension of science, communication and dissemination of letters and principle, why may not the way be paved for the easier acquisition of the English language? . . . The correction of its orthography, upon some principle of having characters to represent the sounds which we use, has occupied the attention of many scientific gentlemen from time to time, but through lack of influence, energy, or some other cause, they have failed to accomplish so desirable an object. If something of this nature could be introduced which could be brought into general use, I consider it would be of great utility in the acquirement of our language. I am happy to learn that the Regency are deeply engaged in investigating this interesting subject; and hope that ere long, they may be able to produce something that will prove highly beneficial.<sup>11</sup>

The subject of language reform was often discussed at the board meetings, and they made several attempts to create a new writing system. The members of that board could not agree among themselves whether they wanted to use a phonetic system, use the current Roman symbols in a different manner, create an entirely new set of symbols, or keep the old alphabet intact. Willard Richards wanted a completely new

alphabet because he felt it would cause the learner confusion if the old alphabet symbols were simply jumbled around.<sup>12</sup>

During November and December of 1853, “the board labored and investigated the matter of a new alphabet diligently, then they adopted unanimously the alphabet presented by their committee.”<sup>13</sup> The alphabet that the regents decided upon became known as the Deseret Alphabet.

It is not known where the actual characters of the Deseret Alphabet originated. Historians have proposed several theories, suggesting that the characters were taken from Ethiopian or other ancient alphabets, from Pitman’s phonetic system, or even from reformed Egyptian symbols found on the Book of Mormon plates. A comparison of Deseret Alphabet characters and other alphabets suggests that, although there may be some similarities, the Deseret Alphabet is for the most part original.<sup>14</sup> A majority of scholars believe that George D. Watt was the principal creator of the Deseret Alphabet characters.<sup>15</sup>

The Deseret Alphabet contained thirty-eight characters, one character for each sound in the English language.<sup>16</sup> The January 19, 1854, edition of the *Deseret News* reported:

The Board of Regents, in company with the Governor and heads of departments, have adopted a new Alphabet, consisting of 38 characters. The Board have had frequent sittings this winter, with the sanguine hope of simplifying the English language, and especially its orthography. After many fruitless attempts to render the common alphabet of the day subservient to their purpose, they found it expedient to invent an entirely new and original set of characters.

These characters are much more simple in their structure than the usual alphabetical characters; every superfluous mark supposable, is wholly excluded from them. The written and printed hand are substantially merged in one.

We may derive a hint of the advantage to orthography, from spelling the word *eight*, which in the new alphabet only requires two letters instead of five to spell it, viz: AT. There will be a great saving of time and paper by the use of the new characters; and but a very small part of the time and expense will be requisite in obtaining a knowledge of the language.

The orthography will be so abridged that an ordinary writer can probably write one hundred words a minute with ease, and consequently report the speech of a common speaker without much difficulty.

As soon as this alphabet can be set in type, it will probably be furnished to the schools of the Territory for their use and benefit; not however with a view to immediately supersede the use of the common alphabet—which though it does not make the comers thereunto perfect, still it is a vehicle that has become venerable for age and much hard service.

In the new alphabet every letter has a fixed and unalterable sound; and every word is spelt with reference to given sounds. By this means,

strangers can not only acquire a knowledge of our language much more readily, but a practised reporter can also report a strange tongue so that the strange language when spoken can be legible by one conversant with the tongue.<sup>17</sup>

In the “Eleventh General Epistle of the Presidency of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, to the Saints,” issued April 10, 1854, the First Presidency stated:

The Regency have formed a new Alphabet, which it is expected will prove highly beneficial, in acquiring the English language, to foreigners, as well as the youth of our country. We recommend it to the favourable consideration of the people, and desire that all of our teachers and instructors will introduce it in their schools and to their classes. The orthography of the English language needs reforming—*a word to the wise is sufficient*.<sup>18</sup>

In December of 1854, Brigham Young spoke to the territorial legislature, stating that it was an opportune time to introduce the Deseret Alphabet. He recommended “that it be thoroughly and extensively taught in all the schools.”<sup>19</sup> Before this speech was delivered, B. B. Messenger was already teaching the new alphabet at a Farmington, Utah, evening school. The following spring, Messenger taught the Deseret Alphabet to the clerks of the Church Historian’s Office, after which some Church records were written using the new system.<sup>20</sup>

A number of schools taught the Deseret Alphabet during 1855, including an evening class in Salt Lake City and John B. Milner’s classes in Provo, Lehi, American Fork, Mountainville, and Pleasant Grove.<sup>21</sup> One of the difficulties of teaching the Deseret Alphabet at this time was that there were no printed materials except an 1854 broadside with the new alphabet characters and their pronunciations.<sup>22</sup> Plans were under way to have type made and books published in the Deseret Alphabet. In a December 1855 letter to Franklin D. Richards, Brigham Young wrote: “We contemplate having a set of school books printed at the Liverpool office, in the new alphabet; we would like to have you inform us in relation to getting up a font of type, and whether we will have to send any person to Liverpool for that purpose, or to oversee the printing of books, the manuscript of course being furnished from this territory. It is our intention to introduce this system in the schools throughout the territory.”<sup>23</sup>

Several attempts were made to create Deseret Alphabet type, both locally and through an order to a St. Louis foundry.<sup>24</sup> Although local efforts failed, the type made in St. Louis was used to print sections of the *Deseret News* in the new alphabet for a number of months.<sup>25</sup> But Brigham

Young was still not pleased with the quality of the St. Louis fonts. President Young was also convinced that the alphabet had not reached its completed state and “intended to have a new set cast, but would wait until the former had been thoroughly revised and improved.”<sup>26</sup>

The movement for alphabetic reform lost its impetus for a time because of other more pressing matters. With the coming of Johnston’s army and the Utah War, followed by the Civil War, the push to have the Deseret Alphabet published and taught was neglected and nearly abandoned. During the mid-1860s, a renewed interest in phonography stimulated promoters of the Deseret Alphabet to revitalize their efforts. On February 12, 1868, the *Deseret News* reported that “a full board of regents met in President Young’s office, and discussed the best form of characters to be used for a phonetic alphabet. A reconsideration of the Pitman alphabet drew forth a universal expression in favor of our characters, known as the Deseret Alphabet, as being better adapted for printing and writing. . . . A motion was made to take the necessary measures to introduce it in printed works.”<sup>27</sup>

Orson Pratt was given the assignment of preparing elementary texts to be printed in the Deseret Alphabet. David O. Calder was sent to New York City to oversee the printing of Pratt’s completed manuscript.<sup>28</sup> The August 13, 1868, edition of the *Deseret News* reported that a specimen copy of the new primer had been printed. The book contained thirty-six pages, and although “the characters, to a person unaccustomed to them, may look strange . . . to the eye to which they are familiar they are beautiful.”<sup>29</sup>

Two elementary readers, or primers, were published for the Deseret University by the Russell Brothers Publishing Company in New York. Ten thousand copies of each volume were printed and shipped to Salt Lake City. At the 1868 October general conference, Brigham Young said to the congregation:

We have now many thousands of small books, called the first and second readers, adapted to school purposes, on the way to this city. As soon as they arrive we shall distribute them throughout the Territory. We wish to introduce this alphabet into our schools, consequently we give this public notice. We have been contemplating this for years. The advantages of this alphabet will soon be realized, especially by foreigners. Brethren who come here knowing nothing of English language will find its acquisition greatly facilitated by means of this alphabet, by which all the sounds of the language can be represented and expressed with the greatest ease. As this is the grand difficulty foreigners experience in learning the English language, they will find a knowledge of this alphabet will greatly facilitate their efforts in acquiring at least a partial

English education. It will also be very advantageous to our children. It will be the means of introducing uniformity in our orthography, and the years that are now required to learn to read and spell can be devoted to other studies.<sup>30</sup>

A number of errors were found in the two primers, and Orson Pratt, George D. Watt, and R. L. Campbell served on a committee to make corrections. An errata sheet was printed to include in each book.<sup>31</sup> Orson Pratt was also assigned to transliterate the Book of Mormon into the Deseret Alphabet, a project he completed in the spring of 1869. Pratt then went to New York to have the books printed.<sup>32</sup> The board of regents planned to publish the Book of Mormon in three parts, for use in the schools of the territory, and a complete Book of Mormon in one volume for use in the home.<sup>33</sup>

Following the publication of the two primers, eight thousand copies of part one of the Book of Mormon were published in 1869. The second two parts of the Book of Mormon were never printed. A complete Book of Mormon was published in 1869, but only about five hundred copies were printed. All four books were advertised for sale in the *Deseret News*. The first primer sold for fifteen cents, the second for twenty cents. The family edition, (the complete) Book of Mormon sold for two dollars, and part one of the proposed three-volume set cost seventy-five cents.<sup>34</sup>

Brigham Young may have believed that conditions were right for the success of alphabet reform. Latter-day Saints were isolated from the rest of the nation during their early years in the Great Basin, making the creation and adoption of a new alphabet more feasible. The Saints were united as a people in the exodus to the West and the colonization efforts, and most of the Saints seemed willing to follow the instructions of Church leaders. But for whatever reason, though encouraged and promoted by some Church and educational leaders, the Deseret Alphabet generated little interest among most teachers and students.

By the latter part of 1870, the *Deseret News* was no longer advertising the sale of Deseret Alphabet books. During the 1870s, the alphabet was mentioned less and less until interest in it had virtually disappeared.

In 1877, Orson Pratt was sent to England to have the Book of Mormon and the Doctrine and Covenants printed, not in the Deseret Alphabet, but in the Pitman phonotype system.<sup>35</sup> Evidently, Brigham Young still had an interest in orthographic reform, but the Deseret Alphabet experiment had come to an end. When Brigham Young died in August 1877, so did plans to have books printed in the Pitman system.

## Reading, Writing, and Speaking Deseret

In its formative stages, the Deseret Alphabet varied in characters from as many as forty-three to the thirty-eight that became the alphabet's standard. All printed materials were done with the thirty-eight-character alphabet. Each of the characters had only one form, there being no difference between capital and lowercase letters except for size. It was decided not to have any tops, tails, or dots on any of the characters so that the type would last longer without wearing out. Only a few familiar characters from the Roman alphabet remained, and in most cases the sounds represented by these characters were different in the new alphabet.<sup>36</sup>

Because the Deseret Alphabet was a phonetic system, the creators simply assigned characters to specific sounds. By reading the characters of the Deseret Alphabet, one can see how words were pronounced by the people of that territory at that time, or at least the pronunciation of those who created the alphabet. It is interesting to note that the word *Deseret* was transcribed differently than the common pronunciation today. While most people today pronounce it “de-ze-ret,” the pronunciation from the new characters would make it “de-see-ret.” Other pronunciations found in the Deseret Alphabet readers, which are still common in some areas of Utah, are harse (horse), farbid (forbid), shart (short), barn (born), and archurd (orchard). Other unusual pronunciations include nur-see-ri (nursery), e-nee-mi (enemy), and to-urds (towards).

Some people have suggested that the Deseret Alphabet is the cause of some of the unusual accents found in Utah.<sup>37</sup> With the little attention given the Deseret Alphabet and even less use, this is highly unlikely. It is more probable that some of the people who settled the Great Basin area already had this accent. These spellings, symbolized by Deseret Alphabet characters, reflect pronunciations in the Utah Territory at that time. It is doubtful that the Deseret Alphabet can be given any credit (or blame) for perpetuating this accent. Children typically learn to speak by listening to their parents speak—the accent is passed from one generation to the next.

## How the Deseret Alphabet Was Used

Evidence suggests that the new alphabet was not taught or used to any great extent. Some classes were taught, and a few journal entries from teachers and pupils describe their experience with teaching and learning the Deseret Alphabet. As mentioned earlier, only four books were ever published in the new alphabet, and the *Deseret News* advertised these books on sale with discounted prices, perhaps implying that they

sold poorly. Indeed, boxes of the unsold primers were found in the late 1950s and were sold for fifty cents each.<sup>38</sup>

In addition to its use in the publications mentioned above, the Deseret Alphabet was used by a few people to write in their journals. Some Church records were kept in the new alphabet, including Brigham Young's ledger and his personal history.<sup>39</sup> Gold coins were minted in Salt Lake City with Deseret characters on them, and a tombstone was found in Cedar City with chiseled Deseret Alphabet characters. To what degree the alphabet was used in schools and by immigrants learning English cannot be determined. Examples of where the alphabet was used, such as coins and diaries, are scant. These outcomes suggest that the Deseret Alphabet movement never became popular.

### Reasons for the Alphabet's Creation and Demise

The motivation of Brigham Young and other Church and education leaders for the creation of the Deseret Alphabet has been credited to the following:

1. The Saints' desire for exclusiveness, or to separate themselves even more from the United States, to the point of having their own writing and their own literature.<sup>40</sup>

2. An attempt to teach English to Native Americans so they might more effectively be taught the gospel.<sup>41</sup>

3. The intention to create a new worldwide system that would revolutionize the way people read and write.<sup>42</sup>

4. The idea of making learning easier for children so they would have to spend less time in school.<sup>43</sup>

5. A plan to keep "yellow-covered literature" out of the hands of the youth of the Church simply by publishing only approved material in the Deseret Alphabet.<sup>44</sup>

6. The desire to teach English to immigrating converts in a shorter amount of time.<sup>45</sup>

7. An effort to keep sensitive Church information secret by writing all the information down in a "secret Deseret code."<sup>46</sup>

Most of these explanations make sense and can be considered as possible reasons, or a combination of reasons, behind the creation of the Deseret Alphabet. But the idea of separating from the world by keeping writings secret does not make sense in the light of the Church's desire to publish its literature in as many languages as possible. Also, the use of a secret code is not especially effective when the key to the code is printed on cards that are sold to anyone interested and is included in the front of each book published in the Deseret Alphabet.

Some purposes mentioned for the Deseret Alphabet may have been afterthoughts. It is likely that the original intent of Brigham Young, George Watt, and others was to simplify and improve the English alphabet so that children could learn to read and write with less time spent in school. Also, converts immigrating to Utah who did not speak English could learn the language more quickly and more readily adjust to a new way of life and the society into which they had recently moved.

Reasons why the Deseret Alphabet was not successful include the following:

1. The difficulty of reading Deseret characters.<sup>47</sup>
2. The cost to the citizens of the Utah Territory to develop a unique alphabet, create type, and print materials.<sup>48</sup>
3. The coming of the railroad and, with it, the availability of inexpensive published materials from the East.
4. The inability of territorial leaders to demand that the new alphabet be taught in a non-tax-supported school system.
5. And the key factor: most people had very little interest in learning a new system of reading and writing, including the teachers who were supposed to be promoting the system and educating people in its use.<sup>49</sup>

Why were most of the Saints not supportive of Brigham Young's desire to switch to a new alphabet? Perhaps it simply seemed too difficult or unnecessary when most already knew how to read and write in the existing system. It may be that some Church members perceived a difference between an idea proposed by their leaders and a direct revelation from God. It is doubtful that Brigham Young received a specific mandate from heaven instructing him to change to a new phonetic writing system. Were this the case, John Taylor probably would have picked up the cause at the death of Brigham Young. It is more likely that President Young believed a new alphabet would provide an easier way to learn English for non-English-speaking immigrants, Native Americans, and little children. He may have believed that this alphabet reform would sweep the nation and then the earth, just as the Church was destined to fill the earth. Perhaps it was a good idea that was ahead of its time. Whatever the reasons for not adopting the new alphabet, when the key figures and influential promoters behind the Deseret Alphabet died—particularly Brigham Young—the movement for alphabet reform within the Church died as well.

The Deseret Alphabet experiment lasted roughly from 1853 to 1877. The project cost the early Saints over twenty thousand dollars, a large sum in those days.<sup>50</sup> The hours spent developing the alphabet, transliterating the scriptures, writing the primers, and promoting and

teaching the new system cannot be determined. Elder John A. Widtsoe called it “a noble experiment, with a thoroughly worth-while objective” that “appeared to be premature.”<sup>51</sup> But whether considered to be a poorly thought out failure or a noble experiment, the Deseret Alphabet remains a fascinating episode in Church history because of the unusual background and unique circumstances of the people involved, the remote location and frontier setting of their society, and the remarkable efforts made to benefit the education of early Latter-day Saints through alphabet reform. **RE**

## Notes

1. B. H. Roberts, ed., *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Period 2: Apostolic Interregnum*, 2nd ed. rev. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1932), 7:382.

2. Bishops’ Meetings 1871–79, July 26, 1877, as quoted in Leonard J. Arrington, *Brigham Young: American Moses* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1985), 397.

3. English orthographic reformers included John Hart, Alexander Gill, Benjamin Franklin, and Noah Webster (see Douglas Allen New, “History of the Deseret Alphabet and Other Attempts to Reform English Orthography” [EdD diss., Utah State University, 1985], 3–4).

4. See Orson F. Whitney, *Life of Heber C. Kimball*, 6th ed. (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1975), 135.

5. See Willard Richards, “Conference Minutes,” *Times and Seasons*, April 15, 1845, 871.

6. See Larry Ray Wintersteen, “A History of the Deseret Alphabet” (master’s thesis, Brigham Young University, 1970), 17.

7. Brigham Young to George D. Watt, Winter Quarters, Nebraska, April 16, 1847, in Kate B. Carter, comp., *Our Pioneer Heritage* (Salt Lake City: Daughters of Utah Pioneers, 1969), 12:349.

8. See William E. Berrett and Alma P. Burton, *Readings in L.D.S. Church History* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1967), 2:452.

9. Minutes of the Board of Regents of the Deseret University, March 20, 1850, Utah Territorial Collection, Church Archives, as quoted in Kenneth Reid Beesley, “The Deseret Alphabet: Can Orthographical Reform for English Succeed?” (paper written for Brigham Young University honors program, 1975), 2–3; see also *Diary of Samuel W. Richards*, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, UT, 91.

10. In *Journal of Discourses* (London: Latter-day Saints’ Book Depot, 1854–86), 1:70.

11. Brigham Young, *The Teachings of President Brigham Young, Volume 3:1852–1854*, ed. Fred C. Collier (Salt Lake City: Collier’s Publishing, 1987), 3:205.

12. See Douglas D. Alder, Paula J. Goodfellow, and Ronald G. Watt, “Creating a New Alphabet for Zion: The Origin of the Deseret Alphabet,” *Utah Historical Quarterly* 52, no. 3 (Summer 1984): 280–81.

13. Summary of board of regents minutes as cited in Alder, “Creating a New Alphabet for Zion,” 282.

14. See William V. Nash, "The Deseret Alphabet" (paper written for University of Illinois Library School, May 1957), 22–23.

15. See Nash, "The Deseret Alphabet," 9; see also New, "History of the Deseret Alphabet and Other Attempts," 196.

16. The number of characters in the Deseret Alphabet varied as it was developed and altered over the years. The standard number arrived at was 38; however, there were times when the characters used in the new alphabet were as many as 43.

17. "The New Alphabet," *Deseret News*, January 19, 1854.

18. In James R. Clark, ed., *Messages of the First Presidency* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1965–75), 2:130; emphasis in original.

19. "Message of His Excellency Governor Brigham Young," April 28, 1855, as cited in New, "History of the Deseret Alphabet and Other Attempts," 205.

20. George A. Smith, "Historian's Office, G.S.L. City," *Journal History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, February 7, 1855, Church Archives.

21. See *Journal History*, March 11, 1855.

22. See "The Deseret Alphabet," broadside, 1854, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University.

23. Brigham Young to Franklin D. Richards, as cited in New, "History of the Deseret Alphabet and Other Attempts," 208–9.

24. Stanley B. Kimball, "The Saints and St. Louis, 1831–1857: An Oasis of Tolerance and Security," *BYU Studies* 13, no. 4 (Summer 1973): 491; New, "History of the Deseret Alphabet and Other Attempts," 211–12.

25. The first printed cut of the Deseret characters in the *Deseret News* appeared on February 16, 1859. The first few editions contained Matthew chapter 5 in Deseret Alphabet. Texts taken from the scriptures and transliterated into the Deseret Alphabet appeared for the following sixteen months until May 1860. The Deseret Alphabet column reappeared in the *Deseret News* in May 1864 and was continued until November of that year.

26. *Journal History*, February 16, 1859.

27. "Meeting of the Regents," *Deseret News*, February 12, 1868.

28. See New, "History of the Deseret Alphabet and Other Attempts," 223.

29. "The Deseret Alphabet—Its Advantages," *Deseret News*, August 19, 1868, 218. It must be remembered that the statement "they are beautiful" referring to the Deseret Alphabet symbols was made by those promoting the use of the new alphabet and not by a nonbiased source or a professional linguist.

30. *Journal of Discourses*, 12:298.

31. See "Board of Regents," *Deseret News*, November 4, 1868.

32. Orson Pratt was sent to New York to "superintend the publishing of the Book of Mormon in the characters of the Deseret Alphabet" (see "Items from Tuesday's Daily," *Deseret News*, April 28, 1869).

33. Wintersteen, "A History of the Deseret Alphabet," 37.

34. See Nash, "The Deseret Alphabet," 26. *Deseret News*, April 28, 1869, has the first notice I could find of *Deseret Readers* for sale. The *First Reader* sold for fifteen cents. The *Second Reader* was not yet available but would eventually sell for twenty cents.

35. See *Journal of Discourses*, 19:112.

36. See Leslie L. Sudweeks, "The Deseret Alphabet," *Improvement Era*, November 1954, 805.

37. See Ken Connaughton, "Is Deseret Alphabet to Blame for Eating 'Carn'?"

with a ‘Fark?’” *The Herald*, Provo, UT, April 4, 1976, 23.

38. See New, “History of the Deseret Alphabet and Other Attempts,” 228.

39. See Richard F. Burton, *The City of the Saints and Across the Rocky Mountains to California* (Niwot, CO: University Press of Colorado, 1990 reprint from American edition, New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1862), 419. Burton wrote, “One of my favorite places of visiting was the Historian and Recorder’s office, opposite Mr. Brigham Young’s Block. It contained a small collection of volumes, together with papers, official and private, plans, designs, and other requisites, many of them written in the Deseret alphabet.” Other items relative to the Deseret Alphabet found in L. Tom Perry Special Collections, BYU, include the Journal of Thales Haskell and the Parowan Stake Record written in the Deseret Alphabet.

40. See William A. Linn, *The Story of the Mormons* (New York: Macmillan, 1902), 439.

41. See George Q. Cannon, “Editorial Thoughts,” *Juvenile Instructor*, October 2, 1875, 234.

42. See “The Deseret Alphabet—Its Advantages,” *Deseret News*, August 19, 1868, 218. It should also be noted that Mormons believed that the pure language Adam spoke would someday be restored to the earth and that the phonetically based Deseret Alphabet might be a means whereby people could learn to read and write Adamic (see Journal History, August 2, 1855).

43. See “Meeting of the Regents,” *Deseret News*, February 12, 1868.

44. See T. W. Ellerback (secretary to Brigham Young) to Franklin D. Richards, as cited in Kate B. Carter, comp., *Heart Throbs of the West* (Salt Lake City: Daughters of Utah Pioneers, 1940), 2:3.

45. See “History of Brigham Young,” Journal History, January 31, 1859.

46. See Jules Remy and Julius Brenchley, *A Journey to Great-Salt-Lake City* (London: W. Jeffs, 1861), 184.

47. *Juvenile Instructor*, October 2, 1875, 234, reported that “President Young has decided that they are not so well adapted for the purpose designed as it was hoped they would be. There being no shanks to the letters, all being very even, they are trying to the eye, because of their uniformity. Another objection some have urged against them has been that they are entirely new, and we should have characters as far as possible with which we are familiar” (see also Hubert Howe Bancroft, *History of Utah* [Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1964], 714).

48. The Deseret Alphabet venture cost over twenty thousand dollars. As early as 1859, however, Orson Pratt estimated it would cost a million dollars to provide Deseret Alphabet textbooks for Utah Territory schools. *The Latter-day Saints’ Millennial Star*, November 18, 1873, printed a lecture given by Orson Pratt where he said, “A sufficient quantity of copies of each of the thousand volumes might probably be published in the phonotype form, and suitably bound, for about five millions of dollars.”

49. See New, “History of the Deseret Alphabet and Other Attempts,” 240–42.

50. See New, “History of the Deseret Alphabet and Other Attempts,” 240.

51. John A. Widtsoe, “What Was the Purpose of the Deseret Alphabet?” *Improvement Era*, January 1944, 63.