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Almanacs in the New England Heritage of Mormonism

David J. Whittaker

It has been more than twenty years since Leonard Arrington cautioned Mormon historians to avoid the “solid-achievement bias” in their work. He suggested that historians were too concerned with long treks, irrigation projects, buildings constructed, and the more physical or “solid” (that is, more easily measured) accomplishments of our forefathers and foremothers, and not concerned enough with the ideas of the past.¹ Some historians have taken Arrington’s advice, but most have not. Thus cultural and intellectual history has only begun to find a place in LDS scholarship.

If we are ever to penetrate the individual or collective mentality of the Mormon past, we must take more seriously the world of print early Latter-day Saints both borrowed from and contributed to. While the products of the early Mormon press represent only a partial index to all that was thought or believed in the early Church, they do provide a valuable window that allows us to view both the sources and channels of the intellectual life of early Mormonism.

The products of early Mormon writers can be classified into twelve main categories: proclamations and warnings, doctrinal treatises, petitions for redress, histories, accounts of the martyrdom of Joseph and Hyrum Smith, scriptural guides and helps, replies to anti-Mormon attacks, almanacs, newspapers, hymns and poetry, exposés by former members, and special publications.² These constitute a large body of source material for those who wish to probe the intellectual and cultural history of early Mormonism. This essay examines the history, context, and content of almanacs in early Mormonism and shows how such a study can assist us to enter more fully into the cultural milieu of early Mormonism.

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In their earliest form, almanacs were calendars. As calendars, they can be found in the earliest societies in the ancient world. They were thus tied into the very cycles of nature and from earliest times were both descriptive and predictive. Until the invention of the printing press, their use was restricted to elite political and religious leaders. After the fifteenth century, almanacs became a staple in the printing business. It is estimated that by 1600 there had been over six hundred different almanacs published in England alone and that by 1700 about two thousand had been issued by about two hundred authors.³ It seems clear that in seventeenth-century England there were more almanacs than Bibles sold; in fact, as students of the almanac have pointed out, the almanac functioned as the secular Bible. Where the Bible told people how to behave on Sunday, the almanac served as a guide during the rest of the week.⁴

Early American almanacs copied those that had appeared in England. Most English almanacs contained three separate items: (1) the almanac proper, which indicated the astronomical events of the coming year, eclipses, conjunctions, and moveable feasts; (2) the calendar, which showed the days of the week and the months and the fixed church festivals; and (3) the prognostication or astrological forecast of the notable events of the year.⁵ Almanacs were popular for a variety of reasons. For one thing, they were one of the few published items that, like the Bible, did not have a quota for the numbers published. In the printing monopoly given by the Crown to the Stationer's Company of London, few works were allowed to exceed 1,500 copies per volume.⁶ In addition, almanacs were much less expensive to print than newspapers or books. Further, almanacs were early on excluded from the rigors of censorship and thus became favorite channels of all kinds of political and religious argument. Finally, they were indispensable in an agrarian age when there were few clocks and when people believed strongly in the influence of the moon and stars on their daily lives.⁷ The indispensable role of almanacs in past centuries is summarized in a nineteenth-century almanac: "A person without an almanac is somewhat like a ship without a compass; he never knows what to do, nor when to do it."⁸

The almanac played other roles in colonial America. In addition to containing information of immediate and practical value to their readers, almanacs often served the purpose of opening readers' eyes to some of the great events in world history, both past and present. This was particularly true of those people on the frontier who were almost entirely shut off from the rest of the world. Here the almanac taught its reader of past societies and cultures, of kings in far-off lands, of wars and plagues, and of the wonders of

the world. It was in this role that the almanac functioned as a textbook to a society becoming more literate. The first poetry and literature many colonial Americans encountered appeared in the pages of almanacs. Little wonder that Benjamin Franklin considered his *Poor Richard's Almanac* "a proper vehicle for conveying instruction among the common people, who bought scarce any other books."⁹

Unlike the Bible, which emphasized the hereafter, the almanac took care of the here and now.¹⁰ It brought both the starry heavens and the everyday world of the farmer into focus. It contained recipes, antidotes for snake bites, mixtures for potions that cured all kinds of illnesses, and beauty tips, as well as the wisdom of the ages that could be regularly referred to by these agrarian families year after year. In spite of their limited use by historians, these little publications were the most read and used works in colonial America. If we would understand their potential use by and impact on early Mormons, it is important to understand their history and development in early America.

Since there were no American newspapers before 1704 and no magazines before 1740, the almanac served as the only periodical in early America. According to the journal of John Winthrop, the first book printed in British America was the 1639 almanac of Stephen Daye. A 1686 Pennsylvania almanac was the first book printed in the Middle Colonies. The format was established early, and readers came to expect certain features. These included the "Man of Signs," a figure of a man surrounded by astrological signs or drawings with indicators to those parts of the body that are governed by these signs whenever the moon passes through their part of the heavens. This diagram was usually accompanied by a key giving each symbol for the astrological sign. These symbols were usually incorporated into the calendar section of the almanac. Just how seriously publishers and readers took astrology is a topic attracting increasing attention among scholars; we shall return to it later.

Early American almanacs, in time, showed additional signs of standardization. They were heavily influenced by the printer, who was also usually the author or compiler. The practice developed early of using pseudonyms to disguise this fact. Very early, almanacs became a major product of these printers. They were available at bookstores, which were usually a part of the printing establishment, or from itinerant peddlers, who spread these volumes throughout the colonies. With no copyright laws until 1783 (really until 1790 with the Federal Copyright Law), the popularity of the almanac assured that much pirating would occur.

And since almanacs were generally exempt from censorship laws after about 1690, they were important channels of political and social discussions.

The almanacs of seventeenth-century America were called “philomaths” due to their being produced at Harvard by “lovers of math.”¹¹ These early almanacs were more mathematical and astronomical than their later counterparts and communicated the latest information on Newtonian science and astronomy.¹² As Marion Stowell shows, the list of early almanac makers reads like a list of First Families of Massachusetts.¹³

When the press at Cambridge lost its monopoly on printing after 1675, astrology and other popular interests began to transform the philomath almanac.¹⁴ These changes produced the well-known “farmer’s almanac” of the eighteenth century. The first of these new almanac authors was John Foster, who, as an engraver, added to his 1678 almanac the Man of Signs. But it was John Leeds, in his almanac for 1694, who oriented the contents for farmers. Leeds gave much space to agricultural matters, with specific monthly reminders regarding plowing and planting. In 1695 Leeds added geographical information and road lists that gave mileage distances between major cities.¹⁵

While Leeds’s almanacs contained astrological information, the almanacs of John Tulley went further by providing prognostications. Tulley also was the first to introduce weather forecasts, an item of critical importance for farmers, whose success depended on the fickle patterns of nature. Tulley’s almanacs were especially noted for their humor and satire, and he used them to advertise his other publications, a practice common in later almanacs.¹⁶

By Tulley’s time, almanacs had reached their standard American format and use: they were the “clock, calendar, weatherman, reporter, textbook, preacher, guidebook, atlas, navigational aid, doctor, bulletin board, agricultural advisor, and entertainer.”¹⁷ By the early eighteenth century, almanacs were appearing regularly in Boston, Philadelphia, and New York. Foster, Tulley, and Leeds had helped create the farmer’s almanac by stressing in just about equal proportion astronomy, astrology, wisdom and humor, history, current events, cures, and weather predictions. Where scholars had produced the seventeenth-century almanacs, practical men of affairs were primarily responsible for those issued in the eighteenth century. The contents became even more practical, and in time, with increased volume, the almanacs themselves began to be specialized, with almanacs issued just for sailors, or farmers, or with specialized contents such as those containing material on evangelical Christianity, medicine, law,

and, of course, on agriculture. Two new kinds of almanacs appeared in the eighteenth century: the pocket almanac, which was a kind of miniature encyclopedia of information, and the register, which specialized in current affairs and miscellaneous legal and governmental data.¹⁸

The most popular almanacs in the eighteenth century were issued by printing families: Leeds (Daniel and his sons Titan and Felix); Ames (Nathaniel, father and son); and the Franklins (James, Ann, James, Jr., and Benjamin). Other important authors of almanacs were Nathanael Low, Benjamin West, Nathan Daboll, Isaiah and Robert Thomas, and Benjamin Banneker, America's only black almanac maker.

All of these almanacs are valuable sources for students of American history. Students of science can trace the gradual spread of Enlightenment astronomy through successive editions; students of literature can find not only the gradual popularization of European authors, but also the emergence of native prose and poetry in early almanacs; students of political history can trace the growing concern with the ideas and implications of liberty in the pages of almanacs, which clearly served as important channels for political propaganda in the eighteenth century; students of religious history can study the moral literature and theological discourse that surfaced early in these volumes; and students of bibliography can literally follow the history of printing in early America via almanacs.¹⁹

Most of the characteristics of these eighteenth-century almanacs were carried over into the nineteenth century with two notable changes. The first was the impact of the expansion of a democratic press in the new nation that witnessed a large proliferation of presses and publication; the second was the tendency of newspapers to assume the function of almanacs by expanding upon the same items that almanacs had previously contained. Of course, almanacs continued to be issued, but they increasingly had to compete with newspapers. By the late nineteenth century, industrialization and the consequent decline in agrarian occupations saw the demand for almanacs decrease. Thereafter, almanacs increasingly became compendiums of useful information, more like the pocket almanacs of the eighteenth century. It is with this form that we are the most familiar today.

ALMANACS IN EARLY MORMONISM

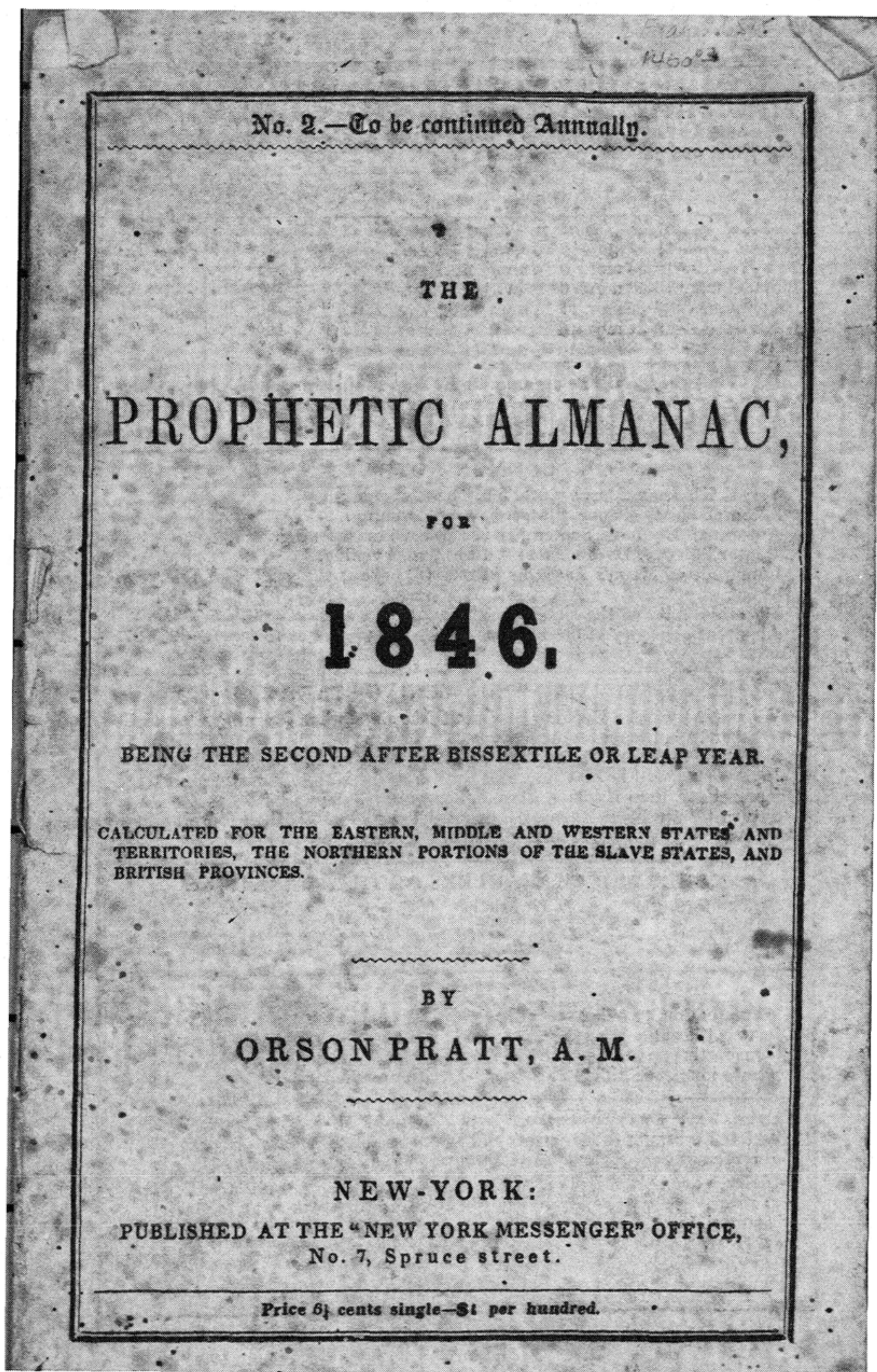
It would be inconceivable to argue that the Joseph Smith, Sr., family would not have owned and used an almanac or two. Like

most New England farming families, the Smiths would have depended upon an almanac as a compendium of vital information essential for the agrarian life. This would have been particularly true for planting and weather information, and just as true for cooking and medicinal items. It is possible that Lucy Mack Smith was referring to the astrological uses of New England almanacs when she spoke in her history of the family's involvement in "drawing magic circles, and soothsaying."²⁰ Is it possible that young Joseph had confirmed from an almanac that 22 September 1827, the night he received the gold plates, was to be both the autumnal equinox *and* a new moon, an excellent time to commence new projects?

The student of almanacs is continually frustrated by the fact that their very commonality seems to have assured their non-survival.²¹ In spite of their wide use and availability through large and regular printings, today most early American almanacs are considered rare books. We do know that there were about 155 separate known printings of almanacs between 1815 and 1831 in areas close to the Smith home near Palmyra. At least twenty-six almanacs were printed in Canandaigua, thirty-one were issued in Rochester, twenty-one in Ithaca, eleven in Buffalo, nine in Auburn, and at least one in Geneva.²² Surely some of these items were available through E. B. Grandin's bookstore in Palmyra, from the itinerant peddlers who followed the Erie Canal or other such routes west, or from neighboring farmers.²³ The more common almanacs, the *Western Almanac*, the *Farmer's Almanac*, or *Beer's Ontario Almanac*, must have found their way into the Smith household.

References to almanacs occur in early Mormon newspapers.²⁴ An almanac was planned as one of the first items to be issued by the early established Literary Firm in Kirtland, Ohio, and in November 1841 the *Times and Seasons* advertised as in press and ready for delivery the "Mormon Almanac and Latter Day Saints Calendar."²⁵ In the summer of 1841, the *Anti-Mormon Almanac for 1842*, more an anti-Mormon tract than an almanac, appeared in New York. John E. Page published a rebuttal to it.²⁶ One suspects, with Donald Scott, that in Mormon periodicals, as in other journalism of the period, newspapers came to function as almanacs had during the Colonial period.²⁷

The first person in early Mormonism to publish an almanac was Orson Pratt. As early as 22 June 1844, the *Prophet*, a Mormon newspaper in New York City, ran an ad for his *Prophetic Almanac for 1845*. The advertisement suggested that this publication would contain "much matter interesting to the Saints."²⁸ Ads continued through successive issues, and the 3 August 1844 issue announced



Title page, Orson Pratt, *Prophetic Almanac for 1846*, 19.5 cm in length, courtesy Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo (hereafter cited as Special Collections, Lee Library). Photograph by William W. Mahler.

TWELFTH MONTH.				DECEMBER, 1846.				31 DAYS.				
Moon's Phases.		New York.		Nauvoo.		FOR New England, New York State, Upper Canada, Michigan. North parts Illinois. Wiscon. and Iowa.			FOR South parts New York, New Jersey, Delaware, Maryland, Pennsylvania, North parts Virginia, and Kentucky, Ohio, Indiana, Ill... Missouri, South Iowa.			
	D.	H. M.		H. M.								
Full Moon,	2	5 50 ev.		4 41 ev.								
Last Quar.	10	4 20 ev.		3 11 ev.								
New Moon,	18	7 46 mor.		6 37 mor.								
First Quar.	25	1 40 mor.		0 31 mor.								
D	D	Sun	Moon	D	Miscellaneous.	Sun	Sun	Moon	Sun	Sun	Moon	H. W.
M	W	fast	south	pl.		rises	sets	sets	rises	sets	sets	N. Y.
		M. S.	H. M.			H. M.	H. M.	H. M.	H. M.	H. M.	H. M.	H. M.
1	Tu	10 42	11 14	☾	☾ south 11 59	7 28	4 32	5 38	7 18	4 42	5 32	7 15
2	W	10 19	morn	☾	☾ ☾	7 29	4 31	6 41	7 19	4 41	6 33	8 0
3	Th	9 55	0 8	☾	☾ runs high	7 29	4 31	rises	7 19	4 41	rises	8 41
4	Fr	9 31	1 1	☾	Aldeba. s 11 42	7 30	4 30	6 24	7 20	4 40	6 32	9 19
5	Sa	9 6	1 52	☾	☾ south 4 55	7 31	4 29	7 22	7 21	4 39	7 28	9 56
6	Su	8 41	2 42	☾	☾ in ☾	7 31	4 29	8 20	7 21	4 39	8 26	10 32
7	M	8 15	3 29	☾	☾ rises 4 46	7 31	4 29	9 17	7 21	4 39	9 23	11 9
8	Tu	7 49	4 14	☾	☾ sets 9 52	7 32	4 28	10 15	7 22	4 38	10 18	11 45
9	W	7 22	4 57	☾	☾ in apogee	7 32	4 28	11 12	7 22	4 38	11 14	ev. 24
10	Th	6 55	5 39	☾	☾ in ☾	7 33	4 27	morn	7 23	4 37	morn	0 59
11	Fr	6 27	6 22	☾	☾ in inf ☾ ☾	7 33	4 27	0 10	7 23	4 37	0 10	2 3
12	Sa	5 59	7 5	☾	☾ ☾ ☾	7 33	4 27	1 8	7 23	4 37	1 6	3 7
13	Su	5 30	7 49	☾	☾ in ☾	7 34	4 26	2 7	7 24	4 36	2 4	4 18
14	M	5 2	8 36	☾	☾ south 11 0	7 34	4 26	3 9	7 24	4 36	3 4	5 24
15	Tu	4 33	9 25	☾	☾ ☾ ☾ ☾ s ☾ ☾	7 35	4 25	4 9	7 24	4 36	4 3	6 23
16	W	4 3	10 17	☾	☾ rises 4 42	7 35	4 25	5 11	7 24	4 36	5 4	7 14
17	Th	3 34	11 13	☾	☾ ☾ ☾	7 35	4 25	6 15	7 24	4 36	6 7	7 59
18	Fr	3 4 ev.	10	☾	☾ runs low	7 36	4 24	sets	7 25	4 35	sets	8 43
19	Sa	2 34	1 8	☾	☾ south 10 28	7 36	4 24	6 13	7 25	4 35	6 21	9 24
20	Su	2 4	2 6	☾	☾ stationary	7 36	4 24	7 21	7 25	4 35	7 27	10 6
21	M	1 34	3 2	☾	☾ cent ☾ Winter	7 36	4 24	8 33	7 25	4 35	8 37	10 46
22	Tu	1 4	3 56	☾	☾ ☾ ☾ ☾ comen.	7 36	4 24	9 44	7 25	4 35	9 46	11 29
23	W	0 34	4 49	☾	Joseph Smith b	7 36	4 24	10 53	7 25	4 35	10 53	morn
24	Th	Slow	5 41	☾	☾ ris 4 39 [1805	7 36	4 24	morn	7 25	4 35	morn	0 16
25	Fr	0 26	6 32	☾	☾ ☾ ☾	7 36	4 24	0 6	7 25	4 35	0 5	1 10
26	Sa	0 56	7 23	☾	☾ in ☾	7 35	4 25	1 14	7 25	4 35	1 11	2 17
27	Su	1 25	8 14	☾	☾ south 10 3	7 35	4 25	2 22	7 24	4 36	2 18	3 36
28	M	1 55	9 7	☾	☾ sets 8 41	7 35	4 25	3 28	7 24	4 36	3 21	4 56
29	Tu	2 24	9 59	☾	☾ ☾ ☾	7 35	4 25	4 30	7 24	4 36	4 23	6 4
30	W	2 53	10 52	☾	☾ south 9 50	7 34	4 26	5 29	7 24	4 36	5 21	6 58
31	Th	3 22	11 44	☾	☾ runs high	7 34	4 26	6 23	7 23	4 47	6 15	7 43

P. P. PRATT AND THE LAWYER!

This gentleman being asked by a lawyer, 'what portion of the present age he thought would be saved,' replied, 'that he did not know.'

'Well,' said the lawyer, 'give us your best judgment on the subject.'

Being somewhat importuned for a reply, Mr. P. observed, 'that he thought perhaps about four fifths of the whole.'

'How so,' enquired the lawyer, somewhat surprised at "*Mormon*" liberality.

'Because,' replied Mr. P., 'there are about that proportion of the world who don't know enough to be damned.'

the volume as “just published.” One year later, the *New York Messenger* (the renamed *Prophet*) announced as published the *Prophetic Almanac for 1846*.²⁹ By the end of October 1845, Pratt was offering a free copy of the 1846 almanac to each subscriber to the *Messenger* as well as encouraging each current subscriber to purchase ten or twelve copies of the six-and-a-half-cent volume to give as gifts to friends and neighbors.³⁰ Although the title page declared that the almanac was “to be continued annually,” Pratt never published another. He did prepare a “Prophetic Almanac for 1849,” which was to be issued at Winter Quarters, but as there was no press in operation there at that time, the work remained in manuscript. At least one copy was made of the original manuscript, apparently for the use of those traveling west to the Salt Lake Valley that year.³¹

In addition to their value in making some money for a missionary who traveled without purse or scrip, Orson Pratt’s almanacs were outlets for his mathematical skills. By publishing these almanacs, he was also providing a product that Americans of his time demanded. Of course, dozens of other almanacs were available to his customers, but Orson was apparently trying to provide a publication that could be both addressed to Mormons and also used as a missionary tool if non-Mormons read it. In this sense it was a hybrid. For his first almanac, Orson Pratt seems to have borrowed from the contents and form of the many other almanacs that were available to him in New York City. It was not blind copying, however; as he warned readers in his 1845 almanac, several of the eclipses as published in the *Comic Almanac* of Turner and Fisher were incorrect.³²

His first almanac contained the standard items Americans had come to expect. Central to the volume was the calendar, which told of the times of the rising and setting of the sun and moon, adjusted according to certain geographical regions along the East Coast of the United States. Dates and places for both solar and lunar eclipses for the year were also provided, along with tidal tables. The moon’s place in the twelve signs of the zodiac was also given. Pratt included in his calendar section birthdays and deathdays for selected secular leaders and authors such as Thomas Jefferson, Queen Victoria, William Pitt, Alexander Pope, John Milton, William Penn, and Christopher Columbus, and similar information on religious figures such as St. George, St. Bartholomew, and St. Augustine. He also included dates of events of the American Revolution, such as the Battle of Bunker Hill and Independence. The fact that there were no references to Mormon people or events in the calendar section might suggest how derivative this part of the almanac was.

In his “fillers,” Pratt included material from his brother Parley and from Joseph Smith, as well as his own compositions. Following a well-established tradition of adding “wisdom” literature to the almanacs, Orson wrote of “The Mormon Creed,” in which he spoke of man being the offspring of God and declared that man’s final destiny was to be like God. He further suggested that the present forms of political government seen by Nebuchadnezzar (Dan. 2) were soon to be ended by the establishment of the kingdom of God. He also included a copy of the “American Exile’s Memorial to Congress” as well as a copy of a letter dated 11 May 1844 that he sent to the chairman of the United States Senate Committee of the Judiciary. Here he spoke as a proud American citizen whose rights had been violated in persecution, as well as a messenger of the final establishment of God’s kingdom on earth.

As the master missionary, he also included comparative material for the reader to see the “Doctrines of Christ” beside the “Doctrines of Men,” concluding with the “Dialogue between Tradition, Reason, and Scriptus,” which presented his case for the truthfulness of Mormonism. Finally, in good almanac tradition, the last page contained ads for other LDS publications.

In his second almanac, Orson clearly broke away from the more secular model he seems to have followed the year before. For example, with the exception of the Fourth of July, there are no other religious or secular names or events in the calendar. Instead, the birthdays of the members of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles and key dates in Joseph Smith’s life appear. In introducing the “Names and Characters” of the twelve signs of the zodiac, which were simply identified in his 1845 work, Orson added in the 1846 almanac the comment, “which, according to the vulgar and erroneous ideas of the Ancients, govern the different parts of the human system.”³³

He continued adding essays on Mormon doctrine, including a look at Catholicism, or, to use his words, “Popery,” and Protestantism in comparison with Mormonism in an article entitled “Review of the World.” He also added a note of humor in “P. P. Pratt and the Lawyer!” thus continuing a long tradition in which almanac makers poked fun at lawyers.³⁴ The almanac also contained essays on “Four Kinds of Salvation” (written by Parley P. Pratt);³⁵ “Materiality” (which foreshadowed Orson’s later pamphlet *The Absurdies of Immaterialism* and which was also dependent upon earlier writing by Parley); and a prophetic essay on Mormonism as the foretold kingdom spoken of by Daniel to be established in the last days. He concluded with “A Parable”

about a proposed wedding, to which he attached an interpretation. Here was a sample of the puzzle-parables to be found in earlier American almanacs.³⁶ Again, the last page contained advertisements for LDS publications. The unpublished almanac for 1849 contained only calendar sections. Apparently no “filler” material was prepared.

Orson Pratt adapted the almanac format to Mormon missionary work. He also assumed a Newtonian universe, in which the gravity of *all* celestial bodies exerted influence on all other heavenly bodies, a scientific position that was seen as pulling the carpet out from under the central belief in the efficacy of astrology.³⁷ But the fact that Orson included astrological information in his almanacs suggests that his intended audience expected it to be there.³⁸

Between 1851 and 1866, William W. Phelps compiled fourteen known almanacs. During the first few years they were titled *Deseret Almanac*; by 1859 they were simply titled *Almanac*, but the title *Deseret Almanac* appeared again in 1865. The early editions were the first almanacs published in the Great Basin, and thus for a few years Phelps seems to have enjoyed a monopoly of almanac making, but he was struggling with other competitors before the Civil War. Phelps's own personality is evident throughout these publications. They also provide us with a window into early Utah culture. For Phelps, almanacs were primarily financial ventures, a key element in his yearly income. For his customers, they provided the necessary items all Americans had come to expect from almanacs, including the calendar, weather and astrological information, key dates in history, recipes and potions, and a variety of useful and practical information for people living on the frontier.

Phelps was a newspaperman before his conversion to the LDS church in 1831.³⁹ Called early to assist with the publishing activities of the Church, Phelps contributed his newspaper skills to the infant organization.⁴⁰ Following his baptism, he traveled to Independence, Missouri, where he published the first LDS newspaper, the *Evening and the Morning Star*. This work was the first product of the early Literary Firm, which was also to issue an almanac as part of its work.⁴¹ As an author, Phelps continued to contribute his poetry and prose to the Mormon cause to the end of his life in 1872.⁴²

The *Deseret Almanac* for 1851 was Phelps's first effort. He borrowed most of the astronomical material from the *Nautical Almanac* (as he informed his readers) and took a decidedly anti-astrological stance:

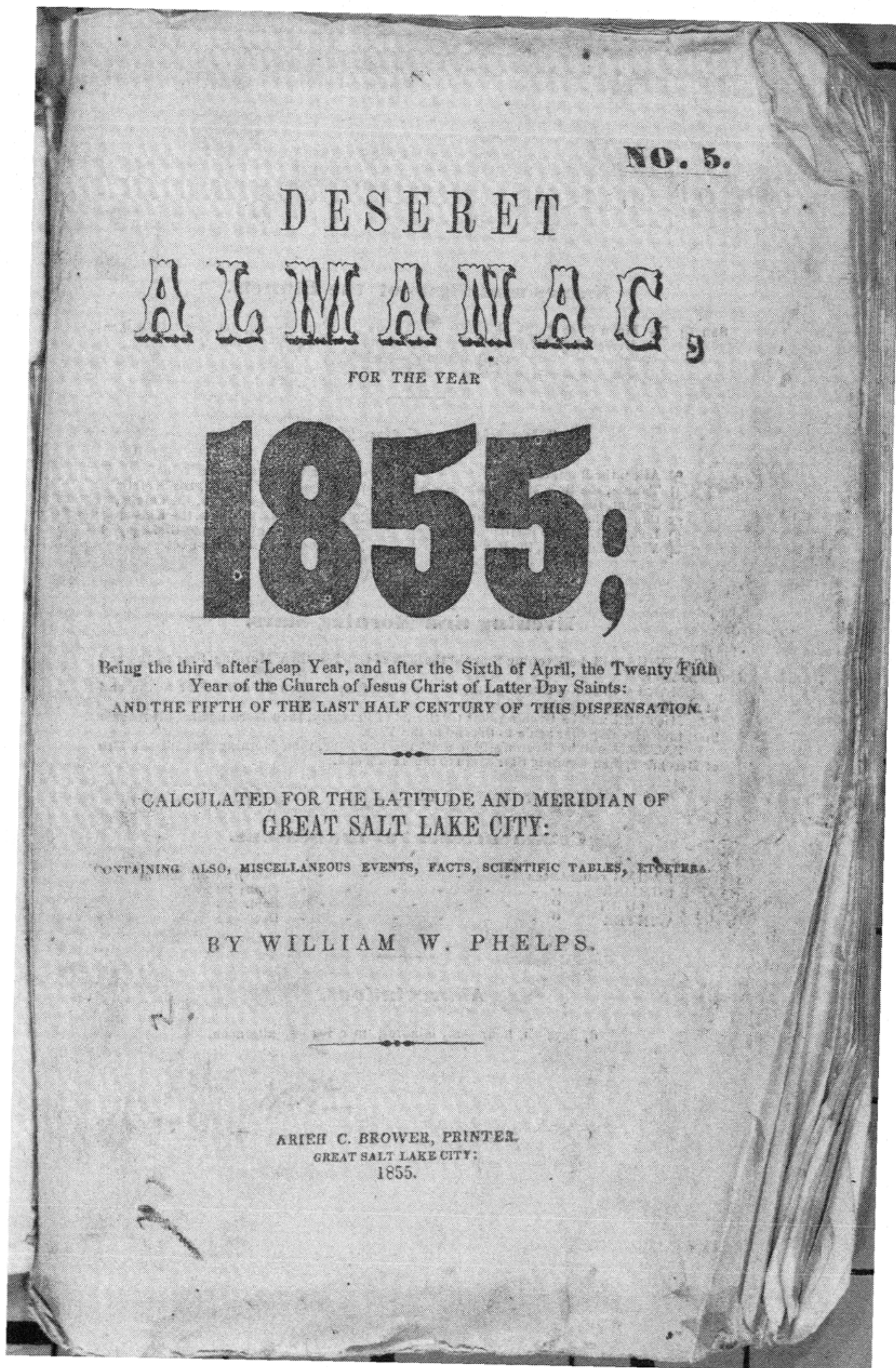
The signs, usual in Almanacs, are omitted as matters of ancient fancy, which never had nor never will have a being or body (as represented by old Almanac-makers) on earth or in heaven. . . . [Thus] most of the arbitrary characters, as well as the signs and wonders, are omitted as useless.⁴³

This first almanac contained no advertising, suggesting the primitive commercial conditions of the early Mormon settlement. The almanac gave readers a twenty-one-year chronology of the history of the Church. Phelps also included some LDS dates in the calendar section, but the bulk of the calendar section contained proverbial material, such as “Vanity and vice ride, while wisdom goes on foot” or “The religion of the world is like dust, which falls upon everything, and remains till it is washed off by a refreshing shower from heaven.” The sixteen-page almanac ended with lists of the current members of the Church’s First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles.

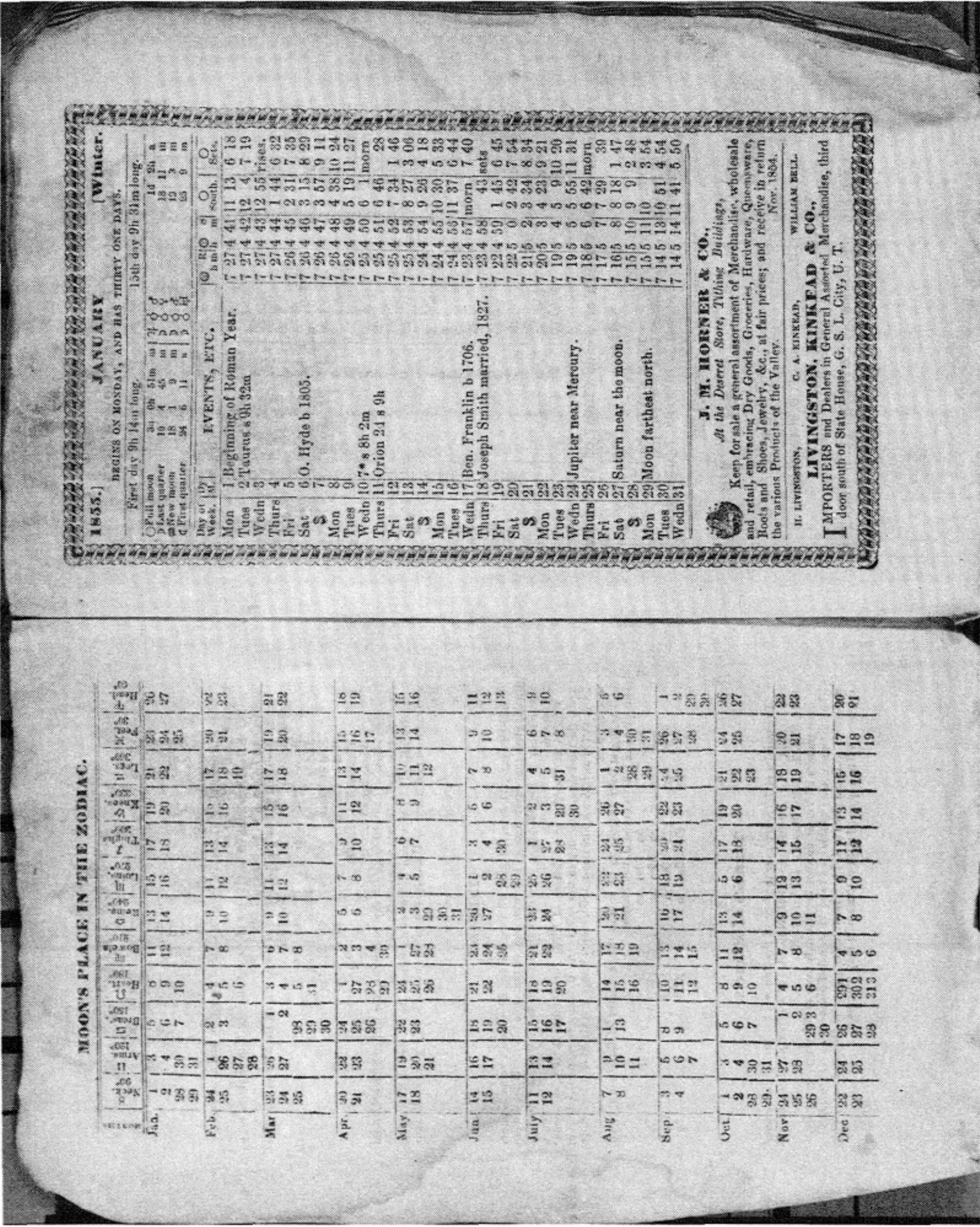
Phelps’s second, and lengthiest, almanac (forty-eight pages) was prepared for 1852. He again began the work by criticizing astrology, specifically the idea that the stars can “govern the anatomy of man’s body.” These ideas of “some farmers and women” were obviously not to be relied on, mainly because no one could measure the distance to Aries! This almanac moved closer to the traditional American almanac by providing recipes for such things as whitewash, Scotch bread, wedding cake, and wine; poems; tables for measuring corn and wheat; lists of discoveries and inventions in world history; lists of Church leaders, territorial officers, officers of the Nauvoo Legion, justices of the peace; and, perhaps most importantly, lists of operating post offices with arrival and departure schedules for the mails. The calendar section contained dates important in Mormon history, but also included dates from American history and several proverbs.⁴⁴

The length of the 1852 volume allowed Phelps to add a variety of essays, particularly short pieces on the moon, planets, and climate, as well as more down-to-earth topics such as education, “Rules for myself,” and even an antiastrology piece, “Philosophy of the Heavens.” For the first time he included advertisements. He closed the volume by requesting information on the schools and students who were attending throughout the territory and by asking readers to submit recipes for the next year’s edition.

The rest of Phelps’s almanacs generally followed the pattern he established in the first two, although he broadened them in several ways. By adding material that went beyond Mormon history to United States and world history, he encouraged a larger worldview among his readers and in a certain sense provided a



Title page, W. W. Phelps, *Deseret Almanac, for the Year 1855*, 19.5 cm in length, courtesy Special Collections, Lee Library. Photograph by William W. Mahler.



Pages 2-3 from W. W. Phelps, *Deseret Almanac for the Year 1855*, 19.5 cm in length, courtesy Special Collections, Lee Library. Photograph by William W. Mahler.

textbook of information. (Phelps was very involved in early Utah education.) And he devoted increased space to advertisements, which gave him a better income and developed broader outlets for his almanacs, since businesses that advertised usually gave copies away to their customers. His later almanacs contained so many ads that they provide a kind of business directory to early Salt Lake City.⁴⁵ He discontinued including proverbial material in his calendar section with the 1855 volume and increased the medical recipes in the later volumes.

Copies of Phelps's almanacs for 1851–55 and 1859–65 are extant. There is evidence he intended to publish a combined volume for 1856 and 1857,⁴⁶ and his almanac for 1860 refers to the volume for 1858.⁴⁷ There is also evidence he sent to press another volume for 1866 and 1867, but no copies have been located.⁴⁸

As early as February 1851, Phelps was supplying the *Deseret News* with weather and astronomical information.⁴⁹ The editor of the *Deseret News* was Willard Richards, who also published Phelps's early almanacs. Phelps also took occasion in the early issues of the *Deseret News* to attack the astrology of the almanacs, although he changed his mind for a brief period.⁵⁰ In January 1857, the Utah Territorial Legislature created the office of Superintendent of Meteorological Observations. William Phelps was the first person appointed to this position, no doubt in part because of his reputation for astronomical knowledge as expressed in his publications.

Phelps's 1860 almanac caught the attention of Richard Burton, who summarized its contents in his *The City of the Saints*,⁵¹ and also of Jules Remy and Julius Brenchley, in their *A Journey to Great-Salt-Lake City*.⁵² In this same almanac, Phelps included a section entitled "Almanac" and told his readers:

The word ALMANAC is probably of Arabic origin and means a daily calculation for the rising, setting, and position of the sun, moon, planets, stars, constellations and phenomena of a year, in advance; and anciently and modernly, contains many other matters of motion that may facilitate the business transactions of man.

A person without an Almanac is somewhat like a ship at sea, without a compass; he never knows what to do, nor when to do it:

So Mormon, others, sect and Quaker,
Buy Almanacs, and pay the maker.⁵³

Enough has been said to suggest that, as Americans, early Mormons acquired and used almanacs for a variety of purposes. They did not have to depend on those issued by either Orson Pratt or William W. Phelps, for these Mormon-produced almanacs essentially shared the same characteristics as most other American

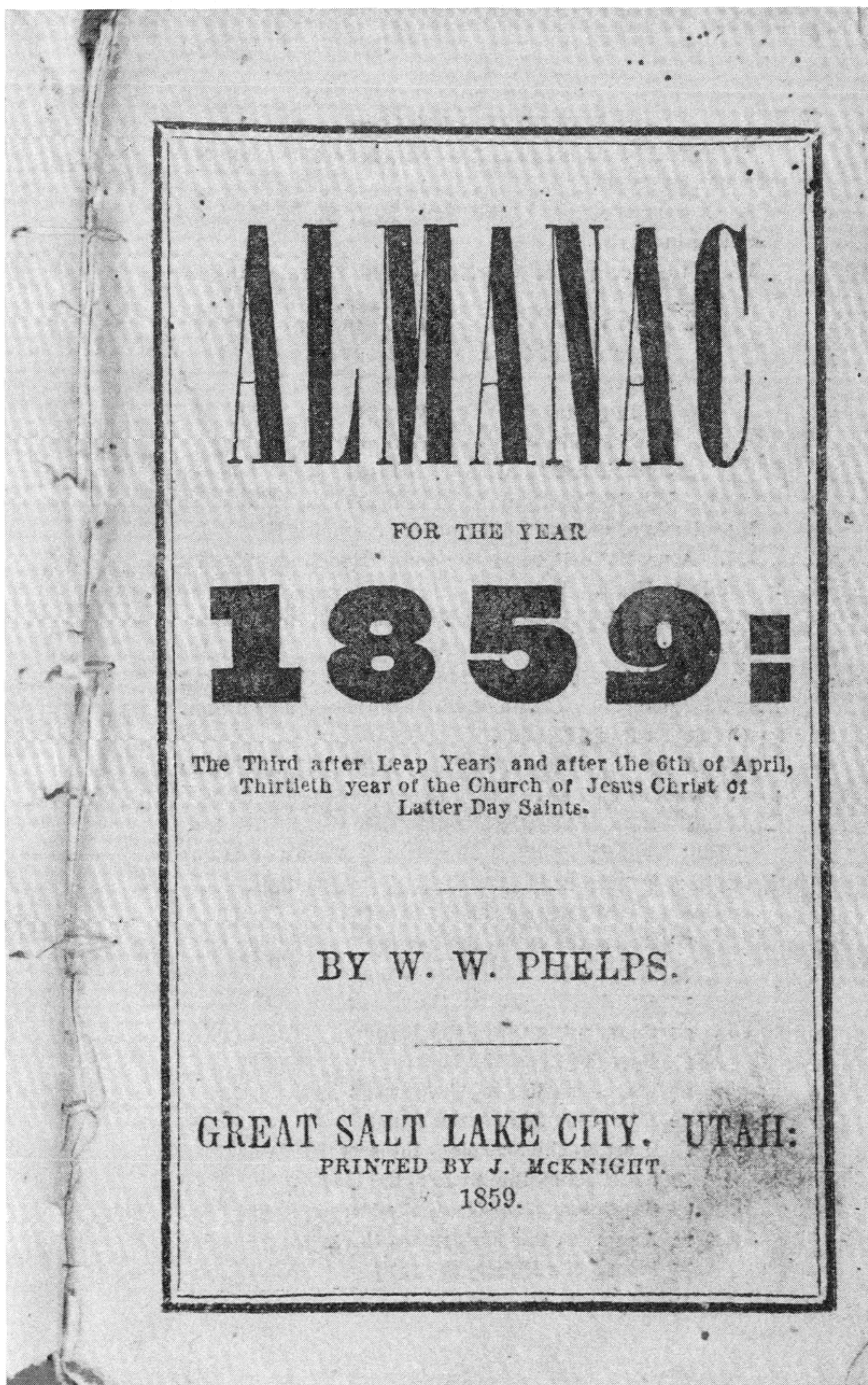
almanacs. Of course, they were localized and “Mormonized.” But on their pages the modern student can gain some of the flavor of a now-gone era, and particularly of the mental world of the common man.

Almanacs were a form of street literature, a category of printed matter that has yet to be fully studied.⁵⁴ Along with broadsides, various tracts and pamphlets, handbills, proclamations, and chapbooks, almanacs were forms of communication separate and apart from the upper levels of the philosophical discourse of intellectuals. Here was a literary form that reached into the lives of common people as it informed, educated, and entertained.

The modern student who peruses Phelps’s almanacs can imaginatively enter into the cultural world of early Utah. One can glimpse, for example, the major medical concerns of an earlier generation by reading of the potions recommended for their cure. Articles on tanning hides, curing diarrhea, treating cuts and bruises, making candles, preparing vegetable glue, and preventing skippers in hams, suggestions on how to preserve various foods, how to soften water or stain wood, how to remove ink stains, or “How to feed fowls in such a manner that they will lay eggs during the winter season” can bring us closer to the daily lives and thoughts of our ancestors. All of these topics, and they could be multiplied, are treated in Phelps’s almanacs for 1863 and 1864.

Beyond the more secular dimensions of pioneer life were the religious and cultural aspects. These almanacs sought, through their emphasis on history, to give their readers a sense of place and time in both local and world history. Religious essays and counsel brought order and comfort to their lives, and the millennial expectations of both the soon to be established kingdom of God and the anticipated destruction to be wrought by the American Civil War probably gave a sense of hope and expectation to their unsure lives as frontier farmers.⁵⁵ Chronologies and calendars helped common people place themselves on the timetable of earth’s history. The wise sayings helped them feel a part of the wisdom that was considered ageless.⁵⁶ Astrological items helped do the same by relating those who believed in it to the larger cosmos.⁵⁷ Mormon symbolism, with its heavy emphasis on celestial bodies (moon, sun, and stars) and nature surely allowed many early members to feel more at home with astrology.

All these items gave the average person a sense of power as it gave them a sense of identity. Because knowledge is power, these almanacs helped agrarian families feel that they could gain control over the world they found themselves in. And in the world of the



Title page, W. W. Phelps, *Almanac for the Year 1859*, 13.5 cm in length, courtesy Special Collections, Lee Library. Photograph by William W. Mahler.

A REVELATION AND PROPHECY BY THE
PROPHET, SEER, AND REVELATOR,
JOSEPH SMITH.

GIVEN DECEMBER 25th, 1832.

“Verily thus saith the Lord, concerning the wars that will shortly come to pass, beginning at the rebellion of South Carolina, which will eventually terminate in the death and misery of many souls. The days will come that war will be poured out upon all nations, beginning at that place; for behold, the Southern States shall be divided against the Northern States, and the Southern States will call on other nations, even the nation of Great Britain, as it is called, and they shall also call upon other nations, in order to defend themselves against other nations; and thus war shall be poured out upon all nations. And it shall come to pass, after many days, slaves shall rise up against their Masters, who shall be marshalled and disciplined for war: And it shall come to pass also, that the remnants who are left of the land will marshal themselves, and shall become exceeding angry, and shall vex the Gentiles with a sore vexation; and thus, with the sword, and by bloodshed, the inhabitants of the earth shall mourn, and with famine, and plague, and earthquakes, and the thunder of Heaven, and the fierce and vivid lightning also, shall the inhabitants of the earth be made to feel the wrath, and indignation and chastening hand of an Almighty God, until the consumption decreed, hath made a full end of all nations; that the cry of the Saints, and of the blood of the Lord of Sabbath, from the earth, to be avenged of their enemies. Wherefore, stand ye in holy places, and be not moved, until the day of the Lord come, for behold it cometh quickly, saith the Lord. Amen.

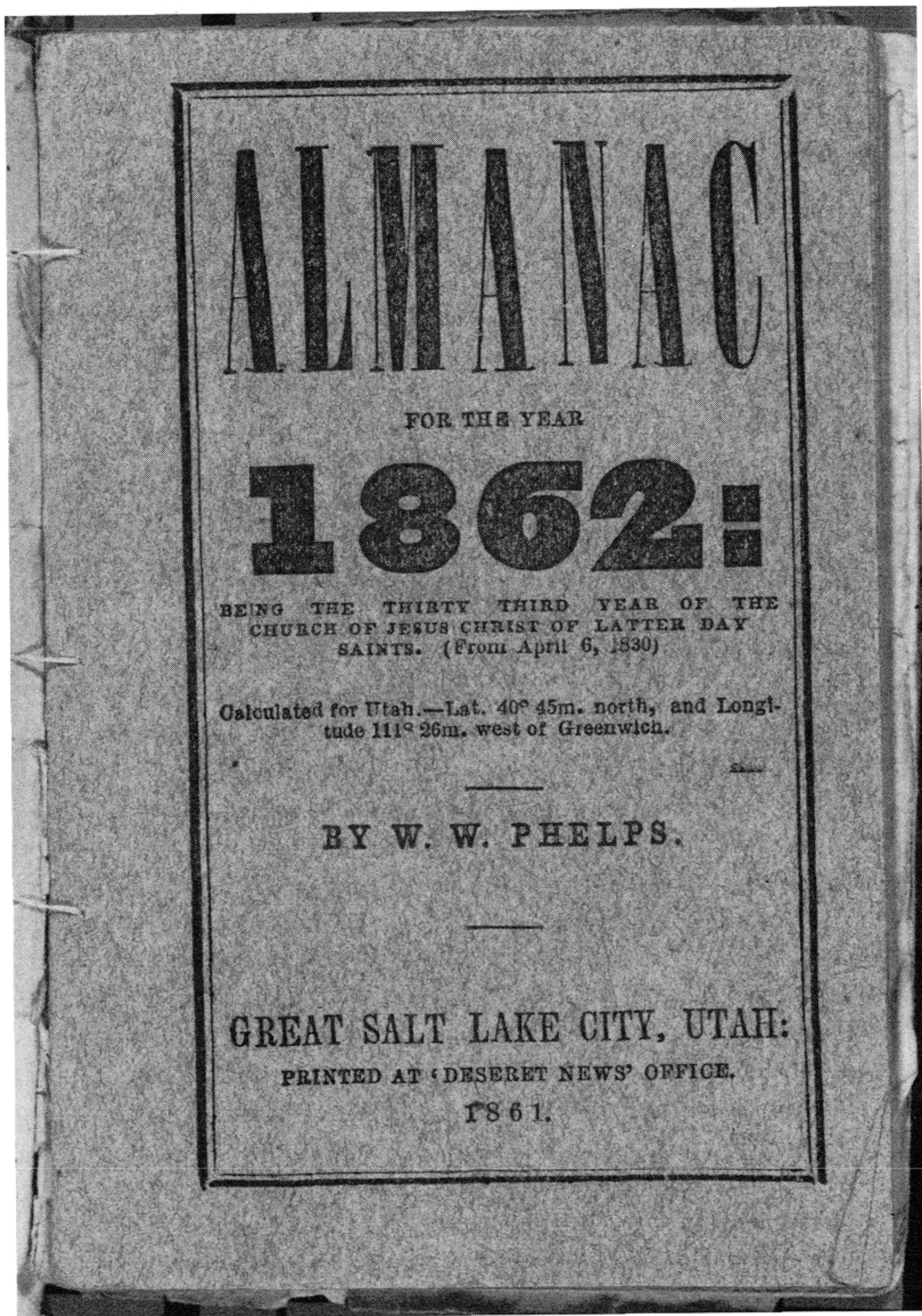
On the 20th day of December, 1860, South Carolina seceded.

JAMES LAWSON,
FIRST-RATE Blacksmith, ready for business: half
block south of Union Square, 19th Ward.

WILLIAM NEWELL,
CARRIES on Shoemaking, West side of East Temple
street; a few doors south of Dinwoodle's chair shop.

A TABLE
Showing the number of days from any day in one
month, to the same day in any other month, through-
out the year.

Months.	Jan.	Feb.	Mar.	April.	May.	June.	July.	Aug.	Sept.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.
Jan.	365	31	59	90	120	151	181	212	243	273	304	334
Feb.	334	283	58	89	119	150	181	212	243	273	304	334
Mar.	306	277	46	77	107	138	168	199	229	260	290	321
April.	273	244	33	64	94	125	155	186	216	247	277	308
May.	245	216	304	335	365	396	426	457	487	518	548	579
June.	214	185	273	304	334	365	396	426	457	487	518	548
July.	184	155	243	274	304	335	366	396	427	457	488	519
August.	153	124	212	243	273	304	335	366	396	427	458	489
September.	122	93	181	212	242	273	303	334	365	396	427	458
October.	92	63	151	182	212	243	273	304	334	365	396	427
November.	61	32	120	151	181	212	243	273	304	335	366	397
December.	31	2	90	121	151	182	212	243	274	304	335	366



Title page, W. W. Phelps, *Almanac for the Year 1862*, 13 cm in length, courtesy Special Collections, Lee Library. Photograph by William W. Mahler.

USEFUL RECIPES.

HOW STEARIN CANDLES ARE MADE.

The fat or tallow is first boiled with quick-lime, and made into soap, and then the soap is decomposed by sulphuric acid, which takes away the lime and leaves the fat re-arranged as stearic acid, while a quantity of glycerin is produced at the same time. Glycerin comes out of the tallow in this chemical change. The oil is then pressed out of it; and the impurities are carried out by the oily part as the pressure goes on increasing; what is left is the stearin, which is melted and cast into candles. It is hard as wax, and not a bit more greasy.

TO MAKE HENS LAY.

A Correspondent of the "Prairie Farmer" says:—"I send you a recipe for making hens lay: Take some oats and boil them until soft; then fry them in hot fat, and you will have any quantity of eggs."

TO RENDER HARD WATER SOFT.

For every hundred gallons take half a pound of the best quick lime, make it into a cream by the addition of water; then diffuse it through the hard water in a tank or reservoir, and allow the whole to stand; it will quickly be bright, the lime having united with the carbonate of lime (which made the water hard), will be all deposited. This is one of the most beautiful applications of the art of chemistry.

FIRE AND WATERPROOF PREPARATION.

Slack common stone lime in a close vessel; when cool pass eight quarts through a fine sieve, and add to it a quart of fine salt and two gallons of pure water. Boil

and skim. Then, to every four gallons of this mixture, add one and a quarter pound of rock alum, three fourths of a pound of copperas, half a pound of potash, and five quarts of fine beach sand. This wash will now admit any coloring matter that may be desired, and may be applied with a paint or whitewash brush, in the same manner as oil paints. It looks better than paint, will stop leaks in the roof, prevent moss from growing, and when laid upon brick-work, will render it impenetrable to rain or moisture.

TO PRESERVE HERBS.

The best way to preserve sweet and savory herbs for winter use, is—

1. To gather them at the right time, that is, just before they begin to flower.
2. For that purpose be sure to choose a fine dry day, and gather them when the dew is off.
3. To clean them well from dust and dirt; cut off the roots, and separate the bunches into smaller ones.

Dry them as quickly as possible without scorching them; the best way of doing this is to lay them prettily singly on a stove or in a Dutch oven in front of the fire. Thus their flavor and color will be best preserved.

6. When thoroughly dried, pick off the leaves, pound and rub through a hair sieve, and keep them in bottles closely stopped down.

Basil— is in the best state for drying from the middle of August and three weeks after.

Knotted Marjoram—from the beginning of July, and during the same.

Winter and Summer Savory—the latter end of July, and throughout August.

Thyme, Lemon Thyme, and Orange Thyme—during June and July.

Mint—latter end of June, and during July.

farmer, weather information was especially important in the ongoing battle with nature.

In preindustrial societies, the cycles of nature and the absence of calendars and clocks turned the attention of all people to the cycles of the heavens for establishing order in their lives. Astrology was thus a means for turning the mystery of the universe into a puzzle, and of course, puzzles are capable of solution. As Keith Thomas has suggested, astrology was never an exact science, but it attracted men of intelligence because it offered a coherent system of thought that helped people bring order and understanding to their world. Astrology also offered a practical guide for people who sought self-knowledge; horoscopes functioned in ways very similar to psychoanalysis today.⁵⁸

Almanacs, then, offer us another window into the world of the past. They were probably the most important and consistent meeting ground of high and popular culture, and thus are important tools for the new social history that tries to recover the lives and thoughts of average people. Almanacs invite us, as they did our ancestors, to more fully see and understand the world around us.⁵⁹ Almanacs were mirrors of, as much as they were windows to, early Mormons. They still are for students of Mormon history.

NOTES

¹Leonard J. Arrington, "The Search for Truth and Meaning in Mormon History," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 3 (Summer 1968): 62-63.

²See David J. Whittaker, "Early Mormon Pamphleteering" (Ph.D. diss., Brigham Young University, 1982), 71-81.

³Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1971), 294. On the early Chinese almanacs see Martin Palmer, ed. and trans., *T'ung Shu, The Ancient Chinese Almanac* (Boston: Shambhala Publications, 1986).

⁴See, for example, the comments of Marion Barber Stowell, *Early American Almanacs, The Colonial Weekday Bible* (New York: Burt Franklin, 1977), x. Eustace Bosanquet, "English 17th Century Almanacs," *Library*, 4th ser., 10 (March 1930): 361, notes that "no book in the English language had as large a circulation as the annual Almanack" (cited in Elizabeth L. Eisenstein, "Some Conjectures about the Impact of Printing on Western Society and Thought: A Preliminary Report," *Journal of Modern History* 40 [March 1968]: 34).

⁵Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, 293. See also David D. Hall, *Worlds of Wonder, Days of Judgment: Popular Religious Belief in Early New England* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1989), 7, 10, 58-61, 76, 81-83, 111.

⁶See Cyprian Blagden, *The Stationers' Company: A History, 1403-1959* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1977).

⁷These items are summarized from a variety of scholarly studies on almanacs, including Louis K. Wechsler, *The Common People of Colonial America* (New York: Vantage Press, 1978); Robb Sagendorph, *America and Her Almanacs: Wit, Wisdom, and Weather, 1639-1970* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1970); George Lyman Kittredge, *The Old Farmer and His Almanac* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1924); Joseph P. Goldberg, "The Eighteenth-Century Philadelphia Almanac and Its English Counterpart" (Ph.D. diss., University of Maryland, 1962); Susan Elizabeth Lyman, "Colonial Life and Learning as Reflected in American Almanacs, 1639-1776" (Master's thesis, Columbia University, 1933); Robert T. Sidwell, "The Colonial American Almanacs: A Study in Non-Institutional Education"

(Ph.D. diss., Rutgers University, 1965); and Bernard Capp, *Astrology and the Popular Press: English Almanacs, 1500-1800* (London: Faber and Faber, 1979). Important bibliographical listings include Hugh Alexander Morrison, *Preliminary Check List of American Almanacs, 1639-1800* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1907); and, most completely, Milton Drake, comp., *Almanacs of the United States*, 2 vols. (New York: Scarecrow Press, 1962).

⁸W. W. Phelps cited in Drake, *Almanacs of the United States*, 1:[ix]. See also text at n. 53.

⁹Quoted in Lawrence Cremin, *American Education: The Colonial Experience* (New York: Harper and Row, 1968), 389. See also C. William Miller, "Franklin's *Poor Richard Almanacs*: Their Printing and Publication," *Studies in Bibliography* 14 (1961): 97-115, and John F. Ross, "The Character of *Poor Richard*: Its Source and Alteration," *PMLA: Publications of the Modern Language Association* 55 (September 1940): 785-94. Franklin's commercial success as a printer was due mainly to his almanacs. A useful summary is Bernard Fay, *Franklin: The Apostle of Modern Times* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1929), 156-69. It is estimated that Franklin's *Poor Richard's Almanac* sold about ten thousand copies annually, but it was not as popular as those issued by Nathaniel Ames, which sold about sixty thousand copies per year, not counting the large number of pirated copies that also circulated in the eighteenth century.

¹⁰Paraphrased from Stowell, *Early American Almanacs*, x. Students of American history have noted over the years the important role the almanac played in the lives of people: "On the popular level the magazine and especially the almanacs contributed to the diffusion of scientific knowledge" (Merle Curti, *The Growth of American Thought*, 2d ed. [New York: Harper and Row, 1951], 90); "In books, sermons, pamphlets and almanacs . . . the seminal ideas of the Enlightenment circulated in America" (Carl Bridenbaugh, *Cities in Revolt* [New York: Capricorn Books, 1964], 182-83); "Geographic and economic conditions limited the reading of common people during the colonial period mainly to the Bible and the almanac" (Wechsler, *Common People of Colonial America*, xiv); "Almanacs spread up-to-date political information, opinion, and arguments in the years just before the Revolution" (Daniel Boorstin, *The Americans: The Colonial Experience* [New York: Random House, 1958], 326). See also Chester N. Greenough, "New England Almanacs, 1766-1776, and the American Revolution," *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society*, n.s. 45 (October 1933): 288-316; and Clarence Brigham, "An Account of American Almanacs and Their Value for Historical Study," *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society*, n.s. 34 (October 1925): 3-28.

¹¹See the discussions in Sidwell, "Colonial American Almanacs," 1-19; Stowell, *Early American Almanacs*, 36-47; and Cremin, *American Education*, 390.

¹²Useful studies include N. W. Lovely, "Notes on New England Almanacs," *New England Quarterly* 8 (June 1935): 264-77; M. Nicolson, "English Almanacs and the 'New Astronomy,'" *Annals of Science* 4 (1939-40): 1-33; and Chester E. Jorgenson, "The New Science in the Almanacs of Ames and Franklin," *New England Quarterly* 8 (December 1935): 555-61. See also Norriss S. Hetherington, "Almanacs and the Extent of Knowledge of the New Astronomy in Seventeenth Century England," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 119 (August 1975): 275-79. This trend is summarized by Clinton Rossiter: "The assumptions and attitudes of Newtonian science [were] made palatable . . . to the people in almanacs and newspapers" (*The First American Revolution* [New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World, 1956], 207). As Sidwell points out, of the forty-four extant almanacs issued before 1687, forty-one were prepared by twenty-six graduates of Harvard ("Colonial American Almanacs," 2-3).

¹³These include ministers, college presidents, and governors. See the list in Stowell, *Early American Almanacs*, 41. See also Charles L. Nichols, "Notes on the Almanacs of Massachusetts," *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society*, n.s. 22 (1912): 21.

¹⁴These changes are discussed in Stowell, *Early American Almanacs*, 55-56. Part of the larger story is presented in William D. Stahlman, "Astrology in Colonial America: An Extended Query," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3d ser., 13 (October 1956): 551-63.

¹⁵See briefly Stowell, *Early American Almanacs*, 55ff.; the more detailed discussion in Sidwell, "Colonial American Almanacs," 83-193; and Cyprian Blagdon, "The Distribution of Almanacs in the Second Half of the Seventeenth Century," *Studies in Bibliography* 11 (1958): 107-16.

¹⁶See Richard F. Hixson, *Issac Collins: A Quaker Printer in 18th Century America* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1968), 31. See also Robert K. Dodge, "Didactic Humor in the Almanacs of Early America," *Journal of Popular Culture* 5 (Winter 1971): 592-605. On Tulley, see Alfred B. Page, "The Almanacs of John Tulley: 1687-1702," *Publications of the Colonial Society of Massachusetts* 13 (July 1912): 207-23.

¹⁷Stowell, *Early American Almanacs*, ix.

¹⁸See the summary in *ibid.*, 65-66. See also Victor Hugo Paltsits, "The Almanacs of Roger Sherman, 1750-1761," *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society*, n.s. 18 (April 1907): 213-58.

¹⁹In addition to the scholarly studies cited above, see Francisco Guerra, "Medical Almanacs of the American Colonial Period," *Journal of the History of Medicine* 16 (1961): 234-55; and Marion Barber Stowell, "American Almanacs and Feuds," *Early American Literature* 9 (Winter 1975): 276-86. For information on French almanacs see Lise Andries, "Almanacs: Revolutionizing a Traditional Genre," in Robert Darnton and Daniel Roche, eds., *Revolution in Print, The Press in France, 1775-1800* (Berkeley: University of California Press in collaboration with the New York Public Library, 1989), 203-22.

²⁰This passage has been deleted from all the published versions of Lucy Mack Smith's history, but it can be found in the "Preliminary Manuscript," 77, Library-Archives, Historical Department, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City (hereafter cited as LDS Church Archives).

²¹Almanacs are absent from the inventories that exist either of libraries in Palmyra/Manchester or of Mormon collections or printing establishments during Joseph Smith's lifetime. This in spite of the clear indications that such publications were commonly used. Of course more work needs to be done on the reading habits and book ownership of early Mormons, but so far almanacs do not show up on currently available lists. An important guide to early Mormon publications, including almanacs, is Chad J. Flake, ed., *A Mormon Bibliography, 1830-1930* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1978).

²²These numbers are based on surviving copies as inventoried in Milton Drake, *Almanacs of the United States*. Drake's inventory is arranged chronologically by state and year.

²³As J. R. Dolan shows, peddlers carried almanacs as part of their wares into the nooks and corners of early America (*The Yankee Peddlers of Early America* [New York: Clarkson N. Potter, 1964]). The role of the local printer's office is described in Milton W. Hamilton, *The Country Printer, New York State, 1785-1830*, 2d ed. (Port Washington, N.Y.: Ira J. Friedman, 1964). Many local printers had a reading room at their printshop where customers could examine the latest products of the press, including almanacs. Thus the local printing office was often the cultural center of the community in addition to its function as a bookshop (see Hamilton, *Country Printer*, 78-82, 247). An extended study of the role of almanacs in the early years of the new nation is Jon Stanley Wenrick, "For Education and Entertainment—Almanacs in the Early American Republic, 1783-1815" (Ph.D. diss., Claremont Graduate School, 1974). For a brief study focusing on the pre-Civil War era see F. G. Woodward, "An Early Tennessee Almanac and Its Maker: Hill's Almanac, 1825-1862," *Tennessee Folklore Society Bulletin* 18 (March 1952): 9-14.

²⁴*The Evening and the Morning Star*, the first newspaper issued by the Church, cited material from an almanac by Fisher Ames (see vol. 1 [December 1832]: [6-7]). The *Nauvoo Neighbor* cited information about preserving potatoes from the *American Agriculturalist's Almanac* (vol. 1 [27 December 1843]); the *Prophet* mentions a phrenological almanac (vol. 1 [1 June 1844]) and a nautical almanac (vol. 1 [15 June 1844]). The comments of Parley P. Pratt in his 1837 *Voice of Warning* suggest even more: "The predictions of the prophets can be clearly understood, as much so as the Almanac" (13).

²⁵*Far West Record*, 30 April 1832, MS, LDS Church Archives (more conveniently found in Donald Q. Cannon and Lyndon W. Cook, eds., *Far West Record: Minutes of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1830-1844* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1983], 46); *Times and Seasons* 3 (15 November 1841): 599. Peter Crawley called this last item to my attention. No doubt almanacs were available to Mormons in the Whitney Store in Kirtland, Ohio, and in the Windsor Lyon drugstore in Nauvoo, Illinois.

²⁶A copy of the *Anti-Mormon Almanac* for 1842 is in the LDS Church Archives. John E. Page's reply was *Slander Refuted*, probably published late in 1841 in Philadelphia. The *Times and Seasons* 2 (16 August 1841): 513-14, took note of the appearance of the *Anti-Mormon Almanac*. In 1855 the *Chicago Tribune*, with heavy satire, accused Mormons of using almanacs to find texts for their sermons (see *The Mormon* [New York City] 1 [15 December 1855]. This item was called to my attention by Craig Foster). To emphasize Joseph Smith's great accomplishments, Martin Harris said in 1870, "Joseph Smith could not print a almanac in his day but he did it all" (cited in a letter of John MacNeil, 18 November 1870, in Frederick Stewart Buchanan, ed., *A Good Time Coming: Mormon Letters to Scotland* [Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1988], 104).

²⁷Donald M. Scott, "Print and the Public Lecture System, 1840-60," in *Printing and Society in Early America*, ed. William L. Joyce, David D. Hall, Richard D. Brown, and John B. Hench (Worcester, Mass.: American Antiquarian Society, 1983), 291.

²⁸*Prophet*, 22 June 1844. This was the second publication by the man who became one of the most prolific writers in early Mormonism. For a study of these publishing activities, see David J. Whittaker, "Orson Pratt: Prolific Pamphleteer," *Dialogue* 15 (Autumn 1982): 27-42. A book-length study of Orson Pratt's life is Breck England, *The Life and Thought of Orson Pratt* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1985).

²⁹*New York Messenger*, 2, 9 August 1845. In a letter to Reuben Hedlock, dated 20 August 1845, Pratt said that the 1846 almanac was printed in an edition of five thousand copies (see *New York Messenger*, 30 August 1845, 67).

³⁰*Ibid.*, 18 October 1845.

³¹The two copies of the five-page, legal size manuscript, one in Orson Pratt's handwriting and the other in the hand of Thomas Bullock, are in the LDS Church Archives. The text includes notes to the printer showing that Pratt intended publication. See also *Journal History*, 1 January 1849, 3. There is evidence that Orson intended to publish another almanac for British Latter-day Saints in the 1850s.

³²*Prophetic Almanac for 1845* (New York: Published at the *Prophet* Office, 1844), [2].

³³*Prophetic Almanac for 1846* (New York: Published at the *New York Messenger* Office, 1845), [2]. He did add to his almanac information relating the parts of the body to the respective sign in the zodiac. He included the same caution in his unpublished almanac for 1849.

³⁴See Sidwell, "Colonial American Almanacs," 62-63, 84, 89-90.

³⁵It had appeared in the *Millennial Star* 2 (June 1841): 21–22.

³⁶See Sidwell, "Colonial American Almanacs," 145, 214–215.

³⁷See the short summary in Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Copernican Revolution: Planetary Astronomy in the Development of Western Thought* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1957), 94, 260ff.

³⁸The same was true for colonial American almanacs. Even though many of the almanac makers did not approve of astrology, they learned that their volumes would not sell if such material were deleted. For example, when John Holt refused to put astrological items in his New York almanac for 1767, people refused to buy it, so he put them back in the next year (see Wechsler, *Common People*, xv).

³⁹For biographical information on Phelps, see Walter Dean Bowen, "The Versatile W. W. Phelps—Mormon Writer, Educator, and Pioneer" (Master's thesis, Brigham Young University, 1958).

⁴⁰In section 55 of the Doctrine and Covenants, Phelps is called to assist Oliver Cowdery in the "work of printing" and to specifically help in selecting and writing books for schools in the Church. This was the beginning of his writing and publishing career in the early Church. As late as October 1864 Phelps was asking Brigham Young to help him to fulfill this early revelation by obtaining a general conference vote for him to proceed with further publishing for the Church (see his letter to Young, 8 October 1864, MS, Brigham Young Collection, LDS Church Archives).

⁴¹The best summary of the history and work of the Literary Firm is in Lyndon W. Cook, *Joseph Smith and the Law of Consecration* (Provo: Grandin, 1985), 43–55. Phelps seems to have been a member of the firm from its inception in November 1831.

⁴²This included acting as scribe and ghostwriter for Joseph Smith. For example, Phelps authored Smith's *Views of the Powers and Policy of the Government of the United States* (1844). See Phelps's letter to Brigham Young, 6 August 1863, MS, Brigham Young Collection, LDS Church Archives.

⁴³*Deseret Almanac for the Year of Our Lord 1851* (Salt Lake City: W. Richards, [1851]), [2–3].

⁴⁴*Deseret Almanac for the Year of Our Lord 1852* (Salt Lake City: W. Richards, [1852]). The last dated item in the almanac is December 1851; it would appear that the work was issued early in 1852.

⁴⁵Phelps later complained to Brigham Young that William S. Godbe was giving other almanacs away at his store and that this competed with his own sales. See his letter to Young, 19 October 1865. See also his earlier comments in another letter to Young, 9 September 1856. The 1856 Almanac was printed for Godbe in New York City by the Graefenberg Company. A copy is in the LDS Church Archives. Both Phelps letters are in Brigham Young Collection, LDS Church Archives. President Brigham Young himself ordered almanacs from England (see the 27 April 1854 notation in "European Mission Publication Accounts Journal," vol. 8, MS, 687, LDS Church Archives. The almanacs requested were the 1854 *Hannays Almanack* and the 1855 *Nautical Almanac*). In 1853 Mormon missionaries in India supplied their printers in Calcutta with a "list of the names and stations of the Elders throughout India. They intend inserting them in a almanac for the coming year" (A. Milton Musser, Journal, 2 August 1853 [vol. 3, 15], LDS Church Archives).

⁴⁶Letter of Phelps to Brigham Young, 9 September 1856, MS, Young Collection, LDS Church Archives.

⁴⁷See *Almanac for the Year 1860* (Salt Lake City: J. McKnight, 1860), 29. Given the material presented in n. 50 below, the 1858 almanac ought to have the greatest emphasis on astrology of all of the Phelps almanacs.

⁴⁸Phelps, in a letter of 29 March 1866 to Brigham Young, said that he was going to combine 1866 and 1867 into one volume. In another letter dated 27 October 1866 he informed his leader that the volume was at press. MSS of both letters are in the Brigham Young Collection, LDS Church Archives.

⁴⁹*Deseret News*, 8 February 1851, 202.

⁵⁰*Deseret News*, 8 March 1851, 219–20:

Again Doctor, I solicit a space in your columns, to say a few words upon 'the weather,' which is so wonderfully foretold by the almanac maker, or the printer's devil, in many almanacs, for the vexing consolation of farmers, travellers, and some visiting women. . . .

In addition to this kind of soothsaying, a large majority of mankind actually believe, that the moon holds an immense sway, at her changes, over the weather; and this serves to strengthen the almanac maker's or the printer's devil's faith, or cunning, or calculations, in foretelling the hidden treasures of the weather. . . .

I have witnessed more that six hundred changes of the moon in fifty years, during which time not less that ten thousand changes of weather have happened by night and by day, among which were snow in summer, and thunder showers in winter; and yet, before, and after all; when true philosophy, which is Truth, was consulted, I never found a man of this world, that knew what a day would bring forth, a year, a month, or a week ahead, unless revealed by the spirit of prophecy.

Phelps, of course, was not a farmer, and by 1857 changed his mind about astrology after a discussion with Brigham Young. After President Young told him that he believed astrology was true, Phelps wrote to Young, "I believe I did wrong in saying I did not know what astrology was . . . so I will now say astrology is one of the sciences belonging to the holy Priesthood perverted by vain man" (see Wilford Woodruff,

Journal, 28 June 1857, MS, LDS Church Archives; and letter of Phelps to Brigham Young, 29 June 18[57], MS, Brigham Young Collection, LDS Church Archives). By 1861, Brigham Young had changed his mind, suggesting that it would not do to favor astrology (see Brigham Young, Office Journal, 30 December 1861, MS, LDS Church Archives). Regardless of these fluctuations, it seems apparent that the average Mormon farmer probably took seriously the astrological content of almanacs. Brigham Young remembered an attempt to establish astrology in Nauvoo (see his Office Journal, under the date cited above). And Thomas Job wanted to establish a school for astrology in Salt Lake City (see letter of William Clayton to Brigham Young, 30 October 1865, MS, Young Collection, LDS Church Archives). The first known action of a Church court against "using magic and telling fortunes" resulted in a disfellowshipment, but those involved wrote from England to Nauvoo seeking to know if they had done the right thing (see letter of George A. Smith to Don Carlos Smith, 29 March 1841, in *Times and Seasons* 2 [1 June 1841]: 434. See also Wilford Woodruff's Journal, 28 March 1841. Compare a later case in Nauvoo High Council Minutes, 25 March 1843, MS, LDS Church Archives). The fact that members of the Church were open to astrology should not surprise us; they were also influenced by other cultural movements of the time, particularly spiritualism and phrenology. For an overview see Davis Bitton, "Mormonism's Encounter with Spiritualism," *Journal of Mormon History* 1 (1974): 39-50; and Gary L. Bunker and Davis Bitton, "Phrenology among the Mormons," *Dialogue* 9 (Spring 1974): 43-61. See also the editorials, "Astrology and Magic," *Millennial Star* 10 (15 February 1848): 50-52; and "Astrology and the 'Great Tribulation,'" *Deseret Evening News* (24 May 1879): 2.

⁵¹(1861; reprint, New York: A. A. Knopf, 1963), 279-80.

⁵²2 vols. (London: W. Jeffs, 1861), 2:185-86.

⁵³*Almanac for the Year 1860*, 32.

⁵⁴A useful introduction is Leslie Shepard, *The History of Street Literature* (Newton, England: David and Charles, 1973). See also David B. Hall, "The World of Print and Collective Mentality in Seventeenth-Century New England," in John Higham and Paul K. Conklin, eds., *New Directions in American Intellectual History* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979), 166-80.

⁵⁵Orson Pratt's almanacs stressed the coming establishment of the kingdom of God spoken of by Daniel; William Phelps's almanacs reprinted a number of times the Civil War prophecy (D&C 87) in the 1860s, and, at least privately, he spoke in very strong millennial terms as to the fate of the nation. Phelps wrote and sent to Brigham Young several hymns that make his own thoughts clear on this matter. Copies are in the Young Collection, LDS Church Archives. In his *Almanac for the Year 1861*, Phelps included his own translations of verses from Daniel 4 and 12.

⁵⁶On this aspect of the early American almanacs, see Richard M. Gummere, "The Classical Element in Early New England Almanacs," *Harvard Library Bulletin* 9 (Spring 1955): 181-96.

⁵⁷A valuable look at another early Mormon who was a contemporary of both Pratt and Phelps and who also involved himself with astrology and alchemy is James B. Allen, *Trials of Discipleship: A Life of William Clayton* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1986). See chap. 12, "The Esoteric Tendency," which addresses some of the same themes we are treating here. See also D. Michael Quinn, *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View* (Salt Lake City: Signature, 1987).

⁵⁸Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, 330. As Lewis Mumford has suggested, the invention of the mechanical clock meant that eternity would cease to serve as the measure and focus of human events. Clocks weakened God's supremacy because they superseded nature's authority. *Technics and Civilization* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1934), 14-16. This was called to my attention by Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business* (New York: Viking, 1985), 11-12.

⁵⁹It should be stressed that folk culture is not just a thing of the past. It is still a real part of our world. A recent compilation of folk-sayings in Utah reminds us how pervasive folk culture and astrology still are, especially in agrarian settings in contemporary Utah (see Anthon S. Cannon et al., *Popular Beliefs and Superstitions from Utah* [Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1985]; see the index for references to "moon." See also Wayland Hand, "Magic and Supernaturalism in Utah Folklore," *Dialogue* 16 [Winter 1983]: 51-64).