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The Peirce Mormon Bibliography at Utah State University

Ann Buttars

In 1916 the Board of Trustees of the Agricultural College of Utah in Logan purchased the Eli H. Peirce library, a collection of books dealing with Mormon and Utah history. This purchase generated a fair amount of concern and a number of problems. However, it also provided a solid foundation upon which to build the special collections of Utah State University and one of Utah's most robust Mormon bibliographies.

The biennial report of the board of trustees for the years 1915-16 reported the purchase this way:

The Pierce [*sic*] Library of Utah History was purchased by the Board of this Institution. The books have been classified and cataloged with other books of the Library, but shelved as a special collection. This Pierce Library consists of 680 volumes relating to the history of Utah and Western United States. The collection includes also many of the publications of the Latter-day Saints, and much of the vast literature which has been written on Mormonism, pro and con.

Many of the volumes are very rare and the entire collection is a valuable and desirable addition to the library.¹

This statement, though short, is an accurate description of the books the library had just acquired and to which Peirce had dedicated a major portion of his life. However, this purchase had been neither approved nor appreciated by the library staff.

On July 5, 1916, Elizabeth Church Smith, librarian at the Agricultural College, wrote an irate letter to Dr. E. G. Peterson, newly appointed president of the college, questioning the appropriation of library funds for this purchase and saying that "the requisition for the purchase of the Pierce [*sic*] collection of Utah History books amounting

Ann Buttars is Assistant Curator of the Special Collections and Archives Department at Utah State University. This article is a modified version of a paper presented at the Mormon History Association's Twenty-third Annual Conference, May 7, 1988, in Logan, Utah.

"THE MESSENGER TO THE NATIONS."

*"What shall then one, (The Messenger to the Nations) say?
That the Lord hath founded Zion; and that the poor of his
people shall trust in it."—ISAIAH.*

*"All ye inhabitants of the World and dwellers on the Earth, see ye when
he lifteth up an Ensign upon the Mountains, and when he bloweth a
trumpet hear ye."—ISAIAH, 18-3.*

From the above text of holy writ, it is evident that something very remarkable is designed to be understood; and, as nothing has as yet transpired which has been regarded as a fulfilment of this wonderful prediction; and as the attention of the whole world is called to the subject of the text—which is the lifting up the Ensign, and blowing the trumpet—it becomes imperative for one that has the light to let it shine, that it may be seen by all. And in order to do this the holy scriptures should be allowed to be their own interpreter. According to this rule we shall point out the Ensign; and in so doing will also explain the last clause of the text, which we consider

relative; and the blowing of the trumpet is the light concerning the Ensign, to all nations. And as these are regarded as the spiritual things of the holy Scriptures, the apostle Paul declares that none can understand, except revealed unto them, by the Spirit:—2 Cor. 2-10 to 16—and in his secret unto his servants the prophets:—Am., 3—when the light of the Ensign is revealed, and shined forth to all the world; that the time for the fulfilment of this remarkable prediction has arrived. Wherefore with this subject before us, we shall refer to another scripture by the same prophet, whom, we of course must suppose, best understands his own words. Says Isaiah, ch. 11, verse 12: "And he (the Lord, see verse 11,) shall set up an Ensign for the nations, (and to show when it should take place, he continues,) and shall assemble the outcasts of Israel, and gather together the dispersed of Judah, from the four corners of the earth." And then to the end of the chapter, he speaks of the return of the Jews, as immediately following the event of the setting up of the Ensign; so that we are led to the conclusion, that another event than the coming of Jesus of Nazereth is spoken of in these scriptures; inasmuch as no such thing took place at his coming. We quote again from the 10th verse, to show more fully who is the character called the Ensign: he is here called the Root of Jesse, whose rest, (the Millennial rest) should be glorious; and also to whom the

Page 3 of *Zion's Messenger* by Francis Gladden Bishop, published in Council Bluffs, Iowa, 1854. The only original copy known to exist is in the Peirce Library. (Courtesy of Utah State University Merrill Library.)

to \$1299 is to be taken from the 1916 library fund of \$1900” which would leave “practically nothing . . . for the purchase of any new books for the departments and none for magazines.”² She was extremely concerned because no new books had been ordered for the coming school year and the majority of the library budget had been spent. Later that month, she again wrote to Peterson reemphasizing her concern and frustration while acknowledging the inherent value of the collection:

I wish that I might say to you unofficially that the Pierce [*sic*] Library was not a library buy. It was done entirely by the Board and I feel that they should arrange in some way by special appropriation to pay for it as it was fully expected would be done. To be sure it is a splendid collection.³

Smith had apparently not been included in making the arrangements for the purchase of the Peirce Library. Although she had called it “a splendid collection,” she, being a devout Episcopalian, probably did not entirely approve of the acquisition of a Mormon collection of books, let alone its consuming almost the entire library budget.

After voicing her opinion in several letters on the handling of this purchase, Smith left the matter in the hands of President Peterson in hopes that he would do something about this situation. On September 8, 1916, Smith received a letter from the secretary to the president informing her that an order for new library books had been sent off and an additional appropriation had been made to cover all other requests.⁴ With her budgeting problems taken care of, Smith finally accepted the purchase of Eli Peirce’s library and began making preparations for its arrival in Logan.

Eli Harvey Peirce was born in Salt Lake City, February 27, 1850. He received his early education in the Salt Lake City public schools and later graduated with honors from Deseret University, now the University of Utah. In addition, he graduated as a telegraph operator from a school organized by President Brigham Young in 1870 for the benefit of the Utah Northern Railroad.⁵ After completing his training, he worked in Brigham City for eighteen years as an agent for the Utah and Northern branch of the Union Pacific Railroad Company, as an agent for the Pacific Express Company, as a coal agent, and finally as manager of the Western Union and Deseret Telegraph offices.⁶ During Peirce’s tenure with the Union Pacific Railroad Company in Brigham City, historian Edward W. Tullidge aptly described him as

a young man of as much business capacity and push as any young man in our Territory. . . . We should offer him to those who would investigate

the meaning of young Utah as one of the best specimens of that class, concerning whom even our Gentile brethren are prophetic with great promises of the future. Doubtless it is the type of Mormon origin, like Eli H. Peirce, that has suggested to the Gentiles this idea of young Utah. Expounded, the class signifies a host of young men who have received a better education than their fathers, consequently are men of more culture, yet who have sprang from that hardy, indomitable race of pioneers who have peopled and subdued this mountainous country.⁷

While in Brigham City, Peirce displayed his flair for culture by organizing the Brigham Dramatic Association, where he developed a great appreciation for various literary and historical works. There seemed to be nothing that could stop him in his endeavors. He was indeed a very ambitious man and continued to be so throughout his entire life.

Upon leaving Brigham City, Peirce moved to Salt Lake City, where he became associated in the insurance business with Heber J. Grant, future President of the LDS Church, and later operated his own prosperous insurance business with offices in the Templeton Building. During this time, he was an active member of the Mormon Tabernacle Choir, which he also served as business manager. He played a prominent part in planning and organizing some of the earliest trips taken by the choir.⁸ While living in Salt Lake City, he became well known as a singer, actor, and lover of rare books.⁹

Throughout his active business career, Peirce found time to collect what was reputed to be “the most complete library of books written for and against ‘Mormonism’ ever brought together.”¹⁰ This library was built painstakingly over many years despite Peirce’s modest means and large family.¹¹ Most of his book purchases were handled through the Shepard Book Company on South State Street in Salt Lake City.¹² The company published, imported, bought, and sold old, rare and new books. It advertised:

We carry the largest stock of MORMON and ANTI-MORMON BOOKS in the world. If you are interested in this subject, write or call on us and we will quote you prices on any book on Mormonism in or out of print.¹³

This company was later responsible for buying and selling many of Peirce’s books. Through a 1911 Shepard Book Company advertisement offering a major collection of books on Mormonism for sale, Harvard University became interested in Peirce and his Mormon library. News of Harvard’s intent to buy the collection was leaked to the *Salt Lake City Herald*, and Peirce received extensive criticism from friends and neighbors, the community, the governor, and the

Shepard Book Company

**PUBLISHERS, IMPORTERS
AND DEALERS IN
OLD, -RARE AND NEW**

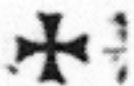
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FOR FURTHER INFORMATION ADDRESS:

SHEPARD BOOK COMPANY.

"De Olde Booke Shoppe,"

272 State St., Opp Hotel Knutsford SALT LAKE CITY UTAH.

Advertisement for the Shepard Book Company found in the back of the 1904 edition of *Brigham's Destroying Angel*. This company was responsible for the buying and selling of many of the Eli H. Peirce books. (Courtesy of Utah State University Merrill Library.)

University of Utah. It was even rumored that General Authorities of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints strongly disapproved of the sale and offered to purchase five hundred of the most outspoken anti-Mormon books to prevent their leaving the State. It was not until three years later that Harvard actually purchased 2,653 books and pamphlets from Peirce. The *Harvard Alumni Bulletin* announced the news of the purchase and proudly listed its contents.¹⁴

Shortly after the sale, Peirce began collecting another, essentially duplicate, library beginning with a few copies of works he had left from the Harvard sale. He was no longer working as an insurance agent and had more time for book collecting. He spent the rest of his life reading and studying these books, inside each volume making notations which listed the page numbers where there was a reference to Mormons. In 1914, just a few months prior to his death, he used a number of these books to write a series of three articles in the *Deseret Evening News* arguing that the Garden of Eden was located in the region of the country that now borders Utah, Wyoming, and Colorado.¹⁵ At the time of his death, on February 9, 1915, Peirce owned approximately seven hundred volumes mentioning Mormons.

These volumes were the library that the Agricultural College of Utah purchased from Mrs. Peirce during the spring of 1916. When the purchase was completed, the books were moved to Logan and deposited in the library. Elizabeth Smith shortly thereafter began processing them for patron use. She registered the books in the accession records, giving a complete description of each and assigning it an accession number as well as a call number.¹⁶ Under the assumption that these Mormon books were not that significant, she classified them according to the ninth edition of the *Dewey Decimal Classification*, which placed books about Mormons in with non-Christian religious groups (#289.9).¹⁷ The books were put there whether Mormons considered themselves Christian or not. The rest of the books were classified and placed in whatever category they corresponded to in the Dewey Decimal system, despite Peirce's notations about mentions of Mormons. The books apparently were never shelved in a separate, special collection; rather they were scattered throughout the stacks of the entire library. Further, there were never any book plates made to identify the books as belonging to the Eli H. Peirce library. The only thing that identified the books as part of the Peirce library was the accession number stamped inside each volume. When it came to the cataloging of the Peirce books, Smith did an exceptional job of descriptive cataloging, but she did not take the

Utah and Mormons

Pgs. 151-288-290-291-307-400-
401-606

Mormons find Gold in Cal-158-288-291-

California Star-153

Brannan & Co.-290-

Much about Indians
see pencil check marks all thru

An example of Eli Peirce's handwritten notes. These notes are in the front of the *American Quarterly Register and Magazine*, vol. 2, located in the Peirce Library. (Courtesy of Utah State University Merrill Library.)

time nor feel it appropriate to put Mormon subject headings on all of the books. The original shelflist cards reveal that many of them were cataloged under author and title only.

The Peirce library also included a large collection of pamphlets, but these were never fully processed because the policy of the library at that time was not to process such items. They were simply laid on shelves in the back of the library with the myriad of other too-small-to-catalog items waiting to be taken care of later or bound in buckram as a book that could be processed. There is no way of knowing how many pamphlets were in the Peirce library, but apparently there were quite a few; many pamphlets with notations about Mormon material and in the same handwriting as that in the Peirce books have been transferred over the years to the Special Collections Department from other areas of the library.

Little did Elizabeth Smith know that the Peirce library would be not only the beginning of a Mormon bibliography at Utah State University, but also the foundation of the Special Collections Department of the Utah State University Merrill Library. Although the 1915–16 Biennial Report of the Board of Trustees stated that the Peirce Library would be shelved as a special collection, a department for doing so was not established at Utah State University until January 1965. In announcing the creation of the Merrill Library's Special Collections Department, Dr. Milton C. Abrams, university librarian, indicated that books "acquired over a period of years by purchase, gift and university publication" would be used as the foundation for the new department.¹⁸ Some of the books he referred to were those of the Peirce library.

Though many of the books from the Peirce library were placed in the newly established Special Collections Department, they were not gathered into the originally promised special collection until 1971. Under the direction of A. J. Simmonds, curator of special collections at Utah State University, and with the aid of the library accession records for 1916, the stacks of the Merrill Library were searched to find the remaining books of the Peirce library. At last, the Peirce books were gathered together and placed in the Special Collections Department as Book Collection 13.

This time the actual content and value of the Peirce library was finally realized. The books range in date from 1830 to 1914, with volume one of *The Millennial Harbinger* being the earliest published volume in the collection. The books span the history of the LDS Church from its organization through 1914, the year prior to the

THE MILLENNIAL HARBINGER.

{ No. 1. } BETHANY, VIRGINIA: { Vol. I. }
 MONDAY, JANUARY 4, 1830.

I saw another messenger flying through the midst of heaven, having everlasting good news to proclaim to the inhabitants of the earth, even to every nation and tribe, and tongue, and people—saying with a loud voice, Fear God and give glory to him, for the hour of his judgments is come: and worship him who made heaven, and earth, and sea, and the fountains of water.—JOHN.

Great is the truth and mighty above all things, and will prevail.

PROSPECTUS.

THIS work shall be devoted to the destruction of sectarianism, infidelity, and antichristian doctrine and practice. It shall have for its object the developement and introduction of that political and religious order of society called **THE MILLENNIUM**, which will be the consummation of that ultimate amelioration of society proposed in the Christian Scriptures. Subserving to this comprehensive object, the following subjects shall be attended to:—

1. The incompatibility of any sectarian establishment, now known on earth, with the genius of the glorious age to come.

2. The inadequacy of all the present systems of education, literary and moral, to develop the powers of the human mind, and to prepare man for rational and social happiness.

3. The disentanglement of the Holy Scriptures from the perplexities of the commentators and system-makers of the dark ages. This will call for the analysis of several books in the New Testament, and many disquisitions upon the appropriated sense of the leading terms and phrases in the Holy Scriptures and in religious systems.

4. The *injustice* which yet remains in many of the political regulations under the best political governments, when contrasted with the *justice* which christianity proposes, and which the millennial order of society promises.

5. Disquisitions upon the treatment of African slaves, as preparatory to their emancipation, and exaltation from their present degraded condition.

6. General religious news, or regular details of the movements of the religious combinations, acting under the influence of the proselyting spirit of the age.

7. Occasional notices of religious publications, including reviews of new works, bearing upon any of the topics within our precincts.

8. Answers to interesting queries of general utility, and notices of all things of universal interest to all engaged in the proclamation of the *Ancient Gospel* and a *Restoration of the Ancient Order of Things*.

9. Miscellanea; or, religious, moral, and literary varieties.

Much of the useful learning which has been sanctified to the elucidation of those interesting and sublime topics of christian expectation,

VOL. I.

1

Volume 1, number 1 of *The Millennial Harbinger*, published in Bethany, Virginia, January 4, 1830–December 1833. This is the earliest publication in the Peirce Library. (Courtesy of Utah State University Merrill Library.)

Peirce's death. They include everything from fact to fiction on such subjects as history, geography, sociology, anthropology, archaeology, geology, and, of course, religion. Even such general titles as *Travels around the World*, *Men and Manners in America*, and *Story of the Wild West* are found in the library. At first glance, such books do not appear to be overly concerned with Mormons and Mormonism. However, Peirce's notations concerning Mormon content inside each volume make it quite evident that the entire collection is indeed relevant to the study of Mormonism.

Interestingly, when Dale Morgan visited the Agricultural College Library in 1948 in a search for books to include in his Mormon bibliography, he did not find a substantial number of books on that subject.¹⁹ He was unable to locate many titles because the Peirce books did not have the subject headings under which he looked to identify the books for his bibliography. Had Morgan been able to find and identify all of the books in the Peirce library, he would have found a gold mine of Mormon bibliography and probably would not have thought Utah to be quite as "bibliographically naive" as he indicated in the introduction to *A Mormon Bibliography, 1830-1930*.²⁰ Because of the Peirce Library at the Agricultural College of Utah, Utah was not the "bibliographic desert" that Bernard DeVoto is thought to have judged it to be.

The Peirce library consists of numerous, significant titles in Mormon bibliography. Morgan included such titles as E. D. Howe's *History of Mormonism* and *Route from Liverpool to Great Salt Lake*. Other titles such as *The Latter Day Saint's Messenger and Advocate* and *Voree Herald* are included in his bibliography but are not shown as holdings of Utah State University. Some hard-to-find titles in his bibliography that are also in the Peirce library include *The Olive Branch* and Lucy Mack Smith's *Biographical Sketches of Joseph Smith*. There are a few titles such as Francis Gladden Bishop's *Zion's Messenger* that are part of the Peirce Library but are not listed in Morgan's bibliography.

The purchase of the Peirce library brought a wealth of Mormon bibliography to the Agricultural College of Utah (later called Utah State University). In 1916 the board of trustees paid \$1,299 for the Peirce library, making the average price per volume \$1.98 (a slightly better price than Harvard had been given). Today this collection is virtually irreplaceable. Numerous articles, theses, dissertations, and books concerning "Utah and Mormons" (as Peirce would have annotated them)²¹ have been written using the library. What was a rather

insignificant and troublesome purchase of library books for Elizabeth Church Smith is today one of Utah State University's most cherished and valuable library possessions, as cherished as it once was by Eli H. Peirce.

NOTES

¹ Biennial Report of the Board of Trustees of the Agricultural College of Utah for the years 1915-1916 (Salt Lake City, 1917), 161.

² Elizabeth C. Smith to E. G. Peterson, July 5, 1916, E. G. Peterson Papers, Box 3, Folder S-1916, Utah State University, Special Collections and Archives.

³ Elizabeth C. Smith to E. G. Peterson, July 28, 1916, E. G. Peterson Papers, Box 3, Folder S-1916, Special Collections and Archives, Utah State University.

⁴ Secretary to the President, Utah Agricultural College to Elizabeth C. Smith, September 8, 1916, E. G. Peterson Papers, Box 3, Folder S-1916, Special Collections and Archives, Utah State University.

⁵ Journal History of the Church, February 9, 1915, 3, Archives Division, Church Historical Department, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City.

⁶ *Tullidge's Quarterly Magazine* 2, no. 1 (April 1882): 412.

⁷ *Tullidge's Quarterly Magazine*, 411-12.

⁸ *Salt Lake Tribune*, February 10, 1915, 14.

⁹ Journal History of the Church, February 9, 1915, 3.

¹⁰ *Deseret Evening News*, February 10, 1915, 2.

¹¹ Ray Allen Billington, "The Origins of Harvard's Mormon Collection," *Arizona and the West* 10, no. 3 (Autumn 1968), 216.

¹² The sign from the Shepard Book Company now hangs over the rare book room in the Special Collections Department, Marriott Library, University of Utah, Salt Lake City.

¹³ The Shepard Book Company advertisement was found on the back cover of William A. Hickman, *Brigham's Destroying Angel* (Salt Lake City: Shepard Book, 1904).

¹⁴ Billington, "Harvard's Mormon Collection," 211-22.

¹⁵ Journal History, November 14, 1914, 4; November 28, 1914, 4-5.

¹⁶ Library Accession Ledgers of the Agricultural College of Utah, vol. 6, 1913-16, nos. 29001-29656, Library Archives, Special Collections and Archives, Utah State University.

¹⁷ Melvil Dewey, *Decimal Classification and Relative Index for Libraries, Clippings, Notes*, 9th rev. (Lake Placid Club, N.Y.: Forest Press, 1915).

¹⁸ *The Herald Journal*, January 22, 1965, 6. The announcement of the new department was also published in *Student Life*, February 1, 1965, 2.

¹⁹ Dale L. Morgan to Fawn Brodie, April 20, 1948. *Dale Morgan on Early Mormonism* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1986), 154-55.

²⁰ Dale L. Morgan, Introduction to *A Mormon Bibliography, 1830-1930* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1978), 2.

²¹ "Utah and Mormons" is the most common reference to Mormons used by Peirce in his handwritten notations.

“Above all things, we must be original. The Holy Ghost is the genius of ‘Mormon’ literature. Not Jupiter, nor Mars, Minerva, nor Mercury. No fabled gods and goddesses; no Mount Olympus; no ‘sisters nine,’ no ‘blue-eyed maid of heaven;’ no invoking of mythical muses that ‘did never yet one mortal song inspire.’ No pouring of new wine into old bottles. No patterning after the dead forms of antiquity. Our literature must live and breathe for itself. Our mission is diverse from all the others; our literature must also be. The odes of Anacreon, the satires of Horace and Juvenal, the epics of Homer, Virgil, Dante and Milton; the sublime tragedies of Shakspeare [sic]; these are all excellent, all well enough in their way; but we must not attempt to copy them. They cannot be reproduced. We may read, we may gather sweets from all these flowers, but we must build our own hive and honeycomb after God’s supreme design.”

Orson F. Whitney

Contributor 9 (June 1888): 300