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A HISTORY OF THE DESERET ALPHABET

A Thesis

Presented to the

Department of Speech and Dramatic Arts

Brigham Young University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

by

Larry Ray Wintersteen

May 1970

A HISTORY OF THE DESERET ALPHABET

Larry Ray Wintersteen

Department of Speech and Dramatic Arts

M.A. Degree, May 1970

ABSTRACT

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, during the years 1852-1877, introduced to its membership a form of rhetoric (writing system) called the Deseret Alphabet (phonetic alphabet). This experiment was intended to alleviate the problem of non-communication which was created by the great influx of foreign speaking Saints into the great Salt Lake Valley.

The alphabet was developed and encouraged by the Prophet Brigham Young and a few followers. Much to their dismay the members of the Church did not have the same vision of its workability as did its promoters.

This new alphabet appears not to have met the needs of the people nor did it interest them. Its use and development was hindered by temple building, farming, settling, new doctrine, and possibly little faith in following their prophet, president and leader. The Deseret Alphabet died with Brigham Young in 1877. Yet, it appears to have been a noble experiment towards a spelling reform. Perhaps it would have worked under different situations and different environment.

This thesis, by Larry Ray Wintersteen, is accepted in its present form by the Department of Speech and Dramatic Arts of Brigham Young University as satisfying the thesis requirement for the degree of Master of Arts.

Chairman, Advisory Committee

Member, Advisory Committee

Member, Advisory Committee

Chairman, Major Department

Typed by Karen Robertson

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INTRODUCTION

Human beings communicate. That is, they convey meaning to one another through language. Language, most broadly conceived may be said to include all the ways of behaving which serve to communicate with other persons and to reaffirm an individual's own integrity. Among these ways of behaving are stance, bodily movement, facial expression, vocal movement, and speech. (Speech being the verbal exchange of meaningful sounds.) Of especial interest are the effects these ways of behaving have on objects in the world about us--the products of the manual arts, the products of the vocal arts, and the products of speech. The vocal nature of language makes us view the written language as secondary, no matter what the writing system may be.

Of all the modes of communication, that which involves talk and that which involves a written system are undoubtedly the most generally influential. [1]

In this thesis the author will explore the part that the Deseret Alphabet (phonetic writing system) played in the development of oral or written communication among the Mormon pioneers between 1852-1877.

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[1] Harold B. Allen, Applied English Linguistics (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1964), pp. 344-349.

During this period of Mormon history there were people from many nations coming into the Salt Lake Valley. As these people mingled with the American-born Mormons, the serious problem of communication soon arose. It was because of this mingling of nations in the Salt Lake Valley that a phonetic writing system was introducted among the Mormon people in hopes that people of all tongues would be able to communicate more effectively.

The author wishes to investigate this phonetic writing system as a form of rhetoric. This investigation is applicable to rhetoric upon the following definitions:

"Rhetoric, I take to be the act by which discourse is adapted to its end."[2]

"Rhetoric is used in the broad sense of communication of ideas through speech and writing."[3]

"The art or science of using words effectively in speaking or writing, so as to influence or persuade...."[4]

"Rhetoric is the art (practice) and/or science (theory) of oral

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[2]I. A. Richards, Interpretation in Teaching (New York: Harcourt Brace & Co., 1938), p. 12.

[3]Lester Thonssen & A. Craig Baird, Speech Criticism (New York: Ronald Press, 1948), vi.

[4]Webster's New World Dictionary of the American Language (Cleveland & New York: The World Publishing Co., 1960), 1249.

or written communication. . ."[5]

Since rhetoric encompasses the art of written communication it is necessary at this point to examine the place of writing in communication. A system of writing, among all people who have it, is a vitally important, inseparable phase of their communication system.

The "invention" of writing, while not as epochal an event as the invention of speech, was far more important than may be expected. This is the case in any writing system of a given people. Writing gave to language a scope and many utilities that speech does not have. The first basic fact in connection with the development of writing is that speech, as a means of communication, requires a face-to-face and temporally synchronized relationship between the sender and the receiver of the messages. Speech thus presents distinct inadequacies as a form of communication between persons in face-to-face relationships, or in situations in which the sending and the receiving of the message take place over an interval of time. The second basic fact is that, unassisted, the human memory cannot be depended upon for full and exact recall, and that messages transmitted by human intermediaries, by word of mouth and from person to person, inadvertently suffer some distortion of fact, meaning and intent. What are the

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[5]Robert Owen Day, "The Contemporary Definition of Rhetoric in the Field of Public Speaking" (unpublished Master's thesis, Brigham Young University, 1967), abstract p. 2.

signal supplemental functions that writing adds to communication?

Writing makes possible communication across wide physical space; that is, it makes possible communication in secondary relationships. The range of an unaided human voice is very limited spatially. With the development of writing, people in communication with one another were no longer limited to only those within hearing distance and seeing distance. With writing, which is capable of transmission in many forms, people are enabled to send and receive messages across vast spaces, to and from other people whom they have never met in person, Writing is a supplemental and artificed set of techniques. It consists of a standardized system of visible marks or objects, designed to serve as graphic representations of speech; the meanings of the marks in turn, are also agreed upon by the people using them or at least promoting them. By means of writing, the reader of the marks obtains visual impressions through which he interprets the author's verbalized meanings. In the end, writing is simply a sufficient set of symbols to depict the range of utterances, with the signs carrying meanings arbitrarily established by culture, by usage. In effect, it is a symbol of speech, or as Mario Pei puts it, "a system of writing is a symbol of a symbol."[6]

Writing in both form and content, implies care and attention. To

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[6]Mario Pei, The Story of Language (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott & Company, 1949), p. 86.

a considerable degree, it overcomes the deficiencies of the spoken word. The written statement has tangibility, uniformity and definiteness.

Writing is also a deliberate mode of expression. It can be erased, replaced, or amended. It cannot be destroyed entirely, without incriminating the writer. An incidental related gain in this connection is the fact that people often find that their thoughts are clarified and systematized, and that necessary qualifications and extensions appear, when they subject them to the more rigorous tests of exactness and completeness demanded by the written form.

The Deseret Alphabet, a form of writing, was set up with hopes of helping the communication problem among the early Mormon pioneers, 1852-1877. Like any other writing system, the Deseret Alphabet contained symbols, representing sound or phonetic symbols. This system of symbols was intended to serve as a supplemental and artificed set of techniques to be used in learning the English language. The English language had already been established among the American born saints. The convert immigrants were introduced to the Deseret Alphabet as a means of teaching them the English language.

In order to follow the use and development of this phonetic writing system it is necessary for the author to provide historical evidence relating to the subject matter.

Therefore, the purpose of this study is to:

A. Give a brief historical background of the Deseret Alphabet prior to its use among the Mormons from 1852-1877.

B. Determine through historical study the need for establishing the Deseret Alphabet among the Mormon pioneers.

C. Research and present the available reasons for discontinuing the Deseret Alphabet.

D. Research and present the possible effects of the Deseret Alphabet on oral or written communication from 1852-1877.

E. Display this phonetic system for the examination of the reader.

It is the feeling of the author that this phonetic writing system was a form of the rhetoric used among the Mormon pioneers, 1852-1877.

This thesis will include three units. Unit number one will include background material which the author feels necessary for the reader of the thesis. Within unit one there will be chapters on social and historical setting of the Mormons, on George Darling Watt, and on phonography. Unit number two will deal directly with the Deseret Alphabet as a form of rhetoric. Within unit two there will be chapters on the development of the Deseret Alphabet, the promotion and acceptance of the Deseret Alphabet, and the place of writing in communication. Unit number three will be a summary and evaluation of the material found in the thesis.

At the end of the thesis there will be an appendix showing the phonetic symbols used in the Deseret Alphabet, some printed material in the Deseret Alphabet, and reading instructions.

CHAPTER I

SOCIAL-HISTORICAL SETTING OF THE MORMONS

The exodus of the Mormon pioneers from Nauvoo, Illinois, in February, 1846, stands as an important event in the pioneer history of the western United States of America. In the severe winter they crossed the Mississippi River, their wagons loaded with the few possessions they were able to save and take with them. Behind them were the homes they had constructed during the seven years they had been permitted to live in the state of Illinois. Before them was the wilderness, largely unknown and uncharted. The Mormon exodus to the west was unique in that it was a movement of an entire people under unfavorable circumstances to a land which had been uninviting to other immigrants.

Brigham Young presided over this pilgrim band. They accepted him as a prophet, president and the inspired successor to their beloved prophet Joseph Smith. They believed that he would direct them to a place of refuge "in the midst of the Rocky Mountains," where Joseph Smith had predicted they would become "a mighty people."[1]

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[1] Joseph Smith Jr., History of the Church, Vol. VI. (Salt Lake City, Utah: Deseret News Press, 1904), p. 234.

In the early spring of 1847, while in Winter Quarters (now a part of Omaha, Nebraska), plans were completed for the sending of a pioneer company to the Rocky Mountains. Their responsibility was to chart a route and find a place for the thousands of Saints to follow. On April 5 the pioneer company started west. It consisted of 143 men, three women, and two children, with Brigham Young leading the group.[2]

As the pioneer company approached the Rocky Mountains, travel became more difficult. Their teams were tired and their wagons were in need of repair. The steep mountain canyons, with their fast moving streams and heavy tree growth presented problems they had not faced while travelling on the plains.

It was on July 21, 1847, that Orson Pratt and Erastus Snow, two advanced scouts, entered the Salt Lake Valley. Three days later Brigham Young looked out across the valley and declared, "this is the right place."[3] Before them was the promised land they had long looked for. Their eyes beheld a valley with its salty lake gleaming in the July sun, a treeless prairie and a tract of dry land. This was their land of refuge, the place where the Saints would become "a mighty people in the midst of the Rocky Mountains."[4]

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[2]William E. Berrett, The Restored Church (Salt Lake City, Utah: Deseret Book Company, 1958), p. 342.

[3]Marguerite Cameron, Utah Pioneers (Caldwell, Idaho: Caxton, 1941), p. 23.

[4]Joseph Smith Jr., op. cit., p. 234.

With the arrival in the promised land an "ensign" was truly raised, under which converts to the Church were called from every land to gather in the heart of the Rocky Mountains. In a general epistle[5] sent by Brigham Young and the members of the Twelve Apostles from Winter Quarters, December 23, 1847, the Saints scattered from Nauvoo and those in Canada or the British Isles were instructed to gather on the eastern bank of the Missouri River. It was here on this bank that the Saints were to prepare for the migration to the Rocky Mountains.

When Brigham Young issued this call for the Saints throughout the world to gather to the valleys of the mountains, he did not contemplate that they should all dwell in the Salt Lake Valley. It was inevitable that the boundaries of the Mormon pioneers would extend beyond the Salt Lake Valley. With thousands of converts coming from other nations, other settlements were founded. At first these settlements were all rather close to the Salt Lake Valley, but soon the wagon trains were moving north and moving south towards the distant valleys.

The confines of the "State of Deseret"[6] as the Saints chose to call the territory to which they had come, was three times the size of the now existing state of Utah.[7] On March 25, 1850 the U.S. Senate Com-

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[5]William E. Berrett, op. cit., p. 316.

[6]From March 8, 1849 until September 9, 1850, there existed in America, a state which the Mormons called the "State of Deseret."

[7]James A. Little, From Kirtland to Salt Lake City (Salt Lake City, Utah: Printed at the Juvenile Instructor Office, 1890), pp. 229-230.

mittee on Territories reported two bills for passage. Both concerned the establishment of government over the territory acquired from Mexico. One bill gave statehood to the area known as California, and the other bill divided the rest of the accession into the Territory of Utah and the Territory of New Mexico. The Mormons by this arrangement would be deprived of the area requested below the thirty-seventh parallel of latitude, and their request to have their territory called "Deseret" was rejected.

Whatever form of government Congress granted, the purposes of the church remained the same. Brigham Young was aiming at an isolated commonwealth. The Mormon Zion needed isolation just then. Thousands of people were needed. The missionary program had to be expanded. The communities had to be developed so that Zion's birthrate could increase to the maximum. Then more missionaries would be sent and more people brought in.

Zion did not grow on the principle of individualism; in fact, it would have failed had it been built on the individualism of California. Had the emphasis been placed on such a principle, Brigham Young's following would have fled to California, even before the forty-niners. Zion had to be built by co-operative effort, and it was.

Once the Saints were established in the Rocky Mountains, they had the responsibility to provide their own wants or perish. They not only had to supply themselves with sufficient food, but they had to

produce their own building materials and clothing, create their own amusements, establish their own education system and adapt their own system of communication to meet their immediate needs of survival.

CHAPTER II

ISAAC PITMAN'S PHONOGRAPHY

In 1837, Mr. Isaac Pitman, of Bath, England, published a system of shorthand, under the title of "Stenographic Soundhand."[1] This publication quietly sold, but excited no general interest. Three years later the Penny Post Law[2] was passed in England, and that same year beheld the publication, by Mr. Pitman, of a small sheet entitled "Phonography."[3] An entire system of writing was elaborated on this sheet; a system so simple and philosophic in its principles, tending so certainly to that combination of speed and legibility which are the great requisites of a system of writing for the masses, that it attracted great attention among many men in England. Suggestions for the improvement of the system were forwarded to Mr. Pitman from many quarters.[4] Men were willing to spread the knowledge of this phonetic art because of its

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[1]Alfred Baker, The Life of Sir Isaac Pitman (New York: Isaac Pitman and Sons, Publishers, 1908), p. 41.

[2]In answer to the widespread demand for reading material the stamp tax on newspapers was reduced to one penny, and in 1840 the postage on letters was fixed at a like amount for each half-ounce. A greater volume of mail resulted.

[3]Baker, op. cit., p. 44.

[4]Ibid., pp. 53-55.

promise to be so useful to civilized man. This new system was spread over England, Scotland, and Ireland. Some of the brothers of Mr. Pitman were great pioneers of this new phonetic system.[5] Ever improving with its spread, the art of phonography assumed consistency and importance, until it finally became recognized by many eminent men as one of the most useful inventions of the age. For example:[6]

Glasgow College
13 January 1842

> We have examined with care and interest Mr. Pitman's analysis of the sounds of language which is made the basis of his system of phonography, and we consider it not only ingenious but also as founded throughout on correct philosophical principles. His system of phonography we have not had time to examine, but as it rests on so good a basis, we can have no doubt of its possessing great merit.
>
> James Thomson
> William Ramsay

Legibility and ease of acquisition soon caused phonography to drive away the arbitrary stenographies, out of which it had itself grown.[7] But this was not all, for phonography not only supplied the place of all the systems that had preceded it, but it also met requirements which the stenographic systems had never attempted to satisfy.

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[5]W. L. Musick, Manual of Benn Pitman Phonography (St. Louis, Mo: W. L. Musick Publishing Co., 1905), p. 12.

[6]The Phonotypic Journal for the Year 1842, Vol. I. Published by Isaac Pitman, Phonographic Institution, 5, Nelson Place, Bath, p. 13.

[7]Claude Merton Wise, Introduction to Phonetics (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1957), p. 8.

It offered the merchant, the lawyer, the editor, the author, the divine, and the student, a means of correspondence and recording thoughts and events, with a velocity five-fold greater than they ever could attain by the use of the common script.[8] And upon the reporter it has at least bestowed the means of secure and legible verbatim reporting, a power unknown before its advent, for the old stenographers were forced almost invariably to memorize much of their reports, and that portion of them which they did record was illegible to all save the writer, and often even unto him. But, by the aid of phonography, the stirring and important words of the statesman, the sacred oratory of the pulpit, and the instructive lessons of the lecturer, were transferred to the notebook of the phonographer, with a vivid distinctness, and accuracy, which, to the writer of longhand, and even to the stenographer, must have appeared little less than miraculous.

> He who has stood by the side of a phonographic reporter, and beheld his steady pen paint the flying words of a rapid speaker, can never forget the feelings of wonder and admiration which the sight never fails to call forth. And when we inform the reader that even when written at verbatim speed, phonographic writing has frequently been handed to the compositor and used by him as copy from which to set his types.[9]

An avid student of this phonographic system was a man by the name of

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[8]Isaac Pitman, Phonetic Writing (Bagster, London: December 1843), p. 21.

[9]Baker, op. cit., p. 41.

George Darling Watt, of Preston, England. The following chapter will provide the reader with brief biographical information about George D. Watt.

CHAPTER III

GEORGE DARLING WATT, MORMON CONVERT

Among the Mormon pioneers were men who had spent a great part of their lives studying the English language. Many of these men knew of the scholars who had attempted to simplify the spelling and writing of the English language. George Darling Watt was such a man.

George Darling Watt was born in Manchester, England, January 16, 1815.[1] His father was from Scotland and his mother was a native of England. His father immigrated to America, leaving George D. and his mother in England.[2]

George's mother worked very hard to raise George according to Christian principles and to have a trust and love for God. When George became of age, he moved to Preston, England. It was here that George married Mary (Mollie) Gregson, and on Sunday, July 30, 1837, they were both baptized into the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.[3]

After joining the Church, George spent much of his time in missionary

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[1]Ida Watt Stringham, and Dora Dutson Flack, England's First Mormon Convert: The Biography of George Darling Watt (Salt Lake City, Utah: David J. Ellison, 1958), p. 8.

[2]Ibid., p. 8.

[3]Ibid., p. 12.

work for the Church.

In England in 1837 Isaac Pitman had published his "Stenographic Soundhand." Shorthand at that time was called phonography. George D. Watt studied this new shorthand and became very proficient in its use. After immigrating to Nauvoo, Illinois, he became a professor of phonography, being the only shorthand writer and the only shorthand reporter in the Church during that period of time. His stenographic services were always available to Joseph Smith in any way the Church wished to use him. He also instructed phonography at the School of the Prophets. Many of the early Church leaders came under his instruction, including Brigham Young, Heber C. Kimball, Orson Pratt, Wilford Woodruff, Amasa Lyman, and many others. On one occasion Joseph Smith said of him:

> The valuable services to this Church as professor of phonography are highly appreciated; he has taken down the speeches delivered on this occasion and they will appear from time to time as circumstances will allow them.[4]

George D. Watt spent a great deal of his time in his service of reporting for the Church and did so without pay, until the evening of June 1, 1845, when Brigham Young "met for counsel and prayer with some of the leading members of the Church in Nauvoo who were trustees of the Church. It was voted that George D. Watt be given a quarter of a lot and a house built on it for him. It was also passed that he be made

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[4] Times and Seasons, VI:871

a reporter for the Church and his labors would go toward the payment of his house and lot."[5]

During the time that the Mormons were expelled from Nauvoo, George Watt was sent back to England to serve a proselyting mission for the Church. But, this time he was not only sent to preach the Mormon gospel, but was also instructed to further his studies in phonography. Missionary work was fruitful. He also applied himself to acquiring greater schooling in this new shorthand, phonography. Following his mission he returned to the Salt Lake Valley with added schooling in phonography.

In the Millennial Star, XII:58, 200, 1851, the following notice appears:

> The Robert Campbell (a steamboat) arrived on Wednesday the 21 (May) at Kanesville with a large company of Saints from England, Scotland, etc. under the watchcare and direction of George D. Watt, our able phonographic writer and lecturer. All the Saints who have gone this far on their journey seem to be anxious to get to the end of it; but the weather being so unfavorable for the last ten days they are compelled to lie on their oars a short time against their will.

George D. Watt had a great interest and dedication to the new phonetic system devised by Isaac Pitman.

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[5]Joseph Smith Jr., History of the Church, Vol. VI (Salt Lake City, Utah: Deseret News Press, 1904), p. 425.

*The death of George Darling Watt occurred October 24, 1881. Funeral services were held at Layton, Utah, October 26, 1881.

CHAPTER IV

DEVELOPMENT OF THE DESERET ALPHABET

The Mormon pinoeers arriving in the Salt Lake Valley in July, 1847, were, for the larger part, from the New England area of the United States and had no difficulty in conversing with one another. Very little time elapsed, however, before converts from many corners of the world immigrated to America and trekked over the plains to be numbered with the Saints in the isolated valley in Utah. As these people mingled with the American-born, the serious problem of understanding each other arose.

Yet, due to the excitement caused by Pitman's phonography throughout the world, Church leaders in the Salt Lake Valley began to wonder if phonography might not solve the problem of teaching immigrant converts the English language. This linguistic proposal was depicted as follows in the Deseret News, 1853.

> The traditions that have come through the misty labyrinths of past ages are most powerfully assailed by the Governor (young), whose keen eye looks with suspicion upon the corruptions and perversions of a language which was originally pure. . . One thing seems quite certain in regard to language... especially the language of this people; it ought to be adapted to the urgency of the times.

> Can it be that Apostles will speak. . . so that people of every nation and language will forthwith understand them? If such a language is ever demanded at all, it seems to be required without delay, even now. . . . Now, the people are gathering, and the varied and most general influx of the diverse tribes, nations, kindreds, and tongues, is even at our doors. . .[1]

Many individuals and organizations had made attempts at starting spelling reforms in the English language. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints entered the field of spelling reform in 1853.[2]

One of the first suggestions of a reform in the language came to the Mormons in April, 1852. On April 8, 1852, Brigham Young sat in the "Old Tabernacle" in Salt Lake City, Utah. He was listening to a lecture on education which was being delivered by Orson Spencer, chancellor of the University of Deseret, now the University of Utah, Salt Lake City, Utah. The Journal of Discourses states that Orson Spencer was speaking far over the heads of the listening audience. Following his lengthy remarks, Brigham Young spoke at length of the "senseless complexities" of the English language. He said that he considered it to be a good language, but,

> When we scan it narrowly, we find it to be frought with imperfections and ridiculous vagaries. . . . Brother Spencer has used language quite beyond your reach. Well, I have the foundation, and he can make the building. When he commences the building, I have asked the Board of Regents to cast out from their system of education, the present orthography and written form of our language, that when my children are taught the

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[1]Deseret News, November 24, 1853.

[2]Kate B. Carter, Heart Throbs of the West, Vol. XI (Salt Lake City, Utah: Daughters of the Utah Pioneers, 1945), p. 264.

graphic sign of A, it may always represent the individual sound only. But as it now is, the child is perplexed that the sign A should have one sound in mate, a second sound in father, a third sound in fall, a fourth sound in man, and a fifth sound in many, and, in other combinations, soundings different from these, while in others, A is not sounded at all. I say; let it have one sound all the time. And when P is introduced into a word, let it not be silent as in Phthisic, or sound like F in Physic, and let not two be placed instead of one in apple. . . .

. . . .If there were one set of words to convey one set of ideas, it would put an end to the ambiguity which often mystifies the ideas given in the language now spoken. Then when a great man delivered a learned lecture upon any subject, we could understand his words. . . . If I can speak so that you can get my meaning, I care not so much what words I use to convey that meaning.

. . . .I long for the time that a point of the finger, or motion of the hand, will express every idea without utterance. When a man is full of light of eternity, then the eye is not the only medium through which he sees, his ear is not the only means by which he understands. . . . I shall yet see the time that I can converse with this people and not speak to them, but the expression of my countenance will tell the congregation what I wish to convey, without opening my mouth. [3]

A year and a half later, a reformation in the written language started with the Latter-day Saints. A committee consisting of George D. Watt, Parley P. Pratt, and Heber C. Kimball was appointed by the First Presidency of the Church to meet with the Board of Regents to study the problem and make some recommendations. [4] Some sources indicate that Wilford Woodruff was also a member of the appointed

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[3]Journal of Discourse, I (Liverpool, England, 1853), pp. 69-71.

[4]H. H. Bancroft, History of Utah (San Fransicso, 1890), p. 712.

committee.[5]

Investigation indicates that President Brigham Young was anxious that the government of the territory of Utah pave the way for a simplified method of writing the English language. In 1854, governor Brigham Young made the following statement before the Territorial Legislature:

> While the world is progressing with steam engine power and lightning speed in the accumulation of wealth, extension of science and dissemination of letters and principle, why not the way be paved for the easier acquisition of the English language, combining, as it does great extension and varied expression with beauty, simplicity and power and being, unquestionably the most useful and beautiful in the world. But while we freely admit this, we also have to acknowledge that it is perhaps as much abused in its use, and as complex in its attainments, as any other.[6]

During Brigham Young's address to the Territorial Legislature he continually called attention to the need of a simplified language and said that the "Regency" was working on the problem. This claim could be easily supported through reading the Deseret News of November 24, 1853.

> Now in the present stage of the discussion it is proposed by some to change a small portion of the English alphabetical characters and attach invariable certainty to the sounds of others.
>
> Others are for carrying the reformation still further, thinking that a people of progressive intellect will not be content with only a partial reformation, and that it requires an entirely

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[5]Carter, op. cit., XI, p. 264.

[6]Ibid.

> new set of alphabetical characters to effect a clean, handsome reformation that will be abiding. All seem to be agreed that both the written and printed language should be one and the same.[7]

During a meeting in the Salt Lake City 14th Ward Chapel, December 26, 1853, Parley P. Pratt reported that the "Regency are getting out a new alphabet, and when we learn our letters ourselves, we will teach others."[8]

The first public announcement was made January 19, 1854:

> The Board of Regents, in company with the Governor and heads of departments have adopted a new alphabet, consisting of 38 characters. The regents have held frequent sittings this winter, with sanguine hope of simplifying the English language and especially its orthography. After many fruitless attempts to render the common alphabet of the day subservient to their purpose they found it expedient to invent an entirely new and original set of characters.
>
> These characters are much more simple in their structure than the usual alphabetical characters; every superflous mark is wholly excluded from them. The written and printed hand are substantially merged into one.
>
> We may derive a hint of the advantage to orthography from spelling the word 'eight' which in the new alphabet requires only two letters instead of five to spell it, vix., 'AT.' There will be a great saving of time and paper by the use of the new characters, and but a very small part of the time will be requisite in obtaining a knowledge of the language.
>
> The orthography will be so abridged that an ordinary writer can probably write one hundred words a minute with ease, and consequently report the speech of a common speaker without much

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[7] Deseret News, November 24, 1853.

[8] Deseret News, January 12, 1854.

difficulty.

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

In the new alphabet every letter has a fixed and unalterable sound and every word is spelled with reference to a given sound. By this method strangers cannot only acquire a knowledge of our language much more readily but a practiced reporter can also report a strange language when spoken. . .[9]

The inventor of this new alphabetical system is not too clear to the investigator. Jules Remy wrote that W. W. Phelps "worked out the letters,"[10] but T. W. Ellerbeck, Secretary to Brigham Young, said that the characters were designed "principally by George D. Watt," who had created some himself and selected others "from some of the ancient alphabets" as pictured in Webster's Unabridged Dictionary."[11] Yet, according to Andrew Jenson, assistant Church historian, they were "constructed" by a "committee composed of Orson Pratt, Parley P. Pratt, Wilford Woodruff, George D. Watt, Robert L. Campbell, and others."[12] The reader can see the design of this new alphabetical system in the appendix of this thesis.

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[9]Deseret News, January 19, 1854.

[10]Jules Remy and Julius Brenchley, A Journey to Great Salt Lake City (London, 1861), II, p. 185.

[11]Deseret News, September 13, 1930.

[12]Andrew Jenson, "Deseret Alphabet," Encyclopedic History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Salt Lake City, Utah: Deseret News Publishing Company, 1941), p. 184.

CHAPTER V

PROMOTION AND ACCEPTANCE OF THE DESERET ALPHABET

Work progressed on the alphabet and in January of 1854 the Board of Regents, along with the governor announced that they had adopted a new alphabet consisting of 38 characters.[1] This new movement also had the support of the First Presidency of the Church. Eleven of the 38 characters were sounds including six long and six corresponding short sounds, four double and one aspirate, and twenty-one articulate sounds. The new orthography was so abridged that the ordinary writer could write up to one hundred words per minute, and as Brigham Young stated, could also achieve "a substantial savings on time and paper."[2]

With the new alphabet adopted by the First Presidency of the Church, the Board of Regents of the University of Deseret, and the governor of the territory, along with being presented to the member-

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[1]"The Deseret Alphabet," Utah Historical Quarterly, ed. by J. Cecil Alter, XII (Salt Lake City, Utah, 1944), p. 100.

[2]Christian Joseph Jensen, "A Study of How the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints Attempted to Meet the Educational Needs of its Members for the Period of Time A. D. 1830-1900" (Unpublished Master's Thesis, Brigham Young University, 1931), p. 127.

ship of the Church, its sponsors took steps to promote its use. It was recorded in the Millennial Star that the First Presidency recommended it to the Saints and said they desired that "all of our teachers and instructors will introduce it in their schools, and to their classes. The orthography of the English language needs reforming--a word to the wise is sufficient."[3]

It may be good to point out here that what the First Presidency of the Church said as a First Presidency was considered a ruling for the practicing Mormons. This doctrine was supported by the scriptural reference found within their Doctrine and Covenants, section 112, verse 20. Therefore the acceptance of the First Presidency, the governor and the Board of Regents was all necessary for the adoption of this undertaking.

Regents of the University of Deseret were assigned to visit each school in Salt Lake City and to "enjoin it upon the Trustees and Board of Examination to make it an indispensable requisite in teachers to forthwith qualify themselves to teach the Deseret Alphabet in their respective schools."[4]

Albert Carrington, Church surveyor, and George D. Watt engaged in several lectures in Social Hall, Salt Lake City and Watt began

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[3]Millennial Star, XVI (1854), p. 419.

[4]Deseret News, December 7, 1854.

"organizing schools in the different wards[5] of the city of Salt Lake."[6] A total of six schools were organized in Salt Lake under the direction of George D. Watt.

Elder B. B. Messenger was assigned to teach the Deseret Alphabet to the clerks in the Church Historian's Office.[7] John B. Milner was the prominent instructor of the Deseret Alphabet in Utah County, where he has "considerable success, having sixty scholars at Lehi, twenty-eight at American Fork, twenty-five at Mountainville, twenty-eight at Pleasant Grove, twenty-two at Provo first ward, who are making good progress."[8]

In December 1854, Governor Brigham Young recommended to the Legislature that the Deseret Alphabet "be thoroughly and extensively taught in all schools, combining, as it eminently does, a basis of instruction for the attainment of the English language, far surpassing in simplicity and ease any known to exist."[9]

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[5]An ecclesiastical unit of members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Several wards make up a stake.

[6]A letter from George Albert Smith to Franklin D. Richards in the Millennial Star, XVI, p. 584.

[7]Millennial Star, XVII (1855), p. 270.

[8]George Albert Smith, editorial in the Deseret News, March 21, 1855.

[9]Millennial Star, XVII (1855), p. 262.

On August 2, 1855, George D. Watt presented three resolutions to the Deseret Typographical Association, which were unanimously adopted. These resolutions were:[10]

1. The new alphabet was "as a forerunner in that series of developments in philosophy which shall prepare mankind for the reception of a pure language."

2. The intent of the association was to work "towards rendering universal in our midst the practical adoption of this New Alphabet."

3. Elder Watt announced that he would instruct the members of this association in the New Alphabet. The first lesson would begin August 9, 1855, at 6 p. m.

The schools, however, seemed to respond reluctantly to the plea of Governor Young. Teachers were reluctant to learn such a code and exhibited very little interest. There was little enforcement of the promotion due to the fact that there were no tax supported school systems in the Territory of Utah. And the teachers in the private schools, especially Salt Lake City and Springville, Utah, showed very little interest in the New Alphabet.[11]

In the year 1855 Jules Remy visited Salt Lake City. A year and a half had passed since the official adoption of the Deseret Alphabet in the Territory of Utah. He reported at that time, that "nothing had been published, as far as we know, with these singular types. We have

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[10] Deseret News, August 15, 1855.

[11] William V. Nash, The Deseret Alphabet (Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois, Library School, 1957), p. 44.

known them to be used in private correspondence, and seen them on shop signs."[12] He also predicted that the Deseret Alphabet would be "abandoned by its own authors."[13]

In December, 1855, Franklin D. Richards, who was over the missionary work in the British Isles, received a letter from Brigham Young which read:[14]

> We contemplate having a set of school books printed at the Liverpool office, in the new alphabet; we would like to have you inform us in relation to getting up a font of type, and whether we will have to send any person to Liverpool for that purpose, or to oversee the printing of the books, the manuscript of course being furnished from this territory.
>
> It is our intention to introduce this system in the schools throughout the territory.... The Legislation Assembly will probably take this matter in hand and make an appropriation to further this object.

Brigham Young and other promoters no doubt realized that progress in the use of the system depended on printed material and asked the Territorial Legislature for funds to provide type. They received 2,500 dollars to be "expended under the direction and control of the Chancellor and Board of Regents in procuring fonts of Deseret Alphabet type, in paying for printing books with said type, and for other purposes."[15]

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[12]Remy and Brenchly, op. cit., p. 185.

[13]Ibid.

[14]Millennial Star, XVIII (1856), p. 331.

[15]Andrew Love Neff, History of Utah, 1847 to 1869 (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1940), p. 851.

Once the funds had been appropriated, the Board made plans to have the school books printed. "Elders Wilford Woodruff and S. W. Richards, Regents, and Elder George D. Watt, Secretary of the Board, were appointed as committee members to prepare and arrange the matter."[16] This organization took place under the direction of the First Presidency, February 4, 1856.[17] D. H. Wells, Albert Carrington and W. Willes were added to this committee on February 11, 1856, under the recommendation of Brigham Young.[18]

During a progress meeting of the Board, February 25, 1856, Chairman Wilford Woodruff reported that there was "quite an amount in readiness for revision preparatory to being copied."[19] Three new members were also added to the committee at this time. They were Elias Smith, Orson Pratt, and Parley P. Pratt.[20]

Getting the school books printed seemed to be a slow process. It was not until sixteen months after the formulation of the committee that Erastus Snow was sent to St. Louis to secure necessary type. While he was there the Saints received rumors and reports that Senator

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[16]Deseret News, February 6, 1856.

[17]Ibid.,

[18]Deseret News, February 11, 1856.

[19]Deseret News, February 27, 1856.

[20]Ibid.

Stephen A. Douglas had made a speech on June 12, 1857, at Springfield, Illinois, against the Mormons in the Territory of Utah. These rumors were later confirmed as being accurate. Senator Douglas spoke with authority of reports which indicated that the Mormons were not loyal to the U.S. Government. He charged that nine out of ten of Utah's inhabitants were aliens, that Mormons were bound to their leader by "horrid oath," that the church was inciting the Indians to acts of hostility, and that the Danites, or "Destroying Angels," (an apostate group of the Mormon Church), were robbing and killing American citizens.[21] President Buchanan felt impelled to take action against the Mormons. He met the situation by calling the Mormon problem one of civil disobedience.

Definite news of the invasion did not reach the Saints until July 24, 1857, when nearly 3,000 people, along with uninformed drill units of the Nauvoo Legion, (Mormon militia), were having a picnic in one of the canyons. Three messengers rode into camp bearing the report that an army was marching against Utah. Toward the end of September, 1857, the Mormons took direct defense against the "invasion." Legionnaires were ordered to annoy the enemy without spilling blood or risk

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[21]The speech by Douglas was reported in the Missouri Republican (St. Louis), June 18, 1857. Mormons took comfort in recalling a prediction made to Douglas by Joseph Smith that if he ever raised his voice against the Mormons the hand of the Lord would rest heavily on him. The prophet told him that he would aspire for the presidency, but would fail if he opposed the Saints. Douglas did aspire, and he did fail.

of their own lives. Provisions were removed from the Mormon emigrant depot at Fort Supply, and all buildings or improvements that might be used by the enemy were put to the torch. Wherever possible the grass was burned. Obstructions were set up in the roads. Thus, in 1857-58 we had what history labels as the Utah War. In 1858 difficulties with the United States and Johnston's army were resolved and once again the promoters of the Deseret Alphabet were able to take action. The Territory was now under the governorship of Alfred Cumming of Georgia. Promotion of the Deseret Alphabet was now under the direction of the Church and the Board of Regents. They found no opposition from Governor Cumming. (See Appendix I)

Promotion of the Alphabet once again became moving. Under date of November 20, 1858, the L. D. S. Journal History says:

> At four o'clock p. m. Wilford Woodruff called on President Young, and conversed with him in regard to the Deseret Alphabet. The works that we formerly compiled are all lost. The President wished Wilford Woodruff to take hold with George D. Watt and get up some more.

The Deseret Alphabet was again formally introduced to the people on February 16, 1859, in the Deseret News. In this issue the readers were able to see a cut of the characters, along with an extract from the book of Matthew of the New Testament, printed in the Deseret Alphabet. The Deseret News was not exactly too enthusiastic about this new promotion with the Deseret Alphabet. It said, "We present to the people the Deseret Alphabet, but we have not adopted any rules to bind the

taste, judgment, or preference of any. Such as it is you have it."[22] However, it did indicate that the more the system was studied, the more useful it would appear.

The Deseret News carried brief articles in the Deseret Alphabet until May, 1860. At that time they were discontinued without comment. Four years later, May, 1864, they reappeared, running for only six months.

With this the reform movement came to a standstill. Franklin D. Richards wrote, "Then, other matters demanding attention, the Deseret Alphabet went out of use by a kind of tacit neglect, or by general distaste for it."[23]

Even though the New Alphabet had apparently been abandoned, there were still individuals interested in the art of phonography. Edward L. Sloan wrote a plea in the Deseret News, calling for a meeting of all those interested in organizing a phonographic society to "adopt a uniform system of phonography so that all may write alike."[24] He also offered to train instructors who would be willing to teach the new

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[22] Deseret News, February 16, 1859.

[23] See letter of Franklin D. Richards to H. H. Bancroft, in Utah State Historical Society Library. (letter not dated.)

[24] Deseret News, April 24, 1867.

system in the schools.

This renewed interest in phonography must have reached the promoters of the Deseret Alphabet. At the October 1867 Conference of the Church, Brigham Young and George A. Smith urged the Saints to resume their study of the Deseret Alphabet.[25]

The Deseret News reported that on December 18, 1867, the Board of Regents had "unanimously resolved to adopt the phonetic characters employed by Ben Pitman of Cincinnati, for printing purposes..." And the next day the Deseret News carried the following statement about the discarded Deseret Alphabet:

> The question of reform in spelling had rested with great weight upon the mind of President Young, and his interest in it has never flagged. Under his direction, years ago, characters were adopted, notices for them were imported and a quantity of type was cast. But, whether from ignorance or design, the matrices were very rudely made, and did the characters great injustice.[26]

Even though it appeared that the Deseret Alphabet was to be set aside, the alphabet would not die. On the evening of February 3, 1868,

> a full Board of Regents met in Brigham Young's office, and discussed the best form of characters to be used for a phonetic alphabet. A reconsideration of the Pitman alphabet drew forth a universal expression in favor of our characters, known as the Deseret Alphabet, as being better adapted; and a motion was made to take the necessary measures to introduce it in printed works.[27]

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[25] Deseret News, October 9, 1867.

[26] Deseret News, December 19, 1867.

[27] Deseret News, February 4, 1868.

The following May, on the 15th day, the Board of Regents voted to have Brother Orson Pratt, "as soon as possible, furnish matter for elementary works to be printed in the Deseret Alphabet."[28] After Orson Pratt had completed this assignment, D. O. Calder was sent from Liverpool, England to the states where he arranged for the casting of type and the publication of the school books. The Deseret News reported:

> he has sent on a speciman copy of the primer he has got out. It contains thirty-six pages printed in the new alphabet. The characters, to a person unaccustomed to them, may look strange, but to the eye with which they are familiar, they are beautiful. Their chief beauty is their simplicity.[29]

In that same editorial of August 13, 1868, the Deseret News suggested that, while the proposed language reform was perhaps too much in an ordinary community, "our position is unique. We are united. This system can be made universal among us with but little trouble."

During the October Church Conference of 1868, President Young publicly stated that there were "many thousands of small books, called the first and second readers" soon to arrive in Utah for distribution. During this announcement he asked that these two books be introduced into all the school systems in the Territory of Utah.[30] The "Furst

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[28] Deseret News, May 16, 1868.

[29] Deseret News, August 13, 1868.

[30] Journal of Discourse, XII (Liverpool, England, 1869), p. 297.

Book" contained thirty-six pages of printed matter, and the "Sekund Book" contained seventy-two pages of printed material.

S. S. Ivins states that:

> at the meeting of the Board of Regents on October 30, 1868, it was reported that ten thousand copies of each of the primers had been received, and now require to be distributed among the scholars throughout the Territory. They are well printed, on good paper, profusely illustrated, and make the beginning of a very excellent series of elementary works. . . . Some errors have unavoidably crept in, but these will be corrected in a list of errata, and a printed sheet containing the correction will be placed in each copy.[31]

A committee was appointed to make these corrections. The committee consisted of Orson Pratt, George D. Watt, and R. L. Campbell, school superintendent. They were assigned to "fix the prices of the books, and dispose of them to the schools in behalf of the Board of Regents."[32]

Now that the school books had been printed and circulated, attention turned to the publication of other works in the Deseret Alphabet. By the spring of 1869, Orson Pratt had transliterated the Book of Mormon into the Deseret Alphabet. Superintendent R. L. Campbell assisted Orson Pratt in this "four month" undertaking and later assisted "in the revision of the work, with a view to its speedy publication."[33]

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[31] S. S. Ivins, "The Deseret Alphabet," Utah Humanities Review, I, (Salt Lake City, Utah, 1947), p. 233.

[32] Deseret News, October 31, 1868.

[33] Deseret News, March 2, 1869.

The Book of Mormon manuscript was ready for publication in April, 1869. George Albert Smith announced at the 1869 April Church Conference, that the plans were "to publish an edition of ten thousand copies, suitable for the use of the schools."[34]

The Deseret News of April 14, 1869 reported that Orson Pratt was assigned to go to New York for the publishing of the Book of Mormon in the Deseret Alphabet. It was "intended to publish the book in one volume for family use, and also to publish it in three parts for use in the schools in the Territory."[35]

After Orson Pratt arrived in New York he wrote to Superintendent Campbell that he was forwarding

> two copies of the first six pages of the book, in which by a fifth reading, I discover but one letter wrong. This, I believe, is much more accurate than the generality of books, printed in the old orthography. The large capitals are not yet finished but will, when done, be stereotyped and inserted in their appropriate places in the work. . . . The compositors make a great abundance of mistakes in setting the type, which greatly increases my labor in the corrections.[36]

In the meantime, School Superintendent Campbell and Edward Stevenson continued the task of getting the Deseret Primers into the schools. The Deseret News reported that they were meeting success:

> The incongruities and inconsistencies of the present system of orthography are forming the subject of many a laughable joke,

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[34] Deseret News, April 8, 1869.

[35] Deseret News, April 14, 1869.

[36] Deseret News, April 19, 1869.

> while illustrating the advantages of the Deseret system of reading and writing. The Scandinavians hail the new system with much pleasure.[37]

Brigham Young continued to praise the alphabet. On one occasion he stood before the ladies of the 15th ward Relief Society, Salt Lake City, and recommended its introduction into the schools, "not that the old method may be thrown away or discarded, but as a means of facilitating the progress of the children in their studies."[38] Also during the Church Conference of October, 1869, Apostle George A. Smith charged the bishops of the Church to spread "a knowledge of these characters" among the membership of the Church.

The promotion of the Deseret Alphabet was also published in the Junior Sunday School periodical, The Juvenile Instructor:

> . . . There are two readers and the Book of Mormon now printed in the Deseret Alphabet. Every child should learn to read them. They are easily learned. When these Readers and Books of Mormon are sold, then the Board of Regents will have money to print the Old and New Testament; the Book of Covenants, a dictionary, and other books. . . We hope that every Sunday School Superintendent will introduce these books into his school so that all the children may become familiar with the system.[39]

The Deseret News published a long article in defense of the Deseret Alphabet. It stated that since the primers and the Books of Mormon were available in abundance now, that they "should be used in the

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[37] Deseret News, December 10, 1868.

[38] Deseret News, February 20, 1869.

[39] Juvenile Instructor, IV, (Salt Lake City, 1869), p. 180.

Sunday Schools, in households, and in every schoolroom in the Territory."[40] The Deseret News also took liberty to make a prophecy that "at no distant date, the alphabet would be universally used by the people of this Territory."[41] Edward L. Sloan, "Phonetician and Practical Phonographer," opened a school of phonography, offering his students free instructions in the Deseret Alphabet.[42]

It seems that a few teachers tried very hard to get the system in their schools. W. R. May of Nephi, Utah rebuked those teachers who "think they cannot spare the time." He also went on to say:

> I have a day school composed of eight children in which I have introduced the Deseret Alphabet with success. I feel it necessary to put the Furst and Sekund Readers into the children's hands and they will learn to read in them without teaching. Do not throw cold water upon the efforts of our leaders in this respect by being dilitory in providing the books or in making light of the subject in any way.[43]

Getting the books into the schools was soon abandoned because the characters were too difficult to read.[44] Nothing indicates whether of not the new system was ever used in the course work of the University of Deseret.

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[40] Deseret News, December 17, 1869.

[41] Deseret News, January 19, 1870.

[42] Deseret News, January 4, 1870.

[43] Deseret News, January 17, 1870.

[44] Thomas H. B. Stenhouse, The Rocky Mountain Saints (New York, 1873), p. 230.

By 1869 the Deseret Alphabet began disappearing from use. The alphabet failed to excite the reading public. By the fall of 1870 the Deseret News discontinued advertising the sale of books printed in the alphabet. Although the Church Sunday School held classes using material printed in the alphabet and Brigham Young issued statements and continued to promote its use, the alphabet gradually disappeared. After 1872, it is only mentioned occasionally. Yet, abandonment of the Deseret Alphabet seemed to become official in the summer of 1877, when Orson Pratt was sent to Liverpool, England "for the purpose of printing the Book of Mormon, and the Book of Doctrine and Covenants according to the phonotype system of Pitman."[45] Shortly after his arrival he was called back to Utah because of the death of President Brigham Young. The plans to publish the book in the Pitman system were dropped. "Almost no popular response" caused the death of the alphabet.[46] It died with President Brigham Young.[47]

Coming to an understanding of the purpose and acceptance of the Deseret Alphabet is hindered by both Mormon and non-Mormon references. Many outside the Church had "supposed that the object of the

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[45] Deseret News, June 13, 1877.

[46] "The Deseret Alphabet," Utah Historical Quarterly, ed. J. Cecil Alter, XII (Salt Lake City, Utah: Utah State Historical Society, 1944), p. 102.

[47] Ibid., p. 99.

alphabet was to prevent access to the Mormon books and writings and their translation into as many languages as possible."[48] One writer stated the purpose as "Mormon leaders hiding their blood curdling records from eyes of the unfriendly world."[49] Another historian stated: "A separate people wishing to have a separate language and perhaps in time an independent literature."[50] The Deseret News printed an article explaining the purpose of the alphabet as "enabling our youth to learn more easily to read and spell, and to hinder or prevent their access to the yellow colored literature of our age or any unwholesome reading."[51]

Severe criticism from members of the Church about the alphabet adds even further confusion in reference to the acceptance of the new alphabet. For example, we read in the Deseret News:

> The circumstances attending the introduction of the Deseret Alphabet are similar in their character to the reception which usually attends innovations upon an established system, whether scientific, theological or philosophical. The originators of every new system have always encountered the prejudice which flow as consequence out of the existing ignorance of the newly discovered system or invention.

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[48] Remy and Brenchley, op. cit., p. 182.

[49] Reverend Roy H. Paterson, The Mormons (Edinburgh, Scotland: Church of Scotland Press, 1964), p. 52.

[50] H. H. Bancroft, History of Utah (San Francisco, 1890), p. 710.

[51] Deseret News, September 13, 1930, also Deseret News, February 4, 1868.

> The adoption of the Deseret Alphabet will be a boon to all who use it, and the learner as he advances in his studies realizes this truth. It is a set of characters expressing the sounds used in language, and those characters are easily formed. The adoption of this system must greatly facilitate the student in his pursuit of literature and science.[52]

The following explanation is given by Franklin D. Richards in reference to the purpose of the new characters.

> It was stated at the suggestion of President Young, and afterwards was adopted by the regency of the University of Deseret, with a view of enabling our youth to learn more easily to read and spell. . . . During one year the ledger accounts of President Young were kept by me in those characters, exclusively, except that the figures of the old style were used, not having been changed.
>
> To carry out the aforesaid suggestion of President Young in relation to having an alphabet was designed principally by George D. Watt, a phonetic expert employed by him. The forms of some of the letters were designed or originated by Mr. Watt--those of others were selected by Mr. Watt from some of the ancient alphabets found in the front of Webster's unabridged dictionary, but with a view to making the type wear well, neither tops or tails to the letters were allowed.[53]

The Deseret News, discussing the purposes of the Deseret Alphabet, declared:

> The greatest evils which now flourish, and under which Christendom groans, are directly traceable to the licentiousness of the press. . . It is our aim to check its demoralizing tendencies, and in no way can we better do this, than by making the knowledge of the Deseret Alphabet general and training the children in its use.[54]

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[52] Deseret News, February 4, 1868.

[53] See February 24, 1885, letter of T. W. Ellerbeck to Hon. Franklin D. Richards, in Utah State Historical Society Library.

[54] Deseret News, August 13, 1868.

Jules Remy had predicted that the alphabet was not acceptable because of the "inconveniences to which it would give use, such as the effacement of etymologies, and the disconnection of roots from their derivations."[55] Bancroft stated that the tailless characters, and the monotonous evenness of the lines, "made the words difficult to distinguish; it was found impossible to insure uniform pronunciation and orthography."[56] B. H. Roberts thought that "the limitations of the community" made the experiment "abortive."[57]

John A. Widstoe, former president of the University of Utah, summarized the undertaking:

> The Deseret Alphabet represents a noble experiment, with a thoroughly worthwhile objective. Mormons have reason to be proud of this episode in the history of their people. May the present generation be as ready to exchange old and imperfect methods for new and better ones.[58]

The only books published in the Deseret Alphabet were two primers, the Book of Mormon and the "Part First" of the Book of Mormon containing 116 pages, and designed for a "Third Reader."

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[55] Remy and Brenchley, op. cit., p. 185.

[56] Bancroft, op. cit., p. 714.

[57] B. H. Roberts, Comprehensive History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Salt Lake City, Utah, 1930), V., 79.

[58] John A. Widstoe, Gospel Interpretations (Salt Lake City, Utah: Bookcraft, 1934), p. 265.

Occasionally one can find copies of this printed material on the shelves of second-hand bookstores, on the shelves of old Mormon homes, or within the rare book rooms of school libraries. For example, there is a primer containing the sheet with "a list of errata," in the University of Utah library.

Evidence of the Deseret Alphabet is discovered in various places periodically.[59] Also, one can look at the tombstone of John Morris, who died February 1855 at Cedar City, Utah, and see that his tombstone was carved in Deseret Alphabet characters.

We cannot be certain of the real acceptance of the Deseret Alphabet. The reader may be interested in reading the following statements, all having reference to the acceptance of the Deseret Alphabet.

> I can recall my father having many volumes of the Book of Mormon in our parlor shelves. Oh, yes, they were all in the alphabet. Well, they really weren't books but excerpts of the Bible and Book of Mormon he got from the News. I couldn't read them, but I guess father could. He would give them to friends and callers.[60]

> My mother taught school in Tooele, Utah and tried many a time to get the folk to use the alphabet more. She would practice after supper. Mother loved the President (Young) and would do almost anything he wanted or liked. Seems like her interest in the alphabet just faded away--of course father didn't help much.[61]

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[59] Albert L. Zobell, "Deseret Alphabet Manuscript Found," The Improvement Era (Salt Lake City, Utah: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, July, 1967), p. 10.

[60] Interview with Mrs. Abram R. Fugal, age 84, Roberts, Idaho, May 17, 1969.

[61] Interview with Mrs. Jacob G. Daime, age 87, Ephraim, Utah, February 24, 1969.

As I remember it, there was a special school in Salt Lake that worked with the alphabet. Brother McMaster was the teacher it seems. They use to sell the school in the D. N. all the time. Guess more Saints should have gone--maybe President's dream would have come true. We sure need to get away from these dirty books today.[62]

Sure was a waste of time--those damn Mormons just plain didn't like anything in this world. Course I guess most of them didn't like the alphabet either. Funny ain't it.[63]

Because this undertaking in language reform was permitted to expire so quietly, we have very little contemporary comment on the Deseret Alphabet.

To this period 1853-1877, belongs an effort or a series of efforts to introduce a new alphabet for the English language, called the Deseret Alphabet. This experimental alphabet was a form of rhetoric intended to help the problem of communication among the early Mormon pioneers.

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[62]Interview with Mr. Arthur P. Green, age 91, Spanish Fork, Utah, May 13, 1969.

[63]Interview with Isaac M. Tolman, age 90, Fillmore, Utah, May 8, 1969. (Mr. Tolman has since moved to California with his daughter.)

SUMMARY

Ever since Biblical times, people have been wishing that all mankind might talk the same language, so that misunderstandings, quarrels, wars and oral communication problems might not arise through failure of man or language to understand what his neighbor was saying. We all know the account of the Tower of Babel in the Old Testament. All mankind talked one language from the time of Adam until Nimrod presumed to build a tower to reach heaven, and, to impede the project's completion, the Lord created diversity of speech among all the different peoples working on the tower. This account is very significant from a number of points of view, especially because it recognizes the basic role of oral communication in human cooperation. This account is also interesting with regard to the universal language problem, too, because it symbolizes the old human desire for a single language. This desire has always been present in human speculation and survival; in the last two or three hundred years, not only has there been renewed talk of a universal language or language system, but many plans have been made to bring one into existence. This study does not examine a specific attempt, but it has been the intent of the author to examine a phonetic writing system that was developed for the purpose of establishing, hopefully, an understanding of the

English language among an influx of many different languages.

In 1837 in England, Sir Isaac Pitman introduced a method of shorthand writing which caused great excitement in the civilized world. Pitman's system of shorthand (called phonography) was immediately recognized as being of great value for recording events and talks verbatim. It was more accurate and efficient than the old method of comparing notes of many long-hand recorders.

Although the history of rapid writing systems dates back to the beginning of writing, the Pitman scientific system was one of the first to make such shorthand methods practical. Subsequent systems, although better than Pitman's system, arbitrarily devised symbols for each sound of the language.

This method of "sound-writing" touched popular imagination and soon tens of thousands of people in England, Scotland, Ireland and eventually America were taking classes to learn this new writing method. The Mormon missionaries brought home news of this new writing method when they returned from their missions in England. The Mormon Church, now settled in the Great Salt Lake Valley, made "immediate and enthusiastic use of its method in recording the spoken word."[1]

The talks of the church leaders could now be made available to

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[1] Alter, op. cit., p. 101.

all. Young people were encouraged to take classes to learn sound writing. George Darling Watt, a strong advocate of phonography, was authorized to publish talks of the church leaders in The Journal of Discourses, using this new phonetic writing.

Due to the excitement caused by this phonetic writing method, Church leaders in the Salt Lake Valley began to wonder if phonography might not solve another problem for the church; that of teaching immigrant converts the English language. "It was difficult enough for these people to learn a new language without imposing upon them an irrational orthography."[2] In their homelands they wrote the sounds they spoke. The English language with its many spellings of similar sounds and silent letters in many words was causing confusion among the immigrants. It was difficult for them to realize that English spellings had to be memorized rather than learned by their sounds.

Many individuals and organizations had made attempts at starting spelling reforms in the English language. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints entered the field of spelling reform in 1853. A committee consisting of George D. Watt, Parley P. Pratt, Heber C. Kimball and Wilford Woodruff was appointed by the First Presidency of the Church to study the problem and make recommendations. The Board of Regents of the University of Deseret participated in the final

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[2]Kate B. Carter, Heart Throbs of the West, Vol. XI (Salt Lake City, Utah: Daughters of the Utah Pioneers, 1945), p. 264.

discussions and action.

In the Deseret News, November 24, 1853, we read:

> Now in the present stage of the discussion it is proposed by some to change a small portion of the English alphabetical characters and attach invariable certainty to be content with only a partial reformation, and that it requires an entirely new set of alphabetical characters to effect a clean, handsome reformation that will be abiding. All seem to be agreed that both the written and the printed language should be one and the same.

John A. Widtsoe made this statement on the initial phase of the undertaking:

> It was first proposed that the Roman type in common use be employed in securing the desired reform.... Then it was proposed that a phonographic hand writing be used also in print, as it moved entirely according to sound.
>
> Finally the Regents broke away from all traditions and struck out for themselves. They hewed a new way among the orthographic 'corruptions and perversions' of the language. An entirely new alphabet was invented.[3]

Public announcements[4] concerning the Deseret Alphabet were promising people that (1) the characters were much more simple than the traditional English letters, (2) that every superfluous mark had been excluded, (3) that written and printed hand were merged into one, (4) that a great saving in time and paper had been facilitated by the new symbols, (5) that very little time was required for mastering the

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[3]John A. Widstoe, Gospel Interpretations (Salt Lake City, Utah: Bookcraft, 1934), p. 264.

[4]Deseret News, January 19, 1854.

English language, (6) that the ordinary writer could probably write one hundred words per minute with ease, and (7) that every letter had a fixed sound which facilitated the spelling of words phonetically.

The Deseret Alphabet consisted of thirty-eight arbitrarily designed symbols with a unique sound for each (see Appendix II.) There were seventeen vocal sounds including six long with short sounds, five double sounds with one aspirate, and twenty-one articulate sounds.

The Deseret Alphabet was used sporadically until 1869 when, due to many pressing problems, it fell into disuse. During the fourteen or fifteen years of its use, there were a few works printed which utilized this alphabet. They were:

1. A small sized edition of the Book of Mormon.
2. A large-type printing of the First Book of Nephi. (Part of the Book of Mormon.
3. Two elementary Readers.
4. Occasional alphabetical printings in the Deseret News.
5. A few card announcements, some epitaphs, and copies of the alphabet itself.

The almost total lack of popular support spelled the doom of the reform movement. People were too involved in other matters such as the Utah War, temple construction, farming, etc. to put forth the effort necessary to make the alphabet a success. The last printed official mention of its use was made by the Superintendent of Public Instruction, Robert L. Campbell. In his report of 1870 he said:

> but a few years will pass until the News, the Instructor, the Ogden Junction, and a lot of other intellectual lights, will spring up, clothed in the unique, novel, and simple dress of the Deseret characters.[5]

John A. Widtsoe, former president of the University of Utah, summarized the undertaking:

> The Deseret Alphabet represents a noble experiment with a thoroughly worthwhile objective. Mormons have reason to be proud of this episode in the history of their people. May the present generation be as ready to exchange old and imperfect methods for new and better ones.[6]

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[5]J. Cecil Alter, op. cit., p. 103.

[6]Widtsoe, op. cit., p. 265.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

From this historical investigation of the Deseret Alphabet certain conclusions might be drawn and some recommendations suggested:

1. The experimental Deseret Alphabet appears to have been the project of just a few men. Brigham Young was the chief promoter.

2. The importance of this experiment seems to have been misunderstood by the people. The people primarily failed to share Brigham Young's enthusiasm about the alphabet.

3. The educational directors of this period seemed to pay little attention to the cry of acceptance of the Deseret Alphabet put forth by the First Presidency of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

4. Most of the convert immigrants found the Deseret Alphabet symbols to be more complex and confusing than English writing symbols. The symbols were especially complex when seen in sentence structure.

5. The author really isn't sure in what way the Deseret Alphabet was intended to help the immigrants learn the English language. It would be a good project for some interested student to investigate which comes first, oral or written language, in reference to establishing communication among people with varied nationality.

6. Examination of the present English language system provides a need for a change in the present system. Brigham Young's dream of a better alphabet was certainly valid under such circumstances.

7. The author concludes that the alphabet may have been more successful if the natural lazy tendency of man had not crept in among the Saints.

8. The phonetic system provided a unified writing system, but no unified oral communication.

9. Since the immigrants were faced with learning an established language, they possibly failed to see the worth of learning a new alphabet on top of everything else.

10. The phonetic symbols used in the Deseret Alphabet could be very confusing to a reader, especially if the recorder was a poor penman.

11. The Deseret Alphabet had too many unfamiliar and, at the same time, similar symbols. (See Appendix II.)

12. The Deseret Alphabet provided opportunity for anti-Mormons to find fault with the Mormon isolation.

APPENDIX

APPENDIX I

While it would be inaccurate to say that the only teachers, educators, or schools in Utah before 1869 were those claiming membership or allegiance to the Mormon Church, it is accurate to say that Brigham Young as Governor of the State of Deseret, and for a short time the Governor of the Territory of Utah, and as President of the Mormon Church, did wield a dominant influence in both Church and state education in Utah during the period from 1847 to 1868.

It was not until the close of this period that the non-Mormons or "Gentiles" made any serious challenges to or inroad upon the Mormon monopoly.

The problem of Church and State relationships in education did arise fairly early in the period, especially after the arrival of the first non-Mormon Governor of the territory in 1858, but the Mormon control of political affairs in the territory seemed so complete that Governor Cumming, an astute politician or statesman, chose to work with the Mormon majority rather than in opposition to it.

Succeeding non-Mormon governors were either not as astute as Cumming or less tractable and a seesaw battle began with the governors urging the Mormons to greater efforts in the establishment of free common schools, and Brigham Young and other Mormon leaders countering these recommendations by expressions of satisfaction with the schools of Utah.

During the last two or three years of the period there began a too-prolonged "Gentile" attack on the Mormon monopoly which caused Brigham Young to call for an economic boycott of "Gentile enemies" of the Church in Utah and to publicly denounce Mormon bishops for hiring "Gentile" teachers for their schools in preference to Mormon teachers who were considered by the Church President to be far superior in qualifications.

In 1867 the first non-Mormon denominational school in Utah was established by the Protestant Episcopal Church.

The period ended on a note of expectancy as to what the impact of these new forces and the completion of the transcontinental railroad would be on Mormon society and Mormon education in Utah.

James R. Clark, "Church and State Relationships in Education in Utah" (Unpublished dissertation, Utah State University, Logan, Utah), pp. 195-196.

APPENDIX II



ᏓᎵᏂᎯᏍᏗ ᏢᎵᏍᎦ ᏴᎳᏩ. 15

ᏓᎵᏂ XXIII.

ᏔᎾ ᎩᏁᎲ ᏅᎩᏃ ᎠᏂᏴᎲ ᎩᏍᏆᏂ ᏬᏪ. ᎠᎾ ᏂᎲ ᏅᏬᏚᏂ ᏬᏪ, ᏂᏂᏴᎲ ᏴᏁᎲ ᏂᏗᏬ ᎩᏍᏆᏂ ᏔᎾ ᏃᏂᏬᏬ ᎩᏁᏍ. ᎠᎾ ᎩᏁᎲ Ꮕ ᏴᎵᏴᏂ ᏬᏪᏢ. ᏔᏂᏄ Ꮕ ᎩᏍᏆᏂ ᎡᎬᏄ. ᏣᏓ ᎡᏄᏄᏓᏍ ᏬᎬᎲ Ꮔ ᏬᏪᏢ ᏁᎾ ᏣᏓ. Ꮔ ᏬᏪ ᏬᏂᎲᎲ ᎢᏄ ᏣᏂᏬᏬ. ᏔᎾ ᏣᏂᏴᏂᏍᏗᏍ Ꮔ ᏃᏂᏬᏬ ᏂᏂᏴᎲ ᏣᎬᏬ ᏴᏢᏁᏓᏍ.

Taken from a Deseret Primer which belonged to Lizzie Cain (1869). The interpretation was signed by Kate J. Allred.

Translation of Lesson xxiii (23). Page 15 - Book 1

"We have a red and white cow. She is a quiet cow and does not kick when you milk her. She has a brown calf with a white face. My father gave the calf to me. The cow gives us milk. We churn the milk and make butter."—Kate J. Allred.

The Author was incomplete on this page.

ᛦ ᛍᛇᛒᛟᚠᛇᚴ ᚸᚳᚹᚸᛒᛍᚴ.

Long Sounds

Letter	Name		Sound
ᛅ	e -	as in	eat
ᛂ ᛂ(3)	a -	"	ate
ᛆ	ah -	"	art
ᛅᛆ	aw -	"	aught
ᛟ	o	"	oat
ᛏ	oo -	"	ooze
ᛇ	i	"	ice
ᛒ ᛒ	ow	"	owl
ᚹ	woo		
ᛦ ᛦ	ye		
ᚼ ᚼ	h	"	he
ᚴ ᚴ	p		
ᛒ	b		
ᛏ	t		
ᛑ	d		
ᚳ	che	"	cheese
ᚷ	g		
ᚲ	k		
ᚵ	ga	"	gate
ᚠ	f		
ᚡ	v		
ᚦ	eth	"	thigh
ᚧ	the	"	thy

Letter	Name		Sound
ᛋ	s	as in	ss
ᛌ	z		
ᛐ	esh	"	flesh
ᛎ	zhe	"	vision
ᚱ ᛦ	ur	"	burn (rub)
ᛚ	l		
ᛘ	m		
ᚿ ᚾ	n		
ᛩ	u	"	full (u) Book
ᚹ ᚹ	o	"	shot
ᚢ	u	"	but
ᛁ	i	"	fit
ᛂ	e	"	met
ᚡ	a	"	have
ᚿ	ENG	=	Length

Correct ↓

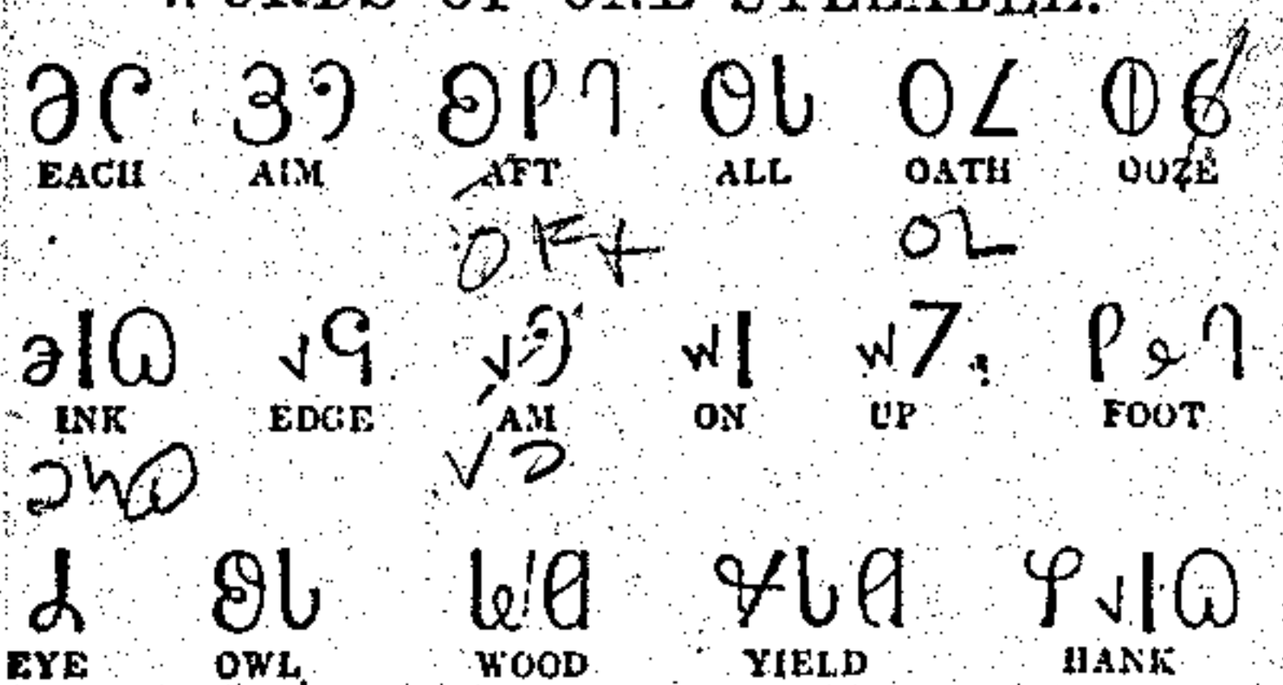
Close? (

WAS THIS LETTER EVER USED FOR ANYTHING BUT THE NEW WORD THE?

AM Á A sounds are Backwards
E should be the symbol not 3

DESERET ALPHABET

WORDS OF ONE SYLLABLE.



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