

EMIGRE NO. 52



Heroes
Deseret Alphabet
Selfsameness
Las Vegas
World of Money
Diazo Haiku

FALL 99

Erigre
AAL Current shlv
UC San Diego
Received on: 10-31-01

AAL
Current
Shlv
NC
997
A1
E4
v. 52

PRICE: \$7.95

A Brief History of the

DESERET ALPHABET

IN 1847 MORMON PIONEERS, fleeing their homes in Nauvoo, Illinois, arrived in the Salt Lake Valley. Here on the shores of the Great Salt Lake, they had an opportunity to build a new society from the ground up. They believed they were building "The Kingdom of God," and under the direction of Brigham Young, their prophet, they experimented in almost every aspect of society from economics to city planning to government.

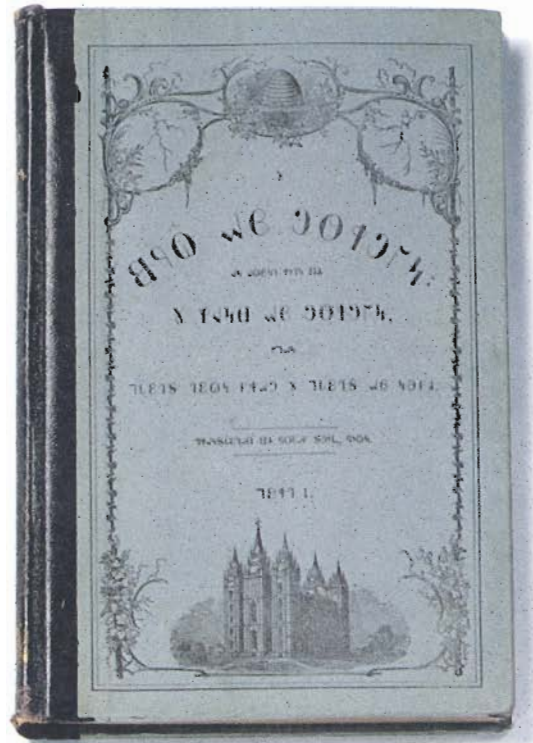
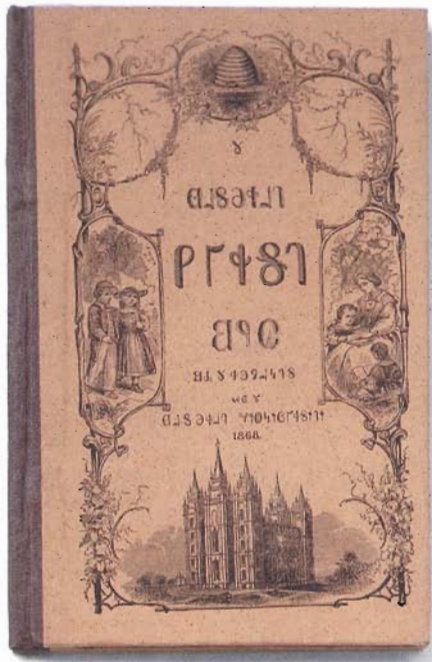
Soon after the Mormon Pioneers arrived, Brigham Young commissioned the Board of Regents of the newly formed University of Deseret to reform the written English language (a popular subject of the day.) This topic, often referred to as "orthographic reform," was not just of local concern. In England in the 1840s, Isaac Pitman, who developed the first practical and widely studied shorthand system, developed a phonetic writing system known as "the Pitman alphabet," which initially had a large influence on the Mormons' project.

Brigham Young in his address at the Mormon April Conference of 1852 said:

I have asked the Board of Regents to cast out from their system of education the present orthography and written form of our language, that when my children are taught the graphic sign for 'A,' it may always represent that individual sound only. But as it is now, 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, sounding different from these, while in others, 'A' is not sounded at all. I say, let it have one sound all the time. And when 'P' is introduced into a word, let it not be silent as in *Phthisic*, or sound like F in *Physic*, and let two not be placed instead of one in *apple*.

In 1855 the legislature dutifully voted an appropriation of \$2,500 for the casting of a font of type. The original metal type was cast in St. Louis, a local attempt having failed.

Through 1859 and 1860, Brigham Young's journals were being kept in the new alphabet, as well as some Church records. By 1860, the Deseret Alphabet had appeared in newspaper articles, on handbills and shop signs, in journals and private correspondence, on a gold coin and even on few tombstones. In 1867 money was again appropriated; and in 1868, two volumes of "readers" were printed for use in schools. In 1869 the *Book of Mormon* was published in the Deseret Alphabet. Over \$18,500 (a huge sum in those days) had been



Left: *The Deseret First Book*, reader published by the Regents of the Deseret University in 1868.
 Right: *The Book of Mormon*, published for the Deseret University by Russell Bros. in 1869

spent on printing Deseret Alphabet books. All of this effort couldn't overcome the greatest difficulty facing all such reforms: the lack of popular support.

In 1869 the *Deseret News* reported "There is no good prospect of the system becoming general in its use. It has the prejudice of the age to contend with, and it meets with strong opposition."

A local educational journal, *The Juvenile Instructor*, reported in 1875:

The *Book of Mormon* has been printed in the Deseret Alphabet, but President Young has decided that they are not so well adapted for the purpose designed as it was hoped they would be. There being no shanks to the letters, all being very even, they are trying to the eye, because of their uniformity. Another objection some have urged against them has been that they are entirely new, and we should have characters as far as possible with which we are familiar; and they have felt that we should use them as far as they go and adopt new characters only for the sounds which our present letters do not represent.

In the end, the alphabet died with Brigham Young.

DESERET ALPHABET

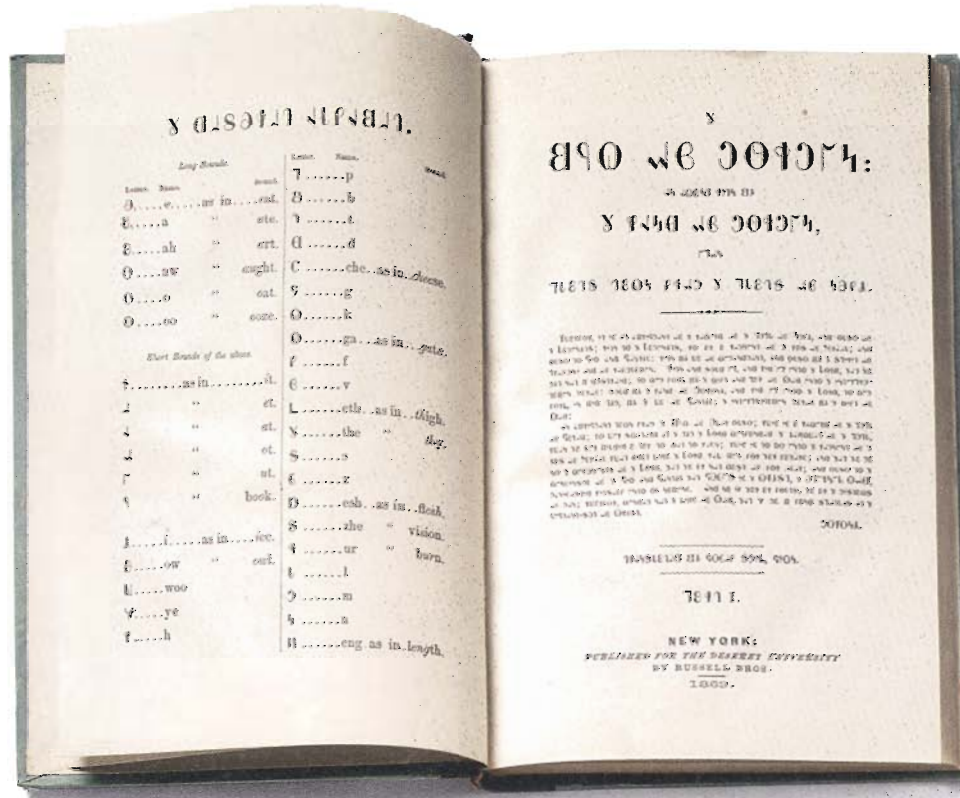
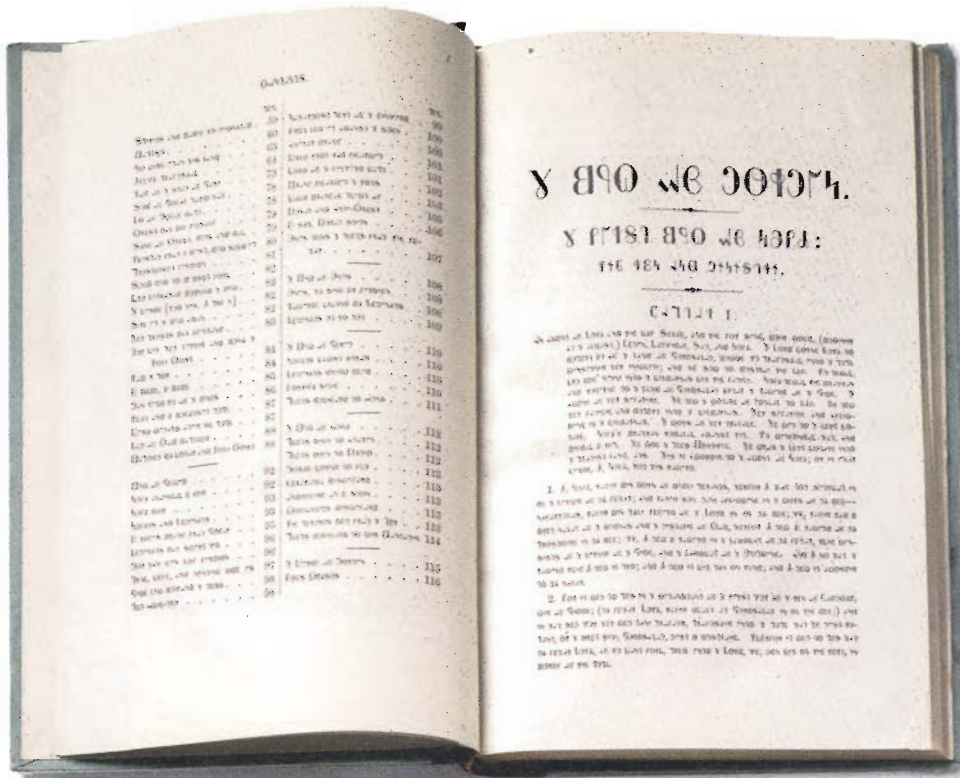
Notes on this font:

This font was digitally redrawn from enlargements from *The Second Deseret Book* published in 1868.

The Deseret Alphabet is a phonetic alphabet – you spell words as they sound, not as they're written in the dictionary. Occasionally you'll run across words that have different pronunciations (You say toe-may-toe, I say toe-mah-toe.) This caused great debate among the creators of the Deseret Alphabet – and there's no official answer to this problem.

The Deseret Alphabet made no distinction between upper- and lowercase letters other than size – the lowercase letters being about 70% of the size of the uppercase characters.

᠗	᠐	᠒	᠕	᠘	᠑	᠖	᠉
᠘	᠒	᠑	᠕	᠘	᠑	᠖	᠉
᠗	᠒	᠑	᠕	᠘	᠑	᠖	᠉
᠗	᠒	᠑	᠕	᠘	᠑	᠖	᠉
᠗	᠒	᠑	᠕	᠘	᠑	᠖	᠉



Inside spreads from *The Book of Mormon*.
 Published for the Deseret University by Russell Bros. in 1869

DESERET LETTER

NAME

SOUND

LONG SOUNDS		
ə	e	as in <i>eat</i> .
ɛ	a	as in <i>ate</i> .
ɚ	ah	as in <i>art</i> .
ɔ	aw	as in <i>aught</i> .
o	o	as in <i>oat</i> .
oo	oo	as in <i>ooze</i> .

SHORT SOUNDS		
ɪ	i	as in <i>it</i> .
ɛ	e	as in <i>et</i> .
ɚ	a	as in <i>at</i> .
ɔ	o	as in <i>ot</i> .
ʊ	u	as in <i>ut</i> .
ɒ	oo	as in <i>book</i> .

DOUBLE SOUNDS		
ɪ	i	as in <i>ice</i> .
ɔw	ow	as in <i>owl</i> .
woo	woo	
ye	ye	
h	h	

DESERET LETTER

NAME

SOUND

CONSONANTS		
p	p	
b	b	
t	t	
d	d	
ch	ch	as in <i>cheese</i> .
g	g	as in <i>geo</i>
k	k	
ga	ga	as in <i>gate</i> .
f	f	
v	v	
eth	eth	as in <i>thigh</i> .
the	the	as in <i>thy</i> .
s	s	
z	z	
esh	esh	as in <i>flesh</i> .
zhe	zhe	as in <i>vision</i> .
ur	ur	as in <i>burn</i> .
l	l	
m	m	
n	n	
eng	eng	as in <i>length</i> .

XXI.



Deseret text in the Deseret font, arranged in several lines.

XXII.

Deseret text in the Deseret font, arranged in several lines.

XXIII.



Deseret text in the Deseret font, arranged in several lines.

XXIV.

Deseret text in the Deseret font, arranged in several lines.

Inside spread from *The Deseret First Book*.
Published by the Regents of the Deseret University in 1868.

For more information about the Deseret Alphabet contact [Edward Bateman](mailto:Edward.Bateman@capteddy@aol.com) at capteddy@aol.com

This article was typeset in Filsofia, a family of fonts designed by Zuzana Lieko, available from Emigre Fonts.