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The Limits of Learning in Pioneer Utah

By Charles S. Peterson

The image of the Latter-day Saint people as supporters of education and learning is one of Utah's well-known and carefully nurtured traditions. Mormon scripture and the teaching of the founding prophet, Joseph Smith, provide such foundation principles as the "glory of God is intelligence," "A man is saved no faster than he gains knowledge," and "Thy mind, O man! if thou wilt lead a soul to salvation, must stretch as high as the utmost heavens, and search into and contemplate the darkest abyss and the broad expanse of eternity." [1] Although less poetic, Brigham Young seemed hardly less ardent. "Cultivate your minds . . . Learn everything that the children of men know" was his admonition. "Is there truth? It is ours. Is there knowledge? It is for us," was his boast.[2] Commitment to learning is also part of the rich lore of Mormon pioneering with nearly every community having its tradition of some dedicated matron teaching in a wickiup or some rustic professor improvising

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Charles S. Peterson is professor of history at Utah State University and editor of the *Western Historical Quarterly*. The research upon which this paper was based was done at the Huntington Library and an early version was presented at the annual banquet of the Utah Academy of Arts, Sciences and Letters in 1978.

[1] Doctrine and Covenants 93:36; Joseph Smith, *The History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, 2nd ed. rev., 7 vols. (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1948), 4:588; and Joseph F. Smith, comp., *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1938), pp. 217, 137.

[2] *Journal of Discourses*, 26 vols. (Liverpool, 1854–1886), 8:83; 16:77; and Brigham Young as quoted in Hugh W. Nibley, "Educating the Saints — A Brigham Young Mosaic," in *A Believing People: Literature of the Latter-day Saints*, compiled by R. N. Cracroft and N. E. Lambert (Provo: Brigham Young University Press, 1974), pp. 219–234.

from slabs and pegs to make benches "for the little fellows" and laying out the three Rs line by line.[3]

Less carefully cultivated, but still alive in the minds of many is an opposite portrait of nineteenth century Mormons with respect to learning and civilization. According to this point of view, they were anything but appreciative of learning and the enlightenment it made possible, embracing instead such backward looking practices and ideals as polygamy, priestcraft, and tyranny.[4]

However, stereotypes, whether positive or negative, are not sufficient to tell the real story. Beneath them lies a more complicated and more meaningful reality. Leaving Joseph Smith and the Mormons of the Midwest, let us look at attitudes and conditions in pioneer Utah, which for purposes here may be defined not only as the pre-railroad era but those conditions and areas in which the pioneer process was extended until about the end of the century.

In the territory's first years, schools were local ventures within each village and ward with only such administrative structure as the moribund University of Deseret and interested parents could provide. By 1865 legislation had provided for a territorial school superintendent, county superintendents, and enabled, but did not require, localities to tax themselves to support the common schools, which, for all practical purposes, were limited to ungraded primary teaching. After the advent of the railroad in the late 1860s, Protestant missionary schools sought to attract young Latter-day Saints and education was engulfed in the bitter Mormon-anti-Mormon controversy. Nevertheless, until well into the 1880s, public schools remained under the control of the Mormons who stressed religious and moral training. After the Edmunds Act of 1882 Mormon control loosened and finally yielded in the Free School Act of 1890 which provided for full support by taxation and made attendance at school compulsory.[5]

In the earliest years of pioneering, poverty and isolation left little time, energy, or resources for learning in the formal sense. Because the pioneering process extended in successive frontier localities for upwards of six decades after the Mormon arrival at Salt Lake Valley in 1847, many Mormons lived

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[3] For typical presentations portraying education along these lines see sermons of George A. Smith, *Journal of Discourses*, 14:371; 17:88–89, and 256–257.

[4] The literature of the long anti-Mormon campaign is replete with allegations resting on this point of view. It continues to be openly apparent in such twentieth century writers as Stanley P. Hirshson, *The Lion of the Lord* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1969), and is recognized by implication at least in almost all historical writing about the Mormon conflict.

[5] Good general histories of Utah education that extend into the twentieth century are M. Lynn Bennion, *Mormonism and Education* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1939), and John C. Moffitt, *The History of Public Education in Utah* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1946). Useful accounts of early education may also be found in Ralph V. Chamberlin, *The University of Utah: A History of its First Hundred Years 1850 to 1950* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1960), pp. 11–172; Ernest L. Wilkinson and W. Cleon Skousen, *Brigham Young University: A School of Destiny* (Provo: Brigham Young University Press, 1976), pp. 1–124, while Stanley S. Ivins, "Free Schools Come to Utah," *Utah Historical Quarterly* 22 (October 1954): 321–342; and C. Merrill Hough, "Two School Systems in Conflict: 1867–1890," *Utah Historical Quarterly* 28 (April 1960): 113–130 are standard periodical treatments. To them should be added Frederick S. Buchanan's recent "Education Among the Mormons: Brigham Young and the Schools," *History of Education Quarterly* 22 (Winter 1982): 435–459.

under conditions unconducive to learning until at least 1910. Primitive schools were built in pioneer times and children sometimes attended; but schooling was a hit or miss affair that had only fleeting influence on the lives of many. There was no secondary education in the modern sense until about 1870 and only five public high schools by 1900, although in the closing decades of the century colleges and universities included preparatory courses, and numerous Mormon and other parochial academies existed.[6]

Teachers were poorly trained. They taught for short periods only. Furthermore, they turned to teaching for a wide variety of reasons, including necessity, inclement weather, idle times, calls from authority, desire to have free tuition for their own children, or as in the case of Martha Cox of St. George, because "the idle boy obliged to be out of school" held their sympathy. But they rarely taught because they were well paid or because teaching carried status in the community or because they belonged to a class or a profession in which they could take pride.

Although written from the perspective of sixty years, the biographical sketch of Martha Cox, which tells of pioneer life in Utah's Dixie during the 1860s and 1870s is instructive on many of these points. Almost totally frustrated in her own youthful yearning to go to school, she

> one day passed a group of boys who had stolen out of school to play marbles on the street. The poor old crone, who was trying to teach them must have been glad they had played truant for they were of the age and disposition to be most trying in school. And truly, the fact that a great many children were growing up on the streets of St. George without schooling or moral training even, was truly alarming. I said to the boys mentioned, "If I were your teacher I'd be sorry to have you out of school." A big fellow answered "Oh the old woman's glad we're out." I told the boys "I was sorry to see them growing up without education." "If you're so sorry for us" they said "why don't you teach us? We wouldn't stay out of school if you taught us." "I wish I knew enough to teach you" I said, "and I'd see whether you would." One bright little fellow spoke up "I should think you'd teach us that that you do know." Here was a new thought, there were many children who knew less than I.

Thus prompted, Mrs. Cox ultimately approached the trustees of the St. George Third Ward School, who told her she lacked training. Since no steps appeared to be underway to get the ward school open, she set out to prove her own capacity. She rented a hall, borrowed planks and blocks to improvise seats, found a kitchen table for a desk, and painted a large breadboard for a blackboard. Advised to avoid the "poor white trash" she was quickly informed that the youngsters of the Third Ward weren't fit for uptown kids to associate with. The bishop's wife "volunteered information and advice: I had married into a poor family — was no better than the other wives — go home and take hold with them in the work of the family and not be setting myself up for a school teacher." Others likewise had no confidence in Mrs. Cox and some were afraid to have their children associate with the children of the woman from whom she rented the hall, who "knew nothing except to straddle a horse and swear." Finally, however, the school succeeded. At this development,

[6] See A. C. Nelson, *Fourth Report of the Superintendent of Public Instruction of the State of Utah, for the Biennial Period Ending June 30, 1902* (Salt Lake City: Star Printing Company, 1903), pp. 25–26. See also Moffiitt, *Public Education in Utah*, pp. 177–199.

interest in the ward school began to revive, and she soon received a call "from the Trustees who told me that my pupils belonged to the Ward School and I should dismiss them and let them go to the Ward. We can see a reason for this claim when we understand that our southern schools were taught on the subscription plan. Hence, the more pupils, the more money." Almost simultaneously she received a visit from the trustees of another ward offering her their school, thus resolving the problem all around.[7]

As suggested by Martha Cox's experience, teachers taught in homes, granaries, and in churches. They lived at home or boarded around, and spent much of their time trying to keep records on or collect tuitions that were paid in kind. Some, like Christian Jacobsen in the early 1870s, jobbed almost hopelessly from community to community in northern and central Utah, trying to break into a stable position. Schooled briefly at Draper, during a time when it was under the influence of several men who later distinguished themselves as educators, Jacobsen seemed to belong to no one, nor to any place. He was turned down by a succession of local examining boards — probably with good reason, canvassed the entire Wasatch Front on foot as a sewing machine salesman, slept for warmth on the pumis piles of village molasses mills, bathed in streams on Saturdays, did farm work as the opportunity provided, and in near despair, spent lonely profitless winters trapping in a snow camp high in Cache Valley's Porcupine Canyon before he finally located a relatively stable teaching position at the sprawling and raw farming district that became northern Utah's Lewiston.[8]

But the life of a teacher was better for Jacobsen than it was for George William Thurman of Lehi. Popular and successful, he was providing the beginnings of good education in 1871, when his efforts to decorate Lehi's school/church for a Christmas party were interrupted by a young man he had chastized who shot and killed him.[9]

Although teachers in Salt Lake City, and some other larger communities enjoyed better conditions; even they suffered from the ills of the self-collected tuition system, ungraded schools, and general indifference. Unusual only in degree was the experience of a cultivated young Englishman named Cornaby who taught at Salt Lake City's Seventeenth Ward. During the hard winter of 1855–1856 he repeatedly canvassed ward members who owed him for tuition, in hopes of finding food for his hard pressed family. He also dug Sego roots and joined an extended fishing expedition to Utah Lake. During what his wife later called "his stay in the country," Cornaby came to see "the advantages of owning land and raising grain for ourselves, without having, as in the City, to depend upon others." Learning that Spanish Fork "offered . . .

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[7] The biographical sketch of Martha Cox is available in microfilm at the Church Archives. Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah. See pp. 119–129.

[8] See Diary of Christian Jacobsen, 1871–1881, typescript at Utah State University Library. Entries from May 1874 to May 1879 contain frequent reference to his efforts to locate a permanent appointment and affairs at the Lewiston school after December 1876.

[9] Hamilton Gardner, *History of Lehi* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1913), pp. 213–214.

plenty of land, with a good supply of water" the Cornabys soon made the move and became part of the farming frontier.[10]

It is little wonder that in Salt Lake City as elsewhere through the state teachers quit for any and every reason, including motherhood, missions, bartending, freighting, and salesmanship. Behind many of these actions, and the attitudes that underlay them, was the fact that most of the first generation of American Mormons had little education themselves. Not only had they come from strata of society little exposed to learning as a social value, but they had withdrawn from the mainstream of American cultural development before the doctrines and values upon which public education rested and had become widespread. They were practical and intelligent. They were not learned — not even by the modest standards of mid-nineteenth century America, and they knew it.[11]

As a result they frequently rejected each other as teachers and hired traveling Gentiles. Some of these proved to be charlatans and quacks. Many provided excellent service. Among the latter was the "splendid teacher, Gentile Harry Haines" who in Salt Lake's Fifteenth Ward taught in a one-room school from McGuffey's First Reader, Ray's Arithmetic, and Pinnios' Grammar. He also inspired students to learn by apt demonstrations of Demosthenes, speaking with pebbles in his mouth, and devoting time to them both in and out of school that parents and churchmen, busy with building the Kingdom, were unable to give. He left an abiding imprint on many, including James H. Moyle. However, he withdrew from teaching for the "more lucrative business of bartending" in the Murray saloon of "apostate bishop" Andrew Cahoon. where his influence was jokingly acknowledged by the nickname "mayor of Murray." [12]

Another Gentile teacher was Charles St. Clair, a Civil War veteran who was hired to teach John D. Lee's family at Harmony in 1867. A tempest in a teapot had flared between a Mormon teacher named James Russell and John D. Lee who wrote about it in his diary. In a bitter display of irony Lee first charged that when Russell had been called by Bishop Henry Lunt of Cedar City "to be an Aaron to" his less articulate betters in the community, he had "been lifted up to the highest notch." Subsequent charges included brutality (beating children with a "gad"), madness ("Puffing & blowing, preaching & stamping like a Mad Man"), and egotism. As Lee put it the school "is to small to hold him alone." Most intolerable of all were Russell's inflated ideas about what his pay ought to be. After several days Lee's attack forced Russell

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[10] Hannah Cornaby, *Autobiography and Poems* (Salt Lake City: J. C. Graham and Co., 1881), pp. 36–43.

[11] As historian of education in Utah, Frederick S. Buchanan has pointed out, Brigham Young was himself sensitive about his lack of polish in spite of joking efforts to make a virtue out of having spent only eleven days in school and out of the courseness of his language. See Buchanan, "Education Among the Mormons: Brigham Young and the Schools of Utah," pp. 442–445 and 446.

[12] Gene A. Sessions, ed., *Mormon Democrat: The Religious and Political Memoirs of James Henry Moyle* (Salt Lake City: Historical Department of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1975). As Moyle put it, "Haines graduated from school teacher to the saloon keeper of Murray," pp. 58–59 and 65–70.

to retire and efforts were made to hire another Mormon to teach. When he, too, proved to have enlarged ideas about the value of his time, Lee hired St. Clair, who had evidently been present in town during much of the school crisis, but still had the courage to take the position.[13]

That internal frictions often complicated the smooth flow of learning is apparent in many other diaries as well. At Snowflake, one of Arizona's Mormon villages, a gifted but quarrelsome and unyielding (some said he was unduly heavy handed) English convert named Allen Frost was crowded from his school and ultimately almost from the society. He was succeeded in the classroom by Levi Savage. Equally unyielding and nearly as hotheaded as Frost, Savage's gifts included two polygamist wives, the daughters of a counselor in the stake presidency. The same cabal that had ousted Frost also brought Savage out of his pedagogical chair for indiscretions of discipline, but he was soon relocated as bishop of a neighboring ward.[14]

But at this point it is not my purpose to divert attention entirely from the hiring of Gentile teachers. It would probably be impossible now to know what percentage of all teachers hired in the early public schools were non-Mormon, but I have identified at least two dozen, many of whom became prominent educators. That such hirings were not uncommon is also suggested in the repeated admonitions of church leaders not to hire non-Mormons at any level. Characteristic was the sharp appeal of A. K. Thurber, presiding officer in the Sevier Stake in the fall of 1875. According to notes of a priesthood meeting he

> had not come here to please any Gentile. Let Lawyers alone. Let Doctors alone. Let sewing machine agents alone. Patronize Mormon school teachers and not infidels. Don't employ a Gentile Teacher, but a well tried Mormon.[15]

From the standpoint of young people, the emphasis upon pioneering and salvation often interfered with opportunities to learn. Utah had no compulsory attendance law until 1890 and many parents were either loath to sacrifice children's time to learning or feared its influence upon their children's minds and testimonies. A perceptive commentary on this condition was written by English journalist, Philip Robinson, in 1882:

> Sitting at the door next morning, (at Monroe) I saw a very trimly dressed damsel of twenty or thereabouts, coming briskly along under the trees, . . . She was the school mistress . . . and very soon her scholars began to pass along. I had thus an opportunity of observing the curious, happy-go-lucky style in which 'schooling' is carried on, and I was sorry to see it, for Mormonism stands urgently in need of more education, and it is pure folly to spend half the revenue of the Territory annually in a school establishment, if the children and their parents are permitted to suppose that education is voluntary and a matter of individual whim. Some of the leading members of the Church are conspicuous defaulters in this matter, and do their families a gross wrong

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[13] Robert Glass Cleland and Juanita Brooks, eds., *A Mormon Chronicle: The Diaries of John D. Lee, 1848–1876* 2 vols. (San Marino, California: The Huntington Library, 1955), 2:42–56.

[14] For Frost's experiences see Diary of Allen Frost, 1838–1901. A typescript of this extensive and informative diary, which includes many entries on schools, is found at B.Y.U. Library. For a short account of Savage's experience, see *The Journal of Jesse N. Smith* (Provo: J. N. Smith Family Association, 1970), p. 384.

[15] Record A, Sevier Stake Historical Record, 1864–1886, LDS Church Archives.

> by setting 'the chores' and education before them as being of equal importance. Even in the highest class of the community children go to school or stay away almost as they like, and provided a little boy or girl has the shrewdness to see that he or she can relieve the father or mother from trouble by being at home to run errands . . . they can, I regret to think, regulate the amount of their own schooling as they please. I know very well that Utah compares very favorably, on paper, with the greater part of America, but I have compiled and examined too many educational statistics in my time to have any faith in them.[16]

How this effected the lives of many young people may be observed in the experience of Levi Savage (whom we met at Snowflake at a later date in his career). Before he was fourteen, young Savage had lived in the home of an aunt while his widowed father filled a mission to Siam. Young Savage pioneered at Scipio and Kanab in southern Utah, participated in the Indian wars of the 1860s, and did the work of a man so often that he never learned to read. Then one February day, fortune — rather than his community's commitment to learning — took a hand when he cut himself badly with an ax. During the months of his convalescence, he finally learned to read.[17]

One sees learning opportunities from a little different perspective at Salina, still a rough frontier town during the closing decades of the nineteenth century. Schools were primitive and ill disciplined, and teachers were often the laughing stock of young people. A. J. Scorup, later one of the state's leading cattlemen, ruefully recalled disciplinary measures that included imprisonment under the platform used to elevate the teacher's desk and of escape from this makeshift dungeon by tunneling out the back way.[18] Still later, at the remote Mormon settlement of Liberty on New Mexico's frontier, the Wheeler boys found little premium set on school attendance and survived a succession of teachers virtually untouched by the magic of learning. Finally, as they reached young manhood, they were exposed to Will Brooks of St. George, who had acquired a love of learning as well as ideas about discipline at Brigham Young Academy and from John A. Widtsoe at the Agricultural College. One of the Wheelers, larger than Brooks by half a head, plagued the school by chewing tobacco and spitting at a knot hole in the floor. Unable to tolerate the practice, or as the school's janitor, to feel good about cleaning up, Brooks finally threatened to whip him if he continued. After the next chew and spit, a fight took place in which Brooks rubbed young Wheeler's nose in the filth around the hole. After some protest from boy's father, discipline was generally established and a period of genuine learning ensued.[19]

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[16] Philip Robinson, *Sinners and Saints: A Tour Across the States, . . . with Three Months Among the Mormons* (Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1883), pp. 188–189.

[17] I have heard Savage, who was my grandfather, tell of this incident and the change it made in his life.

[18] Stena Scorup, *J. A. Scorup, A Utah Cattleman* (1944), pp. 10–11.

[19] As Brooks recalled William Halls, who was a self-educated superintendent of "district schools of Mancos district in New Mexico" as well as a counselor in the San Juan Stake Presidency, told him, "The young people of Liberty are of fine lineage — bright and capable — but they are growing up there without any training whatever. They have driven out every teacher they had had, and take delight in being tough." Juanita Brooks, *Uncle Will Tells His Story* (Salt Lake City: Taggart & Company, Inc., 1970), pp. 118–122.

Other useful insights into pioneering Mormon attitudes toward learning are to be found in the conduct and sermons of leaders. Their statements relative to learning and education show clearly that both were regarded to be handmaidens of larger, more important, objectives. The Mormon formula for advancing mankind lay in the gospel, not in the prospects of science nor in the humanizing engendered by a study of the classics and literature. To neglect gospel learning was to neglect the purpose of life itself. Erastus Snow, for example, commended all good books and every kind of learning, but moved quickly to add that "the foundation of all true education is the wisdom and knowledge of God. In the absence of these," he continued, "we but obtain the froth and lack the foundation on which to rear a proper education." [20]

To Brigham Young, life was the great school and experience the great teacher. On the other hand, he had years of training in a trade and understood thoroughly how skill and efficient effort contributed to mankind's advance. With him, learning that had its direct influence on needed function was greatly preferred over learning that dealt with the theoretical. Indeed "learning that is based entirely upon theory" was to be little trusted and deserved to be banished from the schools.[21] Young was also keenly aware that old world and early American forms of learning tended to create class and professional divisions. As the training places of clergymen, lawyers, doctors, and other professional elites, schools and universities were part of the worldly establishment from which the Saints were trying to withdraw. Fear of them was intense. There also appears to have been little appreciation for institutions of higher learning as the training ground for intelligent citizenship in a democratic country. The University of Deseret existed on paper, but until 1867 it made almost no contributions to higher learning, although its designation as a "parent school" helped establish a precedent that contributed to the development of centralized schools in Utah later. In consequence, for decades few Mormons in good standing had an opportunity to undertake advanced studies either at home or in the east. Such professional training as they enjoyed was almost exclusively of the self-help, home administered variety. As they traveled, Mormon missionaries were alert to things around them. Official Church tours, such as one made in 1872 by a party of Mormon dignitaries, including George A. Smith, a counselor in the first presidency, Apostle Lorenzo Snow, and poetess Eliza R. Snow, stopped frequently at institutions of learning and were constantly alert to industry, transportation, and architecture.[22]

On the other hand, requests to go outside for schooling were discouraged or denied outright. For example, Orson F. Whitney, son of the first presiding bishop in Utah and grandson of Heber C. Kimball, had his heart set on study-

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[20] *Journal of Discourses,* 12:178.

[21] *Journal of Discourses,* 9:369. Frederick Buchanan points out that Stanley Hirshson (*The Lion of the Lord*), is warranted in his judgment that the Mormon penchant, "now as then" to be "more concerned with irrigation than pure mathematics" was the heritage of seeds "Young planted." See Buchanan, "Education Among the Mormons: Brigham Young and the Schools of Utah," pp. 450–51, and 458; and Hirshson, *The Lion of the Lord,* p. 322.

[22] See *Correspondence of Palestine Tourists: Comprising a Series of Letters by George A. Smith, Lorenzo Snow, Paul A. Schettler, and Eliza R. Snow of Utah . . . 1872 and 1873* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1875).

ing the theater in New York. After long importunings, his mother agreed that if the young man could sell a certain plot of ground she had inherited from her father's estate, he could use the proceeds to further this objective. His best efforts notwithstanding, the land remained unsold for two years as Orson yearned and dreamed of bettering himself. Finally his thoughts turned to missionary activity. When he received a mission call, the land so long on the market, sold quickly at a good price and the proceeds were used for missionary finances rather than for learning.[23]

John R. Young, nephew to Brigham, was also denied the privilege of going east to school, when he suggested such a course after returning from San Bernardino in 1857. Even Brigham's older sons apparently had no opportunity for outside learning, although in the last years of life the Mormon prophet reluctantly allowed younger sons to go to West Point, Annapolis, and the University of Michigan law school for practical training; and other members of his family studied music in the East.[24]

In the years prior to the 1870s law and lawyers were held in special distrust. I find few cases of young Mormons going out for training in law in the first decades. On the other hand a number took advantage of well established custom to study law in local law offices. This was particularly true as the anti-polygamy crusade picked up. Even such frontier figures as Parowan's Joseph Fish found opportunity to acquire the rudiments of legal training in the courts and law offices of Beaver, Provo, Salt Lake City, and Ogden. Especially notable in this context was Ogden's Franklin S. Richards, brilliant son of Apostle Franklin D. Richards, who with no law school training whatever tested the metal of the best barristers and jurists in America as he directed the church's legal course through the intricacies of the anti-polygamy raid of the 1880s, the statehood adjustments of the nineties and the Smoot hearings early in this century.[25] In addition at least two young ladies were trained in law and passed the Utah bar by these same home-grown methods during the 1870s.

It was not until the 1880s that fear of law schools and learning generally abated sufficiently for church leaders to begin giving their blessing to young people wanting to study outside. Among those whose lives were touched by this change was James H. Moyle, later a famed Utah lawyer and Democrat. His case throws sufficient light on attitudes toward formal learning as to merit telling here in some detail.

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[23] Orson F. Whitney, *Through Memory's Halls: The Life Story of Orson F. Whitney* (Independence, Missouri: Zion's Printing and Publishing Co., 1930), pp. 67–68.

[24] *Memoirs of John R. Young: Utah Pioneer* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1920), pp. 241–243. For a view of Brigham Young's relationship to his younger sons see Dean C. Jessee, ed., *My Dear Son: Letters of Brigham Young to His Sons* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1974).

[25] John H. Krenkel, ed., *The Life and Times of Joseph Fish, Mormon Pioneer* (Danville, Illinois: Interstate Printers & Publishers, Inc., 1970). Pages 133–179 especially, tell of reading law and practice in southern Utah. Scattered throughout the rest of the book are references to Fish's role as legal adviser to Mormons in northern Arizona. Unlike Fish who, brilliant though he was, can only be called a "frontier jack-of-all-trades," Franklin S. Richards was a professional lawyer, but was nevertheless largely "self-taught." See Gustive O. Larson, *The Americanization of Utah for Statehood* (San Marino, California: The Huntington Library, 1971), p. 107.

Young Moyle had taken full advantage of the Mormon community's educational opportunities, studying first under Harry Haines, the Fifteenth Ward's Gentile teacher, then at the University of Deseret, and finally at John Morgan's Commercial College. His bishop, Joseph Pollard, with whom he had worked closely as church deacon, had been a careful observer of this and warned him: "Jimmy, you are a good boy, but these educated men are damned rascals." Nevertheless, the fire kindled by Gentile Harry Haines burned within him and he continued to dream and to push for an education. Finally on August 20, 1882, he made bold to take a proposal to go to the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor to Angus M. Cannon, President of the Salt Lake Stake. Moyle was keenly aware of his lowly status as a "Fifteenth Ward clodhopper" and expecting opposition, went armed with arguments and visions of the service he could perform for his people. Even so, he was hardly prepared for his stake president's reaction. In an "outburst of protest" Cannon thumped "his fist violently on the counter of the county recorder's office" and fairly screamed, "You will go to Hell!" Years later Cannon apologized for the outburst but showed he had not changed his position when he asked Moyle to take his son John M. into his Salt Lake office to study law rather than sending him East.

For the moment young Moyle was cowed. He took Cannon's outburst as an authoritative prediction of his future. He, therefore, sought out a former ward bishop Robert T. Burton, who by this time was in the presiding bishopric, and gratefully accepted his council to see George Q. Cannon. Few men carried more power than Cannon who had for years been territorial delegate and an apostle and a counselor in the first presidency since 1880. Yet even he referred the question to John Taylor, president of the church. Taylor at first resisted the plan on the grounds that studying law was dangerous; and that since lawyers took both sides of any question, they were especially subject to duplicity and falsehood. Besides "his experience and that of the church was that lawyers had been a source of great wrongs and injustice." Taylor finally acquiesced, however, and in a solemn prayer blessed Moyle with "wisdom and intelligence" and significantly, in terms of the Mormon approach to all kinds of learning, with the "light of revelation." Echoing Angus M.'s dire prediction, he also warned that if Moyle failed to use his training to "protect the rights and liberties and immunities of His People . . . thou wilt go down and wither away." Thus shored up against the adverse influences of learning, Moyle ventured forth to Ann Arbor where he distinguished himself as a law student and returned to a great and loyal career among his people.[26]

In much of this one senses severe limitations in the Mormon conception of learning's role. Directed by the Spirit, it could be a gospel tool. If it involved contemplation or implied doubt or recognized conflicting points of view, it was feared and hedged around. Suggestive of this generally is the fact that although much has been made of the planned society that Young and his followers were establishing, he often avoided not only contemplative exercises, but restrictive planning. For example, to give the Spirit free play, Young

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[26] Sessions, ed., *Mormon Democrat*, pp. 130–133.

spoke from the cuff, sometimes refusing even to plan his remarks, much less writing notes, or the entire text.[27] Similarly, even some of his planned undertakings were singularly ill-defined, as for example, the United Order, which in spite of some directing guide lines, was in many respects a grand petition that divine direction would express itself in the development of improved methods of cooperation as people experimented with various forms of communal life.[28]

Some schemes embraced by Young and energetically pursued appear to have been even more directly aberrant from conventional learning, as well as lacking clear initial blueprints. The most notable case of this kind was the Deseret Alphabet. With the prospects of a worldwide gathering looming grandly before them in the early 1850s, Brigham Young and other Mormons hoped to set in motion a reversal of the great confusion of tongues initiated at Babel in biblical times. A *Deseret News* article of November 24, 1853 describes the ideals that lay behind the experiment:

> One thing seems quite certain in regard to language — especially the language of this people; it ought to be adapted to the urgency of these peculiar times . . . Can it be expected that the Apostles of Great Salt Lake City will speak by the immediate power and wisdom of God so that people of every nation and language will forthwith understand them? Or should we rather look for the power and wisdom of God to be displayed in forming a simple, easily acquired language, in which barbarians and Christians, bondmen and freemen, of every grade of intelligence, out of every tribe, caste, language, and country, can, in a short time, interchange their sentiments and praise God unitedly in spirit and understanding? If such a language is ever demanded . . . it seems to be required without delay, even now. . . . the people are gathering and the varied and general influx of the diverse tribes, nations, kindreds, and tongue, is even at our doors. . . . Can . . . a few interpreters . . . answer the demands of a constant intercommunication between several thousand languages?[29]

Spurred by mounting baptisms in Scandinavia in the years that followed, Brigham Young kept the Deseret Alphabet alive. It appears to have been prominent in the minds and efforts of the regents of the University of Deseret — apparently to the exclusion of more conventional learning. Courses were offered to acquaint adults with it until the late 1860s. Indian missionaries went through strange and largely incomprehensible efforts as they tried to teach the Deseret Alphabet and words formed from it to the Hopi Indians at Oraibi Mesa in northern Arizona.[30] Penmanship in the alphabet was taught in the common schools. Spellers, primers and Mormon scripture appeared in

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[27] *Journal of Discourses*, 3:243; 4:279 and John A. Widtsoe, ed., *Discourses of Brigham Young: Second President of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1951), pp. vi–vii.

[28] The experimental character of the United Order was apparent in the variety of programs applied. The effort to have righteous endeavor lead to an order Mormons everywhere could follow was particularly apparent in the early years of the United Order towns on the Little Colorado in Arizona. See Charles S. Peterson, *Take Up Your Mission: Mormon Colonizing Along the Little Colorado River 1870–1900* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1973), pp. 91–122.

[29] Quoted in Moffitt, *Public Education in Utah*, pp. 54–55.

[30] Two Indian missionaries, Thales Haskell and Marion Shelton, spent the winter of 1858–1859 with the Oraibi Hopis. To begin with the two whites were optimistic, but as the winter lengthened, supplies dwindled and the hospitality of the Indian hosts diminished. They lost heart and finally headed back to Utah in early March. See Juanita Brooks, ed., "Journal of Thales H. Haskell," *Utah Historical Quarterly* 12: (1945), pp. 69–98.

it and territorial school superintendent Robert L. Campbell tirelessly promoted its reforms until his death in 1873.[31]

What can be said of how this remarkable experiment related to learning? Certainly it was bold in its break with the norms of established learning. Indeed it was a radical departure. Herein lies an insight about Brigham Young and the ideas he and other Mormons of his era entertained about learning. In a very real way the alphabet epitomized a Mormon effort to step entirely outside the mainstream of learning and substitute their own system. In the alphabet was no love of English or any other modern or classical language. In it was none of the affinity for Carlyle, Scott and Yeats demonstrated by David O. McKay and other Mormons of his generation. Rather than looking with reverence to literature, the arts and indeed classical learning, church leaders devised an alphabet that may be looked at as an effort to short-circuit much of the world's tradition. In this sense, it may be said to have been an obstacle to the development of an effective tradition of learning among the Mormons. In another sense, it reflected a willingnss to depart from old norms, to see broadly and to experiment courageously. In this it was in learning's best tradition.

One should also observe that Brigham Young was not a man of letters. He was highly articulate and loved to express himself orally in a wide variety of moods and by his conduct. His sermons were almost always taken down and transcribed. On one occasion he answered critics, who asked why he had produced no revelations, by saying that once he had proofread the transcripts, his sermons were as good scripture as existed.[32] In addition he wrote thousands of letters to people in all walks of life. But this contradictory evidence notwithstanding, it may be repeated that he was not a man of letters. It is significant that Young let a pamphleteering thrust of considerable sophistication in the years immediately after he assumed leadership in the Church lapse by the time of his death. With one or two possible exceptions, old veterans of the pamphlet wars had either died, like Parley P. Pratt, or had been downgraded in the Church, as was Orson Pratt in 1875.[33] It also seems possible that the so-called New Movement or Godbeite rebellion was in-part the product of the church's failure to provide meaningful publication opportunities for this highly literate and intelligent group of British converts.[34] Fortunately for the church, one of the most gifted English converts, George Q.

[31] For example, see Robert L. Campbell, *Territorial School Report 1866–67*. Also Robert L. Campbell, *Annual Report of the Territorial Superintendent of Common Schools for the Year 1868* (Salt Lake City, 1868), pp. 3–5; and same author, title, for the year 1869 (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Office, 1869), pp. 1–2.

[32] *Journal of Discourses*, 12:264.

[33] In a 1977 article David J. Whittaker draws no conclusions as to its implications for learning, but conclusively establishes that a vigorous school of tract writers and pamphleteers came more or less spontaneously into existence by 1845. During the next decade it was brought under "centralized" Church control and after 1857 progressively declined not to be revived again until after Brigham Young's death in 1877. See Whittaker, "Early Mormon Pamphleteering," *Journal of Mormon History* 4 (1977): 35–49.

[34] See Ronald W. Walker, "When The Spirits Did Abound: Nineteenth-Century Utah's Encounter with Free-Thought Radicalism," *Utah Historical Quarterly* 50 (Fall 1982): 304–324.

Cannon, stood fast; but the fact that he founded the greatest nineteenth century Mormon publishing firm (Cannon and Sons) only in 1882, may have had something to do with the fact that Brigham Young was dead, as it certainly did with the fact that Cannon had recently lost his Congressional seat as territorial delegate and had a maturing family to find employment for.

Cannon undoubtedly enjoyed the blessing of John Taylor in establishing this publishing house. Like Brigham Young, whom he succeeded as President of the Church, Taylor could respond to an attack with a verbal blast from the pulpit. But unlike Young, Taylor was likely to respond editorially as well and the position papers he produced were numerous.[35] Taylor's journalistic efforts mark him as a highly literate individual who could and did express himself in writing. By some stretch, Taylor can also be said to have been an educator. A few days before Young's death thrust the effective direction of the church upon him in August of 1877, Taylor was elected to the office of territorial school superintendent. His election to this school position signifies a shift in direction. Not only did it attest that the written word would play a more important role, but it suggested that times generally had changed and that the Church faced new needs, new threats, and new opportunities all of which demanded that a new emphasis be given the role of learning in Mormon society.

Indeed radical shifts had been underway for at least a decade when Taylor became President of the Church. These changes were of several varieties and in conclusion, can be quickly surveyed here.

In the first place, the Mormon frontier was rapidly passing. Mining, railroading, and national reform were becoming part of the Utah scene. In the years ahead learning would be the great gateway to temporal opportunity. In the second place, Protestant churches had quickly sensed that learning was a weak point in the Mormon armor and had established dozens of mission schools. Although the lure of free or low cost education of high quality offered by the mission schools probably never attracted more than ten percent of the Mormon pupils, it doubtlessly did contribute to the growing appeal of learning among young Mormons. Thus goaded Mormons tightened their control on the public schools and broadened their own horizons of learning.[36] To the moral character and enthusiasms of learning in other post-frontier regions of America, the competition of Protestants and Mormons added an evangelical fervor as, what may be called high schools, developed for the first time where gifted teachers created personal followings with deep loyalties. The loyalties were not only to teachers personally, but to the ideals of learning and the

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[35] Samuel W. Taylor's biography attributes much importance to John Taylor's writing and makes good use of many of his tracts and editorials in the portrait drawn. See Taylor, *The Kingdom or Nothing: The Life of John Taylor, Militant Mormon* (New York: McMillan Printing Co., Inc.); and Paul Anthon Nielson, "An Annotated Bibliography of the Works of President John Taylor," at Brigham Young University Library lists 308 writings and speeches by John Taylor.

[36] C. Merrill Hough indicates that in 1886 enrollment in the mission schools reached 6,668 while the common schools enrolled 19,437 and concludes, "If even as many as half of the mission school pupils were Mormons, which is unlikely, there were still ten times as many Mormons attending the common schools." See Hough, "Two School Systems in Conflict," p. 122.

prospect of carrying a new temporal gospel to people thirsting for enlightenment after generations largely beyond its reach.

Of special importance in expanding the horizons of Mormon learning was the emergence of what may be called a class of professional teachers. Under their direction and encouragement Brigham Young endowed both the Brigham Young Academy at Provo and Brigham Young College at Logan. Under their patient efforts, many of the conflicts of the Mormon controversy were worked out and a tradition in learning quite in keeping with the developments nationally took place.[37]

In summary then, what can be said for early Utah's education? In the first place the simplistic stereotypes, whether of heroic ancestors or a retrogressive priestcraft fail to give an accurate picture of the role learning played. As Leonard Arrington points out in referring to the Great Basin's regional economy in which pre-capitalistic and pre-industrial customs pertained, ideas about learning reflected values and customs current in the East during the generation before the Mormons were driven out.[38] In addition the pioneering of successive desert frontiers over an extended period of years retarded the development of learning as compared to California and other more affluent regions. Single-minded efforts to build the kingdom also interferred. Revelation, not new ideas and research were seen as the ultimate means of human advance. As in the case of the Deseret Alphabet, Pioneer Mormons sometimes moved on tangents of their own without the support that a full appreciation for earlier learning might have given. At the same time, however, the minds and practices of Brigham Young and other Mormon leaders changed appreciably during the 1860s and the 1870s making it possible for Mormon Utah to profit greatly from the flowering of learning and education in the last quarter of the nineteenth century which itself became one of several important points of embarkation for remarkable achievements by Utahns in the twentieth century.

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[37] For a treatment of this development as Utah emerged from the pioneer period see Charles S. Peterson, "A New Community: Mormon Teachers and the Separation of Church and State in Utah's Territorial Schools," *Utah Historical Quarterly* 48 (Summer 1980): 293–312. Probably the best treatment of the role education played in the Mormon conflict is still Ivins, "Free Schools Come to Utah," which was written in 1954 although more general works are giving the matter increasing attention. See for example, Howard R. Lamar, *The Far Southwest 1846–1912: A Territorial History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966), particularly pages 385–404.

[38] Leonard J. Arrington, *Great Basin Kingdom: An Economic History of the Latter-day Saints 1830–1900* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1958), especially pp. 62–63.