

RED CLOUD, NAPOLEON OF THE SIOUX

TRUE FRONTIER

ACTUAL STORIES OF THE OLD WEST

THE LAST MASSACRE

SECOND LIFE OF
A SEVERED HEAD

A SACRAMENTO,
RIVER OF DISASTER

A RANGER NAMED OUTLAW • UTAH'S STRANGE ALPHABET

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FRONTIER LAWMAN BILL TILGHMAN

TRUE FRONTIER

ACTUAL STORIES OF THE OLD WEST

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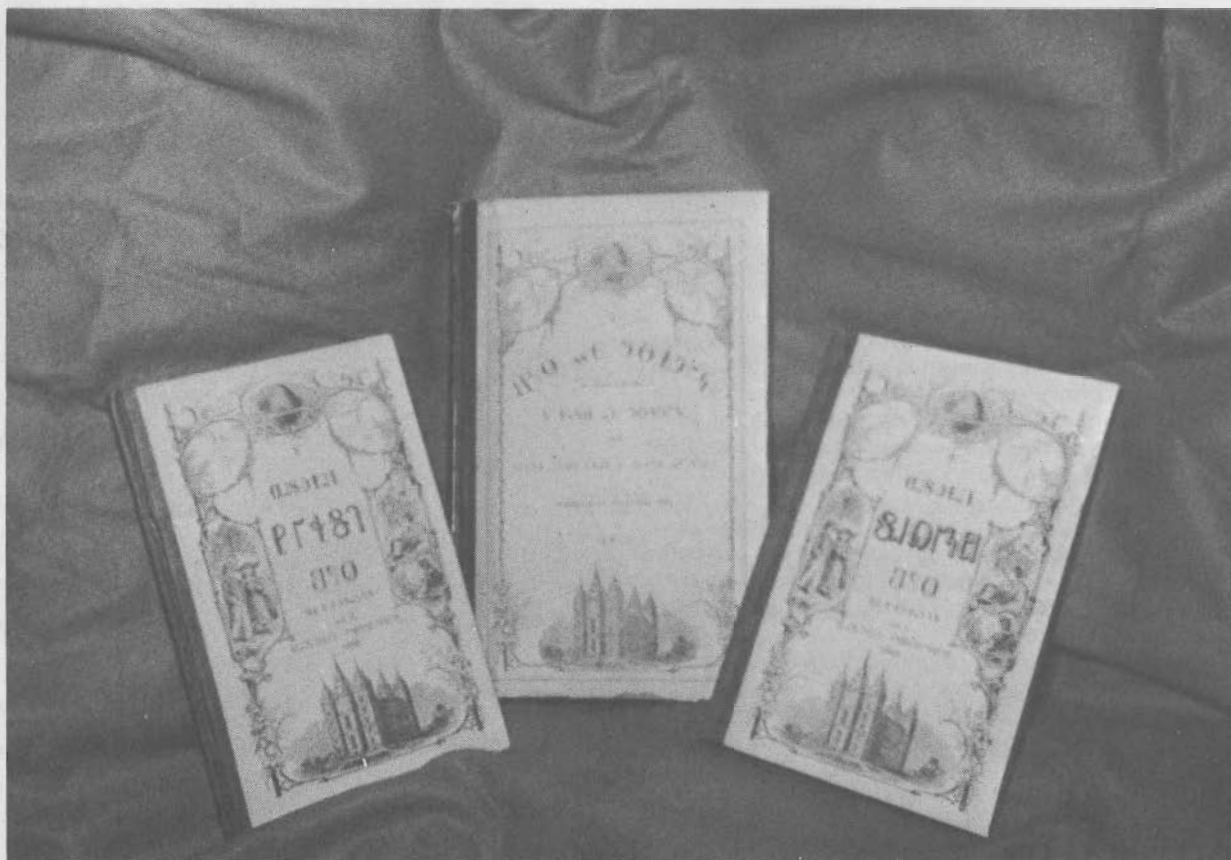
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UTAH'S STRANGE ALPHABET

A noble failure—this new system of language was an attempt to help create a new world in the wilderness.

By A. J. Simmonds



From left, the First, Third and Second readers published by the Territory of Utah in 1868 and 1869 for the instruction of public school students.

That the frontier was the vitally unique factor in American history is hardly a debatable question. That it was frequently unusual is also certain. Its very existence drew a population which hoped for a new and better life beyond the constricting bounds of already established societies whose conventions were rooted in the time-honored traditions and modes which were as much a legacy from past generations as were the roads and buildings and long-cultivated farms.

But the frontier also drew another class of inhabitants. It drew the social innovators—the idealists who saw the virgin land beyond the last settlements as a blank page upon which a new society could write its story.

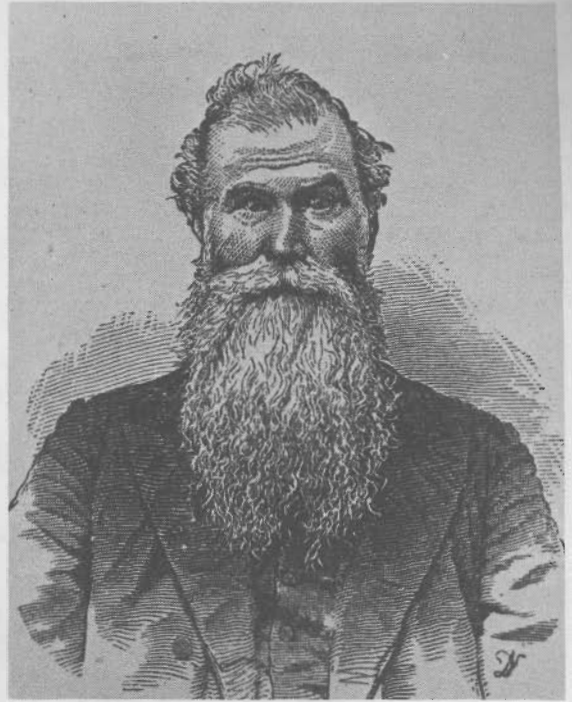
The determined followers of Robert Owen at their com-

munal colony of New Harmony, Indiana; the pioneers and trappers, turned founding fathers, who wrote a constitution for the Oregon Country at Champoege in 1843; the city planners who laid out Versailles-like grids for raw cow towns; the hundreds of Thoreaus who sought private Waldens beyond the frontier; they were so divergent, but they shared something very important beyond the land they came to fill. They were experimentors with a plan who believed that mankind was perfectable and could achieve that perfection in the empty land in the American West.

That land was the scene of many strange events and many bizarre experiments. But none was quite so unusual as Brigham Young's attempt to re-make the English language.



Brigham Young, Governor of the Utah Territory 1850-1857, made a special project of the alphabet from 1853-1870.



Orson Pratt, Regent of the University of Deseret and author of the First and Second Deseret Readers.



Great Salt Lake City as it appeared in 1853, the year the new alphabet was produced.

If there was ever a time and place where more injury was done to a tongue and its grammar, it was on the western frontier of the United States. But it was also in the West that one of the first of many movements was made to reform the language—the Deseret Alphabet.

Mormon interest in language is as old as the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints—founded in upstate New York in 1830 by its first Prophet-President, Joseph Smith, Jr. Smith's *Book of Mormon*, a second volume of scripture for believers, had allegedly been translated from a record engraved on golden plates in characters of "reformed Egyptian." Early in church history leading elders were studying Hebrew and other tongues under the auspices of the "School of the Prophets."

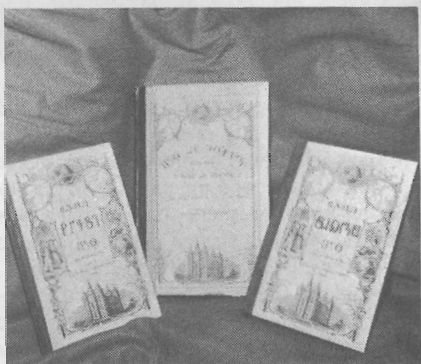
But these were experiments with foreign languages—ancient and modern. Real interest in English began in an inauspicious fashion in 1837 in Preston, Lancashire, England, when George Darley Watt was baptized by immersion

in a chill river to become the first of a hundred-thousand Mormon converts in Great Britain.

The same year that Watt was baptized, Queen Victoria ascended the British Throne and Isaac Pitman published his epochal contribution to phonography, *Stenographic Shorthand*. Watt studied the Pitman system; and when he emigrated to the United States to join the main body of the LDS Church in Nauvoo, Illinois, his skill was utilized as a secretary.

When Brigham Young led the main body of the Church to Utah in 1847, Watt followed. In Salt Lake City he taught shorthand to the church clerks and succeeded in interesting Brigham Young in the Pitman System. For years George Darley Watt made shorthand transcriptions of the sermons of important church leaders.

By 1852 Brigham Young was convinced that shorthand was a great improvement over regularly spelled English. Not only was it phonetic (surviving examples of Brigham's



UTAH'S STRANGE ALPHABET

(Continued from page 30)

into the elementary sounds of language and also into the nature and structure of such characters as are employed to express the radical and multiplied sounds of language."

That was a strange thing to consider for a group of men surrounded by hostile Indian tribes and six hundred miles of wagon road to the nearest American settlements in California and Oregon. But they did consider it; and on January 19, 1854, the *News* announced the result of those considerations.

The article explained that a new phonetic alphabet had been adopted which could be quickly learned and easily written. "The orthography will be so abridged that an ordinary writer can probably write one hundred words a minute with ease, and consequently report the speed of a common speaker without much difficulty . . . In the new alphabet every letter has a fixed and unalterable 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. . ."

Like the university, the newspaper, and practically everything else in Utah Territory, the new alphabet was christened *Deseret*. *Deseret* is a word uniquely Mormon and comes from their second volume of holy scripture, the *Book of Mormon*. That work, a purported ecclesiastical history of the American Indians, speaks of a family fleeing Mesopotamia after the destruction of the Tower of Babel: "And they did also carry with them *deseret*, which, by interpretation, is a honey bee." It is no mere coincidence that the beehive is a prominent emblem on the Utah state flag.

The *Deseret* Alphabet as presented in 1854 contained thirty-eight letters representing common English sounds with symbols for both the long and short forms of the vowels—A, AH, AW, E, O, OO—and the consonants and combinations I, OW, WOO, YE, HE, P. B.

T, D, CHE, G, K, GA, F, V, ETH, THE, S, Z, ESH, ZHEE, R, L, M, N, NG.

Only five characters (O, C, D, S, L)—all but O assigned a new sound—of the Latin alphabet were included among the thirty-eight symbols. For the remainder, George D. Watt invented signs based on Pitman's shorthand or copied from classical alphabets printed in Webster's Dictionary.

As soon as the new alphabet was presented, both the officials of the Church and the University made every effort to foster its introduction. Special schools were started in Salt Lake City to teach the new alphabet, and clerks in the church offices were instructed in its use. The Legislative Assembly voted an appropriation of \$2,500 to purchase fonts of type in the Deseret Alphabet for the local printing of books.

While Erastus Snow was in St. Louis in 1857 making arrangements for the new type, he learned of President James Buchanan's decision to replace Brigham Young as Governor of Utah and to send 2,500 troops to the Territory as an intermountain garrison. Viewing the troops as an army of invasion, Snow abandoned the type and hurried back to Salt Lake.

In the almost comic "Utah War" which preceded the entry of the troops into the Mormon commonwealth, the Deseret Alphabet was almost forgotten. Not until 1859 was the subject again introduced. In February of that year, the *Deseret News* began printing articles in the new characters. From 1859 to 1860 records at church headquarters were kept in the phonetic alphabet. But the early momentum was lost. By 1860 both the *Deseret News* and Brigham Young's secretaries were back to spelling English in the old way with the old letters.

In 1855 Jules Remy, a French visitor to Salt Lake City, saw the strange letters on sign boards and in use in letters and diaries. He predicted, however, that the new alphabet would be abandoned "by its own authors." During the strained years following the Utah War and the economic pressures and opportunities afforded by the War Between the States, it seemed likely that Remy's prophecy would be realized. However, the Frenchman had not counted on Brigham Young's persistence nor on the lengths to which the churchman would go if he felt his commonwealth was threatened. In the last half of the 1860's it was threatened.

Discoveries of rich mineral deposits in the mountains around Salt Lake resulted in an influx of non-Mormon miners and merchants—people who could hardly be expected to be sympathetic to either polygamy or to the closed social and political structure which revolved around the LDS Church. Additionally,

the "splendid isolation" which Utah has known since 1847 was about to end. The Union Pacific from the east and the Central Pacific from the west were straining toward a Transcontinental juncture and the fat government subsidy which accompanied each mile of track laid.

At a time when the mountain fastness of Utah was about to be penetrated, she was further threatened from within by her own success. Nearly a quarter of Utah's foreign born population (thirty-five percent of the Territory's inhabitants) was Scandinavian. A considerable percentage was German, Italian, or Welsh—all non-English speaking peoples. Mormon missionaries on the European continent had been highly successful. But assimilating the immigrants was difficult.

It was church policy to incorporate the new-comers into the English speaking society of their co-religionists as quickly as possible. But it was difficult for the immigrants to transfer the knowledge gained from their phonetic native tongues to English where, as Church President Brigham Young pointed out, the letter A had "one sound in *mate*, a second sound in *father*, a third sound in *fall*, a fourth sound in *man*, and a fifth sound in *marry*."

So the alphabet which had seemed dead a decade before was resurrected—to teach English to foreigners and to effectively isolate Utah's children from the ill effects of close association with the "world" which was sure to enter the Territory in the wake of the

Transcontinental Railroad. As the *Deseret News* editorialized: "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 by training the children in its use."

But to make the Alphabet general involved the production of a literature written in it. On May 15, 1868, the University's Board of Regents hastily instructed Professor Orson Pratt to develop material for elementary school books to be printed in the Deseret Alphabet. He must have worked overtime, for by August proof sheets of the first primer had been received in Salt Lake City. By the end of October 10,000 copies had been printed and forwarded to the Regents.

A committee composed of George D. Watt, Orson Pratt, and Territorial School Superintendent Robert L. Campbell put the books on sale for the Regents. The thirty-six page First Book sold for fifteen cents and the seventy-two-page Second Book for twenty cents.

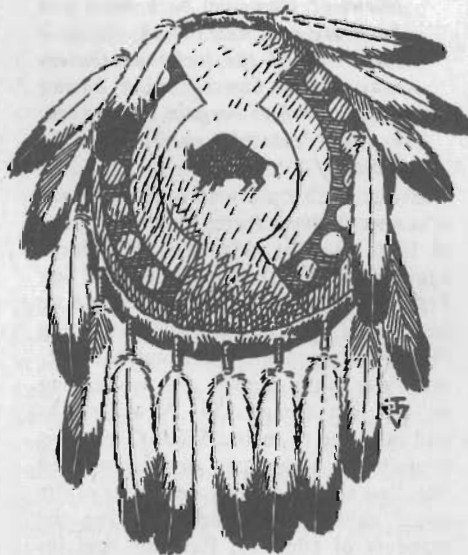
As a children's writer, Professor Pratt was a failure. Except for occasional selections from the Bible or the inclusion of well-known poems, the lessons were deadly reading. But as products of a frontier society, there was a kind of naive directness about them. Lesson XV for example discusses a common pioneer item: "A gun. It is my new gun. Have you seen my new gun? A gun is good to keep off the dogs and bad men at night. We should take care of our guns and keep them clean. We must not point them at any one."

There were also some practical admonitions to "slop" the hogs, feed the chicks, study hard, learn to read, and "do right."

The lessons were kept colloquial enough for Professor Pratt to call a horse a "nag."

Once the primers were available, the Regents' attention turned to the publication of a back-up literature. In Territorial Utah this took the shape of church books and the Holy Scriptures. Professor Pratt went back to the translating table. By March 1869 he had transcribed the *Book of Mormon* and was hard at work on the Bible, the *Doctrine and Covenants*, the Catechism, and a Deseret Phonetic Speller.

In April 1869 the manuscript for the *Book of Mormon* was forwarded to Russell Brothers of New York City. By September 500 copies of the whole book and 5,000 of the first third of the volume had been printed. It was intended that the partial *Book of Mormon* would be



used as a "Third Reader" in the Territorial schools

But the train which brought the books to Utah, only four months after the driving of the Golden Spike, was symbolic of their uselessness. Before 1869 books freighted to Utah from the east or shipped around the Horn and then brought in wagon trains from California were prohibitively expensive. But the railroad made them only slightly more costly in Salt Lake City or Ogden or Logan than in New York, Philadelphia, or Boston. The whole literature of the English speaking world was available. For Utah to have financed wholesale transcription and publication in the phonetic alphabet was impossible.

As it was, the Territory spent \$20,000 for the production of four books. Twenty years later it would spend the same amount to establish Utah State University! Of the sum spent for publication, \$6,000 went for the services of Orson Pratt.

The Regents hoped that the sale of the *Deseret Readers* and the *Book of Mormon* would provide enough money for publishing the Old and New Testaments. It was a vain hope. Few of the books were sold, and during the closing months of 1870 advertisements for their sale disappeared from Salt Lake City newspapers.

But probably the chief reason for so little rank-and-file interest in the *Deseret Alphabet* was its own monotonous nature. Aesthetically, it was dead. The letters all tended to look alike, and it was difficult to distinguish one word from another. Local wags joked that a page from one of the Readers could be mistaken for a Turkish tax list. That was about the kindest publicity it received.

The books were only occasionally introduced in the Territorial schools. Until 1890 when the Free School Act was passed, Utah educated her youth in private schools. Few teachers were willing to co-operate with the authors of the *Deseret Alphabet*, and no legal machinery was available for compelling the alphabet's inclusion in the curriculum.

So the strange experiment ended. The books gravitated into used book shops and private collections. The few students who had learned their letters with the *Deseret* characters spent the rest of their lives overcoming a tendency to spell phonetically a Latin alphabet English. Most people just forgot it—one of those far away frontier happenings which were only possible away from "The States."

Even a kind evaluation of the experiment would have to conclude that it was a failure. But it was a noble failure—a monument to the frontier which gave it birth, which believed that a new world could and should be built in the wilderness. ●

SECOND LIFE OF A SEVERED HEAD

(Continued from page 33)

"The head of the notorious outlaw 'Joaquin Murrieta', which was on exhibition here about a year ago or thereabouts, was seized by Deputy Corbett, and safely lodged in the office of that functionary. The owner proper (Joaquin) being dead, and the owner improper (Mr. Wothing) being in debt, the deputy has assumed the guardianship."

The head and hand reposed in the sheriff's office until September of 1855, when they again changed hands. Under the heading, "New Goods," the following articles appeared in the San Francisco *Alta* on September 26, 1855:

"Some may suppose that an allusion is made to the Japanese cargo; not so; a more curious and novel commodity is in the market: a brigand's head and a robber's digits. The hand of 'Three Fingered Jack' and the head of the celebrated Joaquin Murrieta were sold by the Sheriff on Monday, for the sum of \$36 to satisfy an execution. Judge Lyons and Mr. J.V. Plume were the largest bidders on the occasion. Poor Joaquin, a price was set upon his head while living, and a price is set upon it now that he is dead. It is a head that seems to be particularly liable to executions. Twice has its owner been forced to part with it, to satisfy that provision of the law. If a man's trunk is exempt from execution, why should not his head be so likewise? However, both head and hand are sold and thereby hangs a tale. One of the lucky purchasers may plume himself upon having made a curious bargain, but the other has certainly carried off the palm."

Evidently this particular purchase was of a speculative nature, for in February of 1856, the two hideous exhibits were again sold. A Mr. Craigmiles, of San Francisco, was the new owner, and he announced that he intended exhibiting "his ghastly property" through the interior cities of the country. He was leaving on the first steamer for New Orleans and expected to realize \$50,000 from his project. A newspaper item concluded that "we shall probably next hear of the noted cabeza in Europe, exciting the wonders of cöckney, Parisian, and invalids at Bath and Baden-Baden." The price paid by Craigmiles isn't known.

Details of the travels of the head and hand are lacking, but evidently they were exhibited throughout the east by

the new owner. Horace Bell, an early Californian, noted in his memoirs that he had known a man who had seen them exhibited in a New York museum. After their tour of the east, the head and hand again turned up in San Francisco where they were reportedly acquired by one Andrew J. Taylor in the late 1850's.

Taylor was a forty-niner who had come out during the gold rush from Mississippi. He was known throughout the state as "Old Natchez," and he operated a weapons store and pistol gallery on Clay street, opposite the plaza. He was a skilled gunsmith and if you had anything to do with weapons in old San Francisco, sooner or later you came into contact with Natchez Taylor at his shop.

Here the great and the near-great, as well as the man on the street, came to get their weapons checked, repaired or loaded. The pistol used by gambler Charles Cora to kill U.S. Marshal Richardson was loaded by Natchez, as was the weapon used by Casey to kill editor King of the *Bulletin*. The result of these two shootings was the great vigilante uprising of 1856.

Old Natchez also helped supply arms for the various filibustering expeditions which were outfitted in San Francisco in the 50's. Crabb, William Walker, Charles de Pindray and others were all aided in their vain attempts at empire-building by the popular former Mississippian.

Old Natchez was also the official armorer for California's most noted duel—the encounter between U.S. Senator David Broderick and Judge David Terry. Taylor stood by as Terry deliberately shot down his opponent when the latter's weapon prematurely discharged and missed its target. There was some talk that Natchez had tampered with the trigger settings, had informed Terry of the situation but not told Broderick. The claim was not taken seriously, however, by anyone who knew the mild-mannered gunsmith.

Joaquin's head sat on a shelf in Natchez' store and gazed blankly at the many historic personages who visited the shop on Clay street. Bobbing about in its alcohol-filled glass container, the head was a disinterested observer of an event that took place just a week and a half after the tragic Broderick—Terry duel.

A teamster named Travis, accompanied by a friend, stepped into the Natchez gallery to examine a pair of derringers. While the friend was looking over the derringers, Mr. Travis picked up a pistol from the showcase and inspected it, inadvertently pointing it at Natchez. Suddenly there was a roar and a cloud of black powder smoke. The horrified Travis discovered that he had accidentally shot Natchez in the face, killing him instantly. The unfortunate gun-