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The Deseret Alphabet and Other American Spelling Reform Movements

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THE DESERET ALPHABET
AND OTHER AMERICAN SPELLING
REFORM MOVEMENTS

by

Paula Goodfellow
Everyone that uses the English language has trouble with spelling at one time or another; most people have trouble with it all the time. They may complain about the inconsistencies of English orthography (orthography is a fancy word for the art of spelling) as they reach for the dictionary, but not many people do anything about it. However, a few do try to do something. With some it may become an obsession. This paper is about the various attempts of some of these people to reform spelling.

It is traditional in papers about spelling reform to stop at this point and prove to the reader just how inconsistent English orthography really is, usually through some device such as listing all the sounds that the letter "a" can represent or all the ways there are to represent the sound /æ/. But I'm not going to do that. You may stop and reflect about these inconsistencies if you wish.

When someone gets the urge to reform English spelling he goes about it in one of two ways. Either he tries to work within the existing alphabet and just get rid of those spellings that particularly irk him, or he tries to invent a whole new alphabet in which each letter will represent one and only one sound and no sound may be represented in more than one way. The first method is usually called Simplified Spelling; the second usually produces something called a phonemic alphabet. Simplified spelling reformers include such people as Benjamin Franklin, Noah Webster, Melville Dewey, Mark Twain, and Theodore Roosevelt.
Phonemic reformers include George Bernard Shaw, Isaac Pitman, Brigham Young, and Benjamin Franklin and Mark Twain again.

The earliest American spelling reformer was Benjamin Franklin. Franklin designed a new alphabet in which each letter would correspond to one phoneme and each phoneme would be represented by only one letter. He planned to write a book that was to be called *A Scheme for a New Alphabet and a Reformed Mode of Spelling*, for which special printing plates in his alphabet were to be made. This book is not listed in any catalogue of books, so apparently plans for it were never completed. He enlisted the aid of his friend Noah Webster, and it was through Webster that spelling reform achieved its greatest success.

It is interesting to look at a defense of spelling reform by Franklin in a letter to Mary Stevenson who attacked his reforms because the attacks and the defense are the same ones that come up in later attempts at reform. First Stevenson says that it would be a great inconvenience to have to learn a whole new alphabet. Franklin counters by saying that the new system of spelling would be easy to learn by those that spell well because the letters would represent the sounds and one would only have to write what he heard. He said that it would be especially easier for bad spellers to learn since they already spell by sound. He says that many people use the current system all their lives and still do not learn it well. He also said that the sound of the language was growing farther from the written
form all the time, so that the problem would only worsen. He adds that the new spelling would help foreigners to learn the language more easily because they could learn pronunciation from books. She had also complained that the etymologies would be lost. He said that the etymologies were already undetectable in many words. The etymologies would still be preserved in old books, and Franklin felt that anyone who was really interested in them could find them in the books. He felt that the history of a word was not really important anyway, only its current usage.

Stevenson also thought that the new alphabet would cause difficulties because the difference in meaning of homonyms would not be shown. Franklin said that they were not present in speech, and if a person could tell the difference in rapid speech, he certainly should be able to in writing. Last she mentioned that it would cause great waste because all the books then published would become useless. He said that this was not the case, because this change was to happen over a long period of time, and all these books would still be read by people who had learned the old orthography. Regardless of all these arguments in its favor, Franklin's new alphabet did not succeed as well as his other inventions, and he turned to Noah Webster to implement a lesser type of reform.

When Franklin first tried to interest Webster in spelling reform, Webster was not interested. In fact, he criticized spelling reformers in his 1783 book, Grammatical
But by 1789 he was in favor of it and promoted the subject in his book *Dissertations on the English Language*. He introduced a system of simplified spelling. He is the person responsible for many of the differences in English and American spellings today. He tried to go so far as to drop some silent vowels as the "a" in *bread* and to write "ee" for the vowel sound in words like *mean*, *speak*, *grieve*, and *key*. He also tried to drop the final "e" on words such as *determine*, *examine*, *doctrine*, and *medicine*. These reforms were not accepted, but some of his other reforms were. In his first dictionary, *A Compendious Dictionary of the English Language*, printed in 1806, he made several changes in orthography. He left the final "k" off of some words like *music*, *physic*, and *logic*. However, he was not always consistent; he left the old spelling in *traffick*, *almanack*, and *frolick*. He also changed the spelling of words that ended in "re". So *sceptre* became *scepter*, *theatre* became *theater*, and *metre* became *meter*. He substituted "k" for "que" leaving us with *check*, *mask* and *risk*.

Many of Webster's spellings have been accepted into American usage. This was not true of the attempts of other later reformers who tried to simplify the spelling. Since the reforms were of the same nature it seems that the other simplified spelling should also be accepted. But they were not. At a closer look, one finds that Webster had an extra advantage. He was lucky enough to live at a time when
American culture was just being built. His dictionary of 1806 was the first American dictionary of note. Since it was regarded as an authority, many of the spelling reforms that were included in it have survived. Webster's *An American Spelling Book*, known to several generations as "the blue-backed speller," was the book used by most schools in spelling instruction until well into the middle of the nineteenth century. The students were usually required to memorize the words and spell and pronounce them correctly for their teacher. It is not surprising, given the popularity of this speller, that many of Webster's reforms were accepted.6

Melville Dewey, the inventor of the Dewey Decimal system, also devised a form of simplified spelling. His reform does not seem to have made too much of an impact, on anyone, because no mention is made of it in the books that mention spelling reform, but a sample of it can be found in the introduction to the fifteenth edition of the Dewey Decimal system. The entire thirteenth edition of the Dewey Decimal system was written in this system, which is probably the reason that not many libraries still have their thirteenth edition. His system was almost an attempt at phonemic spelling, but since he retained the Roman alphabet, a real phonemic system was impossible. This lead to some inconsistencies in his spelling such as the use of "y" in *byers* for *buyers* and in *rapidly*. This is just one case of many when he used the same letter to represent two
different sounds. Also there are some instances when he had two different ways of spelling the same sound such as the /i/ phoneme in skeme for scheme and means. Some of his other reforms included using either "t" or "d" to form the preterite instead of "ed" and always using "k" to represent /k/. Dewey system was elaborate and inconsistent. It was too complex to learn by rote, and too arbitrary to simply spell by sound.

The Simplified Spelling Board, instituted by order of Theodore Roosevelt in 1906, was an attempt to legislate spelling reform. This board was to make recommendations about which words should have their spellings simplified. It was not an attempt at phonetic spelling. Roosevelt probably got the idea for the board from his friend, Brander Matthews, a linguist who was concerned with the issue of spelling reform. Matthews, a professor at Columbia University, was made the head of the board. Other members of the committee were Nicholas Murray Butler, president of Stanford University; William James, author and psychologist at Harvard; Mark Twain; Thomas R. Lounsbury, professor of English at Yale; Isaac Funk, editor of the Standard Dictionary; and Richard Watson Gilder, editor of Century Magazine. The board was supported by funds from Andrew Carnegie.7

In 1906 the board came up with a list of 300 words that they felt should be simplified. They included such reforms as medieval for medaieval, honor for honour, plow
for plough, program for programme, judgment for judgement, and tho and thru for though and through. Some of these reforms were accepted eventually. In 1906 Roosevelt instructed the government printing office to publish all government documents with the new spelling. But the new spellings were ridiculed in the public press and by Congress. More lists were published over the years until 1931, but the new forms were rarely recognized by the public. The program gradually died out. Many of the public objections were the same as those given to Benjamin Franklin about his new alphabet. Some people even preferred the difficult spelling because it served as a social indicator; correct spelling was seen as a sign of intelligence by many people. If spelling were simplified, then one social distinction would be lost.

Many of the phonemic reformers based their alphabets on the work of others. The "Philosophical Alphabet" of Jonathan Fisher was not closely related to any of the other reform attempts. Fisher was a New Englander, born in the eighteenth century, and educated at Harvard. He was interested in Linguistics, having learned Hebrew, Greek, Latin and French, and wrote several works describing the various phonemes in English as he perceived them. Fisher also had diverse interests. He was primarily a minister, but was also a farmer, artist of some note, surveyor, and author. His philosophical alphabet was designed in the autumn of 1792 while Fisher was still a student at Harvard.
Fisher used it to save time and paper and used it in his personal papers for the remaining fifty years of his life.\textsuperscript{14}

The alphabet seems to have been for Fisher's personal use only. It seems to have sprung from his linguistic interests and a desire for utility, not from any zeal to reform the language. It is now of interest mainly to linguists, who use the alphabet to study the dialects of New England at his time. Most of the symbols in Fisher's alphabet were taken from the style of orthography of his day. Some came from earlier phonetic alphabets and some seem to have been invented by him.\textsuperscript{15} Fisher used a single symbol for each of several sounds that are represented in conventional orthography by two symbols: \(/\zeta/, /\tilde{z}/, /\xi/, /\eta/, /\theta/, /\varsigma/.\textsuperscript{16} This was one of the best innovations in his alphabet.

The inspiration for many of the spelling reform movements of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries came from the work of an Englishman, Isaac Pitman. He was also the inventor of the basis for modern shorthand. In 1837 Pitman published \textit{Stenographic Shorthand}.\textsuperscript{17} This system was mostly intended to be a rapid system of writing, not as a means of reform. But Pitman was also interested in spelling reform for the general public. He and a linguist, Henry Ellis, attempted to adapt the stenography so that it would be acceptable as an alphabet for general use. They printed a journal, \textit{Phonotypic Journal}, about spelling reform for several years and the Bible and some classical works were
printed in their alphabet.\textsuperscript{18} The alphabet, like the other attempts at reform, did not receive much attention from the public, but it did not really die out either. It was remembered by the few groups of people in the world that thought that spelling reform was a burning issue. It was revived and revised several times in later years by the Mormons in their Deseret alphabet, by George Bernard Shaw in his Shaw alphabet, and by Pitman's grandson James in the Initial Teaching Alphabet. Mark Twain proposed using Pitman's alphabet because it would be even better than the simplified spelling movement.\textsuperscript{19}

George Bernard Shaw, the British playwright, was greatly concerned with both written and spoken language. The pronunciation peculiarities of Englishmen and Americans greatly offended him, and he wanted to set up some sort of means of correcting these offenses. He saw himself as a great Henry Higgins out to reform a world of Eliza Doolittles. He wanted to find a system of orthography that would represent the actual phonemes of the language and establish a standard of English pronunciation. He also thought that a new alphabet could save time and space in printing. He was a friend of James Pitman, and they worked together on the reform. Shaw believed that Isaac Pitman's alphabet proved several things: that a forty letter alphabet would work to represent English sounds, that a new alphabet could be accepted because the Pitman system had spread around the world, and that anyone who wanted to
learn a new alphabet could do so. Shaw used the Pitman system in his own writing.

Shaw was convinced that the new alphabet required forty symbols to represent English accurately. There were postcards printed to promote his reform ideas, and they contained an explanation of how he had arrived at forty. First he said that there were twenty-six characters in the Roman alphabet, but three of them were unnecessary so that left twenty-three sounds. Then he said that seven new consonants were needed to represent the sounds sh, zh, wh, ch, th, dh, ng, and ten new letters were needed to represent various vowels and diphthongs. This added up to a total of forty.

The Pitman system contained forty letters, but for some reason Shaw did not want to use this for his new alphabet. He did not invent symbols for one himself either, although it seems that it would be easy enough since he knew what sounds should be represented. Instead he set up a trust in his will that provided for a foundation that was to find the new alphabet through a contest and give prize money to the winner. The will was contested by family members and friends who thought that they could find better uses for the money than spelling reform. The court took away most of the prize money for the foundation, but the contest was still held. Finally in 1962, seven years after Shaw's death the alphabet was revealed to the public. It was a composite of four of the best entries and contained forty-eight letters. It was not noticed by the public,
and only one thing was printed in it, *The Shaw Alphabet Edition of Androcles and the Lion.* The Economist said that it would not work because of the cost involved and the difference in English dialects.

Shaw felt that the transition from Roman letters to the Shavian would be like the transition from Roman numerals to Arabic; it would make reading easier and save space. He wanted to do away with the differences between capital letters and small letters and between printing and handwriting.

The Deseret Alphabet that was designed by the Mormons in Salt Lake City was also influenced by Pitman's phonography. George D. Watt, a convert to the church from England, came to Nauvoo, Illinois in 1843. He was familiar with the Pitman system and used it to transcribe minutes of church meetings. Brigham Young became interested in this system, and the idea of instituting spelling reform may have occurred to him even then. But the idea had to wait until the Mormons came to Utah. The first mention of spelling reform was made by Brigham Young in a speech on April 8, 1853. He spoke out against the inconsistencies of conventional orthography at this time. That year the Board of Regents of the University of Deseret appointed a committee to oversee the development of a new alphabet.

It is not known exactly who was responsible for the design of the new alphabet or where the characters came from. H. H. Bancroft said in his *History of Utah* that the
letters of the alphabet were like some of the characters that The Book of Mormon plates were in. He also says that some of the writing of The Book of Mormon plates contained Greek letters, so some of the characters in the Deseret alphabet looked Greek.27 In comparing copies of the Deseret Alphabet to extant copies of The Book of Mormon script, some similarities can be seen. Mostly the similar characters are the ones that are similar to Greek letters also. The Book of Mormon characters do not seem to be an important source for the Deseret Alphabet. Brigham Young's secretary, T.W. Ellerback, wrote that G.D. Watt designed the alphabet and that he designed some of the characters himself and took some others from the ancient alphabets shown in Webster's unabridged dictionary.28 Hosea Stout wrote in his journal in March, 1854, that George D. Watt was responsible for working out the characters.29 Jules Remy, a French visitor to Salt Lake City said that the alphabet originated with W.W. Phelps.30 Floris Springer Olsen said in Early Nineteenth Century Shorthand Systems and Possible Similarities Between Any of Them and the Deseret Alphabet that some of the characters in the Deseret Alphabet could be traced to Pitman characters. This would indicate that Watt was responsible for the alphabet. Most of the evidence indicates that Watt probably did most of the work on it.

By 1855 the alphabet was being taught to the clerks in the Church historian's office31 and in March, John Milner taught the alphabet to several hundred people in the Provo
area. On July 31, 1855 the subject of the new alphabet was discussed by the Deseret Typographical Association and a committee was appointed to draft a resolution stating the opinions of that august body on the alphabet. Since the committee consisted of George D. Watt, W. W. Phelps, and Jason McKnight, two of whom were involved on designing the alphabet, the resolution was bound to be favorable. At the Association's next meeting the resolution was read. It is interesting for the insights into the motives behind the Deseret Alphabet that it gives. It stated that English orthography was imperfect and inadequate, but the Deseret Alphabet supplied simple characters for the simple sounds of the human voice that would correct those "absurdities." It said that the new alphabet would make pronunciation more definite and make it easier to learn foreign languages and lessen the trouble of learning to read. It is unclear what was meant in saying that it would make foreign languages easier to learn, perhaps they meant that learning phonemic alphabet would help to learn other languages whose alphabets were phonemic, but it is more probable that they meant the Deseret alphabet would aid the large number of immigrants that were entering Utah to learn the language. Finally the resolution stated that the association should hail the alphabet as a "forerunner in that series of developments in philology which shall prepare man-kind for the reception of a pure language." Also the resolution stated that George Watt should be asked to teach the new alphabet to the Association.
The new alphabet began to be promoted in earnest. On October 4, 1855, Robert Campbell exhibited a letter written in the Deseret Alphabet to the Deseret Typographical Association. This letter was remarkable because it was said to have been written by a missionary who had no knowledge of traditional orthography, but had written this letter after only six lessons in Deseret script. The territorial legislature appropriated $2500 for the purpose of getting some school primers printed on December 28, 1855. On February 4, 1856, President Young met with the Board of Regents and appointed a committee to write the first two primers in Deseret Alphabet. George D. Watt, Samuel Richards, and Wilford Woodruff were the original committee members. By February 25 the work was not progressing quickly enough to satisfy President Young, so three new committee members were appointed: E. Smith, Parley P. Pratt, and Orson Pratt.

There seems to have been a fair amount of public support for the new alphabet even though nothing had yet been printed in it. Jules Remy reported seeing shop signs using it and the tombstone in Cedar City of John Morris, who died April 8, 1853, was carved in Deseret Alphabet. In a July 24 celebration at North Willow Creek in Box Elder County in 1855, two small boys marched in the parade carrying a representation of the alphabet. The primers were not printed at this time however, probably because the type had not been procured. The alphabet was laid to rest for several years because of the 'Utah Wars.'
After the excitement, on November 20, 1858, it was discovered that the work that had previously been done on the primers had been lost, and Brigham Young appointed Watt and Woodruff to compile some more books. The Board of Regents began to make arrangements for the printing of the texts. But the work does not seem to have progressed much, because no mention is made of them in Journal History until May 22, 1862 when Robert Campbell came to Brigham Young with a proposal to print the school readers in common type. President Young said that "he would not consent to have his type, ink, or paper used to print such trash (which he considers such work to be, seeing that they are in the English characters.) He wishes the Deseret characters to be patronized." There was some activity in Deseret Alphabet at this time. The Deseret News printed readings from the Bible once a week from February 16, 1859 to May 2, 1869 when they were discontinued without any explanation. They were revived again for a brief time in 1864. Also several committees worked at adapting the alphabet and deciding on pronunciations of various words. The influence of Brigham Young in planning the alphabet is shown in the Journal History entries of this period because he was present at nearly every meeting. Some work was done on transcribing Webster's Dictionary into Deseret Alphabet, but it was discontinued because of expense. For some reason the interest in the Deseret Alphabet died out until 1868, and no mention is made of the alphabet in Journal.
History until then. In May 1868 Campbell gave Orson Pratt material to transcribe into Deseret Alphabet for the primers. He must have worked quickly because by June 25 the second book had been sent off to the printer in New York by Wells Fargo Express. Throughout the next two years there was a great effort by the Regents and the Deseret News to promote use of the books in the schools through editorials and travel to various districts in the state, but public support was lacking. There were no public schools so use of the alphabet could not be forced by the government. By the end of 1870 the advertisements for the primers that had been carried in the Deseret News were discontinued. The last mention of the alphabet in this period in the Journal History is a letter from Orson Pratt to the territorial legislature asking for $6537.87 for his work in transcribing the Doctrine and Covenants and the Bible into Deseret Alphabet, having written 3996 foolscap pages.

Spelling Reform seems to be a strange subject for a group of people trying to build a city in the desert to be bothered about. There is not really one single reason that caused Brigham Young to be so concerned with reform, instead there were many reasons. As was already mentioned, one of the motivations was the belief that someday there would be a great reform in language and a perfect language would be restored to the earth. This is born out in the resolution of the Deseret Typographical Association that says that the
Deseret Alphabet was just a step in this great reform. Brigham Young felt that young children should not be forced to spend a long time sitting quietly in school "on a hard bench until they ache all over." He thought that they should have more time to move around and do things that interested them. He thought that the Deseret Alphabet would make it easier for children to learn to read so that they wouldn't have to spend so much time in school. This seems to have been one of his major motivations. He also told the Board of Regents that the alphabet could aid foreigners in learning English. Another theory is that the alphabet could have been designed to keep the children of Deseret protected from outside influences.

There were also many reasons for its failure. One certainly was the lack of money that is mentioned many times throughout Journal History entries about Deseret Alphabet. Brigham Young said that one of the problems was that the people knew the old system and did not want to change. He felt that that problem could be solved if the children were instructed in the new alphabet. A. J. Simmonds mentioned the fact that the primers were printed about the same time that the transcontinental railway was completed. The railroad made more books available to the pupils and destroyed the isolation that could have made the alphabet successful. Finally the death of Brigham Young, the alphabet's strongest proponent, robbed it of its driving force.
The many failures seem to show that spelling reform is a hopeless cause. The expense and time involved in making a change always seem to outweigh the benefits of a reform. It is also difficult to institute a good consistent reform. Phonemic reforms cause difficulty because speakers of English everywhere have different dialects, and a widespread phonemic reform would probably cause more trouble than it would solve as each person tried to write the way he spoke. Since there is no body to legislate language rules for English as there is in France, simplified spelling changes will probably also be slow in coming. Finally, perhaps spelling should not reflect speech totally after all. A linguist, Henry Bradley, said that writing was not simply to represent sounds, but to many people it conveys meaning without the intermediary of mental pronunciation, so the difference in some words helps one's understanding in reading. If this is true perhaps spelling reform is not needed or good.
FOOTNOTES


2Noah Webster, Dissertations on the English Language (Gainesville, Florida: Scholar's Facsimiles and Reprints, 1951), p. 408.


4Ibid., p. 430.

5Ibid.


8Ibid.

9Ibid.

10Baugh, Ibid., p. 389.


13Ibid., p. 38.

14Ibid.

15Ibid. p. 40.

16Ibid.

17Baugh, Ibid., p. 388.

18Ibid.

20 Tauber, Ibid., p. 183

21 Ibid., p. 63.

22 Ibid., p. 164-70.

23 "Shaw's Alphabet, Ploys Unpleasant?" Economist, 205:754

24 The Deseret Alphabet, Utah Historical Quarterly, 12: 98-102


26 A. J. Simmonds, "Utah's Strange Alphabet," True Frontier, Nov. 1968, p. 28


30 Jules Remy & Julius Brenchley, A Journey to the Great Salt Lake (London 1861), 2: 185

31 Journal History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints on microfilm in Special Collections at Utah State University, Feb. 7, 1855.

32 J.H., Mar. 11, 1855.

33 J.H., July 3, 1855.

34 J.H., Aug. 2, 1855.

35 J.H., Oct. 5, 1855.

36 Remy, Ibid., p. 185

37 Monson, Ibid., p. 25.

38 J.H., July 24, 1855.

39 J.H., July 25, 1855.
40 George O. Rampton, "The Deseret Alphabet," unpublished manuscript in USU special collections, appendix.

41 J.H., April 14, 1859.
42 J.H., June 25, 1868.
43 J.H., Undated.
44 Rampton, Ibid., p. 13
45 J.H., Jan. 31, 1859.
46 Simmonds, Ibid.
47 J.H., Sept. 7, 1862.
48 Baugh, Ibid., p. 310
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The Shaw Alphabet for Writers

Double lines \( \approx \) between pairs show the relative height of Talls, Deeps, and Shorts. Wherever possible, finish letters rightwards; those starred * will be written upwards. Also see heading and footnotes overleaf.

<table>
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<th>Deep</th>
<th>Short</th>
<th>Short</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>bib ( f \approx )</td>
<td>eat ( 1 \approx 4 )</td>
<td>( \approx )</td>
</tr>
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<td>dead ( e \approx g )</td>
<td>age ( 1 \approx e )</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>gag ( a \approx c )</td>
<td>ice ( e \approx c )</td>
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<td>up ( 1 \approx 7 )</td>
<td>( \approx )</td>
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<td>ooze ( e \approx o )</td>
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<td>oil ( o \approx l )</td>
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</tr>
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<td>judge ( u \approx d )</td>
<td>awe ( e \approx u )</td>
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</tr>
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<td>*woe ( e \approx o )</td>
<td>or ( o \approx r )</td>
<td>( \approx )</td>
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<td>hung ( l \approx h )</td>
<td>ha-ha ( e \approx a )</td>
<td>err ( e \approx r )</td>
<td>( \approx )</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From The Shaw Alphabet Edition of Androcles and the Lion
(Penguin Books 1962)
SEPURDZ, r"ijes, lift up ywr iz,
And send ywr ferz wwp;
N"oz fram ti rejunz ou ti skiz,
Salve s'un 'barn ti-do.

2. Jezus, ti Gad h'm anjelz fer,
Kum z den to dwel wit yu;
To du he max h'in entrans her,
But nat az manax d's.

3. No gold narpurpl swadlip bandz,
Nar real sinp' biyz;
A menjur far h'in krudl standz,
And holdz ti Kig av kigz.

4. Go sepurdz war ti infant liz,
And se h'iz humbl bron;
Wit tiz av je in jl yur iz,
Go sepurdz kis ti Sun.

5. Bus Gabriel say, and strut ur'nd
Bi hevnlh armiz br'eq;
Go 'bn tar harps to lqfi send,
And bus kanklid tar sqq;

6. "Glor to Gd h'o ranz ubuv,
Let pes sur'nd ti urb;
Maptalz gal no tar Mekur'z luv
At tar Rudsur'z burb."


Janojban Fisur invenit.

FIGURE 1. Text in the block form of the philosophical alphabet. (Reproduced with permission of the William A. Farnsworth Library and Art Museum.)
Franklin's First Known Experiment with Phonetic Spelling
The new alphabet began to be promoted in earnest. On October 4, 1855 Robert Campbell exhibited a letter written in the Deseret Alphabet to the Deseret Typographical Association. This letter was remarkable because it was said to have been written by a missionary who had no knowledge of traditional orthography, but had written this letter after only six lessons in Deseret script. The territorial legislature appropriated $2500 for the purpose of getting some school primers printed on December 28, 1855. On February 4, 1856 President Young met with the Board of Regents and appointed a committee to write the first two primers in Deseret Alphabet. George D. Watt, Samuel Richards and Wilford Woodruff were the original committee members. By February 25 the work was not progressing quickly enough to satisfy President Young, so three new committee members were appointed: E. Smith, Parley P. Pratt and Orson Pratt.

There seems to have been a fair amount of public support for the new alphabet even though nothing had yet been printed in it. Jules Remy reported seeing shop signs using it and tombstone in Cedar City of John Morris, who died April 8, 1853, was carved in Deseret Alphabet. In a July 24 celebration at North Willow Creek in Box Elder County in 1855, two small boys marched in the parade carrying a representation of the alphabet. The primers were not printed at this time however, probably because the type had not been procured. The alphabet was laid to rest for several years because of the "Utah Wars."
letters of the alphabet were like some of the characters that The Book of Mormon plates were in. In comparing copies of the Deseret Alphabet to extant copies of The Book of Mormon script, some similarities can be seen. Mostly the similar characters are the ones that are similar to Greek letters also. The Book of Mormon characters do not seem to be an important source for the Deseret Alphabet. He also says that some on the writing of The Book of Mormon plates contained Greek letters, so some of the characters in the Deseret alphabet looked Greek. Brigham Young's secretary, T. W. Ellerback, wrote that G. D. Watt designed the alphabet and that he designed some of the characters himself and took some others from the ancient alphabets shown in Webster's unabridged dictionary. Hosea Stout wrote in his journal in March 1854 that George D. Watt was responsible for working out the characters. Jules Remy, a French visitor to Salt Lake City said that the alphabet originated with W. W. Phelps. Floris Springer Olsen said in Early Nineteenth Century Shorthand Systems and Possible Similarities Between Any of Them and the Deseret Alphabet that some of the characters in the Deseret Alphabet could be traced to Pitman characters. This would indicate that Watt was responsible for the alphabet. Most of the evidence indicates that Watt probably did most of the work on it.

By 1855 the alphabet was being taught to the clerks in the church hisorian's office and in March John Milner taught the alphabet to several hundred people in the Provo