
Latter-day Saint Poetry and Songs of the Utah War

Kenneth L. Alford

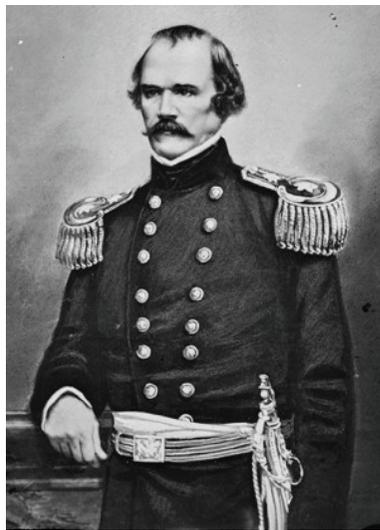
Individuals attending the Fourth of July Independence Day celebrations throughout Utah Territory in 1857 would have been hard-pressed to find any evidence that the Mormon celebrants were anything but loyal Americans. In Ogden, for example, the entire Constitution of the United States was read during a meeting in the tabernacle. In Kaysville, Pleasant Grove, and elsewhere, numerous toasts were offered throughout the day on behalf of President James Buchanan, the Constitution, the government of the United States, and the liberty and freedoms cherished by Americans.¹ However, at the same time these celebrations were occurring, American soldiers were marching toward Salt Lake City.

In the spring of 1857 while Congress was adjourned, President Buchanan, the newly inaugurated fifteenth president of the United States, received reports of insurrection and rebellion in the Utah Territory. In May, he ordered soldiers to Utah to restore order and install new territorial officers, including a new territorial governor, Alfred Cumming, to replace Brigham Young. Buchanan's decision to make no public announcement about his action until the end of the year led to much distrust and confusion. The army left Kansas in July and was forced to winter near Fort Bridger over one hundred miles from Salt Lake City. By 1858, Buchanan sought a solution to the crisis he had created by allowing Colonel Thomas L. Kane, a friend of the Mormons, and two official peace commissioners to travel to Utah to obtain a satisfactory resolution of the conflict. Fortunately, through the efforts of the Kane and the

KENNETH L. ALFORD (ken_alford@byu.edu) is an associate professor of Church History and Doctrine at Brigham Young University. He received his BA from Brigham Young University, an MA from the University of Southern California, an MCS from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, and a PhD from George Mason University. He served as an active duty army officer for nearly thirty years, retiring with the rank of colonel. While in the U. S. Army, he taught at the United States Military Academy at West Point, New York, and the National Defense University in Washington, DC.



U. S. President James Buchanan, 1860. In spring 1857, shortly after his inauguration, Buchanan authorized the Utah Expedition. Photograph by Charles and Henry Meade.



Albert Sidney Johnston, commander of the Utah Expedition. Johnston remained in command of the soldiers stationed at Camp Floyd until 1860 when he moved to California to accept the appointment as commander of the Department of the Pacific. In April 1861, he resigned his post and returned to the East where he accepted a commission as a general in the Confederate Army. He bled to death from a leg wound incurred during the Battle of Shiloh, April 6, 1862. Photograph by E. and H. T. Anthony, ca. 1860–1862, courtesy Library of Congress.

government commissioners, a peaceful settlement was obtained, and a blanket pardon from Buchanan was accepted by the Mormons. The army passed quietly through the Salt Lake Valley in June 1858 and established Camp Floyd forty miles southwest of Great Salt Lake City.

Mormon Poetry and Politics

The observation that “with the Mormons, in the days of the settlement of Utah . . . pioneers sang to keep their courage up” was probably never more true than during the Utah War in 1857–58.² Significantly, politically motivated poetry and songs provided an outlet for feelings of anxiety, defiance,

and faith; and a surprising number of songs and poetry were published during the Utah War.³ In fact, cultural historians Austin and Alta Fife have observed: “So abundant are the songs that the Mormon folk have composed and sung at all of the critical moments in their history that, were every other document destroyed, it would still be possible, from folk songs alone, to reconstruct in some detail the story of their theology, their migrations, their conflict with the Gentiles, and the founding and development of most of their settlements.”⁴

Mormon Poetry, 1847–July 1857

After the Mormons began settling Utah in 1847, a strong sense existed that they, as a people, had finally found a place where they could permanently establish themselves. Much of the poetry written between 1847 and 1857 celebrated the sense of freedom and independence they felt. For example, a poem written by W. W. Phelps and published in the *Deseret News* in 1852 expressed the feelings of many Latter-day Saints who had immigrated to Utah. The last two lines of each stanza declared: “Yet the Mormons shout ‘Hosanna! In Deseret we’re free.’”⁵ In December 1856, John Parry, who several years earlier had been asked by Brigham Young to form a choir with his singing compatriots as the nucleus, published a song sung to the tune of “Come, Come, Ye Saints.” The lyrics of the second stanza read:

Let’s not forget the afflictions which we bore
 In Nauvoo, —in Far West,
 And how the Lord, from mercy he had in store,
 Brought us home to our rest:
 His praise we’ll sing, our God and King,
 And make the hills and valleys ring;
 For in this Valley of the West,
 There is none to molest.⁶

In February 1857, Philip Margetts, who would later become a well-known nineteenth century Utah actor, published “A Song for the Elders” in the *Deseret News*. The last line of the fourth stanza would take on new meaning later that year:

We know that mobs have drove us,
 But Brigham has declared,
 If our religion we will live,
 We never need be scared.⁷

A “Song of Praise” written for the April 1857 general conference by Emily Hill, a British convert who crossed the plains in 1856 with the Willie



Philip Margetts portraying the comical character “Mr. Toodles,” date unknown. Margetts came to the Utah Territory from England in 1850 with a passion for theater and quickly became a prominent and well-loved comedic actor in Salt Lake City. The Margetts Theater in the Harris Fine Arts Center at Brigham Young University is named in his honor. Photograph courtesy Utah State Historical Society.

Handcart Company, expressed the great confidence and faith that the Saints had in their God and their prophet-leader, Brigham Young:

Here’s Brigham Young—the Lion
Who keeps the wolves at bay;
Through him God favors Zion
In this the latter day.

Oh ye who seek our ruin!
Believe God is our friend—
All things belong unto Him—
His people He’ll defend.⁸

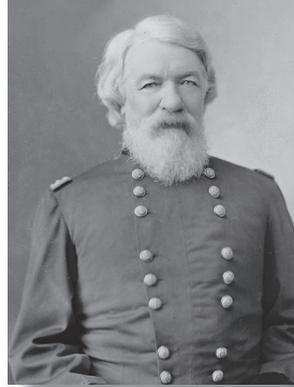
Safely settled in the Rocky Mountains, many Mormons felt that they were now beyond the reach of serious persecution, as these lyrics from a Philip Margetts’s song in May 1857 attest:

Above all people we are favor’d—
Reflect all ye Saints on the past—
From mobs and wicked men delivered,
In Zion our happy lot is cast.⁹

Mormon Poetry Preceding the Army’s Arrival

When the Mormons received word in the summer of 1857 (ten years after the arrival of the first company of Mormon pioneers) that President Buchanan had dispatched an army to march on Utah, it appeared that once more their freedom to worship was being challenged.¹⁰ In remarks given at the bowery on Temple Square during the latter part of July, Heber C. Kimball, Brigham Young’s first counselor, stated defiantly: “Send 2,500 troops here . . . to make a desolation of this people! God Almighty helping me, I will fight until there

Stewart Van Vliet, quartermaster of the Utah Expedition, ca. 1865–1880. Photograph courtesy Library of Congress.



is not a drop of blood in my veins. Good God! I have wives enough to whip out the United States; for they will whip themselves.”¹¹ In September 1857, the army sent Captain Stewart Van Vliet, a U.S. Army quartermaster officer, to meet with Brigham Young and ask for approval to purchase food and supplies. In a dispatch to his superiors dated September 16, 1857, Van Vliet reported Brigham Young as having said

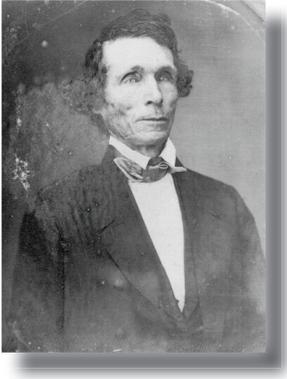
that the Mormons had been persecuted, murdered, and robbed in Missouri and Illinois both by the mob and state authorities, and that now the United States were about to pursue the same course, and that, therefore, he and the people of Utah had determined to resist all persecution at the commencement, and that the *troops now on the march for Utah should not enter the Great Salt Lake valley*. . . .

When those troops arrive they will find Utah a desert. Every house will be burned to the ground, every tree cut down, and every field laid waste. We have three years’ provisions on hand, which we will “cache,” and then take to the mountains and bid defiance to all the powers of the government. . . . [Speaking in a public meeting, Brigham Young] referred to the probability of an overpowering force being sent against them, and desired all present, who would apply the torch to their own buildings, cut down their trees, and lay waste to their fields, to hold up their hands. Every hand, in an audience numbering over 4,000 persons, was raised at the same moment.¹²

W. W. Phelps expressed these feelings of defiance and resistance in a song dedicated to Governor Young, published in the *Deseret News* and sung to the popular nineteenth century tune Lilly Dale. The sixth and eighth stanzas declare:

[Sixth stanza]

When the chain had been broke,
Then we shook off the yoke,
And the bow shall not choke us again;
Is a sword drawn to kiss;
Or a cannon for bliss?



William Wines Phelps, ca. 1853.

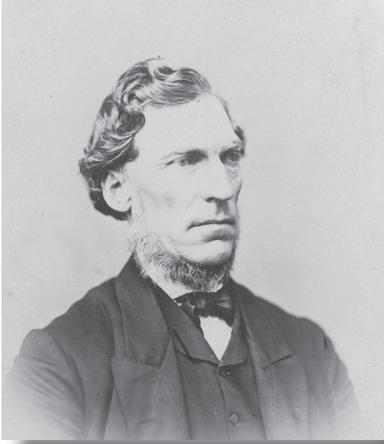
No; such emblems of peace, we disdain:
 Deseret! Deseret! Home of the free;
 May the sun never shine
 On a coward of thine,—
 BRIGHAM stands at the helm now for thee.

[Eighth stanza]

Like old Joshua's band,
 We will clean off the land,
 And prepare for the flock and the fleece;
 If the mob ever comes,
 We will burn all our homes,
 As the bonfire of freemen for peace:
 Deseret! Deseret! Home of the free;
 'Tis the fire and the snow
 That can teach men to know,—
 JESUS reigns on the land and the sea.¹³

In September 1857, Utah's militia, the Nauvoo Legion, under the command of General Daniel H. Wells, who also served as Brigham Young's second counselor in the Church's First Presidency, began making military preparations in Echo Canyon to resist a possible armed invasion. Over one thousand militia members built breastworks, dug trenches, built dams, and loosened rocks in case they should be needed as weapons. In January 1858, the *Deseret News* published a poem by William G. Mills "dedicated to Lieut. Gen. D. H. Wells and his co-champions in arms" (see Appendix A).¹⁴ The following week, the *Deseret News* published another poem by Mills titled "Song," and subtitled "On the Peaceful Return of Zion's Warriors," that continued in the same vein (see Appendix B).¹⁵

Preparations by the Mormon militia continued for the probable arrival of the United States Army while Mormon poets and lyricists wrote and published poetry and songs relating to the looming conflict. In October 1857, for



Daniel H. Wells, Mormon commander of the Nauvoo Legion during the Utah War, date unknown. Photograph courtesy Utah State Historical Society.



“Zion’s Poetess,” Eliza R. Snow, date unknown.

example, the *Deseret News* published a lengthy poem, written by Eliza R. Snow from the “Ladies of Utah” to the “Ladies of the United States camp in a crusade against the ‘Mormons.’”

Why are you in these mountains,
Expos’d to frosts and snows,
Far from your shelt’ring houses—
From comfort and repose?

Has cruel persecution,
With unrelenting hand,
Thrust you from home and kindred
And from your native land?

Have you been mob’d and plunder’d
Till you are penniless,
And then in destitution
Driven to the wilderness?

No no; you’ve join’d a crusade
Against the peace of those
Driv’n to these distant valleys
By cruel, murd’rous foes. . . .

Can woman’s heart be callous
And made of flint or steel?



“Brigham Young mustering his forces to fight the United States troops,”
Harper’s Weekly, November 28, 1857.



“The army crosses the plains,” *Harper’s Weekly*, April 14, 1858.

Perhaps you'll learn to pity,
When you are made to *feel*.

Should sickness prey upon you
And children cry for bread,
With bitter self-reproaches
You'll rue the path you tread. . . .

We're well prepar'd to teach you,
And that you may discern;
We simply here remind you,
You've just *commenc'd to learn*.

The Scriptures are fulfilling—
The spoiler's being spoil'd;
All Satan's foul devices
'Gainst Zion will be foil'd.¹⁶

In October 1857, in a gesture of kindness, Brigham Young sent a letter and copies of the *Deseret News* to Colonel E. B. Alexander, acting commander of the Utah Expedition:

Sir: Presuming that during a dearth of news from the east and your home, news from the west might enliven the monotonous routine of camp life, I have the honor to forward to you two copies each of the latest numbers of the *Deseret News*.

Very respectfully,
Brigham Young

The army graciously acknowledged receipt of the newspapers:

Sir: Colonel Alexander, commanding the United States troops, directs me to acknowledge the receipt by your messengers of packages of papers for himself, Colonel Waite and Captain Phelps.

He appreciates highly the kind attention and politeness shown to him and the officers of the army, and begs that you will accept his thanks.

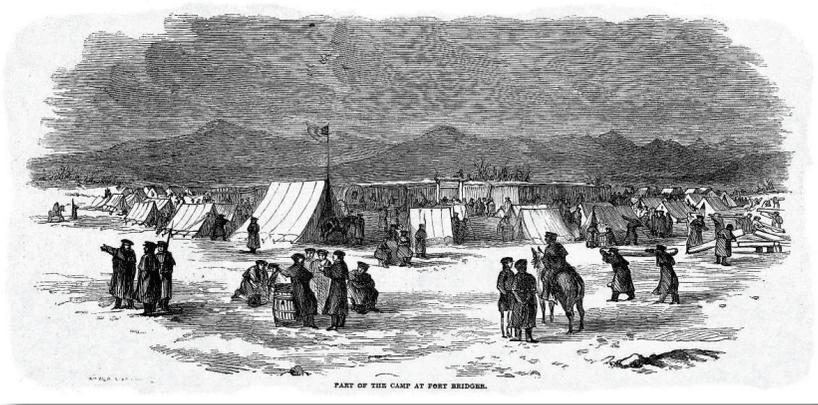
I am, sir, with high respect, your obedient servant,
Henry E. Maynadier¹⁷

Depending on which newspaper issues were sent, the army may have received issues containing the Mormon poetry and songs directed against their expedition.

Throughout the conflict, copies of the *Deseret News* were also sent to newspapers across the nation. One *New York Times* writer called the politically themed poems that frequently appeared “poetical effusions, from Mormon writers, touching upon existing troubles.”¹⁸ Several Mormon poems and songs were subsequently published in eastern newspapers. For example, on January 15, 1858, the *New York Times* reprinted “Mormon Battle Song” (sung



“Snowstorm march,” *Harper’s Weekly*, April 14, 1858.



PART OF THE CAMP AT FORT BRIDGER.

“Part of the camp at Fort Bridger,” *Harper’s Weekly*, January 30, 1858.

to the tune of the *Marseillaise*) by William G. Mills, which had originally been published as “The Marseillais Hymn” in the October 21, 1857 issue of the *Deseret News*.¹⁹

Preparation for the Army’s arrival continued throughout the fall of 1857. In addition to taking defensive actions in Echo Canyon, Mormons sought to harass and slow the army’s march by burning Ft. Bridger and Ft. Supply, harassing supply trains, and scattering livestock.²⁰ Henry Hamilton, who served as a young soldier in the Utah Expedition, noted:

The Mormons, now began to trouble us considerably, impeding our progress in various ways, and making it as difficult for us as possible. Every day when coming to camp they would set the grass on fire, using long torches, and riding swift horses, so that before pitching tents, we always had to fight fire. They destroyed so much of it that the animals had to be driven some distance to get feed. One morning, just before daybreak, they rushed through the camp, firing guns and yelling like Indians, driving off all our mules and horses, numbering about a thousand, and before we could get into line they were safely out of reach of our rifles. It was ten o’clock before we recovered our animals. They hovered around daily, watching and taking every advantage of us, feeling safe in their tactics, knowing our inability to cope with them, as we had no cavalry, while they had the fleetest of horses.²¹

Initial plans called for the Utah Expedition to march into the Salt Lake valley prior to the onset of winter. However, Mormon harassment and internal army delays combined to force the soldiers to winter in Wyoming at a temporary encampment known as Camp Winfield Scott, where they spent a difficult winter. A poem by Eliza R. Snow, published in November 1857, entitled “The Kingdom of God is the Kingdom for me,” illustrates the encouragement many Mormons felt at the time:

[Third stanza]

The Kingdom of God is a kingdom of Power:
In th’ midst of oppression its sinews have grown;
All people who fight against Zion will perish—
To tread on her peace, is to forfeit your own.

[Sixth stanza]

The Kingdom of God is a kingdom of Valor—
The warriors of Israel are valiant and brave:
They quail not in war, and they shrink not in danger—
O’er them and their temples bright banners will wave.²²

Mountains, cold winters, and their distance from the main region of the United States had often been viewed by Mormons as impediments, but during the Utah War they were seen as great blessings from God as selections from

two poems, published in the *Deseret News* in December 1857, illustrate. The first, by John S. Davis, is titled “A Song for Deseret”:

See the Saints from every nation. . .
 Seeking freedom and salvation. . .
 See the mountains high surrounding,
 Mantled in their snowy covering,
 Scaring warlike fiends from coming
 To Deseret.

Dreary plains are long and tedious. . .
 Kanyon rocks are looking furious. . .
 Fierce indeed are faithful lions
 In the mountains, hills, and kanyons,
 Watching mobs and hostile legions
 To Deseret.

Hark! how roars the Lord’s great “Lion,” . . .
 How his thunders reach each nation, . . .
 See how gentiles quake and fear,
 Sit in council oft together,
 Planning to destroy and conquer,
 In Deseret.

But the Lord will fight our battles. . .
 And will waste away the rabbles
 From Deseret.²³

The second poem, authored by John Jaques, a survivor of the ill-fated Martin handcart company in 1856, included these lines:

We thank thee for the mountains
 From earth’s deep bosom hurled;
 They serve as massive curtains
 Between us and the world.
 We thank thee for the deserts
 And for the kanyon bold,
 For all our rocky bulwarks,
 And for the piercing cold,
 And that thou dost surround us
 With heavy mantling snows,
 For these are our defences
 Against our Christian foes.²⁴

A popular refrain in Mormon speeches, correspondence, and discourse at that time was “the Kingdom of God or nothing.”²⁵ Speaking in the old Tabernacle on Sunday, October 18, 1857, Brigham Young declared, “With us, it is the kingdom of God, or nothing; and we will maintain it, or die in

trying,—though we shall not die in trying.”²⁶ Using this theme, John S. Davis composed the song “The Kingdom of God or Nothing” for the Welsh Eisteddfod (musical festival) held in Salt Lake City on January 18, 1858. The second verse exulted:

[Second stanza]
 Long driven and oppress’d,
 We’ve hardly found a rest.
 Ere mobs rush to this far-off land:
 Then, “Liberty or death”
 We’ll shout while we have breath;
 Whatever comes, we’ll nobly stand.
 God’s great “Lion”
 Watches Zion;
 Tyrant’s blood shall stain each sword:
 Rights we’ll cherish,
 Though we perish;
 For, “*The Kingdom of our Lord*
Or nothing,” is the word
 That greets the foe on every hand.²⁷

In 1795, the Scottish poet Robert Burns published a song titled “A Man’s a Man for A’ That.”²⁸ In January 1858, the *Deseret News* published “A Song for 1858” by Matthew Rowan that patterned closely Burns’s sonnet. It was also sung to the same tune as the original. A selection is found below:

Who in all Deseret’s afraid
 Of Uncle Sam and a’ that?
 His wond’rous power, his great parade
 Of soldiers, arms, and a’ that;
 And a’ that, and a’ that,
 His wisdom, wealth, and a’ that;
 ‘Gainst Mormon right, he light may fight,
 And yet be fooled, for a’ that.²⁹

The longest poem inspired by the Utah War (230 lines) was “Uncle Sam and His Nephews,” authored by John Jaques. Published in the *Deseret News* in February 1858, it filled three columns. The most often quoted section (which was also published in the *New York Times* three months later) echoed Brigham Young’s warning to Captain Van Vliet in September 1857:

If Uncle Sam’s determin’d on this very foolish plan,
 The Lord will fight our battles, and we’ll help him all we can.
 If what they now propose to do should ever come to pass,
 We’ll burn up every inch of wood and every blade of grass.
 We’ll throw down all our houses, every soul shall emigrate,
 And we’ll organize ourselves into a roving mountain state.

Every move will make our vigor, like a ball of snow, increase,
And we'll never sue to you, but you to us shall sue for peace.³⁰

One week after “Uncle Sam and His Nephews” appeared in print, another poem by Jaques appeared in the *Deseret News*, titled “The Public Treasury.” The following is an excerpt:

When Uncle Sam self-wisely stands,
With usurp'd powers in his hands,
And issues forth unjust commands;
And when God's kingdom's scarcely known,
At best a little mountain stone,
Which Uncle Sam thinks all his own;
Then James Buchanan's just the man,
By his Tom Fool-ish Utah plan,
To drain the public treasury.

When Sam and Buck lie down and rot,
And their posterity's forgot,
But not their hellish Utah plot;
And when God's kingdom takes its stand,
With rightful power throughout the land,
To rule, to govern, to command;
Then Brigham Young is just the man,
By many a wise and happy plan,
To fill the public treasury.³¹

In February 1858, the *Deseret News* published a letter originally printed in the *Baltimore Sun* wherein the author expressed his opposition to the Utah Expedition:

I am opposed to the next war. It is unrighteous, even if it is Christian. The Mormons, like our Puritan Fathers, claim a right to have a religion different from those who surround them. . . .

Why send an army there? To fight them?—For what? If they are a bad people, will you scatter them again through community? Are they not in the best possible place, where they cannot contaminate others by contact and influence? They interfere with none that stay away from them. They ask no favor or support from any body. They are the most universally industrious of any community known of its size. Their only intercourse with us, is traveling occasionally through the country and buying what they want of us—they have nothing to sell us. They are a sober people—they drink no whisky. Who ever heard of a large community, industrious, sober, self-reliant, and isolated, who were a bad or troublesome people? The charge is preposterous. Then why send an army to fight them? . . .

What has government done for them but harass them with offensive and troublesome officers,—appointing for judges, clerks, marshals, &c., men who are opposed to them in every particular—opposed to them politically, morally and socially. Do the people of Kansas, who are not Mormons, like the government appointees, any better than their Mormon neighbors? Then why send an army to fight them?³²

As with other American military deployments, the longer the military expenditures continued, the greater the nation's concern regarding the cost. In November 1857, an unnamed Washington newspaper correspondent of the *Baltimore Sun* was quoted in the *St. Louis Evening News* as claiming that "the cost to the United States Government of the Mormon war would not fall short of FOUR HUNDRED MILLION DOLLARS." The *Deseret News* republished the article in February 1858.³³ Five weeks later, on March 24, the *Deseret News* published the following poem by Emily H. Mills which focused on the four hundred million dollar cost estimate.

Four hundred millions [*sic*] dollars
The Mormon boys to lash!
Uncle! you're most extravagant,
And prodigal of cash.
What! spend so much upon the few
Who ne'er your path have cross'd?
Such policy will never do—
You'd better save the cost.

Four hundred million dollars!
Are they worth a sum so great,
'The vile, abandon'd Mormons,'
Whose principles you hate?
You NEVER CAN enlighten them;
'Twill all your means exhaust
In raising troops to frighten them—
You'd better save the cost.

Four hundred million dollars!
Is a sum not quickly told;
Consider well, dear Uncle,
Perhaps you'll NEED the gold;
And this conflict, tho' unequal,
Might be wealth and labor lost;
You may not like the sequel—
You'd better save the cost.

Four hundred million dollars!
'Tis well you have the gold,
For the troops will need an outfit,
For a campaign long and cold;
But the 'Mormons' have been longer
Inur'd to snow and frost,
They may therefore prove the stronger—
You'd better save the cost.

Four hundred millions dollars!
What have the 'Mormons' done?

'Tis true they've kept their foes without,
 Nor fired a single gun;
 But who for that can blame them,
 They've been so roughly tost?
 E'en all the world can't 'slave them—
 You'd better save the cost.³⁴

Tensions and concerns, which had run high during summer and fall 1857, began to subside during the spring of 1858 as peace negotiations began. On April 5, William G. Mills, who authored several Utah War poems, wrote to T. B. H. Stenhouse in New York that:

Peace is enjoyed throughout this territory by the citizens, from north to south, and every heart beats with the love of liberty—religious, political, and social. During the winter, festivities were very prevalent, and entertainments of various kinds were enjoyed. Dramatic and literary associations were attended to overflowing, balls and parties were frequent and numerous filled, and every species of amusement suitable for an enlightened and refined people was a source of profit to the caterer, and pleasure and benefit to the patronizers. Indeed, had you seen the manner in which they enjoyed themselves, you would never have surmised for one moment that within a few miles of us there was an army—who were only waiting to kill, corrupt, and debase an innocent and virtuous community. No cases of drunkenness appeared on the streets; no lists for assault and battery on the courts of the city; no trials for larceny, petit or grand; no marks, in those respects, of the civilized manners of the world; no midnight brawlers and assassins.³⁵



William G. Mills,
 date unknown.

In the late spring and early summer months, Thomas L. Kane, the peace commissioner, and Alfred Cumming, the newly appointed governor, reached a settlement with Brigham Young, bringing a conciliatory end to the conflict. A newspaper correspondent accompanying the army described the army's entering the valley and passing through Great Salt Lake City on June 26, 1858:

All day long from dawn until sunset, the troops and trains poured through the city, the utter silence of the streets being broken only by the music of the military bands, the monotonous tramp of the regiments, and the rattle of the baggage wagons The only visible groups of spectators were on the corners near Brigham Young's residence. The stillness was so profound that during the interval between the passage of the columns, the monotonous gurgle of City Creek struck every ear.³⁶

Mormon Poetry Following the Army's Arrival

Two days after the army marched through Salt Lake City, John Jaques composed a lengthy poem about the Utah War. His poem, "The Mormon Question," published in the *Deseret News* on July 21, provides a good summary of the Utah War from the Mormon perspective:

[First stanza]
There's been a great commotion
 About the Mormon war;
It has, throughout the nation,
 Set wisest men ajar.
Some think we are rebellious,
 Guilty of every crime;
Some think we're hardly dealt by,
 And have been all the time.

[Third stanza]
Buchanan then was seeking
 To get an honor'd name;
To win, while he was ruler,
 A lasting wreath of fame.
The world said, 'Strike the Mormons.'
 Though we were not to blame.
He struck! And won confusion,
 And everlasting shame.

[Tenth stanza]
The catalogue of charges
 Which he to us has laid,
Is nothing but an insult;
 To clear himself 'twas made.
'Tis true, we burn'd his wagons,
 And ate his army beef;
So far we'll take his pardon,
 And give his soul relief.

[Eleventh stanza]
Of course we're always ready
 To keep all wholesome laws;
For other reputation
 We've never given cause.
Our country's constitution
 We ever did respect;
'Tis only its abusers
 That we outright reject.³⁷

Three songs published during this period, "Up Awake, Ye Defenders of Zion," "O Ye Mountains High," and "For the Strength of the Hills," deserve

special mention. All three can still be found, with modified lyrics, in the current English edition of *Hymns of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*.

“Up Awake, Ye Defenders of Zion,” written by Charles W. Penrose and first published in 1857 and set to the stirring tune “Columbia, the Gem of the Ocean,” was written in Great Britain and sung at “meetings of the Saints in London and raised a purse of six hundred pounds to aid the elders then in the mission field to return to the valleys of Utah.”³⁸ However, it was not actually sung in Utah during the Utah War. The text of this hymn (which included an additional verse) was originally more bellicose than the version currently found in the LDS hymnbook:

Up, awake, ye defenders of Zion!
 The foe's at the door of your homes;
 Let each heart be the heart of a lion,
 Unyielding and proud as he roams.
 Remember the *wrongs* in Missouri;
 Forget not the *fate* of Nauvoo.
 When the *God-hating foe* is before you,
 Stand firm and be faithful and true.

By the mountains our Zion's surrounded;
Her warriors are noble and brave;
And their faith on Jehovah is founded,
Whose power is mighty to save.
Opposed by a proud boasting nation,
Their numbers, compared, may be few;
But their union is known through creation,
And they've always been faithful and true.

Shall we bear with oppression forever?
Shall we tamely submit to the foe,
While the ties of our kindred they sever
And the blood of our prophets shall flow?
No! the thought sets the heart wildly beating;
Our vows at each pulse we renew:
Ne'er to rest till our foes are retreating,
And to be ever faithful and true.

Though assisted by legions infernal,
 The plundering *wretches* advance,
 With a host from the regions eternal,
 We'll scatter their troops at a glance.
 Soon “the Kingdom” will be independent;
 In wonder the nations will view
 The *despised ones* in glory resplendent;
 Then let us be faithful and true.³⁹



Charles W. Penrose, 1915. Photograph courtesy Utah State Historical Society.

Originally called “Zion,” “O Ye Mountains High” was also composed by Charles W. Penrose, who lived in Great Britain and had not been to Utah when he penned the words.⁴⁰ It was originally sung to the tune of “O Minnie, O Minnie, Come o’er the Lea,” but was afterward adapted to the popular tune “Lilly Dale.” Here is the story of this hymn’s origin in the composer’s own words:

“O Ye Mountains High” was written somewhere along about 1854, published in 1856. I was walking on a dusty road in Essex. My toes were blistered and my heels too. I had been promised that if I would stay in the mission field another year I should be released. That was the cry every year: “Brother Penrose, if you will stay and labor another year, we will see that you are released to go to Zion.” But it kept up for over ten years. Of course I had read about Zion and heard about the streets of Salt Lake City, with the clear streams of water on each side of the street, with shade trees, and so on. I could see it in my mind’s eye, and so I composed that song as I was walking along the road, and set it to a tune—the Scotch ditty, “O Minnie, O Minnie, Come o’er the Lea”; those were the opening words. When I got to the place called Mundon in Essex we held a cottage meeting, and in that meeting I sang it for the first time it was ever sung. Of course the words were adapted to a person who had never been to Zion then, but it was afterwards changed in a very slight respect or two, to fit people who had gathered with the Saints. It was inspirational and seemed to please President Brigham Young.⁴¹

“O Ye Mountains High” was published in 1856 and quickly became a favorite Latter-day Saint hymn. Significantly, it also reportedly played a key role during the peace negotiations that ended the Utah War:

When Johnston’s army was in Echo Canyon, on its way to Salt Lake City, a Peace Commission, consisting of Governor L. W. Powell of Kentucky and Major Ben McCullough of Texas, was sent to Utah, arriving at Salt Lake City in June, 1858. In one of the tense meetings (June 11th) the Commissioners presented their message. Brigham Young responded and the outlook for peace seemed favorable.⁴²

Edward M. Tullidge reported what happened next during that negotiation session:

The Peace Commissioners had laid their message before the council. Brigham Young had spoken, as well as the Peace Commissioners. The aspect of affairs was favorable. Presently, however, a well-known character, O. P. Rockwell, was seen to enter, approach the ex-Governor and whisper to him. He was from the Mormon army. There was at once a sensation, for it was appreciated that he brought some unexpected and important news: Brigham arose; his manner self-possessed, but severe:

“Governor Powell, are you aware, sir, that those troops are on the move toward the City?”

“It cannot be!” exclaimed Powell, surprised, “for we were promised by the General that they should not move till after this meeting.”

“I have received a dispatch that they are on the march for this City. My messenger would not deceive me.”

It was like a thunderclap to the Peace Commissioners: they could offer no explanation.

“Is Brother Dunbar present?” inquired Brigham.

“Yes, sir,” responded the one called. . . .

“Brother Dunbar, sing Zion.”

The Scotch songster came forward and sang the following soul-stirring lines, by Chas. W. Penrose:

O ye mountains high, where the clear blue sky
 Arches over the vales of the free,
 Where the pure breezes blow and the clear streamlets flow,
 How I've longed to your bosom to flee!
 O Zion! dear Zion! land of the free,
 Now my own mountain home, unto thee I have come—
 All my fond hopes are centered in thee.

Tho' the great and the wise, all thy beauties despise,
 To the humble and pure thou art dear;
 Tho' the haughty may smile and the wicked revile,
 Yet we love thy glad tidings to hear.
 O Zion! dear Zion! home of the free,
 Tho' thou wert forced to fly to thy chambers on high,
 Yet we'll share joy and sorrow with thee.

In thy mountain retreat, God will strengthen thy feet;
On the necks of thy foes thou shalt tread
 And their silver and gold, as the Prophets have told,
 Shall be brought to adorn thy fair head.
 O Zion! dear Zion! home of the free,
 Soon thy towers shall shine with a splendor divine,
 And eternal thy glory shall be.

Here our voices we'll raise, and we'll sing to thy praise,
 Sacred home of the Prophets of God;

Thy deliv'rance is nigh, thy oppressors shall die,
And the Gentiles shall bow neath thy rod.
 O Zion! dear Zion! land of the free,
 In thy temples we'll bend, all thy rights we'll defend,
 And our home shall be ever with thee.

The action of Brigham had been very simple in the case, but there was a world of meaning in it. Interpreted it meant—"Gentlemen, we have heard what President Buchanan and yourselves have said about pardoning us for standing up for our constitutional rights, and defending our lives and liberties. We will consent to a peace on honorable terms; but you must keep faith with us. Stop that army! Or our peace conference is ended. Brethren, sing Zion. Gentlemen, you have our ultimatum!" . . .

There have been times when the singing of that hymn by the thousands of saints has been almost as potent as that revolutionary hymn of France—the Marsellaise. This was such a time.⁴³

Finally, in a discourse delivered by Mormon Apostle Amasa M. Lyman in the old Tabernacle in October 1857, he pointed out the importance of the mountains to the Saints living in Utah, and he used the phrase "for the strength of the hills" to illustrate his point.

We are blessed; we are in a place that is blessed, and the very place of which we have almost, at times, been inclined to complain and to feel that we were sharing in a hard lot—that we were forced to lived and dwell in such a place as we now occupy. But the things that we have thus regarded as hardships are blessings to us. . . .

Thank God—for what? For the rugged mountains that are around us—for the barren and desert country that lies between us and the land of our enemies. You will feel, in the spirit of the persecuted of other days and other climes and dispensations, to bless God for the strength of the hills, and that the Plains that lie between us and our enemies are sterile and barren; for in these things are our protection. . . .

If I have ever seen the hand of God—if I have ever seen or known his dealings with his people, or have ever seen a manifestation of his wisdom, it is more than ever manifest in his bringing us to this land, where the distance is so great from the land of our enemies. The character of the country intervening between us and them is better to us than millions of millions of armed men to protect us: it affords us a protection that cannot be found in the armies of the earth, were they all marshalled in our behalf.⁴⁴

The text of the hymn "For the Strength of the Hills" was simply entitled "Hymn" when it was published in the *Deseret News* on January 8, 1858:

For the strength of the hills we bless thee,
 Our God, our father's God;
 Thou hast made thy children mighty
 By the touch of the *mountain's* sod.
 Thou hast led thy chosen Israel
 To freedom's last abode;
 For the strength of the hills we bless thee,
 Our God, our father's God.
 At the hand of foul oppressors,

We've born and suffered long;
 Thou hast been our help in weakness,
 And thy pow'r hath made us strong.
 Amid ruthless foes outnumbered,
 In weariness we trod;
 For the strength of the hills we bless thee,
 Our God, our father's God.

Thou hast led us here in safety
 Where the mountain bulwark stands
 As the guardian of the loved ones
 Thou hast brought from many lands.
 For the rock and for the river,
 The valley's fertile sod,
 For the strength of the hills we bless thee,
 Our God, our father's God. . . .

*The banner of the chieftain,
 Far, far below us waves:
 The war-horse of the spearman
 Can not reach our lofty caves.
 Thy dark clouds wrap the threshold
 Of freedom's last abode.
 For the strength of the hills we bless Thee,
 Our God, our Fathers' God.*

*For the shadow of thy presence
 Round our camp of rock outspread;
 For the stern defiles of battle
 Bearing record of our dead:
 For the snows, and for the torrents,
 For the free hearts burial sod.
 For the strength of the hills we bless Thee,
 Our God, our Fathers' God.⁴⁵*

Although it sounds as though this hymn was written specifically for the Mormons in Utah, Latter-day Saints might be surprised to learn that the hills “originally referred to in this hymn were the Vaudois Mountains in Switzerland. Felicia Hemans [the author] had likely never heard of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints by the time of her death in 1835.” The original poem was entitled “Hymn of the Vaudois Mountaineers in Times of Persecution.”⁴⁶

Conclusion

Given the high degree of political tensions and emotions involved, the Utah War ended as amicably as could have been desired, and it is appropriate

to conclude this article about poetry and songs with a few additional poetic offerings. In a poem published in the *Deseret News* in December 1858, W. G. Mills expressed the feelings many Mormons held for President Buchanan following the conclusion of the Utah War:

[Second stanza]

I praise not him that the people's voice
 Has placed on the chair of state,
 Because that he is the popular choice,
 If his works are not good and great:
 If he rules to serve some selfish ends,
 Or tramples our nation's laws,
 I despise the creature, my good friends,
 Yet am loyal to our good cause.

[Fifth stanza]

The act of the tyrant I despise,
 No matter what name he may wear;
 For titles are things I little prize,
 Unless something good they bear:
 If power and authority are used
 To crush our fellow men,
 I'd firmly stand to defend the abused,
 And deem myself loyal then.⁴⁷

Or perhaps John Jaques adequately summed up the frustration and waste associated with the Utah War when he penned the following lines in his poem "The Mormon Question":

Buchanan bad avoided
 Much guilt and keen remorse,
 If he'd not sent to Utah
 The cart before the horse.⁴⁸

Throughout the entire experience of the Utah War, there remained a confidence among the Latter-day Saints that God was in control and things would be resolved in their favor. The following lines, which express that belief, were initially printed in New Orleans and later republished in the *Deseret News* in June 1858 a few weeks before General Albert Sidney Johnston and the United States Army entered the Salt Lake Valley:

Heaven's invisible armies stir,
 And God's Truth advances;
 Men may hate, oppress and smile,
 Wall out Heaven's light:
 Wrong may flourish for a while—
 God will see it right.⁴⁹

Appendix A

WELCOME

*To the Returned Warriors of Zion. Dedicated to Lieut. Gen. D. H. Wells
and his co-champions in arms.*

Welcome! defenders of the truth,
Ye faithful servants of the Lord;
From hoary age to ardent youth
Obedient to the Prophet's word:
Welcome into our midst again
From snowy cell and icy creek,
From canyons rude and mountains bleak,
Where Winter now asserts his reign.
Welcome! Ye sons of light in truth,
Heroes alike in age and youth.

When those who should our interests feel—
If patriots' noble blood they own—
Work traitors to our common weal
And marched their hordes to tread us down;
No home-endearing tie ye know,
No love of comfort, ease or joy,
No dread of death could you decoy,
Ye nobly marched to meet the foe.
Then welcome! sons of light in truth,
Heroes alike in age and youth.

Strong in the power of Brigham's God,
Your name's a terror to our foes;
Ye were a barrier strong and broad
As our high mountains crowned with snows:
Fear filled the myrmidons of war,
Their courage fell in wordy boast;
The faith and prayers of Israel's host
Repelled the tyrants' gory car.
Then welcome! Sons of light and truth,
Heroes alike in age and youth.

Sing! fellow soldiers in our cause,
For God will show his mighty hand;
Zion shall triumph, and her laws
The standard be to every land:
No blood we seek, nor wealth's increase,
No sin to revel in desire;
But we will fan the patriot fire
To gain the bliss of truth and peace.
Then welcome! sons of light and truth,
Heroes alike in age and youth.

G. S. L. City, Dec 3d, 1857

Source: William G. Mills, "WELCOME," *Deseret News*, January 13, 1858, 1.

Appendix B

SONG

On the Peaceful Return of Zion's Warriors.

Let fame sound the trump of the triumphs of war
While the field is strewn o'er with the dead;
And the groans of the wounded be wafted afar
As the deeds of the warriors are spread:
Let their works be enrolled on the pages of story
When havoc is seen on the plain,
But still let the life-blood bedarken the glory
And sighs be in chord with the strain.

We'll sing to the Lord from the depths of our soul,
That our conquest is bloodless and blest;
That He has subdued, though unseen His control,
And we're left for a moment to rest;
He rules over man, and enfeebles his wrath;
Confuses the thoughts of his mind;
He fights with the tactics of heav'n, yet His path
Is unknown by rebellious mankind.

No blood we have shed stains the snow-covered sod,
No sigh from the wounded is heard;
For our vict'ries are won by the wisdom of God,
Through the counsels of Prophet declared:
Let it fill and adorn the historian's pages,
As a halo of light round our days,
That the theme may be sung to inspire future ages,
And our Father receive all the praise.

G. S. L. City, Dec. 31, 1857

Source: William G. Mills, "SONG," *Deseret News*, January 20, 1858, 1.

Notes

1. "Fourth of July Celebrations," *Deseret News*, July 15, 1857, 7.

2. *Utah: A Guide to the State* (New York, NY: Hastings House, 1945), 170.

3. In addition to the poems and songs highlighted in this paper, many folk songs from the Utah War have been passed down through a variety of sources. This article will include only songs and poems that were actually published in the 1850s.

4. Austin and Alta Fife, *Saints of Sage & Saddle: Folklore Among the Mormons* (Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith, 1966), 316.

5. W. W. Phelps, "In Deseret We're Free," *Deseret News*, April 17, 1852, 2, emphasis found in the original.

6. John Parry, "Song," *Deseret News*, January 14, 1857, 6. John Parry converted to Mormonism in 1846 in Wales. His wife, Mary, died of cholera the same day that they landed at Council Bluffs. "John accompanied his son Caleb and daughter-in-law Catherine to Utah in 1849. John was asked by Brigham Young to form a choir with his singing compatriots as the nucleus; the choir evolved into what is known today as the Mormon Tabernacle Choir. In 1854 John married Harriet Parry, who bore him five more children. The last was born when John was seventy-three. John Parry died in 1868 at Salt Lake City." See Ronald D. Dennis, *The Call of Zion: The Story of the First Welsh Mormon Migration* (Provo, UT: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1987), 93.

7. Philip Margetts, "A Song for the Elders," *Deseret News*, February 4, 1857, 4.

8. Emily Hill, "Song of Praise," *Deseret News*, April 29, 1857, 6. Emily Hill Woodmansee (1836–1906), was born in Great Britain and baptized at age sixteen along. "She emigrated to America in 1856 and pushed a handcart across the plains with the Willie handcart company. In 1857 she was married and had a child, but her husband deserted her." Karen Lynn Davidson, *Our Latter-day Hymns: The Stories and the Messages* (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book Company, 1988), 462. She is the author of "As Sisters in Zion" (#309) in the current LDS hymnal, and "Let the Little Children Come."

9. Philip Margetts, "A Song," *Deseret News*, May 6, 1857, 8.

10. For many years it was accepted that the initial notification of the army's advance was received on July 24, 1857, during a July 4th celebration held in Big Cottonwood Canyon. However, historian William P. MacKinnon, has demonstrated that word of the army's march reached Utah Territory as much as a month earlier. See William P. MacKinnon, *At Sword's Point, Part 1: A Documentary History of the Utah War to 1858* (Norman, OK: The Arthur H. Clark Company, 2008), 145–47.

11. Heber C. Kimball, in *Journal of Discourses*, 26 vols. (Liverpool: F. D. Richards, 1855–1886), 5:95. Kimball apparently voiced a similar opinion on other occasions. For example, see Heber C. Kimball, "Discourse," *Deseret News*, October 3, 1857, 3. These remarks are a transcript of another speech given by Kimball at the Bowery on Sunday, September 20, 1857.

12. Stewart Van Vliet to Captain Pleasanton, September 16, 1857, in U.S. House of Representatives, 35th Congress, 1st Session, Ex. Doc. No. 71, 24–25, emphasis in the original.

13. W. W. Phelps, "Deseret," *Deseret News*, November 25, 1857, 4, capitalization retained from the original published text. The original song is a sad ballad about love lost. The current LDS hymnal gives the name of this tune as "Lily Dale." However, all nineteenth century sources include two l's in the first name—*Lilly*. The original sheet music, published in Boston during 1852, is available online at Sheridan Libraries, Lester S. Levy Collection of Sheet Music, Johns Hopkins University, <http://levysheetmusic.mse.jhu.edu>.

“Lilly Dale” is familiar to Latter-day Saints as the current tune of the hymn “O Ye Mountains High.”

14. W. G. Mills, “Welcome: To the Returned Warriors of Zion,” *Deseret News*, January 13, 1858, 1. Before the Utah War, W. G. Mills wrote several poems that were published in the *Deseret News* and the *Latter Day Saints’ Millennial Star*. For example, see “Lines,” *Deseret News*, October 1, 1853, 1. In addition, he also wrote two hymns that were sung in the April 1857 General Conference—“A Hymn of Thankfulness” and “A Hymn for April 6, 1857.” See “Minutes of the General Conference,” *Deseret News*, April 15, 1857, 3.

15. W. G. Mills, “Song,” *Deseret News*, January 20, 1858, 1.

16. E. R. Snow, “The Ladies of Utah, to the Ladies of the United States Camp in a crusade against the ‘Mormons,’” *Deseret News*, October 14, 1857, 4, emphasis in the original.

17. Brigham Young to Colonel E. B. Alexander, October 7, 1857, and Henry E. Maynard to Brigham Young, October 10, 1857, in U. S. House of Representatives, 35th Congress, 1st Session, Ex. Doc. No. 71, 47. Colonel Alexander was Commander of the United States 10th Infantry. His forces were encamped near the Bear River in Wyoming awaiting the arrival of the expedition’s overall commander, Colonel Albert Sidney Johnston.

18. “Arrival of the Star of the West,” *New York Times*, May 14, 1858, 1.

19. W. G. Mills, “The Marseillais Hymn,” *Deseret News*, October 21, 1857, 8.

20. See Fred R. Gowans and Eugene E. Campbell, *Fort Bridger: Island in the Wilderness* (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 1975), 91. Fort Supply was twelve miles from Fort Bridger.

21. Henry S. Hamilton, *Reminiscences of a Veteran* (Concord, NH: Republican Press Association, 1897), 80–81.

22. E. R. S., “The Kingdom of God is the Kingdom for me,” *Deseret News*, December 2, 1857, 5.

23. John S. Davis, “A Song for Deseret,” *Deseret News*, December 9, 1857, 6.

24. John Jaques, “Hymn,” *Deseret News*, December 30, 1857, 5. The excerpt included begins at the third stanza. On June 30, 1857, just before the beginning of the Utah War, Jaques was appointed captain in the Nauvoo Legion Corps of Topographical Engineers. See “General Orders No. 3,” *Deseret News*, July 1, 1857, 8. He also authored two hymns found in the current LDS hymnbook: “Softly Beams the Sacred Dawning” (#56) and the ever-popular, “Oh Say, What Is Truth?” (#272). Prior to the Utah War, he authored a best-selling church book, *Catechism for Children* that remained in print over thirty years. He also worked as the principal editorial writer for the *Deseret News* and served as an Assistant Church Historian from 1889–1900.

25. See Leonard J. Arrington, *Charles C. Rich: Mormon General and Western Frontiersman* (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 1974), 218–19.

26. Brigham Young, in *Journal of Discourses*, 5:336.

27. John S. Davis, “The Kingdom of God or Nothing,” *Deseret News*, February 17, 1858, 6.

28. For an online copy of this song see <http://www.robertburns.org/works/496.shtml>.

29. Matthew Rowan, “A Song for 1858,” *Deseret News*, January 27, 1858, 1. Ten months later the *Deseret News* published another poem of Rowan’s. See Matthew Rowan, “CASTE,” *Deseret News*, November 10, 1858, 1.

30. John Jaques, “Uncle Sam and His Nephews,” *Deseret News*, February 17, 1858, 8.

31. John Jaques, “The Public Treasury,” *Deseret News*, February 24, 1858, 1.

32. “What shall be done with the Mormons?” *Deseret News*, February 10, 1858, 4.

33. “The Mormon War—Its Vast Consequences—How to Wage it,” *Deseret News*,

February 17, 1858, 6, capitalization as found in the original. The actual cost of the war was probably closer to twenty million dollars. See “Cruel Panegyrics of the Administration Press,” *New York Times*, June 23, 1858, n.p.

34. Emily H. Mills, “You’d Better Save the Cost,” *Deseret News*, March 24, 1858, 6.

35. B. H. Roberts, *A Comprehensive History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, 6 vols. (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 1965), 4:301.

36. Quoted in Averam B. Bender, *The March of Empire: Frontier Defense in the Southwest 1848–1860*. (Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas Press, 1952), 183–84.

37. John Jaques, “The Mormon Question,” *Deseret News*, July 21, 1858, 4. According to the *Deseret News* this poem was written on June 28, 1858. The original newspaper page reviewed was not properly typeset and lists the location as “ingville,” presumably Springville, Utah, where Jaques was living.

38. Heber J. Grant, “Favorite Hymns,” *Improvement Era* 17, no. 8 (June 1914): 777. Six hundred British pounds was worth about three thousand dollars in 1857, or about seventy-five thousand dollars today. See <http://measuringworth.com/uscompare/> to compare the value of 1857 dollars with current dollars.

39. In Richard H. Cracroft and Neal E. Lambert, comps., *A Believing People: Literature of the Latter-day Saints* (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 1974), 274–75. The original text that has been subsequently changed or removed from the current version in the LDS hymnbook is given in italics.

40. Charles W. Penrose also composed these additional hymns that are found in the current LDS Hymnbook: “God of Our Fathers, We Come Unto Thee” (#76) and “School Thy Feelings” (#336).

41. George D. Pyper, “The Story of Our Hymns,” *Improvement Era* 39, no. 8 (August 1936): 492.

42. Pyper, “The Story of Our Hymns,” 492–93.

43. Edward W. Tullidge, *History of Salt Lake* (Salt Lake City, UT: Star Printing Company, 1886), 215–16. The original text that has subsequently been changed or removed from the current LDS hymnbook is given in italics.

44. Amasa M. Lyman, in *Journal of Discourses*, 5:344.

45. “Hymn,” *Deseret News*, January 6, 1858, 8. Original text that has subsequently been changed or removed from the LDS hymnbook is given in italics.

46. Davidson, *Our Latter-day Hymns*, 64.

47. W. G. Mills, “My Loyalty,” *Deseret News*, December 1, 1858, 1.

48. John Jaques, “The Mormon Question,” *Deseret News*, July 21, 1858, 4.

49. “God will See it Right,” *Deseret News*, June 9, 1858, 4. The article notes that this poem was originally published in *The New Orleans Delta*, but no date or additional details are given.