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## William Bowker Preston: Pioneer, Colonizer, Civic Leader, Church Official, Husband, and Father

*Kenneth W. Godfrey*

A stranger visiting Logan, Utah, on 8 August 1908 might have wondered why business offices and public buildings were closed and why citizens were making their way to the tabernacle square. Old, gray-haired men carried flowers and talked in hushed tones as they recalled stories of crossing the plains under the command of William Bowker Preston. The Thatcher family, known for their wealth, fine horses, business acumen, and civic and church service, were dressed as mourners as they followed the bier, as did leading officials of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Even a complete stranger might have guessed that someone quite extraordinary had passed away.

Strangers could not have known that the service in Cache Valley was William Bowker Preston's second funeral; the first had been held in Salt Lake City the day before. Mourners at the initial service included Joseph F. Smith, President of the Church, members of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, the state capital's leading luminaries, and hundreds of common folk who believed Preston had been their friend.

Praised as a man who had carried the brunt of "some of the most arduous labors both in the field of western pioneering and building church missions," Preston was also extolled as a person of wit, good humor, intelligence, faith, integrity, and grit, whose reputation would live throughout all eternity.<sup>1</sup> In a rhyming tribute, Logan's sometime poet, James A. Leishman, refer-

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enced Preston's sterling worth, honor, and grace and declared him a "peer of the great."<sup>2</sup>

Harriet Thatcher, William Preston's widow, who had shared his life for fifty years, knew him as a man whose letters were like an intimate chat, whose quiet wit sometimes brought sunshine into her life, and whose love she never had to doubt. Though they had had far more separations in their married life than either dreamed possible, they somehow managed to forge a relationship that both believed would last forever. Harriet lived without William for more than a decade after his death and remembered, as she read and reread his truly exceptional letters, those magical moments and sometimes quite ordinary moments they had shared while yoked in love.

### Early Years

The William Bowker Preston story began only eight months after the Church of Jesus Christ was organized in Fayette, New York. Born 24 November 1830 in Haleford, Franklin County, Virginia, William was the third child of Christopher and Martha Clayton Preston.<sup>3</sup> He grew up in a close-knit family with four brothers and three sisters.<sup>4</sup> His father, a "well-to-do farmer," counted some members of the United States Congress as his cousins, was proud of his English heritage, and believed that Preston, England, was named in honor of one of his ancestors. Martha, more religious than was her husband, paid little attention to matters of faith but raised William and her other children in the Methodist Church, to which she formed a life-lasting attachment.<sup>5</sup> William's sister Annice believed that the religion of their youth was a "long faced stiff kind that wouldn't even let one waltz or hop around a little when they felt well, without thinking it sacrilege."<sup>6</sup> William, or Billy as he was called, grew his own devotion to matters divine while he was alone and surrounded by "heavy forest of Oake, [sic] Chestnuts, and Pines," which provided a border for his father's farm, more so than he did in church on Sundays. He perhaps enjoyed the sociality that often accompanied church attendance more than long sermons and complex theology.

Almost as important as the church to the Preston family was their two-story home. It was surrounded by a porch and sat on a hill overlooking a small creek that sometimes provided its own music on warm summer nights. The homestead, entered through a large oak gate fashioned by William when only a youth, consisted of barns, stables, and more than one outhouse. A picket fence and railing encircled the large yard. Several slaves worked in the fields and some, including Perry, remained with Christopher and Martha even after the Civil War ended and they had been granted their freedom.

When William visited his family in 1865, Perry told him that "freedom

ain't de thing its cracked up to be.”<sup>7</sup> Neither in William’s diaries nor in his correspondence is there any indication that William considered slavery wrong, and many of his missives reveal his love for the South and his support of the Confederate cause. In an 1865 letter to his brother-in-law, George W. Thatcher, William wrote: “I will say that old Virginia is tired for once so the song must be changed [to] whipped but not conquered. There is now constant collisions between the U.S. soldiers and Negroes. Well the war is not over, the devil is not dead, nor the Millennium here, as the Negro thought when Sherman marched through the south the fool killer hasn’t half done his work.” The Civil War was quite personal for William because his youngest brother, Alfred, lost his life in the conflict and “slept with thousands of Virginia’s noble sons.”<sup>8</sup>



*William Bowker Preston, 1830-1908.*

*Picture taken ca. 1890s.*

*Photograph courtesy Special Collections  
and Archives, Merrill Library,  
Utah State University.*

William in his youth worked with Perry, twenty years his senior, and with younger brothers chopping down trees, ploughing, and planting corn, and he and Perry formed an unequal friendship that lasted a lifetime. Life for William was filled with work. Martha ousted him from his bed at daybreak each morning, and the family prayed together. They sometimes worked all day, but William was sent to a log school taught by Dick Shelton, who filled William’s mind with grammar, arithmetic, and the rudiments of writing. William also attended a singing school in which he learned to appreciate good music. There were also days spent picking berries in the hills for the blackberry pies his mother made, fishing in the streams, and gathering apples and peaches from trees of the family’s own planting. The family grew chickens, hogs, and cattle as well as cotton and tobacco. Before finding its way to the frying pan, one of the roasters attacked William, scratched his face, and left behind a scar that William carried to his death.

In the evening, tired from their labors, the Prestons gathered together and sang or played games until bedtime. When grown with two children of his own, William wrote, “Father raised me in more ways than one and I

never knew what it was to say what do you want me to do that for or I can't, to say nothing about I won't even to Mother."<sup>9</sup> William was taught obedience and believed this principle essential in finding true joy. Throughout his life, he obediently responded to calls from ecclesiastical superiors because he knew, as William James expressed it, that religion must not be a dull habit but instead an acute fever.<sup>10</sup> Later in his life, married with children of his own, William remembered that as a child he had been strong headed and needed the discipline of his father and mother.

As a youth, he filled his life with work, and his parents learned he could be depended upon and trusted. In turn, he knew the joy of a loving family and developed strong ties to his parents and siblings. Still, he grew up confident and was not afraid to leave home and hearth and strike out on his own.

Reaching the end of his teenage years, William left his father's farm and gained employment by clerking in a store. Finding that he liked meeting people and working with numbers and produce, he developed people skills that won him confidence and trust. Standing five feet, seven inches tall and weighing 125 pounds, he was not an imposing figure, but he drew people to him by using good humor, wit, and a native, cheery disposition. Moreover, he became adept as a teller of entertaining tales. When he was nineteen, he traveled fifty-five miles from Staunton to Lynchburg and worked as a salesman for a cousin, J. T. Davis, who was worth three quarters of a million dollars. One of his aunts, Annice, also resided in Lynchburg; and she, as William learned in visits with her, had accumulated half a million in assets. S. C. Hurt, another resident of the city, became a good friend.

Early in his life, William sensed that he was restless, sometimes uneasy, and full of wonder, and he felt a growing desire to see more of the world. The discovery of gold in California piqued his interest, as it had thousands of Americans; and, in 1852, the twenty-one-year-old salesman left Virginia behind and traveled to New York City. There he boarded a freighter and sailed to Panama. The railroad across Panama, "the first steam road to El Dorado," was begun in 1850 at the height of the gold craze but required five years to complete. The trail across the Isthmus, as described by historian David McCullough, was "a narrow, treacherous mule path that in the wet season—nine months of the year—was virtually a river of mud." William mounted a donkey and embarked on the six-day journey that, for those who survived, "remained one of life's memorable experiences." The letters and diaries of those who made the crossing, as did William, describe insects in swarming great clouds, encampments swamped by blinding rain, and pack mules sinking to their haunches in putrid muck.<sup>11</sup> When William reached the Pacific Ocean, he had already in his young life survived an extraordinary adventure.

## Conversion to Mormonism

Taking a boat, he reached San Francisco, whose growth the gold rush exacerbated, and found himself a stranger in a new land with no friends and no clear idea as to what he wanted to do now that he was in the golden state. Later in his life, he told his family that he had never before felt so alone, so frightened, and so homesick. He had, before leaving New York City, wired money to the city by the bay, but he discovered when he attempted to retrieve his funds that proper identification was required. He had none, and having no friends to vouch for him, he was denied access to his money. Then, he remembered that he had signed a slip while in New York and that the slip was to accompany his draft. He told the bank manager, who fortunately was able to locate the paper, and William, much to his relief, was able to secure his money.<sup>12</sup>

After a few days in the city, one day before a great fire broke out, William left San Francisco and managed to reach Sacramento where he joined the quest for gold. Quickly, he realized that his farming skills might bring more wealth than panning for precious metals. In Yolo County, northwest of Sacramento, he purchased an eighty-acre farm, moved into the home, and over time acquired horses, cattle, hogs, and chickens and settled into a farmer's life.<sup>13</sup>

Historian David Vaught wrote that many ex-gold miners became farmers in the 1850s and sought to replicate the Midwest in the Sacramento Valley.<sup>14</sup> It is more probable that William on his own farm replicated in some ways his father's farm in Virginia. Still, like Midwesterners, Preston raised wheat, planted fruit-bearing trees, and cultivated a fine garden as well.

There is no evidence that he knew much of anything about the Mormons when he reached California, but he did know that his neighbors, farmers too, were from Virginia, that they had a large family of both boys and girls, and that their home must have reminded him of his own. Hezekiah and Alena (called Alley) Thatcher, who lived on the farm next to Preston, were converts to the Church. After having settled at Neff's Mill in the Sugar House area in Salt Lake City for a few months, they in 1848 decided, against Brigham Young's advice, to try their luck in California. Hezekiah purchased land, ran a freighting business,<sup>15</sup> and opened a hotel. He was known as a man of considerable wealth. He and his family liked the genial, hard-working young William Preston, their neighbor, but not as much as did their fifteen-year-old daughter, Harriet. William, drawn to the quiet, reserved, and educated young woman, met strong opposition from Hezekiah because of Harriet's youth and also because William was not a Mormon. When made aware that with Harriet came the Church, William began a serious study of Mormonism, accompanied by prayer and discussions with Hezekiah and



*Probably Harriet Ann Thatcher.  
Photograph courtesy Special Collections  
and Archives, Merrill Library,  
Utah State University.*

Alley, Thatcher's studious and theologically gifted wife.

William, deep into the conversion process, learned that Brigham Young had called the California Saints home and that Hezekiah and his family, except for his sons John, Aaron, and Moses, who were serving missions and were scheduled to return to Utah later than the rest of the family, were going to Utah.

William was disappointed to learn that Harriet was leaving with her family and that Hezekiah was opposed to their marriage because he thought William should prove by his actions that his interest in the Church was not entirely laced to his love for Harriet. The father and his future son-in-law parted company not entirely pleased

with each other. When Harriet bid him farewell, William said that his leaving the home of his childhood, his father, mother, brothers, and sisters was a trial but that waving goodbye to Harriet, "the partner of my feelings and my joys," was the most difficult of all partings. Feeling sad, alone, and buried in sorrow, he "went into the bushes" and asked "Heavenly Father to support [him] and enable [him] to overcome this trial."<sup>16</sup> Returning to his own ranch, he watered the cows and hogs, stabled the horse, laid down on top of the haystack, thought of Harriet, and, still fasting, fell asleep. When he awoke the next morning, he felt certain that "Heavenly Father would bless him and Harriet even if they never saw each other again."<sup>17</sup>

William added to his depression with further discoveries. He had purchased a horse that would not pull, no one wanted to buy his land, he was struck with bilious fever, and he received no mail. Furthermore, he felt like a hen with one chicken "all the time busy doing nothing." A month passed, and one day after taking some pills, he felt better. While doing chores, he surprised himself by "singing in a loud clear tone," causing the chickens to run and stick up their heads in astonishment, for it was "the first song or even a whistle" they had heard from him in a month.<sup>18</sup>

Perhaps William drew his happiness from the well of his resolve to leave Yolo County after disposing of his wheat, whether the ranch sold or not, and after finally receiving a letter from Harriet in which she expressed her love and her willingness to become his wife. Studying the Book of Mormon and

pursuing the immediate prospect of engaging in some proselyting activity with Henry G. Boyle and Harriet's brother Moses also brought a measure of joy.

Before becoming a full-time missionary, William received a letter from Harriet written on 5 August 1857. In this missive, she told William about the family's journey to Utah, of encounters with Missourians and their animosity toward the Mormons, of trouble the Indians experienced with non-Latter-day Saint emigrants, of her belief that the Native Americans "will attack" companies they believe could be easily overpowered, and of how well armed they were. She wrote of attending a meeting in Salt Lake City at which Brigham Young spoke about the pending war with twenty-five hundred United States troops approaching and his request that all who were willing to "demolish their homes and follow him to the mountains to make it manifest by holding up both hands and every hand that was in the bowery was up in a moment," except some gentile merchants.<sup>19</sup> Never before in her life had she seen such a show of unity. The elders, she wrote, had been called home, and she expected to be reunited with William in the fall. Harriet was a guest in the Franklin D. Richards home while Hezekiah was in Fillmore City collecting his family. Land in Utah, she said, was inexpensive because some residents wanted to leave the territory.<sup>20</sup> Harriet's letter is of more than passing interest because she describes conditions in Utah only four weeks before the Mountain Meadows Massacre, and her account is neither colored nor influenced by the tragic events that occurred there in September.

William harvested and sold his wheat and barley, disposed of his livestock, and managed to find a buyer for his farm before the arrival of the autumn sun. Just as he left his "good home," the first letters in two years from his Virginia family arrived; and he learned they were astonished that he had become a Mormon and was planning on marrying a Latter-day Saint. His less-than-devout father requested only a piece of the wedding cake.<sup>21</sup> His mother urged him to return home with his bride and again unite with his family.

Disregarding her advice, William teamed up with a Brother Hawkins, a man of slow speech, and Moses and Henry Boyle; and, after receiving appointments, they preached the gospel to their California neighbors. Few listened, but Preston, ever the optimist, had already settled on a motto, "Try, try again, never despair." George Q. Cannon, editor of the *Western Standard* and charged with leading the Mormons in northern California, told Preston that his mission would last eighteen months, causing him to ask Harriet to take Cannon aside when she saw him at the October general conference and "tell him how old I am and show him the top of my head that is almost bald," and "perhaps he will let me join you earlier." Displaying his faith, William

also wrote that he was “willing to stay and sacrifice and will be cheerful and happy as long as the Lord wants me to.”<sup>22</sup>

Fortunately for William, the approach of Johnston’s army caused Brigham Young to call the missionaries and other Mormons in California home. However, it was the middle of October 1857 when John B. and Aaron and Moses Thatcher joined William and Henry B. Boyle and, under Henry’s leadership, traveled south to the San Juan Mission where they were joined by other Latter-day Saints and then went on to San Bernardino. The emigrants left San Bernardino on 27 November 1857 and shortly after Christmas stopped at Boyle’s home in Payson where the Thatchers had a reunion of sorts. Harriet seemed more excited to greet William than she was to greet her brothers.

William’s missionary service, his good sense, and his devotion “to hard work, as well as his high morals and sense of humor,” won him the approval of Hezekiah and Alley Thatcher, and the Thatcher boys already thought of him as a brother. On 24 February 1858, Harriet and William were sealed by Brigham Young and began a well-matched marriage they believed would last forever.<sup>23</sup> The beginnings of their union seemed a harbinger of the next fifty years.

Mature, good with animals, brave, and a natural leader, William served as a minuteman in the Utah War. In the spring of 1858, he left Harriet with her family in Payson and, with twenty-two other Latter-day Saints under the command of Nicholas Groesbeck, successfully avoided Johnston’s army, which was still camped at Camp Scott. Near the Platte Bridge, they retrieved a cache of merchandise and brought the goods to Salt Lake City. This brief mission, Edward Tullidge wrote, “was to demonstrate to Johnston’s Army that Brigham Young intended to keep the treaty he had made with the Powell Peace Commission.”<sup>24</sup> Upon William’s return home, he constructed an adobe house in Payson, and then Hezekiah asked him to lead a company back to California to procure goods to stock a store Thatcher planned to open in Utah.

William’s task was far from easy because San Bernardino was filled with thieves. “Hells Kitchen” was the name he used to describe the city in a letter he sent from there to Harriet. It was difficult to trade or sell horses when people were afraid the horses would be stolen, but he was relieved to purchase some that he broke on the trip home. William purchased thirty-four hundred pounds of sheeting, bleached cotton, ticking, linen, tea, coffee, sugar, cups, saucers, plates, knives, forks, candles, tumblers, shoes, lids, and other household items and started home. He was relieved when he got out on the desert among the Indians.<sup>25</sup>

Muddy roads and teams in poor condition delayed his arrival home, but he finally reached Payson and his reunion with Harriet. The goods had



weathered the journey intact. William and the Thatchers decided to move to Cache Valley in the summer of 1859 where abundant water, land, and business opportunities were to be found. Tired of forever being on the trail and wanting to establish a permanent home, he, along with Harriet, was among the first settlers of Logan, Utah. When William saw the site near the Logan River, he declared that “this is good enough for me.” Working day and night to construct homes and gather winter feed for their animals, William and his extended family soon believed they were ready and could survive the approaching cold weather.

Church leaders concluded that the seventeen families who now called Logan home needed a bishop. Peter Maughan, leader of the Mormons in Maughan’s Fort, told Apostle Ezra T. Benson that William B. Preston would make a good bishop, even though William had been a Church member for only two years. Maughan’s suggestion resulted in William’s being ordained and set apart as the city’s first bishop on 15 November 1859.<sup>26</sup> Harriet reportedly was among Logan’s first school teachers.<sup>27</sup>

With Jessie W. Fox, William surveyed and laid out the city, allotted land and water, performed marriages, and presided over Church meetings. Congregants found him wise beyond his years and were drawn to his good sense and practical approach to religion and life. The Thatchers, in time, constructed mills and opened a store, all of which supplemented their income from farming. William, displaying great foresight, united the community in digging a canal from Logan to the new community of Hyde Park. He also proposed that a tabernacle be constructed large enough to accommodate the growing numbers of Mormons who called Logan their home.

Following to some extent Joseph Smith’s city-of-Zion concept, the planners laid out Logan with wide streets. Each lot was large enough for a garden and buildings to accommodate livestock and machinery. Farms were outside the city, and the cattle were, during the summer months, combined into one large herd that was watched over by two men as the livestock grazed on forage in the foothills north of the town. Schools were constructed, and a community drama and dance hall was built, all under William’s leadership. By the spring of 1860, Logan appeared ready to become the largest city in Cache Valley.

In 1860, Preston was elected to represent Cache Valley in the territorial legislature. Both he and Harriet had won Brigham Young’s friendship, and sometimes when in Salt Lake City they ate fruit with the Mormon leader. William took loads of lumber to the territory’s chief city and enjoyed listening to Brother Brigham discourse “on the first principles of the gospel for the benefit of the gentiles, and give them a few things to chew over.”<sup>28</sup> The first legislative session he attended was held in the “Old council house,” and Preston, after listening to the territorial governor, occupied his time pur-

chasing household items for Harriet and for several Logan friends. He also bought twenty-five cents' worth of tobacco for himself to feed an addiction he had acquired in Virginia and had not conquered when he became a Latter-day Saint.

When he returned to Logan and to Harriet, he brought with him knives, cups, saucers, and plates and discovered in his absence that Harriet had overseen the hanging of doors for their new home and the construction of a granary on their property. In the spring, he planted a large garden, which included apples and peach trees, currant bushes, and other fruits. Just as he had in California, William raised wheat, barley, and hay. Livestock included sheep, cattle, hogs, and chickens. Two men, John the Dane and John Smith, were hired to take care of things while William was in Salt Lake for legislative sessions.

Harriet, an excellent seamstress, made him an extraordinarily warm winter coat that was the envy of all his friends. Typically, he left Logan late in December and traveled by wagon to Salt Lake City, often in bitter cold. The January journey usually included an overnight stop in Wellsville and then another night in either Ogden or Farmington before William traveled on and reached the city on the third day. While in Salt Lake, he sometimes lodged with his brother-in-law, George W. Thatcher, whose wife Luna was the daughter of Brigham Young. Thatcher managed a theater in the state's largest city. Living in Salt Lake close to the telegraph line, William was able to follow the progress of the Civil War. Clearly, his loyalties were with the Confederacy, and he felt confident that the South would be victorious.<sup>29</sup>

At the time of the Church's April general conference, the legislature was still in session, and William went to all the conference meetings. He was pleased when Brigham Young, who had never looked better, said that the South was not whipped "and that old Abe wasn't able to do it." All Young wanted was for the Lord to hold the North together long enough for the Mormon emigrants to pass through "and then let them rip." William also attended the theater, where he found the place small and the seats only the size of a hand and no room for leg stretching. The scenery, a garden and a forest, was first rate. When he wrote to Harriet on 9 April 1862, only four days remained in the legislative session. He told her he would be on his way home to plant the fruit trees he had sent earlier and to feast on the light breakfast rolls of her creation that he had so much missed.

William's experiences in the legislature were a mixed bag of boredom, listening to "a regular old fool," Governor Hardy, who treated the delegates like "Jack Asses" and insulted the citizens of the territory. Through most of the session, William felt lonesome and homesick.<sup>30</sup> The lack of things to do left him free to continue following the Civil War, and in a letter home, he described the battle of Fredericksburg and the Northern defeats at Vicksburg

and Galveston and stated his belief that the Yankees would be “whipped well in North Carolina.”<sup>31</sup> Again he expressed his joy that the South seemed to be winning and wrote, “Hurrah for Jeff and Stonewall.” Though he wrote about the Civil War, his missives contain nothing about legislation passed or the content of debates; instead, he advised Harriet to purchase some good whiskey and some eggs so she could make a fine Christmas eggnog.

When the legislative session concluded, William expected to spend the summer at home with his family—farming and looking after his business interests. Brigham Young, however, had other ideas. At the Church’s general conference, William was called to command a wagon train composed of Cache Valley men and to travel to Florence, Nebraska. There he would meet emigrants from Europe and transport them safely to Utah. In letters William wrote to Harriet while on the trail, he spoke of overturned wagons, broken wagon tongues, lame horses, hostile Indians, dusty roads, and the passing of fourteen hundred wagons that followed the afternoon sun. He had become a fine trail cook who was tired of eating beans and of washing his own clothes “to get out the sweat.” Reaching Florence, he found a “miserable looking place” of four stores, five whiskey shops, a part of a stable, and an old bridge. Prices were high, but he was able to have his picture taken so Harriet could see “how rough and tough” he looked.<sup>32</sup>

William led a large group of Danish converts from Florence to Salt Lake City. Near Wood River Center, Nels Nelson, whose home was in Hyde Park, while examining the cap of his pistol one evening, accidentally shot a fifteen-year-old girl. The bullet entered the upper part of her shoulder. William obtained the services of a doctor traveling in another wagon train fifteen miles behind the one he led. While waiting for the physician’s arrival, the camp was engulfed in gloom; and Nelson, William wrote, “seemed to feel as bad as the girl if possible.” The doctor came and removed the bullet, and the girl recovered.

The wagon train arrived safely back in Utah, and William expressed pride that all the emigrants were well, that only two animals had been lost—less than any other train, and that no wagons were broken. Presiding Bishop Edward Hunter told Preston that his was the best wagon train, with the best animals he had ever seen. William counted it a blessing, too, that the group he led traveled free of contentions. “This makes me feel well,” he wrote, “and proud of our Cache Valley home and the good people who live there.”<sup>33</sup>

Each April, William attended the Church general conference and spent the summers of 1863 and 1864 on the plains as a wagon-train captain. He was recognized among the best frontiersmen in the Church because of the care he took of animals and equipment and because of his ability to lead both men and women. He did have to rely on donated stock; and, in 1864, some of the animals were described as weak and poor. In a letter to Harriet,

he wrote, "I wish the men that sent them was here and tied to their tails and not permitted to camp till they could bring the cattle in." Still, he was able to strengthen the stock he had been given and reach the Missouri River. While on the trail eating beans and bread, he envied Harriet who was at home consuming new peas, potatoes, currants, and strawberries and playing with Allie. William and his neighbor, Peter Maughan, each summer engaged in a friendly garden-growing contest, and William vowed in 1864 that his pie plant would beat Maughan's at the county fair. He also hoped that his trees would outgrow those of Maughan. Because William was gone so much, Harriet had to do the work that accompanied his wagers with Maughan.

Harriet did not take well to William's four-month absences every summer and sometimes complained.<sup>34</sup> She once threatened to give Brigham Young a good talking to. In the summer of 1866 when the Mormon leader came to Logan, he called on Harriet first and gave her a ride in his carriage. This special attention and recognition greatly pleased her and somewhat assuaged her resentment. When she wrote to William detailing her experience, he wrote back, "I guess you gave him that blowing up you promised him last spring, didn't you?"<sup>35</sup> knowing full well she had not. Then, he told her he was bringing home a new pump for the well, a table, window shades, a washboard, pitchers, and cloths and would very much like to eat some new potatoes, peas, and strawberries and cream.<sup>36</sup> In his own subtle way, he made Harriet aware that she was not the only one making sacrifices at the request of Brigham Young.

While camped at Cottonwood Springs in the summer of 1864, William wrote, "Some passengers are sick, several have died, ran over one woman by way of variety, but didn't hurt her much." Everyone, it seemed, sacrificed for the cause of Zion. He also wrote of having beans for dinner and the next morning for breakfast as well. While on the trail, William further developed his leadership skills and became more confident in his abilities to influence people and to unify those with differing backgrounds into a cohesive whole. Using his faith, his humor, and his ability to tell well a tale, he drew people to him and to the Church as well. His reputation as a wagon master extended beyond his Logan home and won him the confidence of Brigham Young and other Mormon leaders.

Participating in the 1864–65 legislature, William complained that he had little to do and no money to spend to help him pass away the time.<sup>37</sup> On Christmas day, Harriet, with William in Salt Lake City, spent her time at home alone. No one came to call, and she welcomed night's darkness, feeling "low and blue." "I wonder," she wrote in a letter to William, "if it is always to be our lot to be separated from each other. I cannot give you up for months and even years without regret like some of my more fortunate sisters. I have not as yet been able to arrive at that degree of perfection."<sup>38</sup> William,

too, harbored feelings of loneliness and avoided parties, partly because he “never fails to get disgusted with the vanity and false desire for show and display of fine dress and great display of personal charms to attract the attention of the gaping velvet lipped sycophants that disgrace (if possible) the name of the honest and virtuous.” The theater that he sometimes attended had become a “rather muddled affair,” and Brigham Young refused to attend because the manager “engaged Pauncefort [George] as the would-be star.”<sup>39</sup> After writing a somewhat preachy missive to Harriet shortly after the 1865 New Year’s Day, William told her there would be no teams sent east in the spring, so they could look forward to spending a summer at home together, their first in three years.<sup>40</sup>



*Harriet Ann Thatcher Preston.  
Photograph courtesy of David Jonsson.*

William and Harriet’s dream of a summer together was shattered when he, while attending the April 1865 general conference, was called on a mission along with forty-six others. Moreover, he was appointed captain of the group and charged with delivering them safely to New York City and booking their passage to Europe. Harriet, not fully reconciled to making yet another sacrifice for the Church, was left behind to care for their children, Allie and William. She taught school, managed the household and two hired men, and improved living conditions by enlarging and painting their home. In every way, she proved to be an astute businesswoman.

William left the territory in May 1865 and, blessed with good teams and wagons, quickly moved through Wyoming and Nebraska, leading his fellow missionaries in evening devotionals as they often fought battles with mosquitoes and saw, still dangling from ropes, Indians who had been hanged almost a week prior to the arrival of William’s company. Traveling from Omaha to New York City, first by boat and then by train, William obtained lodging in the Star Hotel. After securing passage for the men he led, he traveled south and spent three weeks visiting his family, whom he had not seen in thirteen years. At home with his family, he learned that his youngest brother, Alfred, had been killed in the Civil War and that a boyhood friend had spent four months in a Yankee prison camp. William saw firsthand the destruction and pain engendered by the conflict. In an eighteen-page letter to Harriet, he described in great detail his experiences with his father, who

was suffering memory loss, and with his mother, sisters, brother, and old friends. Though his family did not understand his Mormonism, especially plural marriage, he was warmly accepted, and his letter clearly depicts the deep love the Prestons shared and the quality of their relationships. His parents and siblings wished Harriet and the children had come with him. His mother, after hearing him describe Harriet, said, "She loves you as though she has known you, that you write such good kind letters and send so much love." The Virginia Prestons, it is clear from William's letter, were a fully functional family, and many of his own good qualities were rooted in the way he was brought up.<sup>41</sup>

As he prepared to leave and said his goodbyes, William told his father that he "would not exchange places if they would give me ten miles square of Virginia under the Yankee yoke that they now have to bear." His mother, he confided to Harriet, was not as good a cook as he remembered. Harriet surpassed her.<sup>42</sup> After taking a last look at the school of his youth, the tree in which he used to play, the tobacco barn, and the black servants Perry and Sofa, William departed for New York City. The train on which he rode was hit by a freight train, forcing him to travel by stage to the Potomac River. After having his bag taken by a thief, he finally arrived in New York City. His visit home had taken twenty-two days.<sup>43</sup>

### **The British Mission**

The missionaries he shepherded from Salt Lake City to New York City were already on the high seas when William paid his \$35 and alone boarded the *City of Dublin*. Not knowing anyone on the ship, he bore the brunt of his seasickness alone but managed to write in his diary, "My belly has gone to my back for protection."<sup>44</sup> After pills calmed his stomach, he had a rather pleasant voyage, playing quoits and fox and geese and throwing dice. As the day of his Liverpool arrival grew closer, he wrote, "I almost tremble to think of the labors that are before me."<sup>45</sup>

Perhaps he had reason to tremble because when the ship docked, William wore a dirty Scottish cap, a gift from one of the passengers, when his own had blown away.<sup>46</sup> He was certainly not going to make a good first impression.

William's mission was somewhat atypical from the missions of other Mormon elders who had labored in England, though it began much the same, save for the soiled hat. President Daniel H. Wells, who with his wife was preparing to return home, asked William to preside over the New Castle, Tyne, and Durham Conference, one of the most challenging areas of the mission. Writing to Harriet, William confessed that "I feel very green concerning the labors that are before me, almost as much so as when I was made

bishop, or when I started across the plains with a train without knowing a foot of the road.”<sup>47</sup>

William missed his family, and it usually took more than two months for a letter from Logan to arrive in England. Brigham Young told William when setting him apart to leave his family under the protection of God and to concentrate on his labors with the promise that all would be well when he returned home. William resolved to do as Brother Brigham asked. William did, on occasion, preach to Harriet, instructing her on how to raise the children, operate the farm, and maintain the proper use of their resources. “Never spend anything, till you get something to spend,” he wrote in one missive; and in another, he told her not to “scold the children continually, for soon they will not do anything without it.”<sup>48</sup> Still, most of his letters are filled with good cheer, humor, and peace, designed to lift the spirits of his sometimes lonely spouse who longed for his return.

William settled into his first assignment and began fulfilling his responsibilities in an area filled with beggars and poor folks whose personal hygiene and commitment to Mormonism he found wanting. His days consisted of visiting and counseling members, conducting meetings, including Church courts, preaching three or four times each week, and overseeing the numerous branches in his conference. The golden or legendary years of the British Mission, when thousands flocked to the fold, he and other elders believed were in the past. Only hard work and a convert every now and then seemed their lot. He changed clothing and bathed once each week, and he sometimes slept in beds with bugs and fleas and other missionaries. However, he believed three elders in one bed to be too many.<sup>49</sup> He walked long distances in shoes that did not properly fit, caught a stomachache from eating sweet and spice cake with a bowl of milk, and gave up using tea, coffee, and tobacco after being asked to do so by mission leaders.<sup>50</sup> At first, he believed himself deficient in public-speaking skills, but before many weeks had passed, he sometimes preached for an hour and a half.

As did other missionaries, he attended the theater, visited museums, and once had his head examined. The phrenologist told him he was fond of home yet loved to travel, had to see to believe, was determined to a fault, liked good music, was no great speaker, possessed a good recollection of places, and was cool and collected in time of danger.<sup>51</sup>

Long letters written to Harriet, though at times tiring, were pleasant experiences because the letters “had a faint resemblance of conversing together.”<sup>52</sup> During his first Christmas in Great Britain, William attended a branch party where he danced three times and sang but refused to participate in the games because they all included kissing. He concluded that his evening was one of little fun.<sup>53</sup>

Only four days into the new year of 1866, William arose early and trav-



*William B. Preston. Carte-de-visite portrait taken while on European mission, 1865–1868. Photograph courtesy Special Collections and Archives, Merrill Library, Utah State University.*

eled by train to a special mission conference held in Birmingham. Ninety-five elders were present, and all bore their testimonies in the three days of meetings. As the conference drew to a close, William perceived that everyone was satisfied. At least he was, although he thought that the benches were getting hard and that meetings lasting three to five hours made “a pretty good sit for one time.”<sup>54</sup>

At the Birmingham conference, he learned he had been given a new assignment; and for the rest of his mission, he worked at mission headquarters in Liverpool. Brigham Young himself told his son Brigham Jr. to use William in the office. “I will be in luck,” he wrote to Harriet, telling her of his new assignment, “if I should have an easy birth for once, for ever since I have been in this church I have had seemingly one of the hardest places all the time.”<sup>55</sup> William’s

fears were not ill-founded, and he sometimes felt blue and inadequate during the first days at headquarters.

His new duties included writing letters for the mission president, studying grammar, and reading the Book of Mormon. After a few days, he was “put in charge of the mission’s money” and made foreman of the lower office where the books and accounts were kept. He performed his duties so well that he was then made the mission office manager. He assisted with immigration and was also involved in editing the *Millennial Star* as well as in keeping the office journal. On 2 April 1866, he wrote in his diary that he was “very busy, I have a good appetite for sleep nowadays.”<sup>56</sup> Sometimes feeling like a caged bird, he did receive an assignment to attend the London conference where he was the first speaker. He then listened to Orson Pratt deliv-



er an hour and a half's sermon "on the time of the gentiles." After the meeting's conclusion, he went to the London Music Factory and ordered instruments for the Logan Brass Band.<sup>57</sup>

His major challenges as a missionary were not related to proselyting or to difficulties with members but instead were physical. Writing, keeping books, and proofreading, all done in the basement of the mission office by gaslight, affected his eyes, causing considerable suffering. He also gained weight, and a round stomach protruded over his belt, complementing, he said, his bald head. When time permitted, he visited museums, parks, and the theater and toured the world's largest steamship, the one that had laid the Atlantic cable, which William considered the greatest feat of the nineteenth century—all of which gave his eyes a most welcome rest.<sup>58</sup>

Nothing, not even sore eyes, curbed his excitement when his brother-in-law, Moses Thatcher, arrived in Liverpool on 2 August 1866. They talked about home until midnight. William was very pleased with Thatcher's performance as a missionary, his leadership skills, his speaking ability, and the way he drew people to him. After only a few months in England, Moses was asked to lead the mission's largest and perhaps most prestigious conference. Franklin D. Richards, who replaced Brigham Young Jr. as mission president, on occasion sent William to visit his brother-in-law, and they were together for the 1866 holiday season.

Important special assignments given to William included proofreading the new edition of the Doctrine and Covenants, securing the type for the Deseret alphabet, and participating in a twenty-two-day tour of the mission that included a visit to branches on the Guernsey and Jersey Islands. Even after having served for almost two years, William still believed himself inadequate as a public speaker. "I never get up now to preach," he wrote to Harriet, "but what I feel my weakness, but I am not so bad as some."<sup>59</sup> Although he may have felt inadequate speaking in public, he took great comfort in keeping mission rules and in doing what his leaders asked him to do. "I have done nothing I am ashamed of," he told Harriet. "Some elders will weep and mourn because of their sins," but "I have learned there is no joy, no peace, nor pleasure only in trying to do what we are told by our file leaders."<sup>60</sup>

Orson Pratt, a man he admired, taught a grammar class for those who worked in the office. "Common nouns, gender, third person singular, mood and tense and so forth, it sounds very familiar to me," he wrote to Harriet, "and Briggy [Brigham Young Jr.] makes an awkward fist of it, quite as bad as I did when I went to school to Dick Shelton in Virginia in that old log school house twenty years ago, and I am trying to reflect my mind with grammar and such like, for I have to send proof every week and make corrections where there happens to be errors and sometimes the printer makes a good

many mistakes and there are all kinds of letters come here for publication, the brethren who come from home know but little about reading, writing or anything else except going to the canyon and riding. It's surprising how fast some of them learn. I hope to see the time when the elders will go to and prepare themselves for the duties that will devolve upon them in future life."<sup>61</sup> As for himself, he also wanted to learn more history and so began purchasing books that would assist in making his dream a reality.

With the end of spring, William's workload increased as he assisted more than two thousand Latter-day Saints in their effort to leave England and settle in the Great Basin. It was his job to secure passage, pass out the tickets, pay all the debts, and help charter boats—activities that caused him to labor far into the evenings and exacerbated his eye problems. But he loved his work, gained more weight, and experienced satisfaction in not having tobacco in his mouth for four months.<sup>62</sup> "I am vain enough to think," he told Harriet, "that leaving off the use of tobacco for a constant diet has helped me very much and then I don't drink tea nor coffee as a beverage. I have not made any covenants concerning these things but thought I would try it for awhile. So far I have done well through the help of the Lord strengthening me to overcome the temptation, for it is a great temptation now to see them take a chew of good tobacco or smoke a good cigar, but generally the tobacco here is so poor that its not much credit for a fellow to quit the use of it."<sup>63</sup>

When the last of the Mormon emigrants were safely on the high seas, William, Charles W. Penrose, and A. Miner visited the great Paris Exhibition, as did thousands of others. This missionary trio saw palaces, art galleries, and the latest advances in technology. William was impressed with Paris and admired its clean air, tidy streets, beautiful flowers, and fine gardens. He wished Harriet could have been with him.

Comfortable with his assigned duties and full of faith, he told his wife that he "often found himself dancing for joy in the blessings of the gospel."<sup>64</sup> He liked working in the office, too, because he kept improving mentally and physically, and the office environment allowed him to keep posted on "everything pertaining to the old and new world, the Kingdom of God and Utah particularly."<sup>65</sup>

Though he was happy in the yoke of missionary service, he experienced sorrow in the transgressions of some of the missionaries. C. A. Benson's "grievous sin," probably of a sexual nature, was made public, and he was sent home. Other elders, William noted, "drank liquor, smoked, chewed tobacco, and escorted girls to and from meetings." Such behavior violated mission rules.<sup>66</sup> He was also disappointed to find "that I am no preacher when it comes to preaching to the world for I cannot quote scripture much," and though he had been on a mission for almost two years, he believed he had not learned much. Yet he felt some satisfaction in doing his office work so

well that Orson Pratt and Franklin D. Richards could go forth and preach while he remained at home attending to business.<sup>67</sup>

One letter from Harriet pleased William as he learned that Brigham Young had visited Logan, taken Harriet for a ride in his carriage, doddled the children on his knee, and sang to them. Writing to Harriet, William said he would always remember when “President and sister Young stayed with us and we made a hard pallet on the floor of the kitchen.”<sup>68</sup> Young, William believed, was a down-to-earth prophet who cared about his flock and who knew how to bring cheer and hope into the homes of women who sacrificed their husbands to full-time missionary service.

William’s letters home are filled with humor, advice, and expressions of love and admiration. Lacking sufficient news to fill the pages of one missive, he provided Harriet with a rather complete room-by-room description of the mission office. His word-picture is so vivid that the reader can almost visualize the “old dingy, rickety, smoky looking inside and out, shakey floors, and warped door frames from the house settling one sided, the wall cracked from top to bottom and at one end nine inch birch walls papered inside with rusty looking paper and every hole, and there are lots of them all over, crammed with old papers, books, old *Stars*, and journals, profiles, wood and steel engravings of various elders who once figured here in the balmy days of their mission, when money was plenty, tracts without number of all sorts from various authors . . . the collection of 28 years.”<sup>69</sup> On the walls of his private office were pictures of various celebrities who figured prominently in the mission. Vivid, too, was his description of the women’s indoor privy, which was kept clean and tidy, being supplied with a water spout that could be turned on and off.<sup>70</sup>

His whiskers turning grey, William sometimes cried in the night from being lonely for Harriet and the children as the last year of his three-year mission began.<sup>71</sup> As his longing to see his family grew, so did his wisdom and judgment. President Richards sent him to a branch in the mission to repair the damage caused by a branch president who excommunicated the members when they would not do as he wanted. William was able to restore order, and he believed that there was too much “backbiting and bickering among the saints” and that only sharp talk would rectify the situation.<sup>72</sup>

William also had troubles of his own. In his letters to Harriet, he frequently dispensed advice regarding managing the farm, raising the children, teaching school, educating his family, and dealing with the hired help. He sometimes told Harriet to dress warmer, gain more weight, visit friends in Salt Lake City more, cease teaching school in the winter, and quit feeling sorry for herself. He encouraged her not to recount all the sorrowful things she had passed through, and he counseled her not to rack her brain to conjure up something sorrowful that might happen. All she has done, he wrote,

“is [to be] appreciated by himself, good men, angels and God.”<sup>73</sup>

Attempting to soothe her blues, assuage her anger, and assure her that she was not the only one in their marriage making sacrifices, William wrote, “Some of the brethren say I grind my teeth when I sleep, I tell them that this dry life is enough to make anyone grind their teeth.”<sup>74</sup> Fearing that when he returned home Harriet would find him the same hard case he was before leaving, he confessed that he seemed “to feel more cross and cruelty in some company to keep from being run over.” However, he would come home filled with hope that under Harriet’s “gentle tender care,” she would find him “docile as a lamb, and unpretending as a school boy.”<sup>75</sup> He also confessed that he worried less than did his wife, especially about things he could not help.<sup>76</sup> He failed, it appears, to fully realize that teaching school for Harriet was a way to make the time pass more quickly, to help her feel important, as well as to provide needed financial assistance. She had fifty students and was a well-liked, gifted instructor. She also studied French while William was away, and years later their French-speaking daughter, while working in an army hospital in France, praised her mother for the fine French her mother used in her letters.

The last months of his mission William wore glasses, grew gray whiskers, had little hair on the top of his head, and suffered with the itch. He kept fat without tea, coffee, or tobacco. Giving up tobacco, he told Harriet, “has been a sore trial to me. You know I loved the weed and to quit has tried all the firmness, faith and blessing from God I could muster.”<sup>77</sup> He also began collecting books and managed to ship home twenty-nine bound volumes of *The Millennial Star*, eleven volumes of *The Journal of Discourses*, books on the history of Rome and Greece, scientific dictionaries, and a number of children’s books.<sup>78</sup> He acquired enough printed material to start a rather nice library.

Early in April, he visited the Isle of Wight, the winter residence of Queen Victoria. The castle, he told Harriet, was noted for its deep well of more than 250 feet. A donkey drew the water, and William, fascinated with the animal, learned that the beast’s predecessor had drawn the water for forty-nine years and, during the last twenty years of its life, had received a pension of one penny loaf a day in addition to its regular food allowance. That animal, William believed, “stands high on the pages of the history of donkeys.”<sup>79</sup>

Harriet managed to save and send William \$62 to use for his journey home. For the way she had managed their affairs and for her love, William expressed his thanks and promised, “When I get home I will fold you to my embrace, and kiss away the tears till past pangs and pains bury themselves beneath the tide of oblivion and let the sunshine of joy and happiness spring up around us and our little flock, while we sing merrily the songs of Zion and

look forward to a happy future.”<sup>80</sup>

As he prepared to lead a large company of Latter-day Saints to the Great Basin, William worked late into the night securing passage for more than two thousand emigrants who departed on three separate sailing vessels. He and Charles Penrose managed on 10 July 1868 to have a donkey race, riding two small animals. The one Penrose rode fell down, and a laughing William won the race.<sup>81</sup> Early in July, William and five hundred Latter-day Saints boarded the *Colorado*; and, because he was the company’s leader, he traveled in the first cabin.

The journey on the sea, largely uneventful, took only a few days. After successfully winning medical clearance, William found a \$100 draft awaiting him, courtesy of Harriet. Writing to her from New York City, he expressed pleasure that he had been seasick only three days and reported that there had been “no deaths, no births, and no sicknesses among the saints he led.”<sup>82</sup> The emigrants traveled by rail to Burton, Nebraska, just west of Omaha, and found sufficient wagons had been sent from Salt Lake City to transport them to Zion. Aaron Thatcher, his brother-in-law, was among the teamsters, and they had a joyful reunion. “It almost made me jump up and haller,” William wrote, “to think I will be in Logan in about a month.”<sup>83</sup>

No letters survive detailing the September 1868 reunion with his wife and children. But after only a few weeks at home, William secured employment by logging in Echo Canyon. Foreman of a crew that was cutting trees to make ties for the railroad, he was paid \$15 a day, a good wage for the time in which he lived.<sup>84</sup> When bad weather set in—too soon for his taste—he returned to Logan for a few weeks, but he was back in Salt Lake City early in 1870, having been elected to the state legislature.<sup>85</sup>

Serving as a bishop, as mayor of Logan, and in the legislature, even as he took care of his businesses and farm, left William little time for recreational activities. However, late in the autumn of 1872, he and Harriet left the oldest children, Allie and Willie, with the Thatchers and, taking baby May with them, boarded a train in Ogden and traveled east. Their companions were William D. Hooper and George Q. Cannon. William and Harriet ate from the food basket she had prepared and marveled at the ease and comfort of their journey. After taking care of business in Chicago, New York, and Washington, D.C., the Prestons traveled to Virginia to visit with William’s family.

They arrived at Locust Grove on 19 December 1872, and for the first time Harriet met her mother-in-law and sisters-in-law. It was love at first sight. On Christmas Eve, she wrote, “Seems just like my own home—I feel that I shall regret very much to leave it.” Harriet enjoyed hearing William talk over old times with his family.<sup>86</sup> The Prestons visited aunts and uncles, took horseback rides, went sleigh riding, feasted on fine meals, and spent

many long winter evenings around the fireplace talking. Their vacation lasted until late in February, and of the farewell, Harriet wrote, "Will wept many tears at parting with his dear sisters."<sup>87</sup> On their way back to Utah, they spent a few days in Tomahawk, West Virginia, calling on Harriet's aunts and uncles. As they returned home, the Prestons were able to ride the train all the way to Logan, the railroad having reached that city late in January of 1873.

When Peter Maughan died, Brigham Young appointed William presiding bishop of Cache Valley, a position he held for six years. Active in Church and community affairs, he pushed for the building of a larger tabernacle in Logan than was intended when the building project had begun ten years earlier.<sup>88</sup> In 1877, when the Cache Valley Stake was organized, Moses Thatcher asked that William serve as first counselor in the stake presidency. Two years later, in 1879, when Moses was called to the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, William was asked to serve as the stake president. The stake over which he presided stretched from Avon on the south to Rexburg, Idaho, on the north. There were twenty thousand members in thirty wards and branches for whom he was responsible. The man for whom public speaking was a chore delivered sermons at least three or four times a week. The content of his discourses reveals a practical, down-to-earth leader who was firmly rooted in Mormonism.

### **President Preston's Preaching**

Charles O. Card, who served in the stake presidency with Preston and often traveled with him to the stake's wards and branches, was a man who, for much of his life, kept a diary. His record reveals the themes as well as the content of more than three hundred of William's sermons. Those students of Mormon history who believe Latter-day Saints of those times regularly listened to talks relating to blood atonement, the Adam-God theory, the marriage of Jesus, men becoming like God, and other doctrines considered in the far corner of the left field of Mormon thought will be disappointed to learn that Preston's discourses lacked color or controversy and might be considered quite ordinary. In fact, one reader not affiliated with the Church found Card's diaries and his record of Church leaders' sermons boring. Though they might be boring, Preston's instructions to his flock reveal that Mormons, at least those who resided in northern Utah and southern Idaho, listened to preaching devoted to rather practical, mainstream Christian values suitable for everyday living.

The most common themes of Preston's sermons were paying tithes and offerings, observing the Word of Wisdom, and properly teaching children the principles of the gospel. He came down hard on those who sold liquor,

often assigning them a place in hell. When a Mormon bishop, who had served nineteen years, had to be released because of his addiction to alcohol, William condemned those men in Hyrum who had tempted their leader. William believed their own salvation was in jeopardy.<sup>89</sup> William's own struggles to give up tobacco, tea, and coffee allowed him to sympathize with others who found living the Word of Wisdom challenging. Still, he believed that those who conquered their addictions experienced peace, joy, and satisfaction.

Some have mistakenly believed that before Church President Lorenzo Snow received his St. George tithing revelation, Church leaders had paid little attention to that principle. To the contrary, if William B. Preston is an accurate gauge, there were relatively few weeks when Latter-day Saints were not found listening to at least this Church leader stress the importance of giving a tenth of their increase to the Church.

He also urged wards and branches to organize their priesthood quorums properly. Teachers, he believed, should visit all Church members, ferret out iniquity, and cause the Saints to repent. Priests, he said, should use the sacrament prayers found in the Doctrine and Covenants and not make up prayers of their own when they blessed the bread and water. Furthermore, priesthood quorums should be fully functioning in each ward.

Preston, moreover, was convinced that too many Mormons made dancing their religion. To the contrary, he declared that the dance was not a gospel principle and that round dancing—that is, the waltz—was not acceptable in Church-sponsored socials. Bishops were asked to attend and oversee all dances, and those patrons who were inebriated or who engaged in round dancing were to be sent home. In many of his talks, Preston urged the people to enlarge and improve their meetinghouses, plant trees, flowers, and gardens, and beautify their surroundings and roads. They were asked to support community cooperatives, keep the Sabbath day holy, become unified, and make certain they carefully kept and preserved minutes of meetings. Furthermore, he spoke of improving teaching, arriving at meetings on time, forgiving others, and valuing education. Latter-day Saints, he said, should not be mean-spirited, should read more, should be more obedient, and should resolve to be nice. Sometimes he spoke about political issues and urged the people in Cache Valley to support the Democratic newspaper, *The Northern Light*. If his preaching mirrored the culture, then through his talks, readers can glimpse those late-nineteenth-century facets of Mormonism that needed the most attention.

The Latter-day Saints were not, if Preston's assessment is accurate, in need of more speculative theology or doctrinal theory. Instead, the practical, everyday aspects of living revealed principles challenged them the most. Only rarely did he talk about the so-called signs of the times that might indi-

cate the Second Coming of Jesus was near. Urging the members of his stake to be kind to their animals, use proper language, develop good manners, and beautify their surroundings, William's teachings reflect his feelings that Christian conduct was of infinitely greater value than knowledge of God's mysteries. On a number of occasions, he admonished parents to instruct their children relative to proper manners and proper hosting methods, and he declared that education begins on the mother's knee. When William spoke, listeners heard words that were practical and sensible and that related to daily life.

### **Humor, Wit, and Wisdom**

Preston endeared himself to friends and associates. Among his many talents was a gift for telling a good story, and he possessed a fine sense of humor and the ability to see life's bright side. Even as a child, he was known as a fine conversationalist, and his letters reveal this talent as well as his sense of humor.<sup>90</sup>

Camped on the Muddy, twelve miles from Ham's Fork, his wagon rocked by a fierce wind, William in a letter to Harriet wrote, "We had a large mess of beans yesterday and now while I write the wind rocks the wagon so badly that I was almost afraid to try to write for fear you would think I was sick. But it was not the beans that raised all this wind for there is a stronger man at the bellows out south west."<sup>91</sup>

While serving in the state legislature, he visited the Salt Lake Theater one evening and saw Shakespeare's *Richard III*, performed by Thomas A. Lyne and John T. Caine, among others. William praised Lyne and wrote of Caine's performance, "But he was J. T. Caine for all that."<sup>92</sup> Describing his lazy, dirty housekeeper, he said, "I don't know what I should do with such a woman as she is. Guess I do give her a divorce and say I was mistaken in the critter."<sup>93</sup>

After a year of missionary service, he told Harriet, "Don't be discouraged about me getting fat and your being thin, for it is a long road that does not turn." He also, on more than one occasion, advised his wife, "Don't look for me till you see me at the gate and hear me holler."<sup>94</sup> Not only was being absent from home and hearth a trial for William but also he missed the labor associated with farming. "I wish I could be home a few hours," he wrote in the spring of 1866, "and get good and dirty once, wear a hickory shirt, go out and feed the pigs and dig in the ground, plant some seed, farm it a little, just enough to take off the wise edge. This dressing up every day in black cloth and keeping spruced all the time is rather a tax on me and makes me feel old batchelorish or maidish or some other ish. But I guess I will learn to stand it and maybe when I come home, I'll have another cloth coat or two to sell or



perhaps may be proud enough to wear them myself.”<sup>95</sup> Still new in the mission office, he informed Harriet, “Now for myself, I am as busy as a hen with one chicken.”<sup>96</sup>

William early in the summer of 1866 visited London and saw the prince and princess of Wales as well as Prince Alfred. Telling Harriet about his visit, he wrote, “I could not see that there was anything uncommon about them. They were blooded folks, I suppose, so am I. My blood is just as good as theirs. I have just as good looks, and I think a better looking wife than the Prince of Wales has and I am satisfied but he is not.”<sup>97</sup>

After his brother-in-law, Moses Thatcher, arrived in England, William told Harriet that her brother’s gift for language and preaching was far superior to that of other men. Then, William described his own abilities. “I find the more I speak the more perceptible is my slowness of speech compared with those who are fluent. I don’t know that I am cut out for a preacher. I tell Jonney [John W. Thatcher] and Mose [Moses Thatcher] that I am going to raise Willie for an orator. Jonney says that he has voice enough to make them hear for a mile if he continues to improve.”<sup>98</sup> Concluding one of his letters, he wrote, “My dear Harriet, I am about to run ashore for news.”<sup>99</sup>

William believed his hired man’s wife was lazy and told Harriet that James (the hired man) “ought to get him a little house up and put her into it and tell her to root pig or starve.” Then, he added, “Oh well why should I talk, I don’t know anything about a lazy indolent thing for a wife. If I had one maybe I would jump up and bite my nose.”<sup>100</sup>

In England’s New Prince Theater, William saw his first Italian opera and described the performance as a riddle. He told Harriet about his experience. “When Miss Young [Brigham Young Jr’s daughter] asked me what I thought of it, I said, it was the most magnificent thing I ever saw, I didn’t understand a word of it and I saw none that I thought did. The upper crust and the American Cod fish aristocracy thought it excellent. Moses and I got our money’s worth . . . [and] being squeezed for it was much crowded.”<sup>101</sup>

When Brigham Young Jr. toured Mormon missions in Europe in the fall of 1866, he left Orson Pratt in charge of the British Mission. William and Orson were in each other’s company much of the time in Young’s absence. Of this experience, William told Harriet, “Brother Pratt is but poor company for a boy, he might be interesting to a man who could talk science and profound literature but for a plough boy raised with an ax in one hand and a whip in the other there is no use talking. Just wait till I get home and I can maybe show the philosopher how to raise potatoes and Brother Pratt thinks he can do that just as well as anybody if he was left at home long enough to try good and hard.”<sup>102</sup>

In the same letter in which he commented on Orson Pratt’s fetish for matters of the mind, William told Harriet, “If the children do not mind,

Mamma must give them a little hickory oil or string soup and tie them up to the bed post.”<sup>103</sup> William had been away from home for more than a year when he read in one of his wife’s letters that she intended to send him a love letter. In reply, he wrote, “I hope you do send me one, then I will know what a love letter is. I try to write you a love letter every time I write to you.”<sup>104</sup>

Sometimes his sense of humor broke forth as he wrote home about England. He was afraid “to eat English sausage for fear it is filled with puppies, kittens, and cats.” There had been a royal wedding, and he told Harriet, “I felt like saying throw the royalty to the dogs.”<sup>105</sup>

Snippets of humor abound in a long letter dated 27 March 1867. “Here I am again,” he said, “scribbling away trying to have a bit O chat with you, the man who invented writing was a genius and deserves our thanks for its mighty convenient ain’t it.” In answer to his wife’s continued anxiety about when he might be coming home, he told her, “My dear wife you must not look for me until four or six hours after you hear of me being at Box Elder. Then when you see me coming across or around the square you may be sure I am almost there. . . . Well my dear wife, I am scratching again to fill up this letter at intervals and I fear it will not interest you much but scattered shots kills the bird and maybe I will interest you in spots if I don’t all over.”

Reverting to his own desire to return to home and hearth, he told Harriet, “In fact I begin to feel quite old bachelorish and expect I shall need lots of training before I get broke in to my usual want to play with children and doddle you on my knee but I flatter myself that I am not altogether enticeable and will with a little gentle care be as docile as a lamb.”<sup>106</sup> He also told her that if she were to analyze his fat, she would find it was “made up of beef, mutton, potatoes (lots) milk, water, molasses, sugar, no tea or coffee, no liquor, no tobacco.” Continuing his missive, he wrote how he remembered in days of yore that he “used to gulp down two or three cups of coffee or tea, or butter milk, and then get up and ram a cud of tobacco in my mouth and commence to spit myself all away, no wonder I was poor.”<sup>107</sup>

Thinking he would not be able to attend the Paris Exhibition, he told Harriet, “Never mind we will get an exhibition of our own some day and have Napoleon for the gate keeper and the prince of Wales for coach driver.”<sup>108</sup> He was also able to look on the bright side of his not having much success in bringing English citizens into the Church and seemed to enjoy the forty-two pounds he added to his frame since his feet had touched English soil. Writing home, he made the following observations: “If you saw me you would think I was in a family way. I told the brethren that with your help I could have made more good saints staying home than I have in England.” Then he revealed that he and Harriet planned on having twelve children and declared that when he came home, she should plan on having twins to make up for lost time.<sup>109</sup>

Following a visit in the company of Franklin D. Richards to the Latter-day Saints who worked in the iron and coal mines, he described the British people as “small, butt headed, broad shouldered, short, stubby and very ignorant, indeed.” Even though he was impressed with Paris, he remarked, “People say see Paris, then die, because there is nothing in the world worth seeing after that. I say what is Paris by the side of Niagara Falls, the Natural Bridge, Monmouth Cave, the Missouri River, Twin Peaks, or Logan Canyon?” It is evident that he preferred the creations of God to those of man.<sup>110</sup> In England, he chose another motto: “Just as well laugh as cry for spilt milk for neither will add to it.”<sup>111</sup>

In honor of love and Valentine’s Day, he drew a facsimile of a British banknote and wrote, “I herewith send you a bank note drawn at sight on the Bank of Love by cupid the manager—and also a little token as Valentines Day draws nigh.”<sup>112</sup> The bank of William’s humor was well stocked with funds.

### **Wives and Family**

William had many happy times as he developed businesses, acquired farms, and served the Church. Only three years after his return to Logan, he, as did many Church leaders, became a polygamist. He and Harriet talked and sometimes joked about him taking another wife, and on 27 November 1871, he and Bertha Marie Anderson were married.<sup>113</sup> Together, they had five children: Lee, Stephen (who lived only two years), Nephi (who died as an infant), Samuel, and Mary. William did not flaunt his second family or expose them to unnecessary scrutiny, and he escaped serving time in prison for violating the Edmunds Law. On 4 October 1888, Bertha, age thirty-nine, died, leaving William to raise their children, with the assistance of Harriet. The youngest child, Mary, was only three years old at her mother’s passing and grew up to become an army nurse serving in the World War I. In her letters to Harriet, she calls her “Mother,” and Harriet, in her missives to Mary, refers to her as her daughter. Their letters depict a close relationship.

Alfred, William and Harriet’s first child, died the day he was born, but Allie (named after Harriet’s mother) and William Bowker Jr. grew to maturity. William Jr. served a mission to Germany and, upon his return to Logan, married Katherine Dallinger Pyper, a young lady five years his junior. Allie met a young man while attending school, Lyman Royce Martineau, and was married 29 December 1881. She and her husband had six children.<sup>114</sup> Lee grew to maturity, married, and ran the Preston farm in Wyoming.

William had strong opinions regarding the rearing of children; and his letters, especially those he composed in England, often contain instructions for Harriet and the children. He told his wife not to treat their children as

dolls but to allow them to “go rough and tumble, ragged and dirty because it was better for their health.” He wrote, “Now I know you don’t believe it, but just remember shade plants do not grow so vigorously as those in the sun.”<sup>115</sup> Believing reading was very important, he and Harriet taught their children how to comprehend writing early in their lives. When they had grasped this fundamental academic skill, he had them read to him after the evening chores were finished.<sup>116</sup> He also played horse with his children, allowing them to ride on his back as he took them from room to room in the house. When away from home, he purchased gifts for them and always had something for them when he returned home. Sometimes his gift was a dress or new shoes or a doll or some other toy.<sup>117</sup>

When in Omaha, Nebraska, on 4 July 1865, he received a letter from home in which Harriet told him that his being away from home wore upon her mind. In responding to her yearnings, he wrote, “Although I can imagine to some extent your feelings, your love and the heart yearning for me, yet I cannot feel proud of it, for the very affection and love you bear me, [is] one of the greatest blessings if kept within proper channels, but let it wear upon the mind and overwork the system and paralyze it, to that extent, you destroy the very foundation of happiness, your powers of doing good to yourself, your children, your husband, and friends.”<sup>118</sup> He noted that pining out one’s life drop by drop does not change or “make the matter better one iota, and so one might as well cheer up and get on with life. Do not fret over possibilities,” he told her; “instead be thankful that God has been so kind.”<sup>119</sup> “Always look on the bright side of everything, because the dark side will show itself quite enough.”<sup>120</sup>



*William B. Preston with child,  
carte-de-viste portrait ca 1860s.  
Photograph courtesy Special Collections  
and Archives, Merrill Library,  
Utah State University.*

After being in England for only a few weeks, he told Harriet that he could not raise a potato for her, nor be with her, nor counsel her in all her little home affairs, nor was she to worry and be anxious to please him for chances are he would never know.<sup>121</sup> She, if he had his way, would never do her own washing and would wear warm clothes and thick-soled shoes that would protect her from the cold.<sup>122</sup> He warned her not to succumb to modern fashions in women's wear and to be sure to conserve her health by not overworking.<sup>123</sup> "People live longer," he believed, "who take life easier."<sup>124</sup>

Often, his letters were filled with praise and expressions of appreciation for all the things Harriet had done, such as calcimining the rooms of their home, painting the house, taking care of the animals, and exhibiting her ability to handle money wisely. But he did urge her never to spend money until she had it. There were times when he believed that she was doing better at home without him.

"Keep a pretty tight reign over Willie," he wrote, "because children should be made to be obedient." Further, he said, "Bend the twig when young because when it gets old you can't." Continuing his child-raising philosophy, he declared that "those who scold and mock children the most always have the worst ones. . . . You might have to whip them to make them know that you mean what you say." It was better, he believed, to give the children the switch once in awhile than to scold them too much.

Reflecting the social mores of his time, he had definite ideas for raising his children. He urged Harriet to teach Willie how to speak correctly so Willie could become a fine missionary. The gift he brought home for his son was a knife. Allie, he hoped, would be taught how to cook, sew, and weave. Her present was a doll.<sup>125</sup> He also purchased a number of children's books



*William B. Preston and child,  
tintype 1890s.  
Photograph courtesy Special Collections  
and Archives, Merrill Library,  
Utah State University.*

while in England and brought them home with him so his offspring would have ample reading material.<sup>126</sup> He wanted his children to learn so they would not have to blunder through life in ignorance. William was very pleased that while he was away, Harriet studied French and English grammar and became a fine schoolteacher as well.<sup>127</sup>

When he learned that Allie was “white as a Lily,” he told Harriet to see that Allie exercised and exposed herself to the sun, and he encouraged her to play outside and participate in sports. He did not believe that women should be thin and frail. “Let the children go outside and become dirty,” he advised, and “feed them milk, potatoes, cornbread, mush and bread and milk for supper. Rise early, go to bed early, drink no tea or coffee and from five to twenty years will be added to their lives.”<sup>128</sup>

Often in his letters he asked that Harriet tell the children they must be “good and kind to mama and do everything she tells them.” He noted that if they do so he would “love them and be glad to see them. But if they are naughty [I] won’t love them at all.”<sup>129</sup>

There were occasions when he believed Harriet sacrificed too much and worked too hard. In fact, they had a disagreement over these issues in the fall of 1867. William had written that he disliked the portrait Harriet had sent. He thought she looked pale and thin. Feeling discouraged, blue, and unappreciated, Harriet wrote that she had not attended conference as he had suggested because her clothes were plain and not good enough. Furthermore, she had not had a new dress since he left home. She was also living a dull life and had nothing interesting of which to write about while he traveled all over England and France and always composed fascinating letters. Therefore, she had concluded to write only every six weeks—if that often. Furthermore, she did not much like the photograph of himself that he had mailed to her. She resented, too, that he had allowed Franklin D. Richards to read one of her letters.

Her reflections wounded his feelings “worst of anything. I have scarce been out of my mind,” he wrote in reply. Then, he told her to purchase more than one new dress and said that her letters were wonderful and to please write more often, not less. The reason his photograph was so poor, he said, was because it was taken just after his arrival in England and because he had been seasick for a dozen days. Further, he allowed Richards to read her letter to him only because William’s eyes were too sore to read it himself. Finally, he wrote that she was to take a willow to Willie if he refused to mind and that she was not to make herself a martyr to such an idea as economy.<sup>130</sup>

William, Harriet, and Bertha were able to raise a good family—but not without experiencing sorrow. As has been noted, three of their children died while young. Then, on 15 August 1907, forty-four-year-old William Jr. took a ride on the Bear River in a gasoline launch with four friends. The boat,

traveling at a high rate of speed, hit a pike near Cache Junction and overturned, and William Jr. and C. A. Gowans, a doctor, were drowned. Four months later, Allie, age forty-five, as she prepared breakfast for her husband and six children, fell into the arms of her son and died from a cerebral embolism.<sup>131</sup> The family mourned, but members were somewhat comforted by a letter they received from Church President Joseph F. Smith in which he expressed his deepest sympathy and wished he could write something “to relieve the burdens of their aching hearts.”<sup>132</sup> Knowing that he cared enough to write seemed to provide some of the relief he sought to cast their way.

### The Final Years

Active in railroad building, banking, mining, and farming and effectively discharging his duties as northern Utah’s chief ecclesiastical officer, in the summer of 1883, William was called to accompany his brother-in-law, Apostle Moses Thatcher, on a visit to the newly baptized Indians who resided on the Wind River Reservation in Wyoming. After taking care of some railroad business in Salt Lake City, William joined the other missionaries, including Junnius M. Wells, the Church’s Young Men’s president, Lorin Farr, William Apperly, Amos Wright, and James Brown, a Native American, at Beaver Canyon, Idaho. The men passed through Henry’s Lake, Targhee Pass, and Yellowstone Park, traveling in light spring wagons. They lived on deer, sage hens, and an occasional buffalo. William, in charge of the horses, kept them shod and fit. Meetings with Washakie and his Shoshone band went well, and the travelers returned to Logan, beating the winter snow.<sup>133</sup>

After serving five years as the president of the Cache Valley Stake, William received an assignment change. Presiding Bishop Edward Hunter passed away, and in the April 1884 general conference, President John Taylor announced that William B. Preston had been called as the new presiding bishop. Church members sustained this action, and William once again entered a new and challenging phase of life. Harriet, who served as the president of the Young Women in Cache Valley, was extended an honorable release; and the Prestons moved to Salt Lake City. A reporter in the local newspaper said of William, “Brother Preston has earned for himself here during nearly a quarter of a century the name of being a good leader and a faithful worker for the benefit of God’s people; they feel that while they suffer a great loss the exaltation to which their guide has been called will be for the benefit of the whole church, and hence are more inclined to acquiesce in the call.”<sup>134</sup>

William chose to retain the two men, Leonard Wilford Hardy and Robert Taylor Burton, who had served with Hunter as his counselors.

However, Hardy lived only four months after William became Presiding Bishop, and in the October 1884 general conference, Burton took his place as first counselor, and John Quayle Cannon replaced Burton as second counselor. This call, historian Ronald W. Walker writes, “did not seem to hold much attraction for” Cannon. He enjoyed cigars, strong drink, billiards, and gambling. To sustain his bad habits, he removed \$11,000 from the Church’s general and temple accounts. Furthermore, he involved himself with a young woman, and after serving for only a year and a half in the Presiding Bishopric, he was excommunicated from the Church at the regular weekly Sunday service in the Tabernacle.<sup>135</sup> John R. Winder replaced Cannon as one of William’s counselors. Years later, at Preston’s funeral, Winder said that he was never happier than when serving as William’s counselor.<sup>136</sup>

Only weeks after his call as the Church’s premier bishop, William attended the dedication of the Logan Temple. He had played a pivotal role in the building’s construction and took no small satisfaction in the dedication ceremonies.

Serving as Mormonism’s Presiding Bishop, William oversaw the Church’s temporal affairs. He led a movement that decreased the amount of tithing paid in kind and that increased cash contributions. Presiding over the Aaronic Priesthood, he continued to espouse the proper organization of the lesser priesthood, advocating the use of young men to fill deacons, teachers, and priest quorums. One of his major assignments was moving along the construction of the Salt Lake Temple, and he was pleased when it was dedicated by Wilford Woodruff on 6 April 1893. William received credit for planting the first flowers and grass on Temple Square and for beautifying Church headquarters.

While William served in the Presiding Bishopric, he was also active in his own business ventures. He was an officer in the Utah and Northern Railroad Company, the Thatcher Brothers Bank, and the Bullion-Beck Mining Company. He operated farms in Cache Valley and one in Wyoming, promoted the sugar-beet industry and electric power, and served on the board of trustees of Logan, Utah’s Brigham Young College. And he held leadership positions with the State Bank of Utah, Utah Woolen Mills, the Nevada Land and Livestock Company, and Industrial Bureau. Furthermore, he published a genealogy book detailing his ancestry and served on the board of the Utah Genealogical Society. On 25 July 1864, William received his patriarchal blessing and was told that he would perform a great work for the redemption of the dead and assist in the redemption of the center stake of Zion. His devotion to genealogy, he hoped, helped fulfill this blessing.<sup>137</sup>

He assisted in planning Utah’s exhibit at the World’s Fair held in Chicago in 1893, and his daughter Mary worked at the fair’s Utah building.





*Home of William B. and Harriet Ann Preston on 74 West North Temple, Salt Lake City, Utah. Salt Lake Temple is under construction in the background. Picture taken ca 1887. William was presiding Bishop of the LDS Church from 1884 until his death in 1908.*

*Photograph courtesy Special Collections & Archives, Merrill Library, Utah State University.*

Harriet and William traveled by train to Chicago late in October 1893 to see the fair and their daughter. They ate from a lunch basket their daughter had prepared, slept in one berth, and spent a nickel now and then for a cup of coffee.<sup>138</sup> William also attended a fair in San Francisco in the spring of 1894.

In 1897, William was given the responsibility under a new reorganization plan for all of the Church's money. He held the purse strings. At that time, he also constructed a new wing on the Church's tithing office and established a meat market.<sup>139</sup> He could be blunt and reach a point quickly. He wrote one bishop that the bishop had sent in the worst lot of scraps and trimmings of pork that William had ever seen and instructed him never to do it again.<sup>140</sup>

William was, furthermore, given credit for promoting organ recitals in the Tabernacle.

As they grew older, Harriet spent time in Logan raising a fine garden, and she oversaw the farm and the hired help as she had done when she and William were first married. Grandchildren lived with her from time to time,

and she coddled and loved them. She taught them manners, etiquette, and gardening, as well as moral values, and she encouraged them to choose the right.<sup>141</sup>

At the dawn of the twentieth century, William, acting for the board of trustees of Brigham Young College, attempted to convince John A. Widtsoe, a graduate who held a PhD from a German university, to serve as president of Brigham Young College. Widtsoe, instead, chose to accept the position of director of the Agricultural College's Experiment Station.<sup>142</sup>

Well known in Utah and among eastern businessmen, William was described as "a strong man, resourceful, active and capable of getting through a lot of work. He was a practical man rather than a dreamer, and he always had the respect of those affiliated with him in ecclesiastical or secular activities. A patriot, William was intensely proud of his country and his native state of Virginia."<sup>143</sup> But being active in so many facets of business and Church affairs caused him to have his share of enemies and those who spoke ill of him. William believed that it was more important to know who your enemies were than the fact that you had foes. His enemies, for the most part, were the same men and women who disliked Mormonism.

William, as his life drew to a close, experienced a personality change and became forgetful and difficult to manage. Family members worried about the stress Harriet experienced. Earlier in his life, camped in the Portneuf Valley in Idaho, he had led one of his mares to water. The animal became frightened and kicked William's head and hand. The force of the blow threw him about ten feet and lodged him against the fence with his head between two poles. Stunned and knocked unconscious for a few minutes, he revived and traveled on to Garden Creek where he preached an evening sermon.<sup>144</sup> Perhaps this blow to the head had a belated impact on his personality and memory. On 4 December 1907, after serving twenty-three years as the Church's Presiding Bishop, William was released for reasons of ill health. His release seemed to have a positive effect on his mind, and he became much easier to get along with, giving Harriet some rest.<sup>145</sup> Then, he began suffering from jaundice, came down with a bad cold, and had a sunstroke. He died 2 August 1908.

Speakers at the Salt Lake City services in his honor held in the Assembly Hall on 5 August 1908 included Apostles Orson F. Whitney and Francis M. Lyman, as well as John R. Winder, first counselor in the First Presidency, and Church President Joseph F. Smith. A second funeral was held in the Logan Tabernacle where Moses Thatcher spoke, as did Franklin D. Richards, Charles W. Nibley, who succeeded William as the Presiding Bishop, O. W. Miller, Francis M. Lyman, and Joseph F. Smith. William was buried in the Logan Cemetery. Harriet, his wife of fifty years, lived another decade, dying in 1920.

## Conclusion

Though he was born into a family wealthy enough to own a few slaves, William Bowker Preston was, in many ways, self-made. He received a good elementary school education and good religious training, and he was raised in a Christian home with loving parents. Yet he left Virginia behind in 1852 and traveled alone to California where he was introduced to and accepted the faith of the Latter-day Saints. The Hezekiah Thatcher family won his admiration, and their daughter Harriet won his love.

In Logan, he became a man of influence, a leader, and a community builder. The Logan-Hyde Park Canal, a product of his vision, brought needed water to thirsty soil, which in turn became productive farms. His love of flowers, grass, and tidiness enhanced the city, and his ecclesiastical callings spread his influence throughout northern Utah and southern Idaho. He instructed Church members to plant trees and gardens, clean up their yards, enlarge their schools and meetinghouses, and make their communities beautiful. The building of railroads, roads, and public utilities did not escape his attention, nor did the weightier matters of the law, such as forgiveness, faith, kindness, patience, and love.

His civic service included twelve years as Logan's mayor and more than a decade in the territorial legislature. He was never defeated in an election, and the people knew that he could be trusted and that his actions would reflect community values. More than twenty years as a General Authority placed him in the company of the great men and women of Utah, who considered him a peer.



*William B. and Harriet Ann T. Preston  
Family Marker, Logan, Utah Cemetery.  
Photograph by Alexander L. Baugh.*

Perhaps his letters reveal that he was even more impressive as a man of humor, a doting husband, and a caring father than he was as businessman and cleric. His writings reveal, too, his willingness to sacrifice home and hearth as he responded to a plethora of calls from men he believed were prophets and seers. Sacrifice, consecration, and obedience are revealed over and over again as he played out his life.

He was a man who valued education and assisted in founding two colleges, a high school, and more than a few elementary schools. He valued music, the theater, and good books as well as fine horses, purebred cattle, and good stories. Comfortable buildings that accommodated community needs and that bear the mark of his foresight are still a prominent feature of Logan's landscape.

Though he lived much of his life on Utah's center stage, he is today largely forgotten. Yet those who call Cache Valley home are the beneficiaries of his realized dreams, his hopes, his vision, and his works. Probably more than most of his contemporaries, he is entitled to be remembered.

### Notes

1. *The Journal* (Logan, Utah), 8 August 1908, 1; and *The Deseret Evening News* (Salt Lake City, Utah), 3 August 1908, 1.

2. *The Journal* (Logan, Utah), 8 August 1908, 1.

3. Frank Esshom, *Pioneers and Prominent Men of Utah* (Salt Lake City: Utah Pioneers Book Publishing Company, 1913), 1115, indicates Preston was born in Staunton, Augusta, County. However, Orson F. Whitney, *History of Utah*, 4 vols. (Salt Lake City: George Q. Cannon and Sons, 1892–1904), 4:237; Edward Tullidge, *Tullidge's Histories* (Salt Lake City: *Juvenile Instructor*, 1889), 2:49–54; and Lawrence R. Flake, *Mighty Men of Zion* (Salt Lake City: Karl D. Butler, 1974), 481–82, indicate that Preston was born in Franklin County. Mary Jane Woodger, "William B. Preston," in Michael K. Winder, comp., *Presiding Bishops* (Salt Lake City: Eborn Books, 2003), 70, states that he was born in Haleford, Franklin County.

4. William B. Preston to Harriet Thatcher Preston, 6 May 1867, Special Collections, Milton R. Merrill Library, Utah State University, Logan, Utah. All letters noted in this paper are found in the Special Collections Library at Utah State University.

5. William B. Preston to Harriet Thatcher Preston, 9 August 1857.

6. William B. Preston to Harriet Thatcher Preston, 27 November 1865.

7. William B. Preston to Harriet Thatcher Preston, 27 November 1865.

8. William B. Preston to George W. Thatcher, 9 August 1865.

9. William B. Preston to Harriet Thatcher Preston, 27 November 1865.

10. Donald W. Parry, Daniel C. Peterson, and Stephen D. Ricks, eds., *Revelation, Reason, and Faith: Essays in Honor of Truman G. Madsen* (Provo: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, Brigham Young University, 2002), 5.

11. David McCullough, *Brave Companions* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1992), 91.

12. Woodger, "William B. Preston," 70.

13. Some accounts read that his farm was 320 acres, suggesting he possibly added to

his holdings over the years. See Woodger, "William B. Preston," 71.

14. David Vaught, "After the Gold Rush: Replicating the Rural Midwest in the Sacramento Valley," *The Western Historical Quarterly* 34, no. 4 (winter 2003): 447.

15. Linda Thatcher, "The Thatcher Family: A Case Study in Community and Family Interaction," 3, unpublished paper in possession of the author.

16. William B. Preston to Harriet Thatcher, 13 July 1857.

17. William B. Preston to Harriet Thatcher, 13 July 1857.

18. William B. Preston to Harriet Thatcher, 26 July 1857.

19. Harriet Thatcher to William B. Preston, 5 August 1857.

20. Harriet Thatcher to William B. Preston, 5 August 1857.

21. William B. Preston to Harriet Thatcher, 9 August 1857.

22. William B. Preston to Harriet Thatcher, 23 August 1857.

23. Whitney, *History of Utah*, 4:238–39.

24. Tullidge, *Tullidge's Histories*, 2:50.

25. William B. Preston to Harriet Thatcher Preston, 3 March 1859.

26. On one occasion, Wilford Woodruff gave William a blessing in which he said, "The Fulness of the bishopric was awaiting thee in Zion while thou wast on the way to California though thou knew it not. Thou wilt be numbered in that quorum in the morning of the resurrection. Great will be thy reward." See Woodger, "William B. Preston," 70.

27. Thatcher, "The Thatcher Family," 5.

28. William B. Preston to Harriet Preston, 1 September 1860.

29. William B. Preston to Harriet Thatcher Preston, 6 January 1862.

30. William B. Preston to Harriet Thatcher Preston, 15 December 1862.

31. William B. Preston to Harriet Thatcher Preston, 13 January 1862.

32. William B. Preston to Harriet Thatcher Preston, 4 May 1863; 13 June 1863; 2 July 1863; and 30 July 1863.

33. William B. Preston to Harriet Thatcher Preston, 4 May 1863.

34. William B. Preston to Harriet Thatcher Preston, 25 July 1866.

35. William B. Preston to Harriet Thatcher Preston, 25 July 1866.

36. William B. Preston to Harriet Thatcher Preston, 1 July 1864; and 25 July 1866.

37. William B. Preston to Harriet Thatcher Preston, 12 December 1864.

38. Harriet Thatcher Preston to William B. Preston, 25 December 1864.

39. William B. Preston to Harriet Thatcher Preston, 30 December 1865.

40. William B. Preston to Harriet Thatcher Preston, 4 January 1865.

41. William B. Preston to Harriet Thatcher Preston, 27 August 1865.

42. William B. Preston to Harriet Thatcher Preston, 8 August 1865; and 27 August 1865.

43. William B. Preston, Diary, 7 August 1865, Special Collections, Milton R. Merrill Library, Utah State University, Logan, Utah.

44. Preston, Diary, 9 August 1865.

45. Preston, Diary, 19 August 1865.

46. Preston, Diary, 25 August 1865.

47. William B. Preston to Harriet Thatcher Preston, 27 August 1865.

48. William B. Preston to Harriet Thatcher Preston, 27 December 1865.

49. Preston, Diary, 27 October 1865.

50. Preston, Diary, 4 January 1866.

51. Preston, Diary, 5 December 1865.

52. Preston, Diary, 27 December 1865.

53. William B. Preston to Harriet Thatcher Preston, 27 December 1865; and

Preston, Diary, 25 December 1865.

54. Preston, Diary, 9 January 1866.
55. William B. Preston to Harriet Thatcher Preston, 17 January 1866.
56. Preston, Diary, 2 April 1866.
57. Preston, Diary, 16 April 1866.
58. Preston, Diary, 15 October 1866.
59. William B. Preston to Harriet Thatcher Preston, 17 January 1866.
60. William B. Preston to Harriet Thatcher Preston, 17 January 1866.
61. William B. Preston to Harriet Thatcher Preston, 15 February 1866.
62. William B. Preston to Harriet Thatcher Preston, 22 April 1866.
63. William B. Preston to Harriet Thatcher Preston, 10 July 1866.
64. William B. Preston to Harriet Thatcher Preston, 14 September 1866.
65. William B. Preston to Harriet Thatcher Preston, 14 September 1866.
66. William B. Preston to Harriet Thatcher Preston, 6 October 1866.
67. William B. Preston to Harriet Thatcher Preston, 6 October 1866.
68. William B. Preston to Harriet Thatcher Preston, 16 November 1866.
69. William B. Preston to Harriet Thatcher Preston, 18 January 1867.
70. William B. Preston to Harriet Thatcher Preston, 18 January 1867.
71. William B. Preston to Harriet Thatcher Preston, 23 July 1867.
72. William B. Preston to Harriet Thatcher Preston, 23 July 1867.
73. William B. Preston to Harriet Thatcher Preston, 23 July 1867.
74. William B. Preston to Harriet Thatcher Preston, 13 November 1867.
75. William B. Preston to Harriet Thatcher Preston, 13 November 1867.
76. William B. Preston to Harriet Thatcher Preston, 27 December 1867.
77. William B. Preston to Harriet Thatcher Preston, 17 January 1868.
78. William B. Preston to Harriet Thatcher Preston, 7 February 1868.
79. William B. Preston to Harriet Thatcher Preston, 4 April 1868.
80. William B. Preston to Harriet Thatcher Preston, 10 June 1868; and Harriet Thatcher Preston to William B. Preston, 17 May 1868.
81. William B. Preston to Harriet Thatcher Preston, 10 June 1868.
82. William B. Preston to Harriet Thatcher Preston, 28 July 1868.
83. William B. Preston to Harriet Thatcher Preston, 11 August 1868.
84. William B. Preston to Harriet Thatcher Preston, 22 October 1868.
85. William B. Preston to Harriet Thatcher Preston, 5 February 1870.
86. Harriet Thatcher Preston, Diary, 19 December 1872, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah.
87. Harriet Thatcher Preston, Diary, 21 February 1873.
88. Woodger incorrectly states that Preston was Logan's first mayor. See Woodger, "William B. Preston," 75. However, that honor goes to Alvin Crockett, who served as the city's leader from 1866–1870 when Preston was elected.
89. Charles O. Card, Diary, 10 November 1880, copy in possession of author.
90. Warren J. Richards, "Pathway to Promise," unpublished paper, 1974, Special Collections, Utah State University, Logan, Utah.
91. William B. Preston to Harriet Thatcher Preston, 3 May 1864.
92. William B. Preston to Harriet Thatcher Preston, 12 December 1864.
93. William B. Preston, Diary, 2 December 1865.
94. William B. Preston to Harriet Thatcher Preston, 11 March 1866.
95. William B. Preston to Harriet Thatcher Preston, 22 April 1866.
96. William B. Preston to Harriet Thatcher Preston, 22 April 1866.
97. William B. Preston to Harriet Thatcher Preston, 3 June 1866.

98. William B. Preston to Harriet Thatcher Preston, 5 August 1866.
99. William B. Preston to Harriet Thatcher Preston, 5 August 1866.
100. William B. Preston to Harriet Thatcher Preston, 6 October 1866.
101. William B. Preston to Harriet Thatcher Preston, 26 October 1866.
102. William B. Preston to Harriet Thatcher Preston, 26 October 1866.
103. William B. Preston to Harriet Thatcher Preston, 26 October 1866.
104. William B. Preston to Harriet Thatcher Preston, 11 February 1867.
105. William B. Preston to Harriet Thatcher Preston, 6 December 1866.
106. William B. Preston to Harriet Thatcher Preston, 29 March 1867.
107. William B. Preston to Harriet Thatcher Preston, 29 March 1867.
108. William B. Preston to Harriet Thatcher Preston, 29 June 1867.
109. William B. Preston to Harriet Thatcher Preston, 13 July 1867.
110. William B. Preston to Harriet Thatcher Preston, 13 August 1867.
111. William B. Preston to Harriet Thatcher Preston, 4 October 1867.
112. William B. Preston to Harriet Thatcher Preston, 7 February 1868.
113. Luna Young Thatcher found this marriage strange because William, in her opinion, could hardly support the family he already had. Thatcher, "The Thatcher Family," 12.
114. *The Journal* (Logan, Utah), 18 December 1907.
115. William B. Preston to Harriet Thatcher Preston, 3 July 1863.
116. William B. Preston to Harriet Thatcher Preston, 8 June 1864.
117. William B. Preston to Harriet Thatcher Preston, 8 July 1864.
118. William B. Preston to Harriet Thatcher Preston, 4 July 1865.
119. William B. Preston to Harriet Thatcher Preston, 7 July 1865.
120. William B. Preston to Harriet Thatcher Preston, 27 November 1865.
121. William B. Preston to Harriet Thatcher Preston, 27 November 1865.
122. William B. Preston to Harriet Thatcher Preston, 27 December 1865.
123. William B. Preston to Harriet Thatcher Preston, 11 March 1866.
124. William B. Preston to Harriet Thatcher Preston, 3 June 1866.
125. William B. Preston to Harriet Thatcher Preston, 22 April 1866.
126. William B. Preston to Harriet Thatcher Preston, 25 December 1866.
127. William B. Preston to Harriet Thatcher Preston, 4 October 1867.
128. William B. Preston to Harriet Thatcher Preston, 9 March 1867.
129. William B. Preston to Harriet Thatcher Preston, 13 August 1867.
130. William B. Preston to Harriet Thatcher Preston, 14 October 1867.
131. *The Herald Journal* (Logan, Utah), 15 August 1907, 1; and *Deseret News* (Salt Lake City, Utah), 17 December 1907.
132. Joseph F. Smith to William B. and Harriet Preston, 12 January 1908.
133. "Moses Thatcher's mission to the Wind River Indian Reservation," unpublished manuscript, Marriott Library, University of Utah, Salt Lake City, Utah.
134. *The Journal* (Logan, Utah), 9 April 1884, 3.
135. Ronald W. Walker, "Qualities That Count," *BYU Studies* 43, no. 1 (2004):105–6.
136. *Deseret News 1989–1990 Church Almanac* (Salt Lake City: *Deseret News*, 1989), 66–67.
137. Woodger, "William B. Preston," 84.
138. William B. Preston to Allie Preston, 19 October 1893.
139. Woodger, "William B. Preston," 80.
140. Woodger, "William B. Preston," 81–82.
141. Harriet Thatcher Preston to Mary Preston, 14 April 1891.

142. Alan K. Parish, *John A. Widtsoe: A Biography* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2003), 119–20; and William B. Preston to Harriet Thatcher Preston, 18 June 1900.

143. *The Journal* (Logan, Utah), 4 August 1908, 1.

144. Charles O. Card, Diary, 26 November 1883.

145. Moses Thatcher to Harriet Thatcher Preston, 28 May 1908.