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Mormon Passage of George D. Watt

Ronald G. Watt

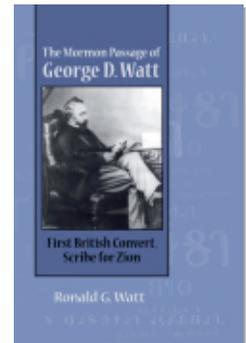
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PREFACE

I started this endeavor more than three decades ago, researching and writing about the life of an ancestor who intrigued me. Driven by curiosity, my search extended to sources at the LDS Church Archives where I worked. “Journal History,” primarily a newspaper-clipping file, with its index proved a wonderful place to begin. I expanded to other sources like the *Millennial Star* and some church records.

I had earlier started this quest by reading a small red volume, a biography by Ida Watt Stringham and Dora Dutson Flack, entitled *England’s First “Mormon” Convert: The Biography of George Darling Watt*, which gave me an outline of my ancestor’s life but nothing more. The more information I found, the more I doubted the authors’ interpretations. For a while, I did not believe that the “Little George” stories, written by George Watt in the *Juvenile Instructor*, were true and for a short time even wondered whether my George was the author. After I completed a thorough analysis of those writings, however, I became convinced he was the author, and the stories were the autobiography of his youth. I also wondered if he had later gone to live with his grandparents in Scotland as his obituary says, but a discovery of shorthand letters has now proven this fact correct.

After thirty years of interest in this man, I have many people to thank, even some I may not remember. After I finished my first book-length manuscript, A. J. Simmonds, Chad Orton, and Ronald K. Esplin critiqued that early draft. I have benefited from having colleagues and friends show me sources because they knew I was working on Watt’s biography. W. Randall Dixon, Michael Landon, Chad Foulger, Jay Burrup, Scott Christensen, Linda Haslem, Melvin Bashore, Pauline Musig, Steven Sorensen, William W. Slaughter, April Williamsen, Jeffrey O. Johnson, Clint Christensen, and William Hartley all provided me with materials. Russell Taylor, Larry Draper, and K. Haybron Adams kindly helped me at the L. Tom Perry Special Collections at Brigham Young University, and Ronald E. Romig found some material at the Community of Christ Archives. Yvonne Christensen helped

me find information at the Davis County Courthouse, and Linda Ross gave me information from the Kaysville Cemetery database about three little Watt girls who died.

I appreciate the support of administrators and friends who encouraged and listened to me: Donald T. Schmidt, Jeff Anderson, Glenn N. Rowe, Blake Miller, Matthew Heiss, Ronald W. Walker, Richard E. Turley Jr., Linda Haslam, Jim Kimball, and Richard Jensen. I will always be grateful for the support of Leonard J. Arrington, who in his inimitable way helped me and all others interested in Mormon history. Ronald O. Barney, David Whittaker, Gene Sessions, Lavina Fielding Anderson, Walter Jones, Polly Aird, and Ben Bennion read all or some chapters. Will Bagley showed me two letters, held by a cousin of mine, which led me to court cases at the Utah State Archives, and I thank its staff, especially Alan Blain Barnett. Ardis Parshall showed me Watt's writings about practical agriculture and economic theory in Salt Lake's *Semi-Weekly Telegraph*, and without that input, I could never have made him a complete person. Barbara Bannon and John Alley contributed their editing skills.

I also owe a great debt to LaJean Purcell Carruth, whose ability to read shorthand provided me with transcriptions of Watt's diary and letters that I knew nothing about. Shawna Stroebel gave me insight and found sources on Watt's early life, and Robert Holbrook helped. William (Bill) Sanders at the Layton Heritage Museum helped me with sources on his later life. Harris Adams went above the call of duty by traveling to the Davis County Courthouse in Farmington and doing some of my research. He also took me to the geographical sites of Watt's homes and the schoolhouse his children attended. Leon R. and Clara Jeppesen allowed me to photograph Watt's Volcanic lever-action repeating pistol. Claude and Linda Jeppesen, some other cousins, brought some of Watt's shorthand notes to my attention. Derek Farnes drew the maps for the book. Thanks to Peter Witbeck for sending me a photograph of Watt that I had never seen before. I thank all of these people for their help. Without those sources, this biography would be poorer and much less complete.

To the four members of my family who "volunteered" for the George D. Watt committee—Marva and Ralph Watt, Sharm Stevenson, and Suzy Sutherland—I can never show enough appreciation. They helped me many times, showing me errors, always supporting me, and sometimes acting as my cheerleaders when I became discouraged. I would also like to express my thanks to my good wife, Barbara, who listened to my long stories of Watt's life. She calmly stood by me, even when Watt was the only subject on my mind. To these five people, I dedicate this book.

George D. Watt penetrated my heart and soul. I have championed his achievements and wept at his failures. He was so superhuman at times and so fragile at other periods in his life. To me his life is a tragedy, and yet I

have defended him. He so wanted acceptance and love, but he sometimes made decisions that pushed people away from him. His wives stood by him, and when he died, three of them stayed in the community, where they suffered much mental and emotional anguish. Only Martha remarried and left the troubled glens of Kaysville to return to little Manti with her second husband.

Even though I have had the help of many, the mistakes in this book are mine alone.

