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## Mormon Passage of George D. Watt

Ronald G. Watt

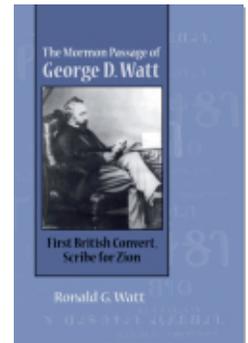
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## A MAN FOR ALL SEASONS

### INTELLECTUAL ACTIVITIES

Demand and supply are the great foundations of commerce; they affect the price of articles among all people, whether savage or civilized. Money capital does much in governing or disturbing them, in making them equal or unequal, according as it is used by capitalists; but intelligence and union can effect more in maintaining an equilibrium between them than money.

“A Talk,” *Semi-Weekly Telegraph*, October 24, 1867

**T**he 1850s in Utah saw the organization of a plethora of cultural and intellectual organizations in which Watt participated. Because of these groups, he expanded his mind and began to think beyond religion. He learned about governments, wars, scientific advancements, drama, music, and agriculture. He became a member of this intellectual and cultural elite and closely associated with some of the greatest minds in the church. During this period, he truly became a self-made man.<sup>1</sup>

One of the first of these organizations started on January 8, 1855, when Brigham Young met with a committee of Wilford Woodruff; Robert L. Campbell, who later became territorial superintendent of schools; and several others to discuss the possibility of organizing a society to diffuse all knowledge and science, called the Universal Scientific Society. Almost a

1. For the best discussion of these early cultural and intellectual groups, see Joseph Heinerman, “Early Utah Pioneer Cultural Societies,” *Utah Historical Quarterly* 47 (Winter 1979): 70–89.

month later, the group had its first formal meeting and elected Woodruff as president, Campbell as clerk, and Watt as assistant clerk. Most of these men were either members of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles or clerks in President Young's office. Thus began a learning experience that was meant to educate them on nature, science, travel, government, and many other subjects. From their members, they learned about architecture, home manufacture, and theology, among other subjects. Watt lectured to them about the Deseret Alphabet as his contribution for membership.<sup>2</sup> They also had an orchestra that played at their meetings. Unfortunately, the society did not last a year. Sometime after October 20, it ended for unknown reasons.<sup>3</sup>

On February 6, 1855, the Polysophical Society organized with Lorenzo Snow as its president. Samuel W. Richards wrote in a letter to the *Millennial Star* that "Brother Lorenzo has a select party which meets at his Hall once a week, to continue through the winter; social improvement and to cultivate a taste for literature and refinement the object."<sup>4</sup> Members enjoyed dramatic productions in French, Italian, and, of course, English. Watt taught them about the Deseret Alphabet, and Orson Pratt lectured to them on the heavens.<sup>5</sup> They also had music, consisting of "about half-a-dozen violins and a bass, piano, guitar, clarinets and flutes, and that most lovely melody which sometimes gets blown out of a Scotch bagpipe."<sup>6</sup> Henry Naisbitt, one of the directors, wrote, "This was the first nucleus of a varied intellectual character in the Church, and it speedily drew toward itself the lion's share of that latent talent which, through the gathering, gravitated to Salt Lake City."<sup>7</sup> The society came to an abrupt end in October 1856, when Jedediah Grant, second counselor in the First Presidency and an honorary member, said that the Polysophical Society was a "stink in his nostrils," for it had an adulterous spirit.<sup>8</sup>

Next Brigham Young founded the Deseret Theological Institute, another short-lived organization, at the April General Conference in 1855. This group declared that it was "the extension of those principles of light and truth which we have received through the instrumentality of the Holy Priesthood."<sup>9</sup> Young spoke once on knowing the "only wise God and Jesus

2. Universal Scientific Society, Minute Book, 1855–56, pp. 19–36, holograph, Church Archives, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City (hereafter cited as LDS Church Archives). Watt's presentation on the Deseret Alphabet occurred on June 23, 1855, but he is mentioned on many dates as either reporting or giving prayers.

3. Samuel W. Richards, Journal, October 20, 1855, holograph, LDS Church Archives.

4. "Extracts of a Letter from Elder S. W. Richards—The Legislature—Social Meeting," *Millennial Star* 17 (April 7, 1855): 254–55.

5. *Ibid.*

6. *Ibid.*

7. Henry W. Naisbitt, "Polysophical and Mutual," *Improvement Era* 2 (1899): 744–45.

8. Hannah T. King, Journal, October 8, 1856, holograph, LDS Church Archives.

9. "Preamble and Constitution of the Deseret Theological Institute," *Millennial Star* 17 (August 18, 1855): 515.

Christ whom He has sent.”<sup>10</sup> Again Watt contributed by lecturing on the Deseret Alphabet. This group ended because of the Utah War. Watt also became the clerk and reporter for the Deseret Typographical Association, a smaller group than the others. These men were interested in printing books but also tried to cultivate refinement and social improvement. The association had its last recorded meeting on July 16, 1859.<sup>11</sup>

The first cultural group in Utah with music and theater in mind was the Musical and Dramatic Company. The theater started in Salt Lake City during the winter of 1850–51 with the presentation of the play *Robert Macaire* held in the Bowery. On February 20, 1852, the Deseret Dramatic Association, the successor to the Musical and Dramatic Company, was organized with Alonzo H. Raleigh, the bishop of the Nineteenth Ward, as president. Brigham Young supported it and often attended the performances. At the end of March 1852, Watt joined the association. Some of the members’ first discussions centered on where they could perform their plays. Because they could not use the Tabernacle, they built the Social Hall, located just south of Temple Square. Heber C. Kimball conducted the dedicatory meeting on January 1, 1853, and Apostle Amasa Lyman offered the dedicatory prayer.<sup>12</sup>

Most of the plays were sentimental comedies or melodramas. It is possible that many of them were locally written, for it is difficult to find any information about them. President Brigham Young loved the theater and insisted that the plays be uplifting. The association members usually presented two plays at each performance. The main production was always first, followed usually by a farce. On January 7, 1853, they performed *Robert Macaire* and *His Last Legg*. The Deseret Dramatic Association employed artists to paint the scenery, which helped them economically in the new city. Children under the age of six were not admitted.<sup>13</sup>

On January 17, 1853, association members performed *Don Caesar de Bazan* as their first play in the Social Hall. On January 21, 1853, the handbill publicized a melodrama in three acts, again entitled *Robert Macaire*. Then

10. Richards, Journal, April 23, 1855.

11. See Heinerman, “Early Utah Pioneer Cultural Societies.” For the Deseret Typographical Society, see “Journal History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints,” July 16, 1859, p. 2, LDS Church Archives.

12. Deseret Dramatic Association, minutes, 1851–64, holograph, Salt Lake Theater Collection, LDS Church Archives. There are a number of sources about the theater in early Utah. The best overall study is an unpublished paper, Harold I. Hansen, “A History and Influence of the Mormon Theatre from 1839–1869,” Brigham Young University, 1967, copy in author’s possession. For a complete book on the subject, see George D. Pyper, *The Romance of an Old Playhouse* (Salt Lake City: Seagull Press, 1928). For a good article by one of the major participants, see Philip Margetts, “Early Theatricals in Utah,” *Juvenile Instructor* 38 (May 15, 1903): 289–93. For a book written early in the twentieth century, see John S. Lindsay, *The Mormons and the Theatre* (Salt Lake City, 1905).

13. Deseret Dramatic Association, minutes, 1851–64.



Private Collection

George D. Watt ca. 1860

they presented the two-act “laughable farce” *The Irish Lion*, which included G. D. Watt in a supporting role. On February 2, the Social Hall performers presented the “celebrated comedy in three acts,” the *Serious Family*. After it concluded, the crowd enjoyed a community sing while the stagehands prepared for the next play, which was “the laughable play, in two acts” entitled *Irish Attorney*, with James Ferguson, Horace K. Whitney, Leo Hawkins, Joseph M. Simmons, and others, including Watt in a minor role again.<sup>14</sup> Because of the lack of documentation, it is unclear how many more plays he acted in.

The theater group continued to perform plays until the Utah War, when the productions ceased until 1859. The lack of a theater encouraged Philip Margetts, one of the leading actors, to perform plays with a group at the home of Henry Bowring. Watt probably did not participate in these performances. In 1861 the Deseret Dramatic Association once again began to perform at the Social Hall. During that year, Brigham Young announced the construction of a new theater on the corner of State and First South

14. Deseret Dramatic Association, handbills, January 21; February 2, 1853, Church History Library, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City (hereafter cited as Church History Library).

Streets.<sup>15</sup> The building, dedicated on March 6, 1862, could accommodate fifteen hundred people for any production.

Watt involved himself again with the theater. By 1862 he was the secretary of the Deseret Dramatic Association. He also performed in the theater but not as an actor. The theater of that day always had an orchestra. David O. Calder, who was a fellow clerk in President Young's office, knew that the orchestra needed a viola player and probably encouraged Watt to play. So Watt, who had learned the violin already, purchased a viola and began practicing. He was ready when the theater opened. George Sims, another clerk in the office, in writing to William Staines commented that "our orchestral practices deserve much credit, among the most active of the musicians are D. O. Calder, Br. [Charles J.] Thomas [the director] & G. D. Watt. The orchestra numbers about 24 and their music equals in quality the provincial Theatres of England, and the minor ones of London."<sup>16</sup>

The orchestra first performed on March 6, 1862, the day when Daniel H. Wells dedicated the theater. Thomas, many years later, mentioned that the audience applauded them enthusiastically. He said that at first "the orchestra was a crude organization, but the more rehearsals and the more they played, the orchestra became one of the chief features of the theater." In 1865 George Careless reorganized the orchestra and retained only five members of the original group. Watt was not one of them.<sup>17</sup> However, he had participated in the debut of the finest orchestra in pioneer Utah—a major accomplishment for someone who had had no contact with music in his early life.<sup>18</sup>

Watt also joined Calder's Deseret Musical Association, a combined orchestra and chorus. The first concert the group performed was held on December 9, 1862, in the Tabernacle.<sup>19</sup> During the 1860s, this group performed Haydn's *Creation*, Mozart's Twelfth Mass, and Handel's *Messiah*.<sup>20</sup> George D. Watt truly proved himself to be a man for all seasons.

Watt enjoyed reading to learn more about the world, although no catalog of his library exists. He read books on many subjects. He ordered books through David Calder, who sent for them from the publisher Dick and

15. See Hansen, "A History and Influence of the Mormon Theatre."

16. George Sims to William C. Staines, February 21, 1862, vol. 6, pp. 887–91, holograph, Letterpress Copybooks, Brigham Young Papers, LDS Church Archives; George D. Watt to Mr. Golightly, December 28, 1862, shorthand, holograph, George D. Watt Papers, LDS Church Archives (transcribed by LaJean Carruth, 2005). Br. Thomas was C. J. Thomas, the orchestra director.

17. "Members of the Theater Orchestra Fifty Years Ago," *Deseret Evening News*, March 2, 1912, sec. 2, p. 3.

18. Deseret Dramatic Association, minutes, 1851–64; also see Thomas G. Alexander, *Utah, the Right Place* (Salt Lake City: Gibbs Smith, 2003), chap. 6.

19. See "First concert of the Deseret Musical Association," handbill, December 9, 1862, Church History Library.

20. Alexander, *Utah, the Right Place*, 151–52.

Fitzgerald in New York City. In November 1859, Watt received a book entitled *Inquire Within* by Robert Kemp Philip. Its longer title is *Inquire Within for Anything You Want to Know*, or, *Over Three Thousand Seven Hundred Facts Worth Knowing*. It contains all types of short instructions on almost any subject, including definitions of the laws of chess and directions on the way to swim, the art of conversation, behavior at dinner, and taking care of scratches.<sup>21</sup>

In January 1860, Watt ordered *The Sociable*, *The Corner Cupboard*, and *Live and Learn*. George Arnold's *The Sociable* or *One Thousand and One Home Amusements* has a subtitle that reads, "Acting proverbs, dramatic charades, acting charades or drawing-room pantomimes, parlor games, parlor magic, mechanical puzzles," and many more.<sup>22</sup> Robert Kemp Philip's *The Corner Cupboard* is another fact book for everybody. *Live and Learn: A Guide for All Who Wish to Speak and Write Correctly* is a grammar book with such chapter titles as "Rules for the Use of Capitals and Italics," "Rules for Spelling," and "On the Participle." Watt used *Live and Learn* for the speeches he recorded. It became a great source for helping him transcribe the shorthand sermons into good English. These volumes are like encyclopedias and assemble a wide range of information. They became the reference volumes in Watt's library. They are probably only a few of the ones he purchased, but there is no record of the others. Watt also regularly took the *Deseret News* newspaper.<sup>23</sup>

According to family tradition, Watt was also an artist. His grandchildren used to admire his art in his home in Kaysville.<sup>24</sup> Franklin D. Richards mentioned that Watt cut out his silhouette when he was on his mission to England in 1848, a skill he enjoyed practicing the rest of his life. Watt used dark paper and scissors to create the person's profile.

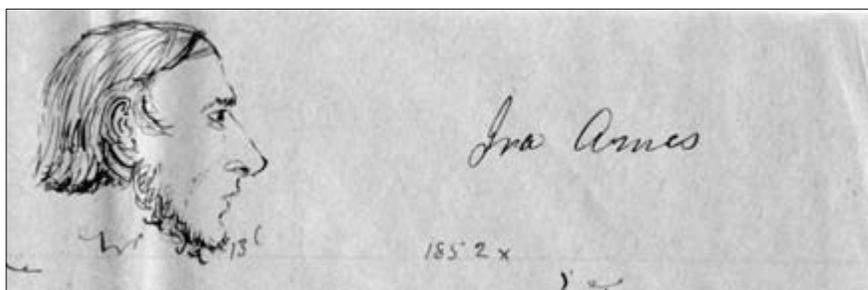
None of Watt's silhouettes or artwork have survived. Some drawings, though, have turned up in a completely unlikely place: his shorthand notebooks. Presumably when Watt had time, he sketched the likenesses of some of the people sitting in the audience. Altogether there are thirty-two sketches in his notebooks. Many of them were drawn hastily, and some are cartoon-like drawings or caricatures. Most of the sketches are only bust length, but a few extend to the waist. Most of them are profiles, especially of the right side. Watt identified only three of the drawings: Ira Ames, Lorenzo Snow, and William Wine Phelps. A few of the others are recognizable, however.

21. Robert Kemp Philip, *Inquire Within for Anything You Want to Know* (New York: Dick and Fitzgerald, 1857).

22. George Arnold, *The Sociable* or *One Thousand and One Home Amusements* (New York: Dick and Fitzgerald, 1858).

23. David O. Calder to Dick and Fitzgerald, November 3, 1859; January 19, 1860, David Calder Letterpress Copybook, LDS Church Archives; Robert Kemp Philip, *The Corner Cupboard* or *Facts for Everybody* (London, 1858); *Live and Learn: A Guide for All Who Wish to Speak and Write Correctly* (New York: Dick and Fitzgerald, 1856). Calder lists each person and the books they requested, that he is ordering for them from Dick and Fitzgerald, a publisher and bookstore in New York City.

24. Interviews by author with George D. Watt's grandchildren.



Courtesy of LDS Church Archives

Ira Ames drawing

Watt has two drawings on the inside cover of the second notebook in 1851. One is just a face with a beaklike nose and curly hair. The other is a waist-length portrait of a man with a Victorian dress jacket and bow tie. His hair is long, and he has a light beard; it is possibly Willard Richards. In 1852 Watt drew a right profile, which he identified as Ira Ames. It shows a man with a long thin nose, a beard, and what appears to be a thinning front hairline. In back his hair comes down to the bottom of his ears.

On July 24, 1852, Watt began a notebook that has three drawings. One person is Brigham Young, although he is not identified. The face is outlined with dark ink, the nose is almost hawkish, and the hair comes down almost to his shoulders. He is wearing a proper Victorian dress jacket with a high-collared shirt. In October 1852, in a book entirely filled with an account of Parley P. Pratt's South American mission, Watt sketched his best full-face drawing. He drew two intersecting lines—one horizontal and the other vertical—and designed the face around them. The vertical line extends through the middle of the forehead, nose, mouth, and chin, while the horizontal one cuts across the top of the eyes. This person is balding with long sideburns and has a beard down his face and under his jaw.

In the next book, which contains sermons by Orson Hyde and Parley Pratt, Watt drew two right-profile sketches in pen and ink that are among his finest. The top one looks like a Neanderthal man with a short neck, a full head of straight hair, sideburns, and a beard. The bottom one depicts a balding man with hair that appears curly in the back. He also has long sideburns that run into his beard that features a tuft of hair beneath his lip. This person is probably Heber C. Kimball.

Finally, in November 1853, Watt sketched the left profile of a person. This individual has a long sideburn but no beard. His hair appears to be of moderate length, but the most distinguishing features are his protruding lower lip and his glasses, which are pushed up on his forehead. The light frames and temples are stretched to their limits, and a portion of the glasses is floating above his head.

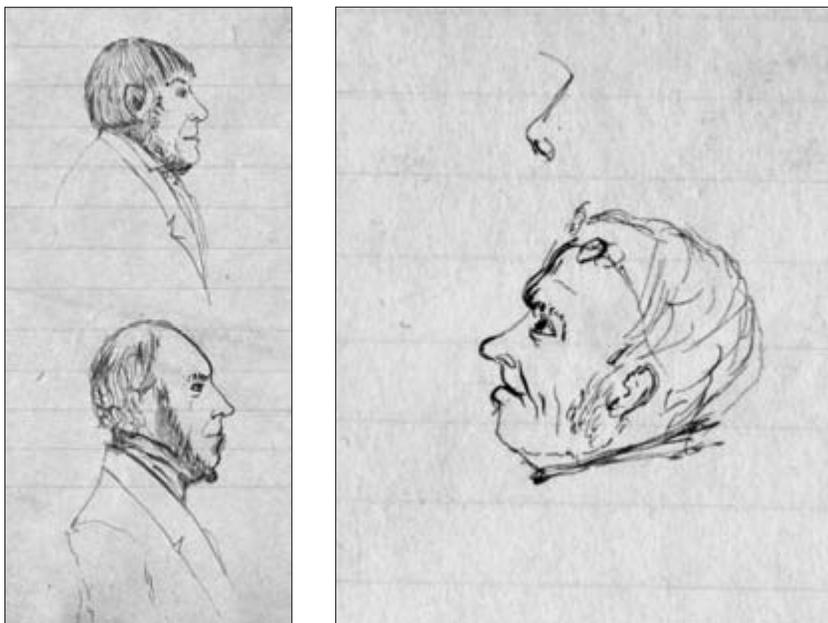


Both courtesy of LDS Church Archives

*Left:* Brigham Young drawing; *right:* unknown person, possibly Albert Carrington

After November 1853, Watt's notebooks have no drawings until 1865, when he sketched a poorly drawn face that looks like Ben Franklin. There are also a few pencil sketches on some of the dark covers of his notebooks. The most interesting is labeled "L. Snow asleep." There are two views of Snow: a right profile and a front view showing him with both eyes shut. In the profile, his chin is resting on his chest, and he is leaning back with eyes closed in the front view. In 1867 Watt drew on the cover of one of his notebooks the face of a man who looks like Abraham Lincoln but was probably Daniel H. Wells. He shows the curly hair, the hawk nose, and the beard that covers his chin. It is one of his best sketches. Next to it is a pencil sketch of a person with long hair, a mustache, a receding chin, and a hat on his head, which is only outlined. On this image are the letters W.W.P., identifying William Wine Phelps. The next year he made a pencil drawing of a man with a rather large, pudgy head in the midst of his shorthand notes. The man is clean shaven with a long nose and glasses and is possibly George A. Smith. Above him is the small head of a woman with a bonnet, the only female in the notebooks. There are a few more drawings; the last is dated April 5, 1868.<sup>25</sup>

25. All of these are in the George D. Watt Papers, LDS Church Archives. Most of the drawings are at the beginning of the collection or at the end of the collection. Maybe there were other drawings, but they have been lost.



Both courtesy of LDS Church Archives

*Left:* Neanderthal man drawing and probable drawing of Heber C. Kimball, 1853; *right:* unknown person

Sometime in the 1850s, Watt's interests turned to agriculture. He became the corresponding secretary of the fruit association, called the Pomological Society and later the Deseret Horticultural Society. It later merged into the Deseret Agricultural and Manufacturing Society (DAM), which emphasized agriculture more than manufacturing. His work with the society consumed a good portion of his time. This organization was the forerunner of the Deseret territorial and Utah State Fairs. The society appointed him the corresponding secretary and reporter at its organizational meeting in April 1856. The legislature elected the officers and Board of Directors. Wilford Woodruff served as president of the board from 1856 to 1861. The DAM encouraged the growth of plants and animals by disseminating information about them. The society also promoted better breeds of farm animals and encouraged farmers to try new sheep.<sup>26</sup>

In June 1856, Watt sent a letter to various bishops asking them to become members of the society for a fee of two dollars and act as agents in their local wards.<sup>27</sup> The wards organized an auxiliary branch of the DAM within

26. For a good discussion of the Deseret Agricultural and Manufacturing Society, see Thomas G. Alexander, *Things in Heaven and Earth: The Life and Times of Wilford Woodruff, a Mormon Prophet* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1991), 207–9.

27. "Journal History," June 19, 1856.



Both courtesy of LDS Church Archives

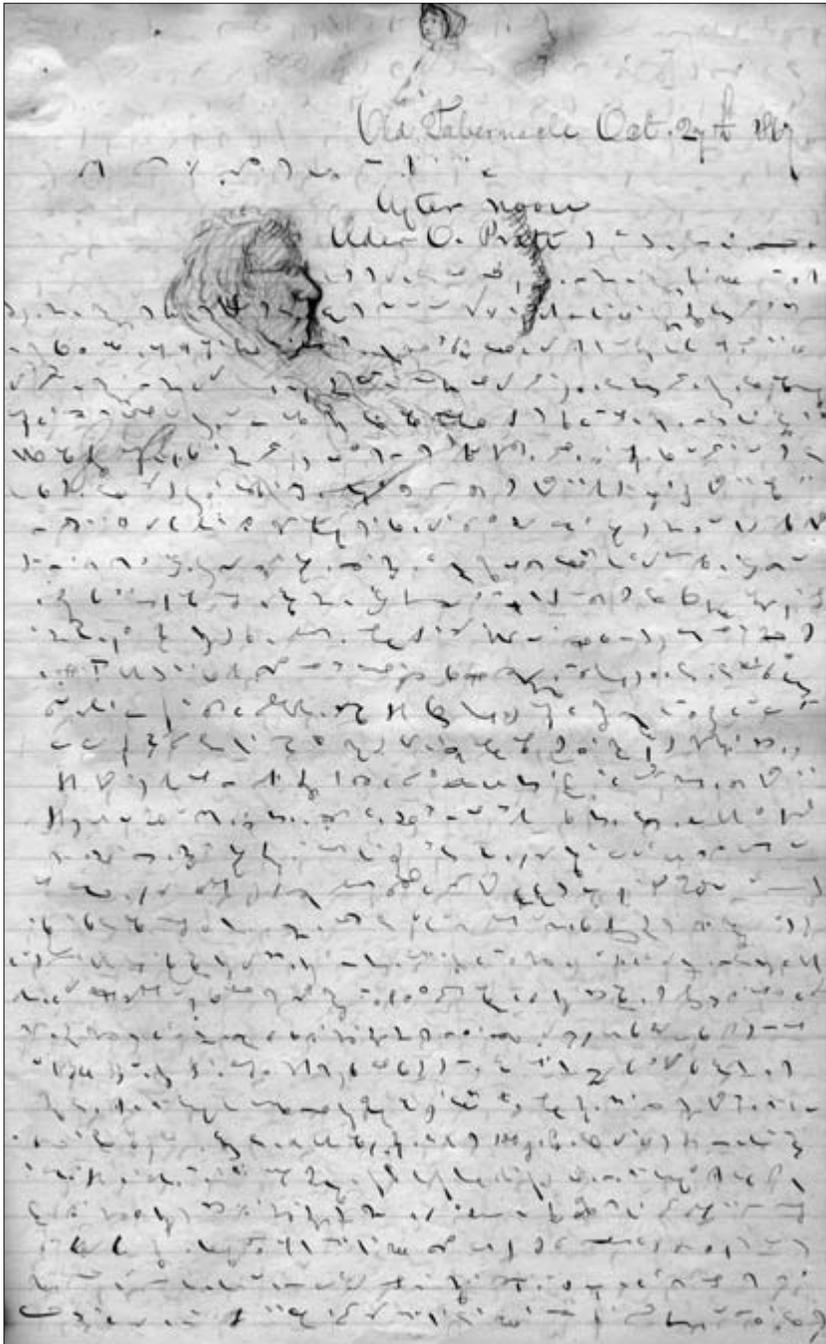
*Left:* L. Snow asleep, 1865; *right:* Daniel H. Wells and W. W. Phelps, 1867

their boundaries. These local groups held ward fairs and meetings, where members of the parent organization, including Wilford Woodruff, Parley P. Pratt, and Watt, encouraged the new members to grow or produce items in Utah.<sup>28</sup> It was during this time that Watt, using the educational information from this society, began to grow bigger and better fruits and vegetables.

Watt continued to use the principles he learned from the DAM throughout his life. He sent for seeds all over the United States. He raised animals and experimented with new crops. He especially became fascinated with silkworms and sericulture. He also spent time on his property growing gardens. His gardens were his hobby, avocation, and even passion. He raised most of the produce that the family needed. He probably had gained an appreciation of gardens in England. He used what he learned from the DAM to make them better.

Watt entered his produce and animals in the annual DAM fairs. In October 1855, he brought four large peaches into the historian's office with the biggest one measuring eight and a half inches around. He called the peach Willard's Mammoth because Willard Richards had planted the tree. Watt divided the peaches among the staff and gave the stones to Thomas Bullock to plant. In 1858 the *Deseret News* reported "some good savory cabbages were brought into the Deseret State Fair by George D. Watt which attracted considerable notice; they were large and solid and good as we

28. J. Cecil Alter, *Utah: the Storied Domain*, 3 vols. (Chicago: American Historical Society, Inc., 1932), 1:220.



Courtesy of LDS Church Archives

Possible portrait of George A. Smith and an unidentified woman in Watt's shorthand notes, 1867

have ever seen.”<sup>29</sup> He also displayed his tomatoes, corn, parsnips, and other vegetables at the fair.<sup>30</sup> He sold radish seed to the other employees at the office. In 1859 the *Deseret News* reported that a hog raised by Watt weighed 455 pounds.<sup>31</sup>

He was always willing to try new agricultural products. In 1860 he exhibited cigars made from the tobacco he raised on his land.<sup>32</sup> The *Daily Evening Express*, printed in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, published a story about his tobacco and cigars.<sup>33</sup> Also in 1860 Watt advertised for sale a number of seeds that he had received from France. They included many varieties of sugar cane, cabbage, brussels sprouts, cauliflower, broccoli, turnips, carrots, beets, parsnips, onions, radishes, lettuce, celery, tomatoes, cucumbers, and eggplants. He mentioned to potential buyers that “all who wish to raise a cabbage head instead of cabbage leaves have now the chance.”<sup>34</sup> Undoubtedly Watt had tried all these varieties in his own garden. In December 1861, J. M. Bernhisel, the territorial representative in Washington, D.C., sent him some dwarf sugarcane seed. Watt probably planted it.<sup>35</sup>

In June 1864, the fruit committee of the DAM, composed of Luther S. Hemenway, Levi Richards, and John V. Long, visited Watt’s gardens and found a large crop of strawberries. The family had been picking them every day for two weeks. These men said they measured several of a type called the Excellenta strawberry, with one reportedly measuring six inches around and three others, four and a half inches; four of the strawberries weighing two and a half ounces each. The committee reported that “we are of the opinion that if we had visited this garden one week sooner we could have found twenty strawberries that would have weighed a pound.”<sup>36</sup> John Jacques, a clerk in the historian’s office, wrote the *Deseret News* that he wanted to see a large bed of strawberries “with the deep working, wide planting, and

29. “Deseret State Fair,” *Deseret News*, October 13, 1858, 8: 139.

30. “Journal History,” October 6, 1858.

31. “Philosophy of Fattening Hogs,” *Deseret News*, December 28, 1859, 9: 344.

32. Historian’s Office, Journal, May 1, 1860, holograph, Historian’s Office records, LDS Church Archives. By this period in Utah history, Brigham Young was actively promoting the Word of Wisdom. He especially opposed drunkenness and selling alcohol. In the 1850s, he told the women in Utah Valley that they should not drink tea and coffee. By the 1860s, he had quit chewing tobacco and thought that others should be able to do that, too. He especially preached that the youth of the church should not indulge like their elders. For the best study of Young and the Word of Wisdom, see Paul H. Peterson and Ronald W. Walker, “Brigham Young’s Word of Wisdom Legacy,” *BYU Studies* 42 (Fall 2003): 27–64.

33. “Affairs in Utah,” *Daily Evening Express* (Lancaster County, PA), April 11, 1860, 3.

34. “Seeds! Seeds! Seeds!,” *Deseret News*, February 29, 1860, 9: 416.

35. J. M. Bernhisel to Brigham Young, December 27, 1861, holograph, incoming correspondence, Young Papers. Bernhisel also sent some of the dwarf sugarcane seed to Daniel Wells, Albert Carrington, H. B. Clawson, and Brigham Young.

36. “Great Strawberries, G.S.L. City, June 20, 1864,” *Deseret Weekly News*, June 28, 1864, 5.

thorough culture which Mr. G. D. Watt gives to his plantations.”<sup>37</sup> In 1866 Watt gave President Young a plate of rich, luscious strawberries.<sup>38</sup>

In June 1865, United States Speaker of the House Schuyler Colfax, who was touring throughout the western United States, visited Salt Lake City. Colfax had assumed the task of traveling throughout the West to learn about its potential and visit its people.<sup>39</sup> In Salt Lake City, he visited the garden of George D. Watt. Thomas B. H. Stenhouse, the editor of the *Semi-Weekly Telegraph*, reported, “Of course, we were of the party, and were more than pleased to see the guests enjoy themselves in that strawberry patch—we did enjoy it. Mr. Watt had the thanks and best wishes of his visitors.”<sup>40</sup> In his journal, Colfax indicated that they visited “the splendid gardens here and found them charming indeed. . . . Strawberries abound, and we revelled in them in the garden of George D. Watt, who has the finest garden of all.” Colfax wrote that Watt “had made a garden where the sagebrush and gravel had reigned supreme, and had apricots, peaches, flax, *morus multi-caulis* [mulberry trees], strawberries largely, plums, cotton, etc.”<sup>41</sup>

In a speech later that evening, Colfax admitted that “no one could traverse your city without recognizing that you are a people of industry.” The gardens astonished him: “No one could look at your beautiful gardens, which charmed . . . me, for I did not dream of any such thing in the city of Salt Lake.” He also described the residents of Salt Lake City as people of taste: “If anybody should doubt that, I think that one of your officers on the hill, who turned us loose in his strawberries to-day, realized that he had visitors of taste. (Cheers and laughter.)” Colfax said that he finally had to leave because he was full: “The truth is I was too full for utterance, therefore I cannot make much of a speech tonight.”<sup>42</sup>

In March 1865, Watt brought into the president’s office a piece of cloth his family had woven from cotton.<sup>43</sup> A few months later, he came into the historian’s office with some yarn that he had purchased as common wool from the tithing office. One of the clerks commented, “It was a fine specimen of yarn.”<sup>44</sup>

Brigham Young preached self-sufficiency: that the Mormons should raise their own crops and not purchase from outsiders. Watt listened attentively and then began to practice these precepts in his own life. He purchased a

37. “La Constante Strawberry,” *Deseret News*, August 31, 1864, 8: 336.

38. “Journal History,” May 29, 1866.

39. See Samuel Bowles, *Across the Continent: A Summer’s Journey to the Rocky Mountains, the Mormons, and the Pacific States with Speaker Colfax* (Springfield, MA: Samuel Bowles & Company, 1865).

40. Thomas Stenhouse, “Visiting,” *Semi-Weekly Telegraph*, June 15, 1865), 2.

41. Bowles, *Across the Continent*, 243.

42. *Ibid.*, 249.

43. “Journal History,” March 15, 1865.

44. “Journal History,” June 2, 1865.

farm in the Kaysville area, where he raised sheep and used their wool for clothes. He also grew everything he could to feed his family on his seven acres in the Salt Lake Avenues.

Not only was he a practical farmer, but he also understood agricultural economics. He furthered his knowledge on this topic by reading newspaper articles and a small library of books. In October 1865, Thomas Stenhouse titled an article in his *Semi-Weekly Telegraph* "The Irrepressible George—A Utah Man." He boasted, "There is no man of our acquaintance who in home manufactures, just resembles brother Geo. D. Watt. He is the greatest home spun institution of the working classes, with whom we are personally acquainted. George is unceasing in his labors and in homespun is irrepressible. We rarely see him but he has something around him of home manufacture, something that he has just got hold of that beats everything imported." He continued, "George has a farm in Kays ward and on 'the bench,' catching a view of the valley from the north, he has a magnificent house and garden, in which he has the best choice of fruits in the Territory; his orchard extends over seven acres and contains everything in that line." Stenhouse thought, though, that Watt's house showed even more homespun industry: "He has cotton spinning, woollen spinning, weaving of all the varied classes; then he has his thousands of silk worms producing in their department. By the bye, George has mastered the violin, is a member of the Orchestra, wears home spun in the summer, home spun in the winter, eats his own bread, wears his own apparel and makes his own music."<sup>45</sup>

Although Watt had an abundant garden and had grown many products, he had never written about his farming skills. The next logical step was for him to focus his descriptive abilities on agriculture.

On February 8, 1866, an article appeared in Stenhouse's *Semi-Weekly Telegraph* entitled, "A Word in Season." The author described the simple practice of planting a fruit tree. Perhaps he had Andrew Jackson Downing's book, *The Fruits and Fruit Trees of America*, which explained to the average farmer how to plant, graft, and prune all types of fruit trees.<sup>46</sup> The author of "A Word in Season" advised any horticulturalist to do the straightforward things that you would assume everyone already knew. He told the reader to clear the snow and dig a hole about eighteen inches deep and six feet wide in February. About a month to six weeks later, the tree could be planted. Next the planter should give it a "bucket of water to settle the earth well about the roots, and a wheel barrow load of good stable manure on the top for a mulch." Not forgetting a continual supply of water, the author advised

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45. Thomas Stenhouse, "The Irrepressible George—A Utah Man," *Semi-Weekly Telegraph*, October 16, 1865, 3.

46. For information on the way Downing's book applies to Utah Valley, see Gary Daynes and Richard Ian Kimball, "By Their Fruits Ye Shall Know Them: A Cultural History of Orchard Life in Utah Valley," *Utah Historical Quarterly* 69 (Summer 2001): 215–31.

“that it is not finished until you have laid out well defined water ditches, to convey water to your newly planted trees when they need it, and in such a way that every fibre in their roots will get a drink.” He also counseled the reader to plant strawberries around the trees. Thus the ground would be productive while he or she waited for fruit from the tree. The Viscountess strawberries “will yield several crops before the trees are large enough to overshadow them, or to bear fruit themselves.” Because the article was signed with the pen name of “W,” no one knew who the author was.<sup>47</sup>

Stenhouse received such favorable comments from his readers that he asked the author to write another article. These articles were written by a Utah man who knew about agricultural methods and could teach the people of the territory how to be good farmers. The author titled his next essay “Apples and Pear Seeds.” This time he also began a treatise on economics. It is possible that the author had been reading Adam Smith’s *Wealth of Nations*, published in 1776, which discusses markets and no regulations on goods by governments, an approach called *laissez faire*. The author never used that term, though. According to this author, the people of Utah had to be what he called “self-sustaining.” He described it this way: “Not being where ocean commerce, and the commerce of our great American rivers can reach us, we cannot, by exchanging our home productions with the people of distant portions of this country, and with foreign countries, bring money and manufactured goods to our doors. Since neighboring gold discoveries have caused mining settlements to spring up in our borders, a market has been created which has partially supplied us with the means of interchange with the Eastern market.” The presence of U. S. troops in the territory had brought “government contracts” and created a market for Utah’s agricultural products. “The high price of Utah flour in the northern mining districts will encourage wide awake agriculturists to raise it there,” the author stated. If, however, the government decided it needed troops elsewhere, part of that money would “be dried up.” To the author, money was simply “a convenient medium of exchange.”<sup>48</sup>

After the author discussed the present Utah economics, he asked, “But what have apple and pear seeds to do with this?” He felt that apple and pear and all other variety of seeds had brought power and glory to the different states of the earth. One should start immediately and plant them so that even “when you are asleep, or following the avocations of life, the little rootlets of these plants may be working for you—may be helping you to that which you cannot get when money cannot be had.” He then reverted to the practical aspects of apple and pear seeds. After soaking them in warm milk and water, the reader should plant them about one inch down in well-manured soil. Every garden should have many trees “growing up

47. George D. Watt, “A Word in Season,” *Semi-Weekly Telegraph*, February 8, 1866, 2.

48. George D. Watt, “Apples and Pear Seeds,” *Semi-Weekly Telegraph*, March 1, 1866, 1.

to form stocks to receive, by budding or grafting, the most choice and precious fruits.”<sup>49</sup>

Again Stenhouse received many favorable comments, and a lot of readers wanted to know who this contributor was. On March 19, 1866, Stenhouse replied, “As we are frequently interrogated for the name of the author of the excellent articles that have been published in the *Telegraph* on gardening signed ‘W,’ we take pleasure in stating that our esteemed friend Geo. D. Watt, Esq., is the writer. ‘Brother George’ has favored us with those excellent and timely contributions, with no motive but the pure one of doing good to his fellow citizens, and we are pleased to see them so liberally appreciated.”<sup>50</sup>

In the same issue where Stenhouse identified him, Watt authored another article with the title of “Asparagus.” He defined it as a perennial plant native to the shores of Britain or the steppes of eastern Europe. Again he said that an important step was to prepare the soil by working it to a depth of two and a half feet and fill it with fourteen inches of “well rotted manure, leaf manure” from the canyons. Then two rows of asparagus could be planted six inches apart “and allow an alley way of three feet between each row for convenience of watering and gathering.” Harvesting should be done sparingly the third year. It was not until the fourth year that the plants could be “cut for the table.” This vegetable was the first of the season, and “after peas become abundant, asparagus should not be cut, but should be suffered to make top and gather vigor and strength of root for another year.”<sup>51</sup>

Watt’s articles were so popular that the *Deseret Evening News* also approached him about writing. In April 1866, the *News* published his article entitled “Shade Trees.” Watt introduced his article by commenting that when the pioneers had first settled the area, they had planted young cottonwoods in the town. He, however, did not like the tree. He thought it grew “well on the wet bottom lands, but on our dry bench lands they are very apt to be sickly, and become a prey to borers and numerous insects.” He also objected to it as a shade tree “on account of a downy substance which, like particles of cotton, floats upon the air, sticking upon the clothing of the pedestrian, and even entering into bed rooms, parlors and kitchens, making it difficult sometimes for cooks to keep it out of the food they are preparing.” Watt felt that locust and mulberry trees provided better shade. “The locust, in addition to being a very thrifty grower, forms, under proper training, a dense top, and produces a hard, tough and useful timber,” he explained. And he claimed that “the mulberry forms a handsome top and is in many ways very useful and profitable.” The owners should also keep animals away from their

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49. Ibid.

50. Thomas Stenhouse, “Our Contributor ‘W,’” *Semi-Weekly Telegraph*, March 19, 1866, 2.

51. George D. Watt, “Asparagus,” *Semi-Weekly Telegraph*, March 19, 1866, 2. The article was also published the day before in the *Deseret Evening News*; see “Horticultural,” *Deseret Evening News*, March 18, 1866, 5.

trees by placing a fence around them. The worst enemies to shade trees were men “who have that destructive tendency to whittle while spinning yarns.” To discourage them, he suggested that “I know of no cure more effective than a good horse whip, soundly and suddenly applied.” There might be some danger involved “in making this application, but as the safety of doing so the owners of trees must be their own judges.”<sup>52</sup>

In October 1866, Watt published an essay in the *Semi-Weekly Telegraph* entitled “Dip[h]theria.” He had no knowledge of modern medicine or bacteria-causing disease, but like many nineteenth-century people, he was concerned with sanitation and cleanliness. He took his views from Britain, where he had been born. Both in the 1830s and 1860s, Parliament published reports that good sanitation in the streets and cleanliness in homes were important for health.<sup>53</sup> Watt thought that anything that was dirty or had decaying substances in it should be cleaned: cellars, walls, carpets, floors, dishes, and utensils. He wrote that “it is often the case that carpets are allowed to remain on floors too long before they are removed and cleansed, and the floors under them swept and washed clean.” Pots and pans of lead and pewter should be entirely banished from the kitchen “as they are never without danger.” Children could receive canker from poorly cleaned pots, pans, and utensils unless they were coated with tin.<sup>54</sup>

In October 1867, Watt began his longest treatise in a six-part series titled, “A Talk.” Again he chose a subject with which he was familiar: sheep. This article started on page three of the *Semi-Weekly Telegraph*, but soon the interest was so high that the last three installments began on the front page. Watt had been a weaver in England, so he knew about good wool. He also raised sheep in America, so he understood how to care for these animals that clothed humanity. However, this discussion was more than just about sheep because he incorporated economics and talked about the way normal households with father, mother, and children fit into that pattern. He was particularly concerned about affluent people in Utah who had invested in sheep but not given them a good shepherd and especially not the right sheds in winter: “The flocks were huddled together in winter in dirty pens, without shelter, exposed to the rains and snows of the fall, winter and early spring, scantily fed.” These sheep would not produce enough wool. Only cared-for sheep would make a good return. In time he thought Utah would become a big “sheep walk,” where animals would winter in the south and travel all the way to the northern part of the territory in the summer, but for now each family should care for a small flock with a trusty dog by their side.<sup>55</sup>

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52. George D. Watt, “Shade Trees,” *Deseret Evening News*, April 4, 1866, 2–3.

53. See Sir Llewellyn Woodward, *The Age of Reform, 1815–1870*, 2d ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962), 463–64.

54. George D. Watt, “Dip[h]theria,” *Semi-Weekly Telegraph*, October 1, 1866, 1.

55. George D. Watt, “A Talk,” *Semi-Weekly Telegraph*, October 24, 1867, 3.

For families to use the sheep's wool, they needed a "common spinning-wheel" to produce cloth. A handmade article was better than anything a machine could do. He gave the example of a Danish lady who offered him a pair of hand-knit socks for a dollar and a half, whereas the imported machine-made ones cost half that amount. Watt thought, though, that the Danish lady's stockings were better quality and would last longer. The imported woolen socks "are made of the refuse of wool, and spun and knit by machinery for the market."<sup>56</sup>

If all the people in the territory wanted two pairs of woolen socks, they would need fifty thousand pounds of yarn "to supply this demand alone." For all Utahns to clothe and blanket themselves in woolen products would require "600,000 pounds to supply 50,000 men." As he said, "Demand and supply are the great foundations of commerce." The principle of supply and demand was governed by what people wanted, and Watt thought that there was no end to the demand. However, greater demand than supply created a higher price—an unreasonable price—and that was not acceptable.<sup>57</sup>

In his treatise at this point, Watt revealed he was opposed to *laissez faire*. No one in that production line from the farmer to the last seller should charge his or her neighbor more money in a scarce period. An unfair higher price "strikes a blow at the best interests of our growing country, and spreads a gloom and discouragement over that portion of society affected by it, and over those interests which keep up an increasing demand to meet lively and active sources of supply." Every enlightened producer should obtain a fair profit but not take advantage of the principle of supply and demand. Now Watt retreated to a communitarian philosophy and stated that a profit "should be determined by a committee." What if the supply was greater than the demand and the price offered the seller was too low? In that case, Watt advocated that farmers should lock up their products to create a demand until they could obtain a fair price, but this should only happen very infrequently.<sup>58</sup>

He also advocated that every person in Utah should be industrious; there would never be enough wealth to justify a life of idleness and pleasure: "The true Mormon husband and father is a farmer, a mechanic, a manufacturer, a shepherd, or a stock raiser; he is valiant in battling the elements to produce what he needs." He should also be a great example for his family: "honest, just and true to his God, to himself, to his family, to his brethren, and to every high-toned honorable, and equitable principle."<sup>59</sup>

Watt then described his ideal Mormon woman: "The true Mormon wife and mother is industrious, economical; managing her household with skill,

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56. Ibid.

57. Ibid.

58. See Watt, "A Talk," *Semi-Weekly Telegraph*, October 31, 1867, 3; and November 7, 1867, 1.

59. Watt, "A Talk," October 31, 1867, 3.

seeking to save on all sides, rather than to recklessly consume and squander her husband's substance. She watches over her children with solicitude and care, as to what they eat, drink and wear. . . . She meets these stern duties with a brave heart, petulance and complaint forming no part of her daily exercises." She should be a woman of judgment, an ideal woman who was at home in the kitchen and the "drawing room."<sup>60</sup>

The children also must be taught to learn and labor. The sons needed to produce and the daughters to manufacture raw material into needed items. "Girls raised after this fashion make proper wives for Utah's sons of toil. In such a community there will always be demand for raw material to manufacture; let no man therefore fear to enter into home production with a right good will," he explained.<sup>61</sup> Essentially Watt proposed establishing a small factory in each home.

In his last installment of "A Talk," he returned to discussing the care of sheep. A shepherd needed a good dog to protect and drive the sheep. In winter the farmer needed to feed his animals well, but "the feeding should not be left to boys and inexperienced hands." In those cold months, "cleanliness, sufficiency, and due economy are three considerations never to be lost sight of." He said that "they should not be allowed to graze in the neighborhood of dusty roads, nor to rest in low places, but only on the heights, where they may enjoy a free circulation of the atmosphere, and be undisturbed by insects." He felt confident that sheep properly herded and wintered would not encounter disease.<sup>62</sup>

After Watt left Salt Lake for Kaysville, he sent a letter in 1870 to the *Deseret Evening News* about grapes. He devoted the entire article to the practical side. According to him, California grapes did not have qualities to produce good grapes in Utah. He listed six varieties that he thought best suited Utah's climate and soil—the Eumelan, Iona, Israeli, Delaware, Diane, and Concord—and evaluated each as a dinner, raisin, and wine grape.<sup>63</sup> He promised to write about other agricultural products, but there were no later reports in any newspaper.

Watt's most significant contribution came from raising silkworms. Sericulture, as it was called, had come to Utah and, according to him, would free the territory from economic bondage and provide employment for

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60. Ibid.

61. Watt, "A Talk," *Semi-Weekly Telegraph*, November 14, 1867, 1.

62. Watt, "A Talk," *Semi-Weekly Telegraph*, November 21, 1867, 1.

63. George D. Watt, letter to the editor, *Deseret Evening News*, October 4, 1870, 4. It is possible that Watt was answering a debate between Daniel Bonelli from the Muddy settlements and Louis Bertrand from Tooele, who had written letters about whether the southern settlements or the northern communities produced a better grape wine. See Waldo C. Perkins, "From Switzerland to the Colorado River: Life Sketch of the Entrepreneurial Daniel Bonelli, the Forgotten Pioneer," *Utah Historical Quarterly* 74 (Spring 2006): 4-23.

many. The worms, usually kept in a shed, fed only on the leaves of mulberry trees. In this controlled environment, the worm developed into its cocoon stage, and every cocoon would produce silk. The process of stripping the leaves, feeding the worms, and finally processing the silk was labor intensive. For the cloth to be economical, it must be produced in a country with inexpensive labor.<sup>64</sup>

A Frenchman, Octave Ursenbach, first brought the silkworm into Utah about 1854. Sometime in the early 1860s, Watt began to raise them. In 1865 he exhibited a silkworm that Ursenbach had imported from Italy as an egg.<sup>65</sup> A month later, Watt brought some frames into the president's office with several hundred cocoons on them. Very quickly he became the expert on sericulture. By 1868 he had ten thousand worms. He collected two bushels of leaves daily from his mulberry trees to feed his worms. Sericulture became his passion. He thought that each family could provide the labor and the product; silk could clothe them, and selling the cloth would in a sense feed them. Silk could make Utah self-sufficient in all ways.

At the end of March 1866, the *Deseret Evening News* published Watt's article on "The Mulberry Tree." He claimed it thrived best in the pure, dry air of the mountains and the benchlands. He gave credit to Octave Ursenbach, William C. Staines, and Brigham Young for proving that mulberry trees could be raised successfully in Utah. They also produced a "palatable" fruit and provided shade. One tree could produce 50 pounds of leaves for worms, so Watt felt that a small orchard of ten, twenty, or more trees should be planted. Altogether 2,500 worms needed 250 pounds of leaves for the season: "In this way tons of raw silk can be raised throughout our country, giving an interesting and profitable employment to our young girls, thus aiding in obtaining that commercial influence and independence which is necessary to the permanent growth, greatness and glory of any nation."<sup>66</sup>

64. See "History of Silk," available online at <http://www.silkroad.com/artl/silkhistory.shtml>; and "History of Silk: The Legend, The Silk Road," available online at [http://www.texeresilk.com/cms-history\\_of\\_silk.html](http://www.texeresilk.com/cms-history_of_silk.html).

65. "Journal History," May 21 1865. Most of the studies of silk in Utah skip over this period to talk about the Relief Society's involvement in the sericulture just a few years later. For an early study, see Margaret Schow Potter, "The History of Sericulture in Utah," (master's thesis, Oregon State College, 1949); for one of the best studies about the entire movement, see Janet Peterson, "Preaching Up Silk: Utah's Half-Century of Sericulture," *Pioneer* (Autumn 2002): 19–22. Another study that looks at the silk industry is Jill Mulvay Derr, "Woman's Place in Brigham Young's World," *BYU Studies* 18 (Spring 1978): 377–405. For another man's involvement with the sericulture, see Jacob W. Olmstead, "Give Me Any Situation Suitable: The Consecrated Life of the Multitalented Paul A. Schettler," *BYU Studies* 41, no. 1 (2002): 108–26. For an examination of the sericulture in the hinterland of Utah, see Virginia K. Nielson, "Sericulture: The Silk Industry in Ephraim," *Saga of Sanpitch* 24 (1992): 44–47; Terri Draper, "Jolly Green Giants," *St. George Magazine* 3, no. 1 (Spring 1985): 78; and Louise Degn, "Susanna G. Cardon," *Studies in Mormon History* 5 (1978): 119–36.

66. George D. Watt, "The Mulberry Tree," *Deseret Evening News*, March 28, 1866, 3.

In March 1868, in a letter to the editor of the *Semi-Weekly Telegraph*, Watt again promoted the silk culture. Utah was indeed silk country, and the mulberry tree could grow in the territory. The furniture maker could use its wood, and its fruit could be mixed with cider and used as a medicine. The fruit was also good in pies. In place of the useless cottonwoods, the people of the territory should plant mulberry trees: "For no insects feed upon their leaves except the silk worm; and then their branches give us fruit and wine, and their leaves an article of clothing of the best and finest quality." He then analyzed how raising silk would "bring into our country millions of wealth annually."

Economically the argument against raising silkworms was how labor intensive it was, but Watt claimed this was not true: "It has been ascertained by actual trial in California,—that one man can tend as many worms as eight persons in the old world." The Utah farmer was poor because he could not raise enough grain—the staple in the state. Every Utah farmer should produce silk. In the winter months, the entire family could spend its time "winding silk and preparing it for the loom at home and the market abroad." He concluded, "While we are so powerfully aided, let us put forth our hands and gather the rich blessings which are within our reach in such unlimited abundance, for there is silk in the soil, silk in the waters and silk in the air."<sup>67</sup>

In March of 1868, Thomas Stenhouse and others climbed the hill and visited the "indefatigable George. . . . We feasted our eyes, however,—on the mulberry trees and the cocoons. . . . We were amazed, overwhelmed and tried to get 'a scripture' about mountains flowing with mulberries and silk worms." Watt showed them around his small farm: "He has a delicious place—trees, bushes and plants in profusion, budding with wealth. We take our incredulous saying all back again—George is 'a model man.'" Stenhouse then commented on how useless an editor or anyone who did not raise mulberry trees was.<sup>68</sup> A few months later, Watt stopped into the office of the *Semi-Weekly Telegraph* and showed the editor 150 cocoons. He told Stenhouse that silk was a good idea, and it should "insure the success of the business. George is an energetic pioneer, and he shall in no wise lose his reward."<sup>69</sup>

In August 1868, Edward Stevenson climbed the bench to Watt's home. He found that the grasshoppers had devastated Watt's locust and fruit trees and much of the bark. Watt showed him twenty-five ounces of eggs that he intended to sell to anyone who wanted to produce silk. He had a market in California but preferred to sell them in Utah. "He seated himself, opened

67. George D. Watt, letter to the editor, *Semi-Weekly Telegraph*, March 12, 1868, 3; Watt, letter to the editor, *Semi-Weekly Telegraph*, November 23, 1868, 2.

68. Thomas Stenhouse, "The Mulberry Trees," *Semi-Weekly Telegraph*, March 23, 1868, 3.

69. Thomas Stenhouse, "The Cocoons," *Semi-Weekly Telegraph*, July 16, 1868, 1.

a sack of cocoons, and began spinning silk, about the consistency of No. 10 cotton yarn," Stevenson said.<sup>70</sup>

Watt's writings on agriculture must have impressed Brigham Young because in 1868 he asked Watt and Albert Carrington to write a general epistle for the church. It is a lengthy treatise, primarily in Watt's handwriting, about the history of the territory, immigration, and the sheep and cotton industries, among other subjects. It ends abruptly, so Young may not have seen the final results. The epistle was never published, and it is possible that when Watt left the office in 1868, it was still in his desk.<sup>71</sup>

Watt also tried writing fiction. George Q. Cannon, an apostle, started a new journal in 1866, *The Juvenile Instructor*. He had heard so many of Watt's stories of his childhood about being a vagabond on the streets of Manchester that he asked him to write about those experiences. Watt wrote one for the first volume, and thus began a series of forty-three installments that ran for more than three years as the "Little George" stories, subtitled, "A True Story." Watt signed them with the pen name Uncle George.

Watt's main purpose was to teach the youth of the territory that the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints was the true religion. However, he did not make this a constant theme in every story. He also told children about other religions, about godfathers and godmothers, and about baptism in the Roman Catholic Church and the Church of England. He admonished the children that true baptism depends on someone with priesthood authority and immersion. Being an economist at heart, Watt also taught his young readers how to obtain the most for their money. Little George will do anything for people who are good to him, and he calls each of them "kind": the kind lady, the kind teacher in the poorhouse, and the kind mistress. Like his contemporary, Charles Dickens, Watt was trying to recreate in his own way some of the events of his boyhood.<sup>72</sup>

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70. Edward Stevenson, letter to the editor, *Semi-Weekly Telegraph*, August 13, 1868, 2.

71. George D. Watt, general epistle, ca. January–February 1868, Young Papers.

72. See *Juvenile Instructor* 1–4, 1866–69. For details of the stories, see chapter one.