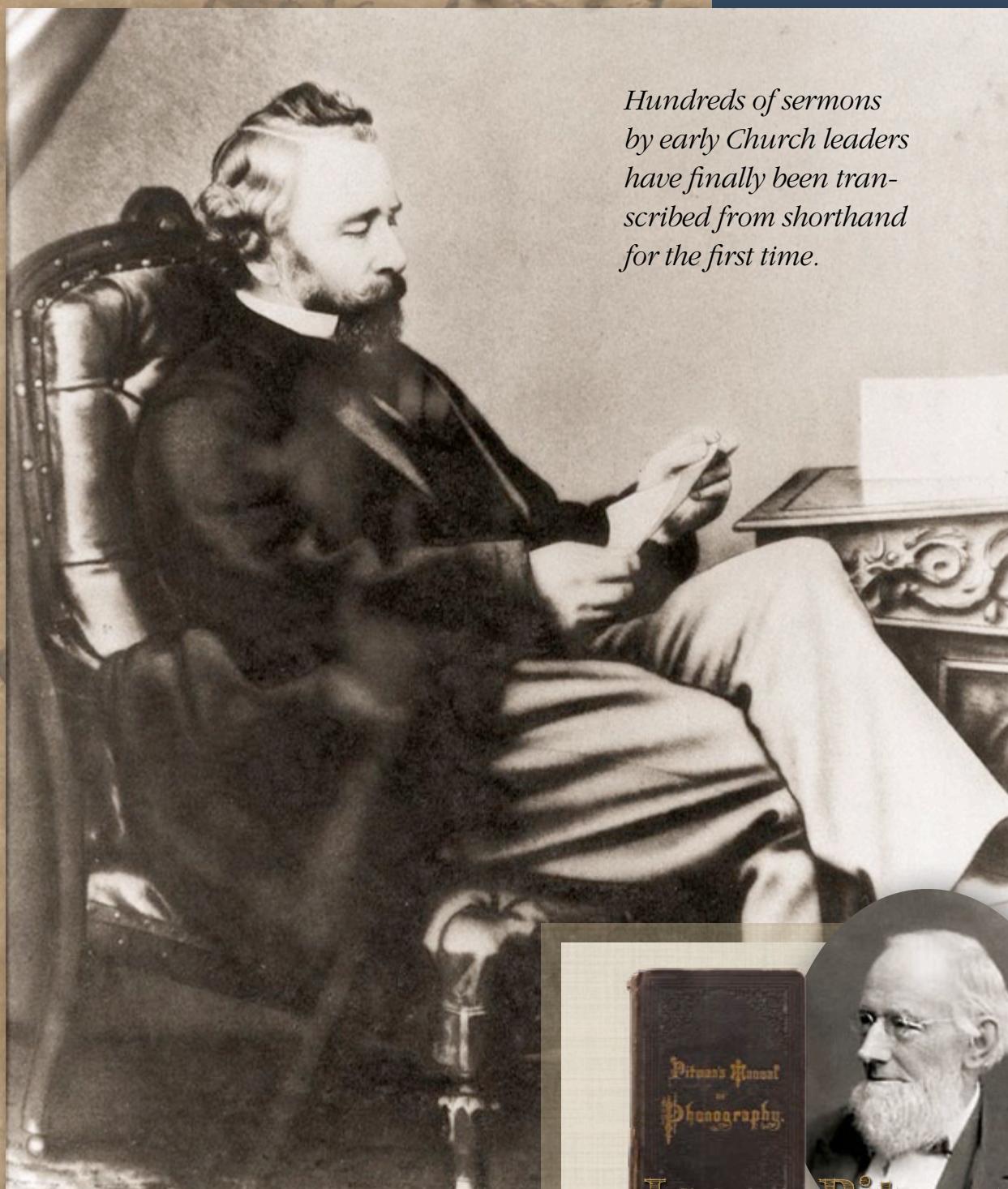
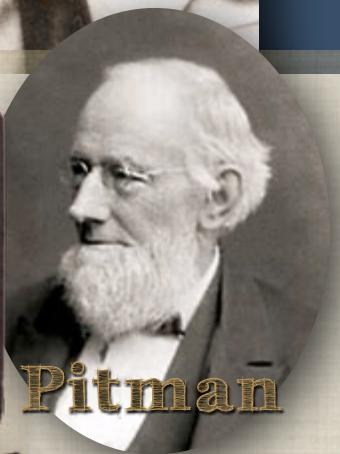
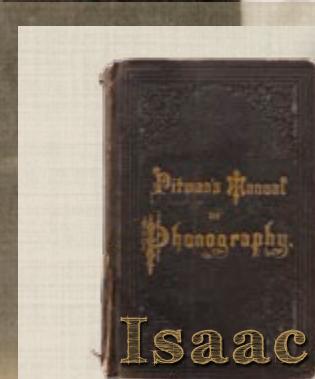


G. D. Watt's

# George D. Watt



*Hundreds of sermons  
by early Church leaders  
have finally been trans-  
cribed from shorthand  
for the first time.*



Isaac Pitman

# LOST SERMONS

By Matthew S. McBride

Church History Department

In 1837, an Englishman named Isaac Pitman published a small book entitled *Stenographic Sound-Hand*. In his book he introduced a new form of shorthand that would allow a skilled reporter to record speakers verbatim. In that same year, another Englishman, George D. Watt, became the first baptized member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Great Britain. Before immigrating to Nauvoo, Illinois, in 1842, Watt learned Pitman's new shorthand system, a skill that would have a tremendous influence on the future of the Church.

Though clerks and diarists such as Wilford Woodruff, William Clayton, and Thomas Bullock frantically took down notes of the Prophet Joseph Smith's words as he spoke, we have no word-for-word accounts of his sermons. The best we can do is combine these varying reports to get a reasonable but incomplete sense of what he said. But beginning in 1852, George D. Watt began taking down the sermons of early Church leaders such as Brigham Young, Parley P. and Orson Pratt, Lorenzo Snow, and many others verbatim. Through his efforts, we have available to us a wealth of wisdom, counsel, and gospel teaching from these powerful speakers.

Many of the sermons taken down by Watt

and others were transcribed and published in the *Deseret News* and later in the *Journal of Discourses*. These published sermons are the source of most of the quotations from leaders such as Brigham Young and John Taylor in the *Teachings of Presidents of the Church* books used in Relief Society and Melchizedek Priesthood lessons.

Hundreds of sermons, however, were never transcribed, so their content remained unknown for nearly 150 years. Assistant Church Historian Richard E. Turley Jr. explains: "We've had the shorthand of George D. Watt and others in our collection for many years, but they haven't been accessible to researchers because very few people could read them. We're fortunate to have with us on our staff a woman named LaJean Carruth, who has taught herself to read the shorthand of George D. Watt and has been able to open up this treasure chest of material."

LaJean Purcell Carruth, shorthand specialist in the Church History Department, has painstakingly transcribed many of these sermons after becoming familiar with Isaac Pitman's system. "I went out to the



**George D. Watt, 1849**

BYU library stacks and found a book on Pitman shorthand and just studied it," she says.

Over the course of several years, Carruth has transcribed many significant but previously unknown sermons, including Brigham Young's words at the funeral of Mary Fielding Smith, an eyewitness account of the events at Carthage Jail by John Taylor, a series of sermons on the importance of the Book of Mormon by Orson Pratt, and many more. The transcriptions provide details of the early missions of Parley P. Pratt to Chile and Lorenzo Snow to Italy and of Brigham Young's conversion to the gospel.

They also yield insights into the personalities of the speakers. Carruth shares a humorous example: "Heber C. Kimball got up one day and he said, 'Excuse me if I don't talk proper. I left

my teeth. Laid them on the window and forgot them.' She adds, "The shorthand gives us the closest we have to their personalities and how they differ. We get their humanness and what they really were. And I love it."

Earlier this year, the Church History Department began publishing excerpts from some of these newly transcribed sermons on its website, history.lds.org, in a series titled "Lost Sermons." Now anyone can enjoy the stirring words of these pioneer preachers.

Brother Turley shared his estimation of the significance of these sermons: "As far as I'm concerned, the unpublished sermons of these early Church leaders represent one of the most important previously untapped sources of Church history from the 19th century that we have." ■

*LaJean Purcell Carruth, shorthand specialist in the Church History Department, has taught herself Pitman shorthand and painstakingly transcribed many 19th-century sermons for the first time.*



## Brigham Young

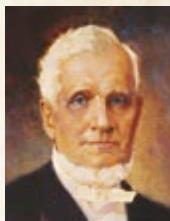
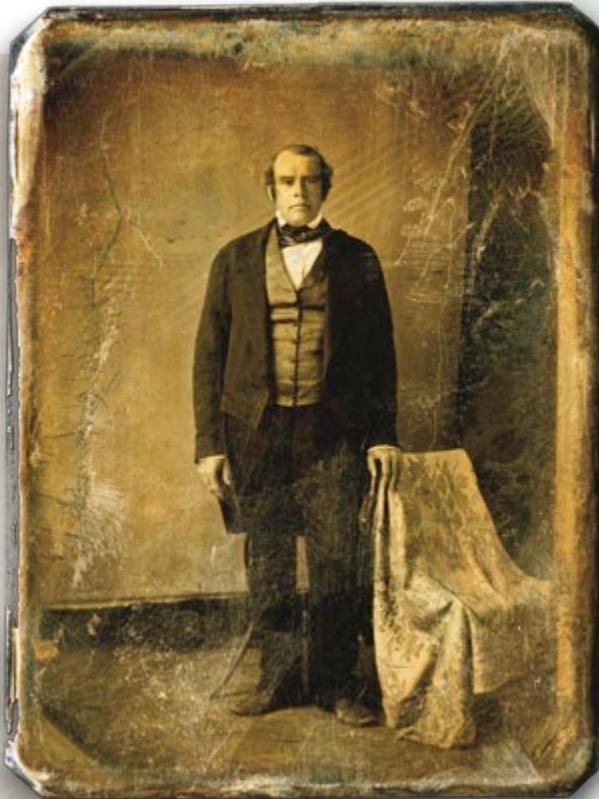
The Lord watches over you. You need not suppose for a moment [that] the Lord's eye [is] not upon you. The angels [are] round about you and they will take care of you, and you may be peaceful and contented. . . . Every good man and woman . . . [is] in the hands of [the] Lord. They are before him, his eye upon them, his angels round about them that they might endure afflictions, suffer pain [and] buffeting by Satan, pass through scenes of afflictions enough to wring their natural hearts out of them, comparatively. Yet God [will] take care of them" (Sept. 23, 1852, Mary Fielding Smith's funeral).

### WHAT IS SHORTHAND?

Shorthand systems consisted of a series of markings corresponding to words or sounds. Clerks and reporters used these systems in the days before sound recordings in order to quickly capture spoken language in writing.

## *Parley P. Pratt*

I will tell [you] my brethren, when I was a lad just out of my teens—about 1830—I read a book that was but little known in the world, although now, probably, it is in half [a] dozen [of the] principal languages of the earth, and it was entitled the Book of Mormon, and had many predictions in it that are plain and easy to be understood, and the spirit and power of God bore witness to my heart of their truth. . . . Well now, these prophecies interested me I assure you. They made an impression upon my mind [that] never has been effaced. . . . I knew in me [in a way] that [would have] been no stronger if I had seen Jesus Christ in his glorified body and heard [the] same words from his own lips" (Oct. 31, 1852).



## *John Taylor*

Wherever the gospel of Jesus Christ exists, there exists revelation; and where there is no revelation there is no gospel" (Oct. 30, 1859).



## *Heber C. Kimball*

When I went into the water [of] baptism I made [a] covenant I would forsake the world with all [that] pertains to it, and cleave unto the Lord God with all my heart all my days. This is the covenant that I made, to turn away from the world. That is the covenant you made, or the one you should have made. Now, will you fulfill it?" (Oct. 7, 1853).

*To read  
excerpts from  
transcribed  
sermons, visit  
[history.lds.org/  
lost-sermons](http://history.lds.org/lost-sermons).*