

A BRIGHAM YOUNG LETTER TO GEORGE Q. CANNON, 1859

Everett L. Cooley

In late 1859, Utah and the Mormon church were trying to return to conditions as they were prior to the disruptions of the Utah War. The full effects of the disruptive “move south” were not yet entirely realized or reconciled, and the citizens were trying to adjust to a new political situation in which the Mormons were no longer in control of any of the appointive government offices in the territory. The Church leaders were attempting to strengthen their organization to cope with the problems arising from the large number of non-Mormons suddenly forced upon them in the form of an army and the numerous camp followers associated with the armed forces.

These were the conditions President Brigham Young alluded to when he wrote to his special emissary to the eastern United States, George Q. Cannon. Of special interest is President Young’s statement that Cannon had just been named an Apostle in the Church hierarchy, but that there would not be a public announcement of this action because of Cannon’s special assignments in Washington and the eastern states.

Acquired by the Special Collections Department, University of Utah Libraries, in 1972 from a grandson of George Q. Cannon, this letter is here published for the first time. It is one of several interesting letters found in the Brigham Young Collection of the library.

G. S. L. City, Nov. 3, 1859

Elder George Q. Cannon,
New York City,
Dear Brother:—

Your interesting letter of July 22, with accompany slip of Aug. 5, came safe to hand, and the record of your doings met my cordial approval. Our this season’s emigration arrived in good condition and spirits, including br. E. R. Young & company who brought up the rear, having started rather late.¹ But the fall was very favorable to late arrivals, the weather having been and still being remarkably pleasant.

¹Ebenezer Russel Young, from New Jersey, was apparently no relative of Brigham Young. He came to Utah with his family prior to 1859 and then returned east with special communications for Thomas L. Kane and others. He then headed west with an immigrant company (Frank Esshom, *Pioneers and Prominent Men of Utah* [Salt Lake City; Utah Pioneers Book Publishing Co., 1913], 1270). The Journal History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints on 27 October 1859 records: “Bro. E. R. Young’s company arrived from the States. They left on the 25th of August. This is the last company which will arrive this season. (See also Thomas L. Kane to Brigham Young, 24 July 1859, Brigham Young Incoming Correspondence, reel 71, box 40, folder 8, Library-Archives, Historical Department, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City; hereafter cited as LDS Church Archives.)

The national Utah fever having abated, I shall venture to write more fully by mail than I deemed to be prudent when post offices and mail bags were meeting very close inspection.² With the exception of a few troops at Bridger, the army in Utah is concentrated in Camp Floyd where they are quietly pursuing the routine of camp duties, with what particular benefit to themselves or any body else is mainly left for those who sent and are keeping them here to point out. However, we will venture to explain a little. They brought a large amount of money, goods, mules, wagons, iron, &c, &c., articles much needed in our Territory, and a large portion of which has already been scattered among the people, adding much to their comfort and present and future prosperity.³ How long Government may see fit to retain an army at immense expense in a locality where its services have no opportunity for benefitting the country, we neither know nor care, for though the above enumerated local profits arising from their presence are very convenient, and to the natural man somewhat tempting, still we have prospered without them when we were few and poor, and with like conduct should certainly be able to do so now that we are comparatively numerous and wealthy.

Judge Eckles confines himself and operations very closely in Camp Floyd, with what object or consistency, as a Territorial Judge, perhaps his friends can explain. Judge Cradelbaugh, when last heard from, was in California; and Judge Sinclair has left for the States, as also have Secretary Hartnett and D^r Forney. Gov. Cummings agreeable to resolution passed by the last Legislative Assembly, which he states he subsequently approved, has issued a proclamation convening the next assembly in the Social Hall in this City, a locality affording far greater facilities for Legislative business than Fillmore can as yet, and much pleasanter and more acceptable to the members for many reasons.⁴

D^r W. Beach, of New York City, on the 24th of June last wrote me a very interesting letter, and kindly tendered me the present of one of his works, entitled "Family Physician", wishing me, in case I accepted the present, to inform him how he should

²Brigham Young's concern about the security of transmitting information by mail stems from charges before and during the Utah War that the Mormons were intercepting and censoring mail and the non-Mormon officials were doing the same. There seems to be substance to the charges because when George Q. Cannon visited Thomas L. Kane, the Mormons' friend and special contact with the Buchanan administration, Kane expressed his pleasure at personal contact with a Brigham Young emissary, thus escaping the "prying post office" (Kane to Young, 25 April 1860, Brigham Young Incoming Correspondence, reel 71, box 40, folder 9). This is not the only instance of Kane's expressed concern about information being intercepted in the mails. He wrote, "I write as much as I am willing to entrust to the care of the U.S. mail" (Kane to Young, 15 August 1860, *ibid.*).

³The best single treatment of the Army's coming to and being settled in Utah is Norman Furniss, *The Mormon Conflict, 1850-1859* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1960). However, Leonard J. Arrington has provided the best evaluation of the Army's economic impact upon Utah in his *Great Basin Kingdom: An Economic History of the Latter-day Saints, 1830-1900* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1958), 196-99, and in an article he and Thomas G. Alexander wrote for the *Utah Historical Quarterly* 34 (Winter 1966): 3-21, entitled "Camp in the Sagebrush: Camp Floyd, Utah, 1858-1861." Arrington treats another aspect of Utah economics of this period in "Mormon Finance and the Utah War," *Utah Historical Quarterly* 20 (July 1952): 219-37.

⁴The problems the Utahns had with the newly appointed federal officers have been dealt with in Furniss, *Mormon Conflict*; in Gustive O. Larson, *The "Americanization" of Utah for Statehood* (San Marino, Calif.: Huntington Library, 1971); and in Everett L. Cooley, "Carpetbag Rule: Territorial Government in Utah," *Utah Historical Quarterly* 26 (1958): 106-29. In the latter article (p. 115), note especially the exchange of views between Governor Alfred E. Cumming and Daniel H. Wells concerning the irregularities in the acts of the territorial legislature. Andrew Love Neff's *History of Utah, 1847 to 1869* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1940) goes into great detail on the subject of Utah-federal relations. Howard R. Lamar, *The Far Southwest, 1846-1912, a Territorial History* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1966), also has a good account of Utah-federal relations of this period.

forward it.⁵ Please be so good as to call upon D^r Beach, No. 34, West 41 S^t, New York City, and tender him my thanks for his kind note and very acceptable present, and inform him that if he will hand you the book you will see that it is forwarded to me by the first safe opportunity.

The last mail Oct 24, brought a highly interesting letter from our Friend, which I purpose answering at an early date.⁶

On the 23 of October the First Presidency and Twelve met in the Historian's Office, when you were unanimously elected to fill the vacancy in the Quorum of the Twelve, occasioned by the death of br. Parly P. Pratt.⁷ Your election has not been made public in our papers, nor as yet in the Tabernacle, lest it might in some way militate against the operations in which you are presently engaged. The choice will be made public so soon as it may be deemed wise so to do. Br. Jacob Gates was, at the same meeting, elected to fill the vacancy occasioned by the apostacy of Benjamin L Clapp.⁸

⁵The Incoming Correspondence of Brigham Young contains the letter of W. Beach, M.D., dated 24 June 1859. One paragraph sufficed to attract the attention of Brigham Young. It reads:

My principal object in writing to you now is to ask if you would like to have a copy of my Medical work on *The Defence[?] or Botanic Practice of Medicine* believing as you do that the gift of Healing is ever in the true Church. This gift has been committed to me as you will see by reading my works and more especially by following the principles therein laid down or recommended. (Brigham Young Incoming Correspondence, reel 51, box 25, folder 23.)

⁶"Our Friend" is, of course, Thomas L. Kane of Philadelphia, who befriended and defended the Mormons as early as 1846. He was the one who brought the opposing sides together for a peaceful settlement of the Utah War. Kane had a personal "in" with President James Buchanan and members of his cabinet. Both George Q. Cannon and Kane himself use the expression "your old friend" in communications with Brigham Young. The exchange of letters during this period between Brigham Young and Thomas Kane proves most valuable to understand the efforts to smooth relations between the Mormons and the Buchanan administration, which had dispatched troops to Utah in 1857 (see Brigham Young Incoming Correspondence, especially reel 71, box 40, folders 8 and 9). Kane relates that Buchanan "privately rebuked [General Albert S. Johnston] severely, and [he] would not make such another blunder [to support Judge John Cradlebaugh's attack against the Mormons] in a hurry." Kane also defended Superintendent of Indian Affairs Jacob Forney and Alexander Wilson, territorial attorney, as being friendly to the Mormons. Furthermore, Kane shed some light on the character of Governor Alfred E. Cumming by indicating that Cumming was given to excessive drinking (Kane to Young, 24 July 1859). In this same letter a point of interest is Kane's request of Brigham Young for a full and confidential account of the Mountain Meadows massacre to be addressed to him thus: "my dear Colonel Kane: The truth of the whole matter about the massacre at the Meadows was——." Brigham Young's account is not presently located in his correspondence to Thomas Kane for this period. Kane wanted Brigham Young's version to present to United States Attorney General Jeremiah Black to be used "for good purposes."

⁷Parley P. Pratt was killed in Arkansas on 13 May 1857 by Hector H. McLean, whose wife had left him and become a polygamous wife of Elder Pratt. This event is well covered in Steven Pratt, "Eleanor McLean and the Murder of Parley P. Pratt," *BYU Studies* 15 (Winter 1975): 225–56. The Journal History under date of 23 October 1859 gives the following account of the "electing" of George Q. Cannon to the Apostleship. After some discussion of possible candidates to fill the vacancy, Orson Hyde proposed "that the Presidency nominate and that we sustain their nomination." Whereupon Brigham Young agreed to such action if he had the unanimous vote of the Council. He was given his requested support:

Prest. Young - I nominate George Q Cannon for one of the Twelve, and Jacob Gates for one of the Presidency of Seventies. Amen, amen, responded by several.

If you all feel that it is right for George Q Cannon to fill the vacancy in the Twelve, signify it by uplifted hands. Unanimous Vote

If you all feel that it is right for Jacob Gates to fill the vacancy in the Seventies, signify it by the same sign; Unanimous Vote. . . .

Geo. A. Smith suggested the publication of the appointments.

Prest. Young thought it not wisdom at present. Geo. Q. is known from St. Joseph to St. Louis and in the East in connection with our business and trading.

⁸Jacob Gates, born in Vermont on 9 May 1811, was baptized into the LDS church in 1835 by Orson Pratt. He lived through the difficulties of Missouri in the 1830s and then became a resident of Nauvoo. He came to Utah in the fall of 1847 and was called as a missionary to England in 1849, where he remained for three years. Continuing to serve the Church in Utah, he was again called as a missionary in 1859. He returned to Utah in 1861 and was ordained as one of the First Council of Seventy in 1862. He held several elected and appointive political offices including that of representative to the territorial legislature for Washington and

I wish you to make arrangements to come here as early as possible next season.⁹ In doing so it will be well for you to consult with br. Hooper as to the time br. Andrew Moffat will leave the frontier, and time your movements so as to cross the plains with him, unless you find a safe opportunity for coming sooner.¹⁰

Our crops have generally proved good, the weather unusually pleasant, and all things are working together for the welfare of those who are striving to do good upon the earth in their day and generation

Praying for your prosperity in every good word and work.

I remain, as ever,

Your Brother in the Gospel,

Brigham Young

Kane counties. He was the father of Jacob F. Gates, who in 1880 married Susa Young, daughter of Brigham Young and Lucy Bigelow (Andrew Jenson, *LDS Biographical Encyclopedia* [Salt Lake City: Published by Author, 1901], 1:197-98, 2:625-26).

Benjamin L. Clapp was born in Alabama in 1814. An early pioneer to Utah, he served on the first city council of Salt Lake City and also served as one of the LDS Seven Presidents of the Seventies from 1845 to 1859, when he was excommunicated from the LDS church as he encountered difficulties with Bishop Warren S. Snow in Sanpete County (*ibid.*, 1:195).

⁹George Q. Cannon remained in New Jersey and Washington working with William H. Hooper (Utah delegate to Congress) and directing the affairs of the LDS church in the East. When he returned to Utah in August 1860, he was officially ordained an Apostle (Jenson, *LDS Biographical Encyclopedia*, 1:42-51; B. H. Roberts, *A Comprehensive History of the Church* [reprint, Provo: Brigham Young Univ. Press, 1965], 4:501-2). Apparently it was at this time that his position was first publicized.

Upon the receipt of Brigham Young's letter notifying him of his selection as an Apostle, George Q. Cannon responded:

I know that I scarcely need say to you how peculiar my feelings were on reading in your letter of my appointment to fill the vacancy in the quorum of the Twelve, occasioned by the death of Bro. Parley. You know, I am sure, much better what they were and are than I can write them. I had to steal aside to give vent to my feelings and hide the tremor that shook my frame. I trembled with fear and dread, and yet I was filled with joy—fear and dread when I reflected on my weakness and unworthiness and the great responsibility that rested upon one holding the apostleship, and joy to think of the goodness and favor of the Lord and the love and confidence of my brethren. Never shall I forget, I trust, the feelings and desires I then had. May the Lord give me grace and strength to magnify this Holy Priesthood and calling to the glory of His name and the salvation of His Israel, is my earnest prayer. (George Q. Cannon to Brigham Young, 13 Dec. 1859, Brigham Young Incoming Correspondence, reel 68, box 38, folder 5.)

¹⁰William H. Hooper was Utah's second delegate to Congress, elected on 4 March 1859 to succeed Dr. John M. Bernhisel, who had served in Washington since 1851. Hooper was born in Eastern Shore, Maryland, 25 December 1813. He became a successful merchant and a steamboat captain before he came to Utah in 1850. Prior to his election to Congress, he served in the Utah legislature and as secretary of Utah Territory. Hooper served one term in Congress, 1859-61, and was then replaced by Bernhisel. However, Hooper was again elected as delegate to Congress from Utah in 1869 and served until replaced by George Q. Cannon in March 1873. In Utah in 1868, Hooper was one of the organizers of Zion's Cooperative Mercantile Institution and one of the founders of the Bank of Deseret. He remained president of the bank until his death 30 December 1882. (For an account of Hooper, see Stanford Orson Cazier, "The Life of William Henry Hooper, Merchant, Statesman" [Master's thesis, Univ. of Utah, 1956].)

Andrew J. Moffitt apparently accompanied William Hooper to Washington when Hooper was elected to office in 1859. Moffitt served as a courier and captain of an overland freighting company. He later became bishop of Manti in Sanpete County.