

LDS Perspectives Podcast

Episode 22: “In Brigham Young’s Words,” Part 1, with Gerrit Dirkmaat

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Russell Stevenson: Recording church history does not happen on its own. It demands a process, a technique, and real and diligent labor. Today we have historian Gerrit Dirkmaat to discuss with us the famous, and at times infamous *Journal of Discourses*, a widely cited compilation of speeches by early church leaders. What did the prophets say? How did they say it? What does it mean for our understanding of the 19th century church? Thanks for being here.

Gerrit Dirkmaat: It’s good to be here.

Russell Stevenson: For those of us who have not had the opportunity to learn about this thing that we call the *Journal of Discourses*, give us a little bit of background about dictionary level, what is it?

Gerrit Dirkmaat: The *Journal of Discourses* is a huge source. Actually, it’s hard to wrap your hands around what all of it is, but on the most basic level, this is a 26-volume set that was produced throughout the mid- to late 19th-century of sermons that were recorded. Most of these sermons being given by prophets and apostles, although there are other people that are recorded in these sermons. These sermons were recorded at the time, and they were eventually published in these volumes that were produced roughly every year beginning in 1854 and on up into the late 1870s. There are thousands of words and hundreds of speeches. Primarily, they’re given in a religious setting. It’s a talk that Brigham Young gives at the Tabernacle. It may not be general conference. It might just be a July 4th celebration, and he’s giving a talk, or they’re up Cottonwood Canyon, and they record it or something like that.

The *Journal of Discourses* is this compilation, this collection of these hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of sermons that speak to various different religious topics. Really what they are is they’re just the printed form of these extemporaneous speeches that were given by various church leaders in the 19th century.

Episode 22: In Brigham Young's Words

Russell Stevenson: These kinds of compilations don't just pop up on their own, right? Somebody needs to sit down and decide, "I'm going to put together these speeches." Who made that decision?

Gerrit Dirkmaat: That's a good question. From our understanding of the creation of the *Journal of Discourses*, there is still a lot of questions that go unanswered in the sense of we don't know exactly why George Watt included them, who is the primary compiler of at least the initial phases of the *Journal of Discourses*. It's hard to understand exactly why he includes some sermons and not others. Part of what we found with our research is that Watt recorded dozens and dozens and dozens of sermons that were never included in the *Journal of Discourses*. That's a question that unfortunately no one ever really asked Watt like, "Why did you put this Brigham Young sermon in here, but not this one? Why didn't you put this one in?" Really we don't have a whole lot of answers for that.

Watt seems to be selecting ... This was a private endeavor, the publication. Let me go back a little bit on the history of that. Watt is trained in Pitman shorthand. The best way to talk about it today would be like a court stenographer. He's going to record what the witness testimony is, but not actually every word. He uses symbols.

Russell Stevenson: Back in the '60s, secretaries were trained in Pitman shorthand, right?

Gerrit Dirkmaat: Exactly. Right. There was also a Taylor shorthand. Watt is trained in this shorthand, and the point of this is to capture as much as you can in real time — what a speaker is saying. The problem, of course, is that once you're capturing it in the shorthand, you have to then turn it into readable text. We'll talk about that in a minute. Watt was already occasionally employed to record sermons. He was initially employed by Willard Richards and the Deseret News to go to certain sermons, record them in shorthand, and then provide them to the paper. Richards would publish them in the paper.

Watt and Richards often had conflicts with one another. I think Watt always felt that he wasn't getting paid enough for what he was doing. He eventually approaches Brigham Young and asks if he can, as essentially a private endeavor, make compilations of these sermons that he's recording and then publish them in these larger bound volumes, which is where the *Journal of Discourses* originates in 1854.

Episode 22: In Brigham Young's Words

Russell Stevenson: As I understand it, one of the reasons he wanted to make a little extra money was to help his ailing wife.

Gerrit Dirkmaat: His wife is ill. I think the problem for all journalists is that you're never quite paid what it seems to be worth, whether it's media or not. The reality is that Watt is trying his best to make a living off of this. As I said, I think he thought he would be able to do it just by getting paid for newspaper publications of it or being paid for bit pieces on the side for recording things like conference. The reality is that it's just not making it. Brigham Young is amenable to his request, "What I'd like to do is I'd like to take your sermons and the sermons of other apostles, and I'd like to record them as you're giving them. I'd like to publish them in books. He publishes them in England. They're published at the *Millennial Star* office. They're not published in the United States.

The other argument for Watt aside from, "Hey, I'd like to make a little extra money," is, of course, these sermons aren't being recognized by anyone anywhere even when they're published in the *Deseret News*. The people in Utah territory maybe will read them, but the argument Watt could make is, "If I publish them in England, they can have this wider reach, saints in England, saints in Europe, saints on the East Coast." They're actually going to have better access to them on the East Coast if they're coming from England than if they're coming from *Deseret*. I think that's the other thing that's at play here that Brigham Young sees that this allows some of the messages of the apostles and the church to be spread, and, of course, it helps Watt make some money on the side. At least that's the intention. I don't know how much he actually makes.

Russell Stevenson: It's interesting. From what I understand, it didn't do all that well, at least in England. I was looking at one early report. One of the people in the publishing office said, "I would think it better to sell them to the saints, those disposed to buy our works at the price of wastepaper or even give them away than to have them lie year after year rotting on shelves or on boxes doing no good to anybody.

Gerrit Dirkmaat: I would think that it's a relatively disappointing venture as a money-making venture for Watt and especially for the *Millennial Star* office. Not that they don't sell any. I just think that Mormon history has a tendency ... There's a history in Mormonism, we would say, a tendency of overproduction when it comes to books. The reality of even the

Episode 22: In Brigham Young's Words

publication of the Book of Mormon, the original plan with the Doctrine and Covenants to publish 100,000 copies. Wow, that's —

Russell Stevenson: That's ambitious. That's hopeful.

Gerrit Dirkmaat: You have faith obviously. That's why you're doing it. I think that's similar, too. In some ways, you can understand the overproduction because they only have the ability to publish it once. The costs are so prohibitive of doing a reprint that you're going to go big or go home, but I would say that's probably a fairly good representation that certainly people buy it and certainly people use it, but like many things that are produced, its real value to members of the church is something that grows later.

Even the Pearl of Great Price is a good example of this. You have the Pearl of Great Price being published in the early 1850s — in 1851, but it's not canonized and considered essential and being published everywhere until well into the 1880s. You have this decades-long period. That is a little different because it eventually gets canonized and the *Journal of Discourses* aren't, but by the late 1880s and 1890s, you can see them using the *Journal of Discourses* almost like it's quasi-scripture. Even in some church meetings and in conference meetings, they will reference speeches from the *Journal of Discourses* .

Russell Stevenson: Like John A. Widtsoe's compilation, *Discourses of Brigham Young*.

Gerrit Dirkmaat: Exactly.

Russell Stevenson: On the *Journal of Discourses* .

Gerrit Dirkmaat: That's not saying that ... There was at one point ... George Q. Cannon in one of the volumes does suggest that the *Journal of Discourses* is a standard of work of the church. That's his one statement. That's as it's being published. I think it's in 1868. It is filling this realm between scripture and not scripture. It's often being used as scripture. Of course, the reason why is it's primarily speeches of prophets and apostles. The same way we do today. If a prophet says something in general conference, people are not going to say that's scripture, although some might, but they'll certainly say it's the doctrine of the church. "Well, what President Monson said is the doctrine of the church."

Episode 22: In Brigham Young's Words

Russell Stevenson: That's why we believe in prophets, right?

Gerrit Dirkmaat: Right. I think that that's one of the reasons it occupies a hazy area. It's a private endeavor of a private journalist or recorder essentially to sell these. What he's doing is taking public pronouncements of the prophets and apostles for his private endeavor. Especially, like I said, as you get to the 1880s and 1890s, you see pretty regularly people quoting from it and using it in church meetings not exactly the same way they use the scriptures, but certainly as though they're saying this is an authoritative thing that I'm saying.

Russell Stevenson: Let's talk about Watt's approach as a recorder. Maybe even before we do that, let's talk about the practices of recording speeches and about the practice of record keeping in the mid-19th century. Was there a strict sense of a journalistic ethos that, "When so and so says something, I have a journalistic responsibility to quote them faithfully"?

Gerrit Dirkmaat: I don't think that they have one. You could even argue whether or not that journalistic ethos is alive today, but they certainly don't have the same level of, "I need to get this verbatim," although you do see people who are recording discourses or seem to be trying. Just taking the multiple accounts of the King Follett sermon, for instance. You have the Bullock transcription, and the Woodruff transcription, and the Clayton transcription. There are discrepancies and differences among all of them, but they are not the kind of discrepancies where you're like, "Here is clearly where Wilford Woodruff just went off the rails and didn't even pay attention.

Russell Stevenson: Where he just made something up. You don't see anything like that.

Gerrit Dirkmaat: You have some things: "Oh, here's a sentence that this person missed, but these two people got. Here's someone phrasing it like this, and someone like this." I do think that the people that are recording it feel like they're trying to be faithful to what the person is saying. They obviously aren't able to record it and play it back. For what? This is where the really interesting aspect of the research that LaJean Carruth, and I have done on the *Journal of Discourses* .

Russell Stevenson: Before we go there, let's get some intro. Let's talk about LaJean Carruth a little. She has what we would call a very particular set of skills.

Episode 22: In Brigham Young's Words

Gerrit Dirkmaat: Yeah, they are skills she's acquired over a lifetime. LaJean is an employee of the church history department, who has mastered not just the art of being able to read Pitman shorthand, which is a dead shorthand. No one knows how to read it. Well, she does, but no one knows how to read it just generally. It's not taught anymore in business schools or anything like that or journalistic schools. She has essentially educated herself to really become a master at reading it and more than just a master at reading it. Every shorthand note taker has their own idiosyncrasies. I could pull out my phonograph manual I have over there, and I could look at it. I could have a general idea of what this should be trying to say. The problem is, like every shorthand note taker, he's the one who is going to be transcribing his own notes. Like any student in any college class, you might put an abbreviation down there, and no one on earth would ever have any idea what you mean, but you do.

Russell Stevenson: It's the language of George Watt. It's not necessarily Pitman shorthand.

Gerrit Dirkmaat: Exactly. It's shorthand adapted to how George Watt is using it. That's the real particular blessing, the skill that LaJean has is that she hasn't just mastered shorthand. She's mastered George Watt's shorthand. That allows her to read these in a way that really is unparalleled and to back up again a little bit is that Watt recorded. As he was doing this, he recorded literally hundreds of sermons. He's not the only one who records sermons, but Watt, of course, is the initial instigator of the *Journal of Discourses*. He's the one that records many of the early ones. That was where our research focused.

What you found was that. We have no way of knowing how well Watt's shorthand comports to the original. In almost no cases do you have someone who is doing their own word-for-word transcription, trying to capture it like you do with the King Follett sermon. In any case, Watt was the one that had to take his own notes and turn them into a readable transcript that he would then either send to the Deseret News or publish in the *Journal of Discourses*. The real question becomes, is Watt improving or changing the transcript that he actually took?

As we did our research, that's what we found. It appears that Watt is being pretty faithful to what is actually being spoken on from the pulpit when he's taking his notes. The transition from notes to published draft is where there are many more changes, some that a historian, a documentary editor would say are very substantial.

Episode 22: In Brigham Young's Words

Russell Stevenson: They would say this is unacceptable if you're going by modern standards of documentary editors.

Gerrit Dirkmaat: By documentary editing standards, working with the Joseph Smith Papers, it was a big deal to us if we had four versions of a revelation and one of them had two words that were different. That was a big deal. Why are these two words that are different? In the Watt shorthand transcriptions, as opposed to what was then published in the *Journal of Discourses*, there are sometimes hundreds of differences, sometimes thousands of differences. If you're just talking words, there are some sermons there that have 1,000 words left out. There are some sermons where there's 400 words included. I don't mean just articles like "the" and "and." I mean entire portions of the sermon that were spoken to the congregation that clearly he recorded, but when that same sermon was published were not included.

Then the question becomes who is making those editorial decisions? I think the initial reaction as we started doing this research is we started comparing the notes that were taken at the time that he spoke, the shorthand transcription, and we compared it to what was eventually published in the *Journal of Discourses*. As we found discrepancies, the initial reaction that most people wanted to have was, "You know, that's par for the course. He probably made a transcription. He handed it to Brigham Young. Brigham Young went through it and said, 'You know what? I don't want to say that.' They even do that in general conference now.

Russell Stevenson: There was an official protocol here?

Gerrit Dirkmaat: Yeah, that there's this review process that's going on. The problem is we have very little evidence of that. In fact, we almost have some evidence to the contrary, where it almost appears at times that Brigham Young doesn't have a huge handle on what is actually going in there. There are some places where he talks about reviewing sermons that are going to go in the *Journal of Discourses*.

Russell Stevenson: Right, at one point, he says that, "Any scripture or any sermon that I have given, if I have reviewed it, it can be counted as scripture."

Gerrit Dirkmaat: Yet at the same time, there are multiple instances in which things are published that ostensibly he was reviewing, but that he clearly wasn't.

Episode 22: In Brigham Young's Words

Russell Stevenson: How can you tell that?

Gerrit Dirkmaat: For instance, there are some things ... A great example is from the historian's office when they're publishing the *History of the Church*. They're publishing in serialized format the history of Joseph Smith in the Deseret News. He's supposed to be reviewing all of that. In one instance after something is already published in the Deseret News, he comes down to the office, and he's not happy. He wants to have some interviews with the folks at the historian's office because he says, "There were things I didn't want put in there that you put in or there were things that I would have taken out had I looked at this." You have the same thing when it comes to some of Orson Pratt speeches, where there are speeches that are being prepared for publication. They're already typeset. In fact, in one case, half of it is already published in an issue of the Deseret News before Brigham Young comes and says, "Hey."

Russell Stevenson: That's pretty far down the pipeline by the time Brigham Young —

Gerrit Dirkmaat: It's already type ... In fact, in one instance, half of his sermon actually already gets published in the Deseret News. They put a mea culpa at the bottom because they've already struck off all of the sheets. They say, "This went to press a little earlier than we wanted," but the reality was Brigham Young had said, "I don't want that published. I'm not okay with the doctrine he's presenting there. Our idea would be, "Of course, Brigham Young is going to vet every single thing that goes through."

We don't have evidence in his journal or his works or the historian's office or from Watt or from Richards of him doing that on a consistent ... We have a couple of times where he says, "I'm reviewing this for the ..." That's very early on. We certainly know he's aware of the *Journal of Discourses*. In fact, in 1857 ... The *Journal of Discourses* begun in 1854. When they're putting books into the cornerstone of the Salt Lake Temple, two of the books they put into the cornerstone of the Salt Lake Temple is volume one and two of the *Journal of Discourses*.

Russell Stevenson: It's certainly meaningful to them.

Gerrit Dirkmaat: That's what they're putting in there is, "This is what we want to say matters." They're putting a prayer to protect these historical items. Watt is producing something that Brigham Young is certainly aware. Clearly, I think Brigham Young is aware that there's editing being done, but that's

Episode 22: In Brigham Young's Words

still not the same thing as saying that after the fact editing that's being done by Watt is the same thing as Brigham Young signing off on everything. You think maybe Brigham Young would get mad if it was something. I don't know.

Where we end up with, I think, historically is that the *Journal of Discourses* are a source that are used a certain way most of the time. Most of the time, we use the *Journal of Discourses* to try to make religious points. They're sermons. They're speeches that are almost universally religious in nature. That means when we use them, we're using them to try to make a religious point.

The problem is when you're making religious points, when you're making theological points, words matter a lot. That, I think, can cause some hangups when we're looking at this. For instance, someone might say, "Brigham Young said this and this, but he didn't say this." Actually, he did say the third thing that you were looking for. That's just no longer in the published version. It has to give us a little bit of pause.

I've got an example here from the article that LaJean and I wrote on this topic. In it, what's going on here is this is an example of what was published as opposed to what was written. Here's what was published. In the published *Journal of Discourses*, this is what you would read today if you pulled it up. It's a sermon on the Word of Wisdom. He's giving it in Tooele, so it's a good thing they publish it or no one would even know it happened because it was in Tooele in 1867.

Russell Stevenson: Nothing against Tooele. I love Tooele

Gerrit Dirkmaat: No, I love it. It's just I can't imagine there were more than like 30 people living there in 1867. At least they recorded it. It's a sermon on the Word of Wisdom and Brigham Young says this, according to the *Journal of Discourses*. "Many tried to excuse themselves because tea and coffee are not mentioned, arguing that it refers to hot drinks only. What did we drink hot when the Word of Wisdom was given? Tea and coffee. It definitely refers to that which we drank with our food. I said to the saints at our last general conference, "The spirit whispers me to call upon the Latter-day Saints to observe the Word of Wisdom, to let tea, coffee and tobacco alone and to abstain from drinking spirituous drinks."

Episode 22: In Brigham Young's Words

Someone will read that and say, "That just sounds just like Brigham Young. He's direct. He's to the point. He's saying, 'There are people trying to excuse themselves and they shouldn't.' Here's point by point by point. It's very logical and it's very concise." What was actually recorded as the sermon was given in real time was this. It's very similar in meaning and in content, but not in the way it's presented.

This is how it was actually recorded: "Some of the sisters and some of the brethren will say that tea and coffee is not mentioned in the Word of Wisdom, but hot drinks. As if this doesn't refer directly, perfectly, absolutely, definitely and truly to that which we did drink hot. What does it allude to? What did we drink hot? Tea and coffee. When we made milk porridge, it was food. We couldn't wash it down red hot the way we drank down tea. It alludes to tea and coffee or whatever we drank. I said to the Latter-day Saints at the annual conference of 6 April that the spirit whispers to me for this people to observe the Word of Wisdom. Let the tea and coffee and tobacco alone, whether they smoke, take snuff and chew, let it alone. Those that are in the habit of drinking liquor, cease to drink liquor."

There's a lot of similarities there. There's actually some vast differences, especially in the particularities. For instance, in the original, there's no outlining of what he means by leaving tobacco alone. I mean in the published version. In the original, he's very clear: "I mean tobacco you smoke. I mean tobacco you chew. I mean tobacco you sniff. I mean tobacco."

Russell Stevenson: Different varieties of tobacco. He said, "I'm not going to leave you any kinds of loopholes."

Gerrit Dirkmaat: No. His hyperbole in, "As if it doesn't refer directly, perfectly, absolutely, definitely ..." That is a rhetorical model he's using to really press the point. People who are saying hot drinks doesn't mean tea and coffee, as far as he's concerned, are completely off the rails. He's using this alliteration almost to try to demonstrate that. That's one of the things that's lost from many of these published sermons is Brigham Young didn't just stand up and thunder down, "These are the words from God."

He employed rhetorical tools that speakers used and in doing so, provided a much more broader view of the way he's trying to connect with people. I found places in the *Journal of Discourses* where they had actually told

Episode 22: In Brigham Young's Words

jokes to open their sermon that didn't make it into the published version. They gave, sometimes, background of the sermon they were about to give. Brigham Young gives a long sermon in which the preface to his sermon is his anger with some of the false doctrines that have been propagated in the territory. He says, "Because of that, I'm going to say this. What's published in the *Journal of Discourses* is only the actual sermon, not the preface to it." You're losing some of the reasoning behind it as well.

- Russell Stevenson:** The only way that we would know what was originally said is through knowledge of the Pitman shorthand.
- Gerrit Dirkmaat:** That is the real conclusion you have to come to. There are hundreds of these sermons recorded in shorthand, and LaJean hasn't gotten to all of them. She's only one woman. She's amazing and dynamic and working her tail off, but she's only one woman. She is going through these and creating these transcripts, but there are hundreds of them. If the question for a general member of the church is, "What do I do with a quote from the *Journal of Discourses*?"
- Russell Stevenson:** Let's say the Adam-God theory. That is one of the most infamous.
- Gerrit Dirkmaat:** Exactly. When we're talking the Adam-God theory, words matter a lot.
- Russell Stevenson:** Especially because you're talking about labels for deity.
- Gerrit Dirkmaat:** Exactly. We're saying that, "God is this," or "God is that," or "Adam is this." Now what word Brigham Young uses is actually the crux of the entire question. Unfortunately for the Adam-God theory, at least for the sermon, the most famous sermon that surrounds it, there is no shorthand. It's extend, so what do we do with that? In fact, in most cases, there's not extant shorthand. There are entire years for which there is no shorthand. What do we have to do? We almost have to by induction try to figure out by looking at the way that other sermons were changed, try to determine, "How reasonably can I take this sermon as word-for-word verbatim?"
- Russell Stevenson:** We know about his patterns in editing, some of his quirks. You would look at the final product from the Adam-God sermon, for example. "He did a similar thing in this sermon, so maybe we can suppose that he did the same thing with this."

Episode 22: In Brigham Young's Words

Gerrit Dirkmaat: Yeah, you would at least have to say ... One of the conclusions that I think is fairly difficult for both the historical community and members of the church used to using the *Journal of Discourses* is, one of the conclusions you have to come to is, while the topic and the general information of the sermon can be laid down as reasonably accurate, the words that are used to describe it, you have to be incredibly careful with. There are just so many examples. Again. In the article, we have Heber C. Kimball speech that he gives. It is one of the biggest evidences of how profound some of these changes can be. I'm not going to read everything that he actually spoke because it's huge. It's thousands of words, but it was all about lying and how people are ... In fact, maybe I'll read part of it. I won't read the whole thing. Don't worry.

“When a man tells a lie, that is a crime. When he steals, that is a crime. Can you get rid of it? Except he repent and make restitution, can President Young forgive him? No, the man has got to make the restitution that satisfies the demands of justice or it stands against him in the time of eternity. Until he takes a course to redeem it, that applies to me as well as to you, that is a sin for a man or a woman to violate or forfeit their covenant, which they have made when they receive their endowment. You promised you would not lie, you would not steal, that you would not bear false witness.

What is false witness? For a man to go and tell a lie when not a word of truth is in it and then have a tendency to prejudice his neighbors against his neighbors and crush him down. That is a crime. Was wrong for the man that is wrong, and the restitution has got to be made to the man that is wronged. That is what we have to do. That is according to the law of God, which Jesus gave to his people. That same law is renewed unto us and given to Joseph by Jesus to this people for us to live by.” That's what was originally recorded.

This is what was published of that same portion of the speech: “When a person bears false witness, it is a sin. Or when a person steals, it is a sin. These are sins that must be accounted for either in time or eternity by the person who commits them.” That's it. Full stop. As you can see, there are literally hundreds of words and entire portions of the way he's teaching this, explanations about what false witness is, why you have to make restitution. They are not there. What is there, you might say is a brief summary, but it's a summary that leaves out the very reasons why Kimball

Episode 22: In Brigham Young's Words

is saying what he's saying. What you have, I wouldn't say is inaccurate, but what you have is only a shell of what he's trying to teach people.

Someone might read ... This is how the *Journal of Discourses* gets misused all the time. Someone might read that paragraph that's published and say, "He didn't say in there that you had to make restitution." Actually he spent half of that sermon saying you need to make restitution. That just didn't make the cutting room floor. We have to be incredibly careful, especially when it comes to the *Journal of Discourses* sermons, of saying, "Because this particular word was used or this one wasn't, then that shows what they think." Here Brigham Young said celestial, but didn't talk about terrestrial, then that must not have been ...

We've got to be really careful of that especially when it comes to things like plural marriage, when it comes to topics that are often ... For most members of the church, their exposure to the *Journal of Discourses* is a couple of times in a Sunday School manual or someone throwing at them some kind of quote that's designed to undermine faith. "Did you know that John Taylor said?" So I think an understanding of the fact that before we have serious issues with anything we read or hear in the *Journal of Discourses* ... First and foremost, we need to understand what it is we're reading and that maybe the reason why that word or that phraseology sticks out to you as not being right, it may not even have been in the original as this example demonstrates.

Russell Stevenson: As we do with the King Follett discourse, we have other options besides just analyzing Watt's shorthand. We can look at other potential contemporary sources. In the case of the Adam-God Theory, Brigham Young spoke of that in other contexts in the course of his life. As you say, when we were talking about the *Journal of Discourses* itself, it generally ... Really, you can say never can stand alone. It always requires an outside critical instrument to gage it, to measure it, to bind it.

Gerrit Dirkmaat: That's why I think using it in more general terms or at the very least caveating it to the reader, saying to the reader, "The published version of the edited sermon that Brigham Young gave in 1857 said this," so that the reader at least understands that I am not giving a 21st century general conference talk for you here. I am not literally repeating back word for word what President Monson said. What is going on is a publication of the gist of things. Sometimes it is much closer to being verbatim. There are

Episode 22: In Brigham Young's Words

times where there are what you would say acceptable changes, but those are very rare.

The reality is as far as a documentary editor, I'm the worst person to look at this because to me, the fact that this one says the word friend and this one doesn't, that's a big deal. That may not be as big a deal to your average member of the church, but it actually goes far beyond that. The example I gave was an example where Heber C. Kimball said hundreds of words that weren't published. You have the opposite as well, where there are sometimes hundreds of words that are inserted.

Russell Stevenson: That we have no evidence were ever said.

Gerrit Dirkmaat: No idea where they came from. Again, what someone will want to say if they want to maintain ... For lots of reasons, both historians and members and even antagonists of the church desperately want the *Journal of Discourses* to still be this authoritative source for what people said and did and thought in the 19th century because it's an easy ... It's a source that's accessible.

Russell Stevenson: You've got twenty-six volumes.

Gerrit Dirkmaat: It is.

Russell Stevenson: Hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of sermons.

Gerrit Dirkmaat: It's digitized. If I want to say, "What did early church leaders think about salvation?" I go and type "salvation," and then boom. I've got an article that I put out on salvation. I'm not saying that you can't do that anymore. I'm not saying the *Journal of Discourses* don't have historical and religious value. What I'm saying is we have to be very careful when we're writing about it or talking about or when we're thinking about it when someone is presenting something from it that we realize, especially if much is being made about words that were spoken, ways they were spoken, context in which they were spoken. They're going to have to dial that back a little bit and realize you actually, in most cases, have no idea what was originally spoken, what words were originally used and in those cases where words are inserted. I have no idea where they came from. I'd love it if I could say, "Here Watt wrote in his journal and he said, 'I met with John Taylor. He read over his sermon and decided he wanted to add another ...'" We don't have that.

Episode 22: In Brigham Young's Words

Russell Stevenson: It would simplify things.

Gerrit Dirkmaat: It would be. We don't have that. Again, people will want to think that because the easiest way of dealing with the research from the writings that LaJean is producing ... The easiest way to deal with it is to essentially dismiss it, to say, "Yeah, but I'm sure they're still fine." It becomes a little bit more untenable the more you look at the various differences. It's true that LaJean and I haven't gone through every single sermon, but we've certainly gone through enough of them to say it would be not only highly unlikely at this point, it would be almost impossible to find one that was literally verbatim, where it was only just a couple of words changed here and there, the kind of grammar fixing. There are far too many changes for that expectation.

Russell Stevenson: The research that you've done is a sword that cuts all ways. It undercuts the claims of antagonists who really want to use this as a bat to beat up the church. It undercuts Latter-day Saints who want to see this as a reliable record of the voices of the prophets. It undercuts pretty much all voices in regards to this field of research. Is that a fair —

Gerrit Dirkmaat: Yeah, I would say that that's ... Depending on how someone is using it. The intent, of course, isn't to undercut anyone really, but it is true that for a long time, the *Journal of Discourses* has been essentially casually used. It's been used almost uncritically as a source. People have been very critical of what is in the source, but people haven't been critical of the source itself. They have said, "It's published by the church," even though it's not, but they'll say that. "It's in the *Journal of Discourses*, so that must be true. It's a representation of what Brigham Young said, so that must be true."

You're right, antagonists ... When there are things that deal with difficult issues like violence or plural marriage or the Adam-God Theory or doctrines that ... There are antagonists of the church who certainly want to grab a hold of just those things, which is already proof texting anyway. To say, "Did you know in volume 21 of the ..." Unless we're going to read all the volumes, we're really taking this out of context as a source to begin with. Second of all, if you're going to get hung up on a certain source ... If you're going to say, "No, Brigham Young said that all women had to practice plural marriage," or something like that, you actually need to be a little bit careful because I don't actually know. That does cut the other

Episode 22: In Brigham Young's Words

way. It's possible that there are teachings in the *Journal of Discourses* that members have found very comforting.

Russell Stevenson: And edifying or moving.

Gerrit Dirkmaat: If we're going to get caught up on individual words, we probably need to dial it back. The way I would say using the *Journal of Discourses* is, as a resource, as a beginning, as a means to understanding what they might have been talking about and how they might have been talking about it, but not, "They used this word to describe the temple in 1858." That would be, I think, more than what the research allows.

Russell Stevenson: Excellent. This has been an illumination discussion. Thanks for joining us.

Gerrit Dirkmaat: Thank you.

LDS Perspectives Podcast

Episode 22: "In Brigham Young's Words," Part 2, with Laura Hales

Laura Hales: Hello, this is Laura Harris Hales with LDS Perspectives Podcast. I am here today with my friend LaJean Carruth of the Church History Department. LaJean holds a PhD in German literature from the University of Utah, master's degree in library science and humanities from BYU, and a bachelor's degree in German from BYU. That's quite a bit of schooling, LaJean.

LaJean Carruth: Just kept going to school. I like to learn.

Laura Hales: That sounds fun. You really haven't used your German so much. You're more known as a transcriber of George Watt's shorthand. Can you tell us how you got into transcribing?

LaJean Carruth: When I was 11, I was bored one Sunday afternoon and found in the basement of my parent's home an old *Improvement Era* open to an article on the Deseret alphabet. How that happened, I have no idea. Why we owned that, I have no idea. My family were active church members, but not scholars. I was instantly, completely, absolutely hooked. I learned the

Episode 22: In Brigham Young's Words

Deseret alphabet and decreed that I would be a Deseret transcriber when I grew up. I actually did that.

When I was 22, I was finishing my first master's degree at BYU and preparing to start my second. I was on my own financially and desperately in need of work. A fellow student told me that the manuscript's librarian at BYU had some items in Deseret alphabet he might hire me to transcribe. I went down and talked to Dennis Reilly, who told me that he didn't have much in Deseret, but he had a lot of Pitman shorthand, and if I would learn to read Pitman shorthand, he'd give me a job, a student wage, part-time work, but work. I was 22. I said, "Okay, I'll learn Pitman shorthand." I went out to the stacks and got a 19th century book on Pitman, taught myself to read it in 20 hours of my own time, and began reading George Watt's shorthand notes. I didn't think anything of it until many years later I was trying to teach others to read this old shorthand and realized, "Yes, I really did accomplish something."

Laura Hales: Tell us who George Watt was.

LaJean Carruth: George Watt was the first British convert. He actually ran a footrace. At least two wanted to be baptized that day and wanted to be the first. He had a footrace, and he won. He came to Nauvoo, taught Pitman shorthand. He recorded the Carthage trial, the trial of the murderers of Joseph and Hyrum. Well, of Joseph. The trial was just for Joseph. They never had a trial for Hyrum. Then he went on a mission from 1846 to 1851 back to England and Scotland. In late fall of 1851, he came to Salt Lake City traveling with Orson Pratt's company and began reporting sermons, legislative proceedings, court reports, and other matters in Pitman shorthand.

Laura Hales: How did your life intersect with George Watt's Pitman shorthand?

LaJean Carruth: It took me 30 years and thousands of hours working on other shorthand before I could figure out how to read George Watt's shorthand. I worked at BYU in the manuscripts department for almost two years. Then I became a full-time librarian. Fast forward many years, I did freelance work here and there. I again desperately needed work and contacted the Church History Library. Events happened, and I was hired on. I worked on the John D. Lee trials. Its 1,400 pages of shorthand extant from John D. Lee's two trials for the Mountain Meadows Massacre. Through the thousands of hours, literally, of that, I found I could read George Watt's

Episode 22: In Brigham Young's Words

shorthand. As the Mountain Meadows shorthand project slowed down, I was assigned to read George Watt's shorthand, in which time I found out how very differently his transcript was from his shorthand and how different the *Journal of Discourses* in Deseret News' published versions were from his original shorthand.

Laura Hales: We wish we had transcriptions from the Nauvoo speeches of Joseph Smith. Why do you think we don't?

LaJean Carruth: Joseph Smith had access to shorthand reporters, but he didn't use them. Willard Richards kept Joseph Smith's Nauvoo journal. Others did also, too. Willard Richards wrote a few words of shorthand in Joseph Smith's journal, but we don't have a single line or a single word of shorthand taken from dictation by Joseph Smith. Within a month of his death, Thomas Bullock started recording sermons in shorthand. Maybe at that point, they realized what they'd lost. We don't know why. It's hard to presume someone's motivation. One possibility that I have thought of is if someone took down Joseph Smith's words in shorthand, he wouldn't be able to read the original. He had been misquoted extensively and maybe he didn't want a document that supposedly recorded his words, but he couldn't be sure what it said. That's just my idea. We really don't know.

Laura Hales: Tell us about these early sermons of Utah leaders that you've transcribed.

LaJean Carruth: The Brethren believed that they were to speak as the spirit directed. It was very common for someone to get up and say, "I don't know what I'll be talking about. I will say what the spirit puts into my mind or I will say what comes into my mind." They spoke extemporaneously. They were to prepare themselves by scripture study, by being close to the spirit, but they were not to prepare notes. Their sermons are by today's standards often rambly, very disorganized. Brigham Young would speak on many, many different topics in the same sermon, all the time jumping around. They were much more willing to engage in speculative theology from the Tabernacle pulpit or the bowery pulpit than what we would hear today. The spontaneity is sometimes nice. Sometimes it's very disorganized. They were more open. They were freer to say what they felt. It was a more open atmosphere then.

Laura Hales: We've talked to Dr. Dirkmaat about the *Journal of Discourses*, and you mentioned when you were transcribing the Mountain Meadows Massacre trial, transcriptions of John D. Lee, you found they were very inaccurate.

Episode 22: In Brigham Young's Words

The first time I met you ... I don't know if you remember. We were on the river walk in San Antonio.

LaJean Carruth: Yes, I do.

Laura Hales: It was during a break from a Mormon history conference. You told me a little poem about George Watt. I even had you write it down on a scratch piece of paper because I thought it was profound and pithy. Can you share that with our listeners?

LaJean Carruth: As George Watt transcribed his shorthand, he would rewrite what was said. George Watt was a brilliant, brilliant writer. We have a journal he kept traveling from Liverpool to Salt Lake City in 1851. It stops at Chimney Rock unfortunately. We have some of his letters that he rough drafted in shorthand, including letters to perspective girl brides. Some of those are hilarious. He might have thought he was improving Brigham Young. He changed Brigham Young's blunt speech and his short sentences into what he probably perceived was a very eloquent speech. Brigham Young was a powerful, powerful preacher. When we read the accounts we have extant that were transcribed, we lose the power of his sermons. He was a powerful preacher. More than once I have finished a sermon by someone else and then started a Brigham Young sermon and the difference in power hits me instantly.

George Watt took out words that Brigham Young said. He added words that Brigham Young never said, including whole paragraphs. Large sections in the *Journal of Discourses* have no relationship to the shorthand document. Then he'd change words. He'd change Brigham Young's short sentences to long sentences. I immortalized this in an eloquent poem. "There was a man named George Watt/Who could improve Brigham Young, or so he thought/So he took out words here/And he added words there/And his accuracy was not what it ought."

Laura Hales: If you were to take one or two examples of George Watt's revisions, what would you consider to be the most egregious?

LaJean Carruth: Brigham Young would say, "heart," and George Watt would change it to "mind" time after time after time. This changes it from the realm of the spirit to the realm of the intellect. Brigham Young would frequently address the congregation with questions. George Watt would change those to statements so much that we didn't even know that Brigham Young used

Episode 22: In Brigham Young's Words

questions like that in his sermons. This could change an understanding to an accusing statement. For example, in 1853, Brigham Young was talking about how it was hard crossing the plains and was so hard that many people lost heart and almost lost their faith. He turned to the congregation and says, "Do some of you who came over this year feel this way?" George Watt changed that to, "Some of you who came over this year feel this way." The first is an understanding. The second is an accusation.

He would alter them in other ways. Brigham Young would talk about relative perfection in an encouraging way. Once he said, "If I am perfect in my sphere," and a few lines later, "If my children are perfect in their sphere." George Watt changed it to, "I am perfect in my sphere. My children are perfect in their sphere." Brigham Young knew he wasn't perfect. By the time, it made it into the *Journal of Discourses* as it reads, "We are or ought to be perfect in our spheres." Absolutely, totally, completely different sentiment.

Laura Hales: Brigham Young had eight days of formal education by his own admission. I read somewhere where he was talking about his father buying him one pair of shoes in his lifetime. He could empathize with the poorest of the poor British converts immigrating to Utah. Often he's been compared to a lion. Some people called him a tyrant. You said sometimes he goes on tirades. What kind of things have you learned about what motivated Brigham Young through his sermons? He obviously didn't have his private life transcribed, his private interactions, but his public life, a lot of that was recorded, what he said through his sermons.

LaJean Carruth: Brigham Young referred to himself as a lion in describing a time in Nauvoo when Joseph came and asked him to go to a meeting, and he didn't want to go. Joseph wanted him to get up and speak, and he didn't want to. He got up and spoke, and he said, "And the lion roared." He was speaking in defense of Joseph and the doctrine and the kingdom. Brigham Young's prayers offered insights into him. One of the most interesting items I have found and transcribed is a dedicatory prayer for the Salt Lake Tabernacle. Brigham Young dedicated it on the first day it was used in October 1867, but for some reason this prayer was never transcribed and was completely unknown until I found it. I transcribed it. It's available on history.lds.org, the whole prayer, but when you read it, the Lion of the Lord, as we often call him, is a humble, pleading servant. I have read, transcribed, several of Brigham Young's prayers. When he goes before the Lord, he is very humble and pleading.

Episode 22: In Brigham Young's Words

I think what hasn't come through his sermons, though we often express his concern for the poor and his obligation to help them to come over, is he cared about people, and they knew he cared about them. I recently found a quote by John Taylor that I'm going to read. This is John Taylor speaking February 5, 1865, he wrote, "Here is President Young. I will take his memory. I have traveled with him throughout the length and breadth of this territory. I do not know that I saw him meet anybody yet, but he knew him, and could remember the name of the person and the circumstances connected with him. There is something remarkable in this."

John Taylor is commenting on Brigham Young's memory, but Brigham Young cared for people as individuals. His caring comes out in his sermons, his real sermons, what he really said, and the people knew he cared about them. They felt this caring. They were very aware of his caring. In speaking in September of 1866, Brigham Young said, "I am a common man like the rest of you. Were I the monarch of the whole earth, I should feel no different than when I had my paintbrush in my hand. If I see a woman with their load on their arms, a child I would rather take that than to ride in a carriage."

His caring comes out in the way he addressed them. We have his real sermons. They felt it, and they knew it, and they trusted in his dedication to the Lord and in his leadership. He did have a temper. Many of us have tempers. I do weary of his tirades and anger. In 1868, he mentioned that he had a stroke. Connecting the dots in the sermon, it was about 1842. He suffered some permanent damage from the stroke. This was completely unknown. There's no other record in history of the stroke that Brigham Young had. His health wasn't good. He had toothaches. He had rheumatism. I think as his health deteriorated, I think his patience deteriorated also, as it often does with all of us. He wanted to build Zion. He had this vision of Zion. As the railroad brought more gentiles and more gentile influence encroached, the people wouldn't follow his vision. It frustrated him. I think he simply did not understand why anyone wouldn't work as hard as they could to build Zion.

Yet, he was often very encouraging. He'd go out to the different towns and tell the people, "We have come to cheer you and comfort you and encourage you." He would often tell the saints that he didn't think the people in the city of Enoch made any more rapid progress than they were making. He said Enoch had 300 years to build Zion. If he had the group of

Episode 22: In Brigham Young's Words

immigrants coming from different religious backgrounds and tradition that he had, it would take Enoch 900 years to build Zion.

Laura Hales: We're going to switch topics just a little bit. He was not only the leader of the church, he was also the territorial governor for a period of time.

LaJean Carruth: The news didn't make it across in the winter before the telegraph was brought. They would occasionally give the news from the Tabernacle pulpit. Once he got up and said, "Brigham and I are still governor."

Laura Hales: That's funny. I think Brigham has been an enigma, and someone who's been hard to grasp and understand for a lot of members, but that has intensified in recent years, especially with the release of the Gospel Topics essay on race and the priesthood and temple ban. There's been a lot of confusion about when the ban started. Was it conference? Was it having something to do with the legislature? Were they related? You and Paul Reeve and Christopher Rich gave a presentation at that San Antonio MHA conference about this topic, where you revealed some incredible research. I love what you've done with the *Journal of Discourses*, but I think most listeners would be extremely interested in what you are doing with this research.

LaJean Carruth: We don't know when the priesthood ban began. The first recorded public statement of the priesthood ban was in the 1852 Utah Territorial legislature. From the comments that came right afterwards, it's very apparent that people knew about this. This wasn't known at the time. This is a complex situation that Paul Reeve discusses very well in his book *Religion of a Different Color*, but University of Utah history professor Paul Reeve and attorney Christopher Rich and I are working on a book on this priesthood ban and the territorial legislature.

Utah was admitted as a territory as part of the 1850 Compromise. It was admitted as a slave territory. That means that slavery was allowed in the territory of Utah. Some Southern Mormons came into the territory with a few slaves, and it became necessary for the legislature to enact legislation to control slavery. This is a very lengthy, complex situation that the attorney and the historian can give the background better than I.

Where I come in is the shorthand. George Watt recorded much of these debates on slavery in shorthand. Brigham Young gave a speech in the legislature on February 5, 1852, on slavery and on the priesthood ban.

Episode 22: In Brigham Young's Words

There was one other statement regarding the priesthood ban a few days earlier in the legislature. Somehow in history, this speech was misdated as January 5, 1852. It is the most requested item I had over the years. "Do you have Brigham Young's speech of January 5, 1852?" I would examine my notes, get out the originals again, go through everything I had. I had no notes for Brigham Young for January 5, 1852.

Then Paul Reeve asked me, "Do you have notes for February 5, 1852?" Yes. I transcribed all of the shorthand for the debate on slavery. This was Indian and African slavery. Paul Reeve and Christopher Rich are bringing a legal and historical background to this. Two items are of great importance here. The first is Watt's longhand transcript, inaccurate though it may be is extant, but because the speech was incorrectly dated as January 5, historians hadn't found it. The shorthand was unknown and untranscribed besides Watt's longhand transcript of Brigham Young's speech.

Wilford Woodruff recorded Brigham Young's speech in his journal at the beginning of 1852, notes only, partial notes. They are undated and in my opinion copied from elsewhere. Wilford Woodruff recorded Brigham Young as saying that any man with one drop of African blood could not hold the priesthood. This document was known. It was the cited document. It was used in ecclesiastical judgments. This document was the one known source for what Brigham Young had actually said. Unfortunately, Wilford Woodruff took the social construct of one drop that was used to legally determine who was African in the Southern states. If you had one drop of African blood, as long as it came through the maternal line, you were considered an African. Somehow, his memory put this into Brigham Young's sermon.

George D. Watt's notes of Brigham Young's speech do not contain the words "one drop." I have searched my shorthand records and Van Wagoner's compilation of all published manuscript accounts of Brigham Young's speeches. This phrase is not there. Brigham Young did not say it, but the record we had included it. The clarification of Brigham Young's words are of vast importance to us.

Also, when this speech was dated as January 5, people understood that Brigham Young was telling the legislature what to do. Actually, the legislation was passed and signed by Brigham Young on the 4th of

Episode 22: In Brigham Young's Words

January. Then he came into the legislature on the 5th, the day after. The legislature asked him to give his views on slavery, and he did.

Laura Hales: What was most impressive to me from your presentation ... You gave both Brigham Young's speech and Orson Pratt's speech. Orson Pratt was an original sort of guy himself, prone to speculation, but of everything that I've read of Orson Pratt, this is the most eloquent thing I had ever heard. As I was sitting in the audience listening to you read the speech by Orson Pratt, I wished I knew shorthand. I had taken a semester in high school and I think I got up to 15 words a minute. I was horrible, but luckily a copy of your speech is available online for free at the MHA website. I will put a link to that in our show notes. Could you share just some highlights from what Orson Pratt said?

LaJean Carruth: Orson Pratt gave a vehement anti-slavery speech. This speech is one of my favorite finds in all my shorthand transcription work. He said, and I quote, "Shall we assume the right without the voice of the Lord speaking to us and commanding us to allow slavery into our territory?" One of my favorite passages, again quote, "For us to bind the African because he is different from us in color is enough to cause the angels in heaven to blush."

Laura Hales: I also liked the line, "The Almighty cursed Cain," Pratt said, "but did not authorize man to carry out His curse; neither did He authorize the buying and selling of the African race." That just goes again to how much he abhorred slavery. This was a real debate. This wasn't a show that they put on where they just sat there and listened to whatever Brigham Young said. It was back and forth. That's what they did in those days. They sometimes did it over the pulpit, too.

LaJean Carruth: Again, Brigham Young's comments on slavery on February 5, 1852, were given after the passage of this legislature. There was heated debate in the legislature about what should be and what should not be in the bill. The actual bill is a bill of gradual emancipation. Orson Pratt said, "If the almighty curses a race or a people, but does not authorize someone to carry out the curse, and they carry out the curse, they will be under condemnation by the almighty. The almighty did not authorize enslaving the African race." He was vehemently opposed to it.

Laura Hales: LaJean, you've told me that Brigham made repeated comments about the ban.

Episode 22: In Brigham Young's Words

LaJean Carruth: Brigham Young repeatedly said that any man of African heritage cannot hold the priesthood. He said it would be changed, but he always said, "I cannot change it." He never explained why. He did not give a source for it. We don't know the source for it, but he repeatedly said ... The word he always used is can. "I cannot change it." Yet, he made it clear that the time would come when those of African descent would receive all the blessings.

Laura Hales: There's a lot more we could talk about Brigham Young. There's a lot more we need to learn about Brigham Young. We don't have all of his words and sermons do we, LaJean?

LaJean Carruth: I have George Watt's shorthand for 235 Brigham Young sermons that are not in the *Journal of Discourses*. I have shorthand from other writers of Brigham Young's sermons. There is a tremendous amount said by Brigham Young that we do not have.

Laura Hales: In five sentences or less, sum up what you would like the listeners to take from your research that you have done on Brigham Young and shared with us today and in your other writings.

LaJean Carruth: Five long sentences.

Laura Hales: Okay.

LaJean Carruth: Brigham Young was absolutely, totally loyal to Joseph Smith. When asked about Joseph Smith, did he make a mistake? Did he ever disagree with him? Brigham Young always said, "It was none of my business what he did. It was my business to obey him. Brigham Young was years ahead of himself, decades ahead of himself on how he handled children. He would preach against whipping children, which is very, very common in that time. He related once how he went down to family prayer and one of his children was in the chair where he was going to sit. The child expected a tussle, but he just quietly ignored the child and pulled up a different chair and sat down.

He spoke with great respect of his wives. He said that only twice had he gotten into his wives' personal belongings without permission when he needed something, and they were away. He showed respect for their personal property. Once he told an account of a wife that came to him asking advice on how to deal with a problem with a very young child, but

Episode 22: In Brigham Young's Words

before he said what he told her, he said, "Now, she is one of the best mothers in Israel." He made sure to praise her and approve her before he related what he told her to do with the problem with the child. Brigham Young taught on the same themes repeatedly. I think if a theme stood out, it would be, "If you were not one, you were not mine."

From day to day, day in, day out, year in, year out, Brigham Young taught to build Zion. Obey God. Keep the Commandments. Repent, forgive. Study the gospel. Pray individually and in your families. Be united. Be of one heart and one mind. Keep the Sabbath day. Pay your tithing. Store wheat. Be one. Pray. Be honest in all your dealings. Work. Take care of your families. Teach your children. Provide for your wives and children. Be one.

Keep the commandments. Gather the poor. Help the poor. Live your religion. Stay out of debt. Don't swear. Don't steal. Teach your children correct principles. Take care of what you have. Store wheat. Pray. Be one. Live your religion for this life as well as for the life to come. Build the temple. Follow council. Keep the covenants you have made. Care for your animals. Keep the Word of Wisdom. Forgive. Understand our humanness. Be kind. Be honest. Obey. Be faithful. Be one.

We're taught many of these things today. These are the doctrines that he taught day in and day out. What has been lost in the changes of Brigham Young's sermons is Brigham Young himself. By changing his words, George Watt changed the man as he was represented. Brigham Young would make many statements about himself, saying, "I." George Watt would change the subject to "he, she, you, or they." We don't know much of what Brigham Young said about himself. He would act out while he preached. If he talked about weeping, he'd rub his eyes like he was weeping. Once he was talking about searching for something, and he was searching all of his pockets.

He was human. He had a temper. He hurt. He didn't understand why everybody didn't work as hard as he did to build Zion and for the common good. He didn't understand why the people didn't take care of themselves. He was very, very much interested in their living conditions. He said, "Other religions teach people how to die. We teach people how to live this life and then prepare for the life to come." We don't know Brigham Young. The man Brigham Young has been lost to us. As more of my transcriptions of what he actually said are released, people will come to

Episode 22: In Brigham Young's Words

know Brigham Young as he was. Human, yes, but a very, very, very good, caring, loving human being and totally dedicated to the Lord and to his service as a prophet of God and leader of the church.

Laura Hales: Thank you, LaJean. You've offered us a more nuanced view of Brigham Young than I think we can get from some of the published sources that we currently have. Looking forward to this book. Hopefully within the next couple of years. Maybe we can visit with you again at that time.

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