

Substituted Names in the Published Revelations of Joseph Smith

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David J. Whittaker

Introduction

Until 1981, editions of the Doctrine and Covenants contained seven revelations with pseudonyms of individuals and places, thus cloaking original identities. These substituted names occur in all editions of the D&C from 1835 on, although the practice of bracketing the real names next to the substituted names began with the 1876 edition. By the 1921 edition almost all the real names had been identified. In the 1981 edition the code names were removed from the text in all but four cases, and the identity of one of these four is suggested in a textual note. It is the purpose of this essay to review the history of these substituted names and, based on a recently discovered document, to reveal the identities of the remaining three names.

Historical Setting

The seven printed revelations which contained the substituted names were received by Joseph Smith between 1832 and 1834. This period of just over two years was a hectic time for the infant Church. In January 1832 Joseph Smith was officially sustained for the first time by a conference vote as President of the High Priesthood. With his selection of two counselors in March, the first presiding quorum of the Church was established. Church membership grew from six members in April 1830 to fifteen hundred in January 1832. By the end of the decade the membership was about ten thousand. In February 1831 Joseph Smith moved from New York to Ohio, where the headquarters of the Church remained in Kirtland from 1831 to 1838. Here he received the bulk of the revelations contained in the D&C. These formative years were exciting times for the Church.¹ In addition to the establishment of a more formal church government, new doctrines and programs were given to those who gathered with the faithful in Kirtland. Nevertheless, by 1832 a growing climate of hostility was manifesting itself against the Mormons. For example, the circulation of the Ezra Booth letters in late 1831 had aroused public opinion against Joseph Smith and his followers.²

In the context of this growing hostility the decision was made to conceal the true identities of various early leaders, particularly those responsible

for the economic matters of the Church. Since there were numerous problems connected with the early attempts to establish the law of consecration and stewardship, especially as it related to property holding,³ it was natural to hide the identity of those assigned specific temporal duties.

The Revelations

The published revelations which contained the substituted names include sections 78, 82, 92, 96, 103, 104, and 105. An examination of these seven sections or revelations containing the pseudonyms reveals that all of them were concerned with the united firm (also called the united order) or with other Church-related properties.⁴ Thus section 78, the first section to use code names, deals with the establishment of a storehouse for the poor; section 82 with the management of the properties for the poor; 92 with Frederick G. Williams, who was instructed as a member of the First Presidency to become a member of the united firm; 96 with the purchasing of properties; 103 with the restoration of lost lands in Jackson County, Missouri; 104 with the stewardships of those who were members of the united firm; and 105 with Zion's Camp and the redemption of Zion in Missouri.

The earliest of these revelations is dated 1 March 1832⁵ and the last is dated 22 June 1834. None of them appears in the 1833 Book of Commandments, the first published collection of Joseph Smith's revelations. All but two (103 and 105) were printed in the 1835 Doctrine and Covenants,⁶ and all seven appear in the published editions of the D&C from 1844 to 1869. Until the 1876 edition (the next edition after 1869) the pseudonyms alone were printed in these sections, but with the 1876 edition, the real names were published in parentheses following the code names.⁷ This practice continued through the 1921 edition, the last edition prior to 1981. In the new edition, the pseudonyms, with four exceptions, have been removed from the text.⁸

It is clear that the pseudonyms were not part of the original revelations, for in the cases where original manuscripts are extant, the code names are absent.⁹ Thus the names were inserted after the revelations were given and recorded but before they were made available to the reading public.

Orson Pratt and the Pseudonyms

The first attempt in LDS literature to explain the substituted names was made by Orson Pratt. Pratt had been assigned to publish a periodical in Washington, D.C., to defend the Church following the public announcement in 1852 of the doctrine of plural marriage. On his way East Orson learned of the growing success of Charles B. Thompson, an apostate who was organizing his own church.¹⁰ While in St. Louis, Orson wrote Brigham Young telling his leader of these schemes and especially of Thompson's

claims of receiving revelation from “Baneemy.” It was Thompson’s use of this code name that concerned Orson. He reminded Brigham Young that “Baneemy” was

one of the fictitious names, which Joseph substituted for the real names in certain revelations in the Book of Covenants. . . .

When the Kirtland edition of the Book of Cov. was arranged for the printer, it was considered best to substitute fictitious names for the real names contained in certain revelations relative to a stewardship or firm; & this was done that their creditors in Cainhannoch (New York) should not take advantage of this church frm; But now, as the firm no longer exists, and the members of it are mostly dead either temporally or spiritually, Would it not be wisdom to publish in our next edition the real names of places, things, & persons as they are contained in the original manuscripts? This will not only expose Charles B Thompson’s organization, but will be a great satisfaction to the Saints. The sections containing these fictitious names, are as follows:—76 • 94 • 97 • 102 [in the 1869 ed. of the D&C, to which 87 and 101 should be added to Pratt’s list]. If you should think proper to have the real names restored, I should be pleased to have brother Bullock, or some one, copy from the original manuscript the real names & send them by letter to me • Washington city. The most of these names I recollect, but some I have forgotten.¹¹

It is clear that Thompson’s activities continued to bother Orson, and he attached the following postscript to his next letter to Brigham Young:

Charles B. Thompson or the “Baneemy”ites are making great many converts at the Bluffs and elsewhere. He is deceiving the people by using the fictitious name of “Baneemy” in the book of Covenants. I wrote to you at St Louis to send to me the real names contained in the manuscript, & I would publish them in the next edition of the book of Covenants, and this will put a stop to this impostures. I can recollect most of the real names, but not all.¹²

Brigham Young responded to Orson’s concerns about Charles Thompson in June 1853:

With regard to the fictitious names in the Book of Covenants, please act in the matter as you may be moved upon by the Spirit; at the same time the use C. B. Thompson is making of them to deceive the people would not influence me the weight of a feather in printing or not printing the true names, for I do not conceive how it could be possible for any persons who can be deceived by Thompson to become good Saints.¹³

Thus President Young dispensed with the matter. But the situation continued to bother Orson Pratt. Having been assigned by Brigham Young to prepare the fourth European edition of the Doctrine and Covenants for publication, Orson probably felt that he could deal with the situation by placing the real names in the 1854 edition. However, he was forced to abandon the effort. He explains this in another letter to Brigham Young:

I have not altered the fictitious names in the book of Covenants for the
too much
original ones, as it would interfere \wedge with the stereotype plates.¹⁴

Because he could not make the changes which Brigham Young had approved in his 1 June 1853 letter, Orson decided to publish an article on the matter in *The Seer*. Although it was a short essay, it was the first attempt to publicly reveal the true identities of the pseudonyms. Orson carefully explained to his readers that the substituted names did not represent ancient people or places.

All these names have reference to modern persons, places and things of our day. Indeed, when these revelations were first received by the Prophet Joseph, the real names were given: and it was not until months, and in regard to some of them, even years, had passed away, before the names were altered, and others bearing an ancient appearance were substituted.

We often had access to the manuscripts when boarding with the Prophet; and it was our delight to read them over and over again, before they were printed. And so highly were they esteemed by us, that we committed some to memory; and a few we copied for the purpose of reference in our absence on missions; and also to read them to the saints for their edification. These copies are still in our possession. When at length the time arrived to print the manuscripts, it was thought best not to publish them all, on account of our enemies, who were seeking every means to destroy the Prophet and the Church. On account, however, of the great anxiety of the church to see them in print, it was concluded, through the suggestions of the Spirit, that by altering the real names given in the manuscripts, and substituting fictitious ones in their stead, they might thus safely appear in print without endangering the welfare of the individuals whose real names were contained therein. It was by this means that several revelations were permitted to appear in print in the first edition, that otherwise would have been withheld from the knowledge of the saints, perhaps for many long years, or at least until more favorable circumstances would have permitted them to be made public.¹⁵

Orson made it clear that Joseph Smith made the substitutions through inspiration; for to tamper with divinely revealed texts without inspiration was a serious matter. He concluded his explanation by revealing the real names from memory and listing the five pseudonyms whose real names he could not remember: Alsam, Mahalaleel, Horah, Shalemanasseh, and Mel-ernson. This same essay was reprinted in England,¹⁶ and for over twenty years it was the only published source on these code names.

However, Orson was not satisfied. After he was again assigned to help prepare another edition of the Doctrine and Covenants, he moved to insert the real names into the appropriate sections. He mentioned the substituted names in a published address of 1873.¹⁷ Orson's behind-the-scenes work on the 1876 edition of the D&C is revealed in the following notation from the Historian's Office Journal:

has been

Elder Orson Pratt engaged, at times, for several days, in recopying and arranging the order in which the revelations are to be inserted in the [1876] edition of the Book of Doctrine and Covenants, now in the hands of the

B.

printer. By the counsel of President [^] Young, Elder Pratt has divided the various revelations into verses, and arranged them for printing, according to the order of date in which they were revealed. Elder Pratt has also, in a few cases, restored the original names as they were first given in the manuscripts, enclosing them in parenthesis immediately following the fictitious names that were, for a wise purpose, substituted in the preceding editions.¹⁸

In the 1876 edition the code names were placed beside the real names. This remained the practice until the 1981 edition, in which the pseudonyms are omitted, leaving only the real names except for those that could not be identified. The unidentified names in the 1981 edition, with only one exception, are the same names Orson Pratt could not remember in 1854.¹⁹

The Substituted Names

The accompanying chart lists the twenty-four substituted names, the sections in which they appear in the D&C, and their identification by both Orson Pratt and William W. Phelps. This author recently found the Phelps list in the Brigham Young Collection in the Historical Department of the Church. It is an undated, one-page manuscript, probably composed in 1863, about the same time that, in a letter to Brigham Young, W. W. Phelps explained his own pseudonym in section 82.²⁰

According to the Phelps list, all the men who can be identified as belonging to the united firm, with the exception of Jesse Gause, were given pseudonyms. The exclusion of Gause is significant. If he had not been excommunicated in December 1832,²¹ he probably would have been given a code name for the 1835 printing of the D&C. But instead, he was replaced by Frederick G. Williams in the First Presidency, and it was Williams who was given a code name.

The Phelps list is important because it finally reveals the identity of the remaining substituted names. His listing confirms the reference in the *History of the Church* that Alam was Edward Partridge²² and it reveals the actual names of the remaining three individuals unidentified in the 1981 edition of the D&C: Mahalaleel was Algernon Sidney Gilbert; Horah was John Whitmer; and Shalemanasseh was William W. Phelps.²³ W. W. Phelps would surely have known his own code name, and since the remaining names also occur in the same revelation as Phelps's, it is safe to assume that he was in a position also to know their real identities.

Pseudonyms in the Doctrine and Covenants

Pseudonym	Section in the 1921 edition of the D&C	Identity per Orson Pratt ¹	Identity per William W. Phelps ²	Meanings Suggested by William W. Phelps
Enoch	78, 82, 92, 96, 104	Joseph Smith, Jr.		
Gazalem	78, 82, 104	Joseph Smith, Jr.	Joseph Smith, Jr.	The light of the Lord ³
Baurak Ale	103, 105	Joseph Smith, Jr.	Joseph Smith, Jr.	Blessed of God ⁴
Ahashdah	78, 82, 96, 104	Newel K. Whitney	Newel K. Whitney	A close watcher
Alam	82		Edward Partridge ⁵	Everlasting helmet
Pelagoram	78, 82, 104	Sidney Rigdon		
Mahalaleel	82		Algernon S. Gilbert	He shined from God
Oliyah	82, 103	Oliver Cowdery	Oliver Cowdery	God have mercy
Horah	82		John Whitmer	A conceiver
Mahemson	82, 104		Martin Harris	He turns back
Shalemanasseh	82		William W. Phelps ⁷	A tried broken Pillar ⁶
Shinehah	82, 96, 104, 105	Kirtland		Kirtland stake
Talents	104	Dollars		
Cainhannoch	104	New York ⁸		
Shederlaomach	92, 103	F. G. Williams	F. G. Williams	Unbound sheaf
Zombre	96, 104	John Johnson	John Johnson	Slow to hear
Seth	96	Joseph		
Tahhanes	104	The Tannery		
Laneshire House	104	Printing Office	Printing Office at Kirtland	Printing Office
Ozondah	104	Store	[Storehouse] at Kirtland	Ashery
Shule	104	Ashery	[Ashery] at Kirtland	Ashery
Shinelah	104	print		
Shinelane	104	printing		
Baneemy	105	Sidney Rigdon	Mine Elders	My sons

1. *The Seer* 2 (March 1854): 229. Also in *Latter-day Saints' Millennial Star* 16 (18 March 1854): 173.

2. "Explanation, &c.," 1 p. MS by William W. Phelps, undated (about 1863), MS. d 1234, box 41, fd. 4, Brigham Young Collection, incoming correspondence, Church Archives. The accompanying meanings are also on the manuscript. There are about two lines of material written in the Deseret Alphabet and signed by William W. Phelps at the bottom of this manuscript.

3. In a sermon Orson said Joseph was called Gazalam, "being a person to whom the Lord had given the Urim and Thummim." Discourse by Orson Pratt, 16 August 1873, *Journal of Discourses*, 16:156. Orson was probably thinking of the reference in Alma 37:23.

4. Orson Pratt said that "Baurak Ale" was a Hebrew word meaning "God bless you," *ibid*.

5. See also *History of the Church*, 1:363.

6. This meaning contradicts another statement Phelps made to Brigham Young, in which he specifically stated that "Shalemasseh" meant "an elevated ruler or prince in Zion" (William W. Phelps to Brigham Young, 12 October 1863, Church Archives).

7. Phelps also refers to his code name in William W. Phelps to Brigham Young, 12 October 1863, Church Archives.

8. Also on a letter of Orson Pratt to Brigham Young, 20 November 1852, Church Archives.

One question still remains unanswered. What was the source of the code names? It is possible that they were simply invented, but it appears more likely that most of these names came from the Hebrew studies of early Mormon leaders.²⁴ Orson Pratt specifically interpreted “Baurak Ale” as a Hebrew word, and a recent study of these pseudonyms, while admittedly speculative, does suggest possible Hebrew meanings for these words.²⁵ It must be remembered that these early Mormons were just beginning their Hebrew studies, and perhaps a closer search of their texts and dictionaries might reveal the actual source of these pseudonyms. The Phelps list does, however, contain a list of meanings for many of the code words, as shown on the chart on page 111.

Most importantly, the Phelps list reveals the identities of the four substituted names included in the 1981 edition of the Doctrine and Covenants, and we therefore now know the identities of all of the men for whom pseudonyms had been substituted in earlier editions of the Doctrine and Covenants.

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1. It is beyond the purpose of this paper to recount in detail the Ohio period in Mormon history. Good accounts of these early years include Max H. Parkin, “The Nature and Cause of Internal and External Conflict of the Mormons in Ohio Between 1830 and 1838” (M.A. thesis, Brigham Young University, 1966); Max H. Parkin, “Kirtland, a Stronghold for the Kingdom,” in F. Mark McKiernan, Alma R. Blair, and Paul M. Edwards, eds., *The Restoration Movement: Essays in Mormon History* (Lawrence, Kans.: Coronado Press, 1973), pp. 63–98; and D. Michael Quinn, “Echoes and Foreshadowings: The Distinctiveness of the Mormon Community,” *Sunstone* 3 (March–April 1978): 12–17.

2. The Ezra Booth letters and their impact on the Church in Ohio are discussed in Parkin “Internal and External Conflict,” pp. 101–120.

3. The theory and the early attempts to practice the law of consecration and stewardship are presented in Leonard J. Arrington, Feramorz Y. Fox, and Dean L. May, *Building the City of God: Community & Cooperation among the Mormons* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1976), pp. 15–40. These attempts as part of the larger economic picture are presented in Parkin, “Internal and External Conflict,” pp. 200–12.

4. On the united firm or united order (both terms are used in the early documents), see Lyndon W. Cook, *The Revelations of the Prophet Joseph Smith* (Provo, Utah: Seventy’s Mission Bookstore, 1981), pp. 167–68, 194, 210–12.

5. The “Kirtland Revelation Book,” MS in the Historical Department of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah (hereafter cited as Church Archives), gives 1 March 1832 as the date for D&C 78.

6. The 1835 edition of the D&C contains sections 78 (as section 75), 82 (as 86), 92 (as 93), 96 (as 96), and 104 (as 98). The 1844 edition contains all seven sections: 78 (as section 76), 82 (as 87), 92 (as 94), 96 (as 97), 103 (as 101), 104 (as 99), and 105 (as 102).

7. More detailed textual information can be found in Robert J. Woodford, "The Historical Development of the Doctrine and Covenants," 3 vols. (Ph.D. dissertation, Brigham Young University, 1974).

8. The background of the 1981 edition is presented in an essay by Robert J. Matthews in the last issue of *Brigham Young University Studies*, "The New Publications of the Standard Works—1979, 1981," 22 (Fall 1982): 387–424.

9. See, for example, the comments of Orson Pratt, *The Seer 2* (March 1854): 228. The unidentified names in D&C 82 have remained a mystery in large measure because the original manuscript of this revelation is not extant.

10. For information on Charles B. Thompson, see Russell R. Rich, *Brigham Young University Leadership Week: Those Who Would Be Leaders (Offshoots of Mormonism)* (Provo: Extension Publications, Adult Education and Extension Services and Delta Phi, Brigham Young University, [1959]), pp. 29–30; Russell R. Rich, *Little Known Schisms of the Restoration*, 3d. ed. (Provo: Extension Publications, Division of Continuing Education of Brigham Young University, 1967), pp. 21–27; Dale L. Morgan, "A Bibliography of the Chuches of the Dispersion," *Western Humanities Review* 5 (Winter 1950–51): 114–15; and C. R. Marks, "Monona County, Iowa, Mormons," *Annals of Iowa*, 3d. Series, 7 (April 1906): 321–46.

11. Orson Pratt to Brigham Young, 20 November 1852, Brigham Young Collection, Church Archives.

12. Orson Pratt to Brigham Young, 31 December 1852, Brigham Young Collection, Church Archives.

13. Brigham Young to Orson Pratt, 1 June 1853, Brigham Young Collection, Church Archives.

14. Orson Pratt to Brigham Young, 10 September 1853, Brigham Young Collection, Church Archives.

15. "Explanation of Substituted Names in the Covenants," *The Seer 2* (March 1854): 228.

16. "Explanation of Substituted Names in the Covenants," *The Latter-day Saints' Millennial Star* 16 (18 March 1854): 171–73.

17. Discourse by Orson Pratt, 16 August 1873, *Journal of Discourses*, 26 vols. (London: Latter-day Saints' Book Depot, 1854–86; reprint ed., 1967), 16:156.

18. Historian's Office Journal, 15 January 1875, 33:70, Church Archives. Also cited in Woodford, "Historical Development of the D&C," 1:76.

19. Historian's Office Journal, 15 January 1875, 33:70, Church Archives. Also cited in Woodford, "Historical Development of the D&C," 1:76.

20. While Mormon authors other than Orson Pratt have tried to explain the use of the code names, none has offered information on the unidentified names. See, for example, B. H. Roberts's editorial note in *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, 2d. ed. rev., 7 vols. (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1932–51). 1:255 n.; Joseph Fielding Smith, *Church History and Modern Revelation*, 2 vols. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1953), 1:306; and Max Parkin, "Internal and External Conflict," p. 52.

21. On Gause, see Robert Woodford, "Jessee Gause, Counselor to the Prophet," *Brigham Young University Studies* 15 (Spring 1975): 362–64; and, more fully, the essay by D. Michael Quinn, forthcoming in *BYU Studies*.

22. *History of the Church*, 1:363.

23. Algernon Sidney Gilbert operated the Gilbert-Whitney Store in Missouri; John Whitmer was one of the eight witnesses of the Book of Mormon; William W. Phelps, a prominent Church leader, edited the *Evening and Morning Star*; Edward Partridge was

the first bishop of the Church. All were members of the united or literary firms (Cook, *Revelations of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, pp. 84, 25, 87, 54).

24. See Louis C. Zucker, "Joseph Smith as a Student of Hebrew," *Dialogue, A Journal of Mormon Thought* 3 (Summer 1968): 41–55. This is the only attempt in LDS literature to deal specifically with the possible origins of these pseudonyms (see especially pp. 48–50). Mormon leaders were again forced to use code names in the 1880s due to the anti-polygamy crusade. In a similar fashion, many of these pseudonyms were not known until recent years. See Gustive O. Larson, *The "Americanization" of Utah for Statehood* (San Marino, Calif.: Huntington Library, 1971), p. 120, for a list of the "cohab code" from the journal of Moses Franklin Farnsworth. Unlike the codes of the 1830s, the codes of the 1880s were more contemporary or were drawn directly from the Bible.

25. Paul Nolan Hyde, "The Pseudonym Revelations: An Historical and Linguistic Approach," unpublished essay published for the Church Education System Symposium, Brigham Young University, August 1981; copy in my possession.