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Mo. 11

Friday, March, 19th, 1897.

Presidents Woodruff and Cannon at the office.

President Woodruff again spoke into the graphophone or talking machine, repeating what he said on the 12th inst., as recorded in this journal. The object of the repetition was to obtain, if possible, better results than ~~was~~ obtained on the previous occasion. In order to procure President Woodruff's signature to the testimony he bears, it is herewith repeated and signed by himself:

"I bear my testimony that the Prophet Joseph Smith said, before a large assemblage in Illinois, that if he were the emperor of the world and had control over the whole human family he would sustain every man, woman and child in the enjoyment of their religion. Those are my sentiments today.

I bear my testimony that Joseph Smith was a true prophet of God, ordained of God to lay the foundation of his church and kingdom in the last dispensation of the fulness of times.

I bear my testimony that in the early spring of 1844, in Nauvoo, the Prophet Joseph Smith called the Twelve Apostles together and he delivered unto them the ordinances of the Church and kingdom of God; and all the keys and powers that God had bestowed upon him, he sealed upon our heads, and he told us that we must round up our shoulders and bear off this kingdom, or we would be damned. I am the only man now living in the flesh who heard that testimony from his mouth, and I know that it was true by the power of God manifest to him. At that meeting he stood on his feet for about three hours and taught us the things of the kingdom. His face was as clear as amber, and he was covered with a power that I had never seen in any man in the flesh before.

I bear testimony that Joseph Smith was the author of the endowments as received by the latter-day Saints. I received my own endowments under his hands and direction, and I know they are true principles. I not only received my own endowments under his hands, but I bear my testimony that Brigham Young, Heber C. Kimball, Willard Richards, George A. Smith, John Taylor and other brethren received their endowments under the hands and direction of the Prophet Joseph; and also my wife Pheobe, Bathsheba Smith, Leonora Taylor, Mary Smith and others whose names I cannot recall now.

The Prophet Joseph laid down his life for the word of God and testimony of Jesus Christ, and he will be crowned as a martyr in the presence of God and the Lamb.

In all his testimonies to us the power of God was visibly manifest with the Prophet Joseph.

This is my testimony, spoken by myself into a talking machine on this the 19th day of March, 1897, in the 91st year of my age."

WILFORD WOODRUFF.

Transcript of the words Wilford Woodruff spoke into "Edison's talking machine." Courtesy LDS Church Archives, Salt Lake City, © Intellectual Reserve, Inc.

To listen to Wilford Woodruff's audio recording, go to byustudies.byu.edu.

“This Is My Testimony, Spoken by Myself into a Talking Machine”

Wilford Woodruff’s 1897 Statement in Stereo

Richard Neitzel Holzappel and Steven C. Harper

In March 1844, just weeks before his martyrdom, Joseph Smith “called the Twelve Apostles together and he delivered unto them the ordinances of the Church and kingdom of God.” Wilford Woodruff noted the events of the day in a terse journal entry. March “26th A rainy day. I met in council with the brethren.”¹ Perhaps the sacredness and magnitude of the meeting called for the brief, cryptic note. Or perhaps it would take hindsight for Wilford to recognize the momentousness of the day’s events. In either case, fifty-three years later at age ninety, President Woodruff recorded his spoken testimony of the historic meeting.

Two decades earlier, in late 1877, while working to improve the efficiency of a telegraph transmitter, Thomas Edison noticed that the tape of the machine gave off a noise resembling spoken words when played at high speed. Wondering if he could record a telephone message, Edison experimented with the diaphragm of a receiver by attaching a needle to it. He reasoned that the needle could prick paper tape to record a message. Experiments led him to try a stylus on a tinfoil cylinder, which, to his great delight, played back the short message he recorded, “Mary had a little lamb.” Phonograph was the trade name for Edison’s device, which played cylinders rather than discs. Sound vibrations generated by speaking into the mouthpiece were indented into the cylinder by a recording needle. This cylinder phonograph was the first machine that could record and reproduce sound.

Joseph J. Daynes, husband of President Woodruff’s daughter Winifred and president of Daynes Music, brought a phonograph to his father-in-law’s office on March 12, 1897, “for the purpose of showing its workings, and to get Pres. Woodruff to talk into it.” President Woodruff

In his early years, Wilford Woodruff paced his mill, often late into the night, praying “for light and truth and for His Spirit to guide me in the way of salvation.”¹ He looked forward to the day when he would meet someone who could say like Isaiah or Peter or Paul, “I know the Lord Jesus Christ.”

In due time, he met such a man. More than that, he became one. He became, in the fullest sense of the word, a modern Apostle, a special witness. He was associated intimately with Joseph Smith, not on the outskirts but at the very center of the movement.

Wilford Woodruff’s calling as historian and recorder came to full flower in a journal with a daily entry for sixty-three years. He promptly recorded the singular early events of the restored Church. His minutes of crucial meetings and the spoken word are as close to verbatim as his shorthand could make them.

When President Woodruff was in his nineties, he addressed a youth group about the “last charge” meeting. President Joseph F. Smith arose. He urged those present to write careful notes, “that hereafter in the generations to come they could testify that they had heard him bear witness of these truths.”²

Notes are often misplaced and forgotten. But this recording preserves indelible firsthand experience. With transparent clarity, he blends Joseph’s words with his own. This, Joseph’s last testimony to the Twelve, became his own.

We hear the record of Christ’s redemptive power, his keys of authority, his organization, his pure and transforming doctrines, his spiritual gifts, and, above all, the empowering promises of his holy temple.

Here is a capsule of eternity, a prophetic vision of the manifest destiny of the kingdom of God on earth and in heaven.

—Truman G. Madsen

1. Matthias F. Cowley, *Wilford Woodruff: History of His Life and Labors* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1964), 18.

2. “Our Work: The General Annual Conference of Young Men’s and Young Ladies’ Mutual Improvement Associations,” *Improvement Era* 1 (August 1898): 781–82.



These wax cylinders contain the audio recordings of Wilford Woodruff's testimony made in Salt Lake City in 1897. Engraved by a stylus on the outside surface, the hollow phonograph cylinder was the most popular medium for recording sound during the last two decades of the nineteenth century. Courtesy LDS Church Archives, Salt Lake City, © Intellectual Reserve, Inc.

agreed on the condition that he retain possession of the cylinder to prevent it from being used for advertising. He “spoke into the phonograph, which afterwards repeated back quite audibly and satisfactorily [to] all of the First Presidency.”²

One week later on March 19,

Pres. Wilford Woodruff spoke again into the graphophone, or phonograph, the same words which he uttered into the instrument on March 12th. They were repeated in order to obtain better results than were secured on that date. After reading his testimony as recorded on the 12th inst., he signed it with his own hand, that it might go on record.³

Wilford Woodruff painstakingly prepared the words he wanted to ring in the ears of his posterity—his enduring witness of the prophetic calling of Joseph Smith, who conferred priesthood keys upon the Twelve

and commissioned them three months before his death. Arthur Winter, Church reporter, noted in his journal on March 19:

Several days ago President Woodruff dictated to me his testimony on several points connected with the work of God, his intention being to get his testimony written down just as he wanted it and then he could speak it into the phonograph. Today he repeated it into the talking machine, so that in years to come, long after he shall have passed away, one may hear reproduced by the phonograph, the words he spoke and the very tone of his voice.⁴

We are awed by that voice. It flows from a man whose ears heard Joseph teach the fulness of the gospel, whose eyes saw him “covered with a power I had never seen in any man in the flesh before,” who “received my own endowments under his hands and direction,” and who lived to record a witness that resonates in our ears.

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1. Wilford Woodruff, Journal, March 26, 1844, Church Archives, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City (hereafter cited as Church Archives).

2. Journal History of the Church, March 12, 1897, Church Archives, microfilm copy also available in Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah.

3. Journal History of the Church, March 19, 1897.

4. Arthur Winter, Journal, March 19, 1897, Church Archives.

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