



Columns on the Maeser Building at BYU campus. © BYU Photo.

Beginnings of Brigham Young Academy, 1876–84

You ought not to teach even the alphabet or the multiplication tables without the Spirit of God.

—Brigham Young¹

At 4:48 p.m. on April 5, 1876, the day before general conference began, Karl's world was transformed again. In three deafening blasts, Salt Lake City was severely shaken by a frightening explosion on Arsenal Hill, directly northeast of the city. At the time, Arsenal Hill, now known as Capitol Hill, was the repository of four large bunkers of black powder owned by different companies in Salt Lake. The powder was stored in magazines eighty to one hundred feet apart in buildings of stone and metal with iron doors that were considered "absolutely safe." A ball of flame rose high in the air, huge clouds of black smoke billowed skyward, and "rocks, iron, timber, unexploded powder, dust, and general debris" showered down over more than a two-mile radius. The concussion from the estimated forty tons of blasting powder was felt as far away as Farmington and Kaysville (about twenty miles away). "Houses swayed to and fro; doors were wrenched from their hinges; plaster crumbled from the walls and ceilings fell."² Throughout the city, windows were shattered, and hundreds of people fell to the ground or rushed into the streets, some assuming the end of the world had come. Brigham Young

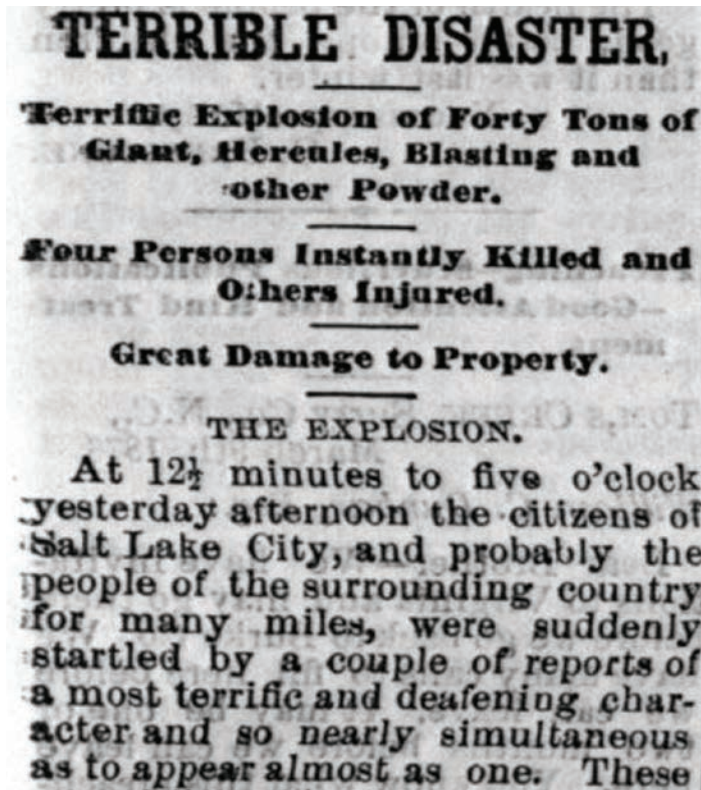


On April 5, 1876, Salt Lake City was shaken by a massive blast of black powder stored on Arsenal Hill. The blast changed Maeser's life again. Photo by C. R. Savage, ca. 1876, courtesy of Southern Methodist University, Central University Libraries, DeGolyer Library.

wrote that his property suffered extensive damage. Shattered glass from his mill was thrown a considerable distance and embedded deeply into the “solid red pine joists.” The Mill House had to be torn down,³ and the new tabernacle lost approximately a “thousand lights of glass.”⁴

The cause of the explosion was never completely determined. Two young men had been seen hunting in the area and may have inadvertently (or purposefully) shot through the door of one of the bunkers, setting off the blast that also exploded the other three bunkers. Miraculously, only four people were killed—the two young men who likely caused the explosion, and two others who were struck by flying debris. However, numerous homes were reduced to rubble, and nearly every structure in the city was affected. “A rock weighing 115 pounds went clear through, from roof to ground, the Theatre saloon, First South St. and a large boulder struck the residence of Mayor Little, going through the roof and two floors.”⁵ An article in the *Herald* stated, “The 20th ward schoolhouse is pretty nearly ruined. The walls are cracked and the roof broken. The building will have to be greatly repaired before it can be considered safe.”⁶ The walls were reportedly “torn out about six inches.”

Maeser went to report his school's damage to Bishop John Sharp and to announce that the lecture scheduled for that night would need to be postponed or moved to another venue.⁷ He found the bishop with Brigham Young. When Maeser reported the nature of the damage and the need



The April 6, 1876, Deseret News reported the details of the explosion on Arsenal Hill. The blast severely damaged Maeser's school. Courtesy of Utah Digital Newspapers.

to repair it quickly for classes to resume, Brother Brigham told him not to worry about it: "Brother Maeser; I have another mission for you. . . . We have been considering the establishment of a Church school, and are looking around for a man—the man to take charge of it. You are the man, Brother Maeser. We want you to go to Provo to organize and conduct an Academy to be established in the name of the Church—a Church school."⁸ The school would become Brigham Young Academy.

A New Model of Education

In its context, this call was much more significant than was obvious at the time. Maeser was being invited to propose a new model of education



Provo City about the time Maeser took over the Brigham Young Academy, 1876. Photographer unknown, ca. 1879, courtesy of LTPSC.

in the Church and not merely to assume the leadership of an ongoing school in Provo. For several years, Brigham had recognized that the Nauvoo model of education would not meet the Church's needs given the political developments of the Utah Territory. Nationally, schools were becoming more and more secular. In ever-increasing ways, religion was being excluded from the curriculum of state-sponsored institutions. In Utah, this trend had the added dimension of explicitly anti-Mormon sentiments from the government. Because the University of Deseret was funded by the territorial legislature, it was subject to the political winds of federal government policies, and those policies were not favorable to Brigham's ideas of proper education. Originally, the University of Deseret was intended to be open to people of all faiths, but it was not intended to become a secular institution. Likewise, the common schools in Utah were not initially expected to adopt secular assumptions, but the pressures to conform to national standards were increasing.

By contrast, Brigham did not distinguish truth into separate "religious" and "secular" compartments. In his mind, "the spiritual and the temporal

cannot be separated, and, in the economy of the Framers of the Universe, are not designed to be.”⁹ On another occasion he preached:

If, on the Sabbath day, when we are assembled here to worship the Lord, one of the Elders should be prompted to give us a lecture on any branch of education with which he is acquainted, is it outside the pale of our religion? I think not. If any of the Elders are disposed to give a lecture to parents and children on letters, on the rudiments of the English language, it is in my religion; it is a part of my faith. Or if an Elder shall give us a lecture upon astronomy, chemistry, or geology, our religion embraces it all. It matters not what the subject be, if it tends to improve the mind, exalt the feelings, and enlarge the capacity. The truth that is in all the arts and sciences forms a part of our religion.¹⁰

To represent knowledge as if it were separated from its religious foundation would be to amputate it from its final meaning and purpose. Therefore, Brigham decided it was time to propose an alternative model of education.

In a letter to Lewis Monch, a teacher in Ogden, Brigham elaborated on the purposes of the new academy: “I have frequently urged upon the brethren engaged in the instruction of our youth the necessity of training them to be Latter-day Saints, but teaching them the principles of truth, righteousness and virtue, and implanting within them the love of the principles of our holy religion.”¹¹ He rehearsed to Brother Monch the requirements he had placed in the deed of the Brigham Young Academy to read the scriptures and added, “In making further endowments, which I have now in my mind, my intention is to add another paragraph to the above clause to the effect in substance, that no book shall be used in such places of instruction that speaks derogatory of the Savior, of the prophets and of the bible; that misrepresents or speak lightly of the divine mission of Joseph Smith, or the principles of the everlasting Gospel, or that falsifies the history of the church.”¹²

Brigham actually started three institutions in response to the secular trends of modern education. The academy at Provo was the first of these,

founded in 1875, and it was followed by the Young Academy at Salt Lake in 1876 and the Brigham Young College in Logan in 1877. Each institution was given the same basic mandate, but Brigham did not define the organizational structure for them. His vision for a new model of education in the Church was therefore launched on a few basic principles and a charge, which was implemented in a different way in each school. It was as though he planted several alternative seeds to see which would grow in the climate of the times, although he would not see these seeds grow to maturity, because he would die suddenly in August of 1877.

On September 28, 1876, Brigham deeded property for the Young Academy at Salt Lake with the expectation that the board would propose its version of an educational model for the Church.¹³ A board of seven members was formed, five of whom were Brigham's sons. It was to be open only to members of the Church and was given the same basic charge as the academy in Provo. In a letter inviting his son Willard, who was studying at West Point, to become a member of the board, Brigham wrote:

We have enough and to spare, at present in these mountains of schools where young infidels are made because the teachers are so tender-footed that they dare not mention the principles of the Gospel to their pupils, but have no hesitancy in introducing into the classroom the theories of Huxley, of Darwin, or of Miall,¹⁴ and the false political economy which contends against cooperation and the United Order. This course I am resolutely and uncompromisingly opposed to, and I hope to see the day when the doctrines of the Gospel will be taught in all our schools, when the revelation of the Lord will be our texts, and our books will be written and manufactured by ourselves and in our own midst.¹⁵

However, the Brigham Young Academy at Salt Lake never materialized, and the property became highly disputed following Brigham's death.¹⁶

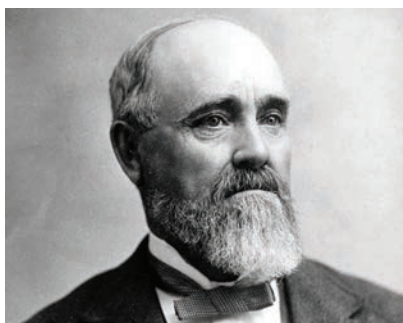
On July 24, 1877, Brigham also deeded property in Logan for the Brigham Young College (BYC) with the same general instructions. This institution carried the ambition of preparing every young man with a trade

and every young woman with domestic skills. Education included practical farming or dairy experience; upon graduating, each student would be provided with tools, a team, a wagon, and farming implements. The college had to delay its opening until September 1878,¹⁷ but it became a prominent high school and college until the Church decided to close it in 1926. Its library was then donated to the Agricultural College of Utah (now Utah State University).

In 1889, a BYC circular described its mission thus: “The gospel of Jesus Christ shall be the basis of college discipline. . . . Besides a special and systematic theological training, secular instructions, meeting the demands of a progressive people in science and art, were to be placed within the curriculum harmonizing the word and works of God.”¹⁸

Founding the Academy: Humble Beginnings

The Brigham Young Academy built upon the early educational efforts of the Dusenberry brothers. Though not yet Latter-day Saints, Warren (1836–1915) and Wilson (1841–1925) Dusenberry moved with their mother to Provo in 1863 to be teachers. Almost immediately, they began teaching at the First Ward School and at a private school on First East and Second



Warren Dusenberry and his brother Wilson began a school in Provo that grew into the Timpanogos Branch of the University of Deseret. He became the first provisional principal of the Brigham Young Academy, though he had almost no time for it. Photographer unknown, ca. 1880, courtesy of LTPSC.

South. By the fall, they had opened their own school, and by the spring of 1864, it had 120 students crammed into its building, which had room for 103.¹⁹ This same year they decided, independently of each other, to join the Church. Though the school was successful, the Dusenberrys became involved in other business ventures, so they closed the school in 1865. Warren served a mission for a year to the southern states in 1867. In 1869, the

Dusenberry brothers opened another school in Provo. It quickly drew the attention of territorial school officials and was converted into the Timpanogos Branch of the newly revived University of Deseret.²⁰ Under Warren Dusenberry, the university branch grew to over three hundred students (more students than were enrolled in the Salt Lake City branch), but Warren could be only nominally involved.

Dusenberry was an effective teacher. In 1872 George A. Smith said of him, "I have known Professor Dusenberry teach a hundred scholars—the wildest, roughest boys we had in a frontier town, and never lay a stick on one of them; . . . there was nothing on the face of the earth that seemed to hurt their feelings more than to feel that they had lost the confidence of their preceptor." He was especially able to cultivate "reasoning powers in the minds of children."²¹

The Timpanogos Branch struggled financially from the outset. Funds that were supposed to come from Washington never did. The Dusenberrys were grateful to Brigham that they were able to use the Lewis Building free of rent, but when the territorial legislature allocated nothing for the branch in 1875, it was ready to close. The teachers had grown tired of seeking payment in "turnips, molasses, and pumpkins."²² This provided Brigham with the opportunity to introduce a new model of education: the deed of trust for the Brigham Young Academy was signed on October 16, 1875.

Though it was understood that he had precious little time to devote to the new school, Warren Dusenberry was appointed the interim principal. Because it was provisionally without a permanent principal or an organized structure, the first academic year was called "experimental." The opening of the academy was delayed until January 1876, and very little effort was made to recruit new students. The Timpanogos Branch had averaged over two hundred students, but only seventy students attended the first "experimental term" of the BYA under Warren Dusenberry, and there were only twenty-nine students left to begin the second experimental term when Maeser took over the reins of the school.

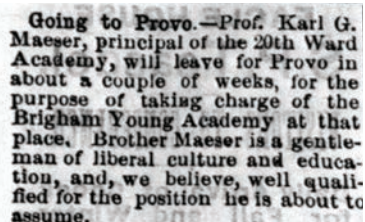
Because it seemed to be merely a slight change in the governance and name of the Timpanogos Branch of the University of Deseret, the signing of the Brigham Young Academy deed aroused very little attention in

October 1875. Two weeks after the deed was signed, the *Salt Lake Herald* included a fifty-eight-word announcement that Brigham had deeded his property to establish a school in Provo “to be called ‘Brigham Young’s Academy’” and that it would be opened in two weeks.²³ No other newspaper even mentioned it.

A New Principal

Maeser was not given much time to consider Brigham’s invitation to become the principal of the BYA. Less than a week after the explosion, the *Deseret News* announced, “Prof. Karl G. Maeser, principal of the 20th Ward Academy, will leave for Provo in about a couple of weeks for the purpose of taking charge of the Brigham Young Academy at that place. Brother Maeser is a gentleman of liberal culture and education and, we believe, well qualified for the position he is about to assume.”²⁴

On April 17, 1876, Brigham wrote to the BYA’s board of directors, “Elder Karl G. Maeser comes to your community to take charge of the Brigham Young Academy.” Brigham recognized the authority of the board over the principal and encouraged them to properly install him, to provide him with “as good a school as possible,” and to make sure that “outside of the instructions given him by the Board he be left untrammelled to perform his duty as the principal of the Academy.”²⁵



The April 12, 1876, Deseret News announced that Maeser would be going to Provo. The new term began on April 24. Courtesy of Utah Digital Newspapers.

The Brigham Young Academy in Provo made arrangements to open the second experimental term, beginning April 24. This meant that Maeser would have to leave as quickly as possible for Provo. These arrangements were compounded by the challenge given from the pulpit in general conference two days after the explosion: the Maesers’ oldest son, Reinhard, was called to serve in the Swiss-German Mission,²⁶ so he would need to prepare himself to leave soon. Emilie, Maeser’s second wife, was teaching

school in Salt Lake and had no replacement, and it didn't help that Anna was in the last stages of pregnancy with another child.²⁷

The evening before leaving for Provo, Maeser asked to see President Young to receive specific instructions for the school that would carry his name. Brigham's counsel was brief, but powerful. Summarizing his philosophy in a most concise manner: "Brother Maeser, you ought not to teach even the alphabet or the multiplication tables without the spirit of God. That is all. God bless you. Goodbye."²⁸ Probably no class since then has graduated from the institution without hearing this challenge. It was not merely an injunction giving permission to do what he felt was appropriate, but a mandate to inquire spiritually about the entire organization and to bring back a prospectus of the way he believed the Lord would have it organized. Maeser departed on April 21, leaving his wives and family in Salt Lake until proper arrangements could be made for them to join him in Provo. This did not happen until August.²⁹

Governing Principles for the Academy

In his last speech as principal of the BYA, Maeser summarized the two governing principles upon which the institution was founded, emphasizing that if ever the school deviated from these principles, it would be disastrous. First, discipline at the academy was developed upon the well-known words of the Prophet Joseph Smith. When asked how he maintained order in Nauvoo he replied: "I teach them correct principles and they govern themselves."³⁰ Second, the mainspring of all teaching at the academy should be the Spirit of God, as demonstrated by the words of President Brigham Young on the eve of Brother Maeser's departure to Provo. These were the two founding principles upon which "the Brigham Young Academy has nailed her colors to the mast."³¹

In *School and Fireside*, Maeser described the founding principles of the academy in these terms:

The fundamental principles of Latter-day Saint education were as plainly marked then as they are now, viz: a religious foundation,



Brigham Young's counsel to Maeser was curt but profound: "Brother Maeser you ought not to teach even the alphabet or the multiplication tables without the spirit of God. That is all. God bless you. Goodbye." Photo by Charles W. Carter, June 1, 1871, courtesy of Greg P. and Marjane Christofferson.

consisting of reverence for, and obedience to, the revealed Word of God, and a living testimony of the divinity of the Latter-day Work. The immediate and practical use of school-room acquirements, the pursuance of science, literature and art, with careful avoidance, as far as possible, of the human adulterations in them; the formation

of character for integrity, truthfulness, chastity, love, and independence; and finally a close connection between school and fireside.³²

Maeser knew Brigham had taught, "Every discovery in science and art, that is really true and useful to mankind, has been given by direct revelation from God, though but few acknowledge it."³³ Maeser applied this principle directly to the organization of the academy. He wrote: "Man will have to keep on experimenting and prospecting so to speak, in educational systems and organizations, as well as in everything else mundane . . . until he commences to learn the language of that 'still small voice' that teaches all truth, and to comprehend it so clearly that to him it will be a constant voice of revelation . . . and mankind shall have on earth an educational system such as is now already enjoyed by the children that are in heaven."³⁴ Maeser believed such an organization would not happen all at once but "line upon line, and precept upon precept."

In many ways, Maeser's proposed organization for the new academy did not look vastly different from other schools. However, Maeser later wrote:

We had the educational systems of the world to pattern after, but we beheld also their faults in the shape of infidelity, of disregard of parental authority and old age, of corruption, of discontent, and of apprehension of unknown evils yet to come. . . . A system, not copied from older ones weighed in the balance and found wanting, but guided at every step of its development by divine inspiration, and testifying to the approbation of the God of Israel by overcoming seemingly insurmountable obstacles need not fear the dark clouds of adversity.³⁵

Upon his arrival at the academy, Maeser immediately recognized the challenges he faced: the school was in poor repair, there were no records, enrollment was scanty, and the circumstances were depressing. The pay they offered him was not very high, even by Utah standards, and the town had a reputation of being anything but refined.³⁶ The school had a

governing board and a prophetic charge but no organization.³⁷ For that, they looked to Maeser.

From the outset, Maeser's vision of the academy was much larger than the tangible realities of the actual school he had been given to build. He had hoped to establish an institution of higher learning but found that none of his students were properly prepared for such an experience. None of them had progressed beyond the fifth-grade reader.³⁸ The building was run down, and there wasn't sufficient furniture. He wrote, "To make matters still worse, there were many, even among the influential men in the community, who not only had no confidence in the stability of the new institution and its avowed education system, but openly opposed it by using their influence against it."³⁹ One local bishop, for example, "drew the Professor aside one day and told him if he persisted in such enlightened measures, he would work a revolution in Provo."⁴⁰ Dusenberry, the interim principal, had been so busy with his legal office that the school had suffered from serious neglect. Classes began at any time between nine and eleven o'clock and sometimes not at all.⁴¹ The school began with twenty-nine students who were poorly prepared to implement Maeser's grand vision of education in the Church.

However, Maeser would eventually come to believe that the almost overwhelming adversities the infant institution had to face "were blessings in disguise." If they had had sufficient financial support, the people wouldn't have developed as much interest in the academy's aims. If the teachers had not been required to sacrifice for such a meager salary, they would not have developed such a commitment to its purpose, and the academy would not have been forced to create its own normal department, a training program to develop its own teachers. If the board had not been so inexperienced in educational affairs, it would not have been able to adjust from the primitive conditions it faced in the beginning to the organizational complexities of its later circumstances. In Maeser's words, "Thus did the little plant grow in spite of storms and weather."⁴²

The first great challenge of the academy was to bring greater order to the school. Then Maeser had to provide adequately prepared students,

and more of them. Punctuality and order were made priorities; students were expected to be prepared and in their seats promptly at 8:45 a.m.

At the end of the eighth or ninth week of Maeser's first term, President Young sent word that in a few days he would be visiting the academy. Brigham wanted to learn how Maeser planned to implement the charge he had given him. Maeser did not yet feel ready to share it; he did not know what to do. "I worried Friday night," he said, "all day Saturday and Sunday and did not sleep Sunday night. Monday morning, while at the organ—I used to lead the choir—I leaned my head on my hand and asked the Lord to show me these things. I had it in a minute. The spirit said to me 'Why did you not ask me Friday. I would have given it to you then.'"⁴³ Maeser had his answer and immediately drafted the school's program. He was prepared for Brigham's visit and able to present a written prospectus to Brigham via the board in July 1876.⁴⁴

The erratic reputation of the previous term was successfully overcome. By the end of Maeser's first term, enrollment reached sixty-seven, and the principal reported "the closing of the spring Term of the Academy in a very satisfactory manner."⁴⁵ In July, the *Deseret News* reported that under Maeser's "able supervision, the Academy is being made an unqualified success."⁴⁶ Even the *Millennial Star* carried a short article commending "the success of this excellent educational institution at Provo." It concluded that the school "as a means for the dissemination of knowledge of correct principles, will doubtless be a lasting monument among the many good works of its founder, President Brigham Young."⁴⁷

Organizing the Academy

Maeser's prospectus for the academy described a school with a "graded system." He described four main gradations: (1) a "Primary Department" for those of the primer—i.e., those in the first- and second-grade readers—and for those developing elementary skills in arithmetic, spelling, and so forth; (2) an "Intermediate Department" for those in the third- and fourth-grade readers and the skills corresponding to these levels; (3) a "Grammar Department" for those in the fifth-grade reader who were developing their

General Programme of Studies, First Term Third Year
 Commencing Aug. 20, 1878

Day	9 AM	10 AM	11 AM	12 PM
Monday	Reading	Writing	Arithmetic	Grammar
Tuesday	Reading	Writing	Arithmetic	Grammar
Wednesday	Reading	Writing	Arithmetic	Grammar
Thursday	Reading	Writing	Arithmetic	Grammar
Friday	Reading	Writing	Arithmetic	Grammar

General Programme of Studies for First Term Third Year (drawn by James E. Talmage, 1878). It outlined the weekly schedule of courses. At first, Maeser was the only teacher and taught all subjects. Courtesy of LTPSC.

dictation, elocution, grammar, rhetoric, penmanship, and arithmetic, both practical and mental; and (4) an “Academic Department,” which was an extension of the Grammar Department but which offered courses in history, natural history, geometry, chemistry, geology, astronomy, algebra, surveying, bookkeeping, technical and artistic drawing, ancient and modern languages, instrumental music, and choir. (Student interest determined which courses were offered when.) In addition to these, there was a weekly theology class that would be “conducted strictly on the principles of the Church,” a “Polytechnic Department” for young mechanics, and a “Domestic Department” to coordinate housing issues. Maeser also proposed a lecture series, the construction of a museum and a library, and evening classes for those who worked during the day.⁴⁸

In July, with the board’s approval,⁴⁹ Maeser traveled with Dusenberry (now a member of the board) throughout the county to recruit potential students. This was not Maeser’s first experience with an educational



The Grand Record contained the first grades at BYA, starting in 1878. Courtesy of LTPSC.

mission, but this became an annual experience for the rest of his life. It must have been fairly successful, because enrollment grew to 272 by the end of the first year.

In August, Maeser traveled to Salt Lake to participate in the Normal Institute, sponsored by the Territorial Teachers' Association. Arrangements had been made for free and reduced fees on the railways and housing for the teachers throughout the Territory to participate in the two-week seminar. The newspapers advertised, "It is hoped, if not expected, that every teacher, present and prospective, in the Territory, will be present."⁵⁰

Maeser was scheduled to teach two classes, one on history and the other on natural science, but "much to the regret of all," some unnamed business required him to return to Provo before the conference's completion.⁵¹

By the end of the summer, it became obvious that the academy should establish its own Normal Department for the preparation of teachers. Maeser also recognized that the new students at the academy typically lacked "a solid groundwork for their grade of studies." This often left them to become discouraged by their lack of preparation. He concluded, "It is essential, therefore, in the interest of this institution, if for no other reason, that the schools in this county gradually be placed into such a condition, that they may be able to sufficiently prepare students for this Academy, which can only be effected by arrangements, placing the Normal Department upon a permanent basis and establishing some connection between the Academy and the district teachers of the county."⁵²

A normal course for teacher preparation, therefore, began at the academy in the fall of 1876 with nine of the most advanced students participating four times per week. The Utah legislature had recognized the need for qualified teachers in the Territory and had allocated funds to provide some training. This offered an important opportunity for the young, struggling academy to supplement its insufficient income with added funds by inviting potential teachers from the county to certify without being required to travel to Salt Lake. It also helped to offset the anti-Mormon efforts to control the district schools of Utah.

Maeser also recognized that to raise the level of preparation for students coming to the BYA, the existing teachers throughout the Territory would require substantial in-service training. Therefore, in the fall of 1876, he also organized a county teachers' institute that held a teacher preparation course every other Saturday. Instruction was given, followed by demonstrations, drills, and practice. It was well attended and helped spread the reputation of the academy as well.⁵³ This role of preparing teachers for the Territory had a profound impact. By June 1884, twenty-nine of the forty teachers in Utah County were graduates of the BYA, and all had participated in training there.⁵⁴

In September 1876, the "hand method" was formally adopted for recitations at the academy.⁵⁵ The "hand method" provided a way to see how prepared the whole class was on a particular question. The teacher would ask a question, and all the students would raise their hands. One student was called upon to answer the question and those who agree with the given answer were to drop their hands. Students with their hands still held up were then given the opportunity to make corrections. This way the teacher had a better idea of the entire class's understanding.⁵⁶ This gave everyone a chance to respond and for the teacher to notice how the students were progressing.⁵⁷ Maeser also felt obligated to keep the parents as informed as possible of the progress of their children. Monthly progress reports were sent to parents, and regular opportunities were made to keep in contact with students' families. Because many students came from areas outside Provo, the "Domestic Department" provided extra support to those students

living away from home. This aspect of mentoring will be discussed in chapter 13.

Of course, the most important characteristic in organizing the Brigham Young Academy was the teaching of theology. Maeser reported to the board, "In conformity with the spirit of our institution, theology was made the subject of the most serious consideration, and has developed itself theoretically and practically into the basis and leading characteristic of all studies, instructions, discipline and organization."⁵⁸ In March 1877, the *Deseret News* published an article regarding this theological aspect of the BYA: "The theological instructions of the Academy form the basis and foundation or rather the focus of all the studies and the whole discipline, and a theological organization pervades the entire Academy."⁵⁹ Every day began with a devotional and ended with a hymn and prayer. Every other Tuesday, a "priesthood meeting" was held, in which the girls also participated.⁶⁰

Formally, theology courses were held at every level according to the preparation of the students. The youngest would study stories from the *Juvenile Instructor* and memorize short poems or scriptural verses. More advanced classes would study Church history, the Bible, and the Book of Mormon. On Wednesday afternoons, all were invited to attend the student-driven, grand theology class, where student questions were submitted, reviewed, and addressed.⁶¹

This organization looked similar to other institutions, but Maeser believed that it was not copied after them. The unique qualities of this new academy must have been in some dimension more fundamental than the overall structure of the institution or the outline of its coursework. Maeser claimed that a careful comparison of the new academy and other institutions would reveal fundamental differences as great as the differences between an oak sapling and a fully grown corn stalk.⁶² The principles of learning in the new academy were grounded deeply in the restored gospel. They went beyond formally reading the standard works of the Church and participating in a common theology course or devotional.

Like Brigham, Maeser did not distinguish between "religious" and "secular" knowledge, but he did distinguish between theological knowledge



Maeser claimed that a careful comparison of the Brigham Young Academy and other institutions would reveal fundamental differences as great as the differences between an oak sapling (left) and a fully grown corn stalk (right). Courtesy of Wiki Commons.

and true religious conviction. While they were not mutually exclusive, they certainly were “not always identical.” He warned, “A man may be a great mathematician, philosopher, surveyor or writer and still be as corrupt as hell.”⁶³ No one could “philosophize”⁶⁴ themselves into the kingdom of heaven:

True theology requires neither philosophical sophistry, nor rhetorical eloquence, but a thorough knowledge of the Gospel, an abiding faith in its principles, an honest compliance with its requirements, and a systematic training in the methods of conveying the divine truth to the hearts and understanding of others. Our Church Colleges and Academies are under obligation, not only to have such theological instruction placed as a regular branch in their curricula, but to conduct all studies, and indeed to manage their entire organizations, in conformity with the spirit inculcated by theological exercises.⁶⁵

Maeser often warned that “we are apt to teach too much theology and not enough religion,”⁶⁶ meaning that theology must be grounded in religious practice or it is hypocrisy. He was constantly reminding teachers that they must be living examples of what they hope their students would become. “No teacher can give what he does not himself possess.”⁶⁷

Teaching the alphabet and multiplication tables with the Spirit of God would require diligent effort on the part of the teachers. Maeser taught:

No teacher should enter the school room without first offering a prayer, “Father, bless me today. Give me Thy Spirit to discern the needs and desires of these little ones, read their thoughts and feel the pulsation of their hearts, that I can look into their eyes as they look into mine, and know that we love each other. Guide me in all I say, etc.” Then, after going through the exercise, a prayer should be offered for God to bless that which has been taught, that no wrong impression may be created, etc.⁶⁸

Maeser also taught that “every teacher must have an ideal if he wants to be a true educator.”⁶⁹ A teacher may not reach this ideal during mortality, but “the mariner is guided by the stars of heaven, although he does not get there with his ship.”⁷⁰ He counseled teachers to be natural, because “affectation of any kind is a near relative to hypocrisy.” Teachers must be “genuine in bearing, voice, language, gestures, manners, noble and pure in principle.”⁷¹ A teacher must never attempt to be or imitate anyone but himself.⁷² Maeser noted that “pupils weigh their teachers in the infallible scale of natural intuition, and size them up very correctly as a general thing. This necessitates much self-investigation on the part of the teacher, that he may not only seem to be, but actually be, what he desires his pupils to regard him.”⁷³

Maeser believed that religion was a basic element in all true education. In his theology course, he taught, “God speaks to us out of every drop of water, every blade of grass, every face we see and in fact God is always speaking to us.”⁷⁴ Therefore, all schools should be infused with a

religious dimension but should not be conducted with “the baneful spirit of sectarian animosity.” Each denomination should be supported to establish schools consistent with their beliefs, and “everyone should be willing to accord to his neighbor’s beliefs and practices the respect he desires for his own. Neither secular nor religious duties ought to be neglected; training on each of these lines is essential to the harmonious development of the soul indicated in the admonition of Christ.”⁷⁵

Later Maeser would argue that each public, nonsectarian high school student should be given the opportunity of a religion class “according to the denomination whose doctrines he chooses to follow,”⁷⁶ but the academy was to be a model of a fully integrated Latter-day Saint learning institution. There would be those who supposed that the Church schools Maeser developed differed from state schools only because theology was taught in them. Maeser declared that this “was an incomplete conception of the difference.” He insisted that “the fundamental characteristic of the work in the Church schools was that the Spirit of God permeates all the work done; whether it were class work, or disciplinary labor.”⁷⁷ On another occasion he taught, “There is something very different between Church schools and the secular institutions of learning. . . . The difference may not be so apparent on the surface. As the Savior said to His disciples, ‘The Kingdom of heaven is within you,’ so it is with the students of these schools. There should be something within them—something the world cannot give, for the world has it not.”⁷⁸

Maeser knew that this model would not and should not be adopted by the public schools, because they had been given a legal mandate to avoid all sectarian instruction. Maeser saw this as “no bar to a proper course”⁷⁹ for their cultural purpose, but he was concerned that “this generation is fast getting into the notion that they can get along without a God.”⁸⁰ On the other hand, merely following “in the old grooves would simply lead to the same results.” Maeser believed that the public schools should be as vigilant in safeguarding young minds against the enemy of all religion—namely, atheism and agnosticism—as they were about avoiding the dominance of a particular denomination. Passing laws that no infidelity should be taught in the schools was far too feeble an attempt. “Just as well try to keep a



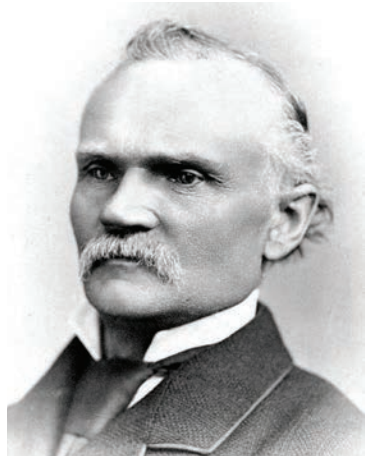
Maeser said that passing laws to prohibit atheism is like trying “to keep a chilling frost out of a flower garden by putting a rail fence around it.” 2013, courtesy of A. LeGrand Richards.

chilling frost out of a flower garden by putting a rail fence around it.”⁸¹ At the same time, however, Maeser taught that public schools should never be allowed to become a “shuttlecock” for politicians to volley between opinions according to partisan politics and special interests. “Politics is necessary and, therefore, good in its place, but in education it is a curse, pure and simple, every time.”⁸² The Brigham Young Academy was to demonstrate the power of a Latter-day Saint model, knowing full well that many Church members would have to rely upon secular schooling supplemented through religious instruction in the home or Church-sponsored religion classes.

A Spiritual Difference

Maeser wrote, “When Israel stood at the foot of Mt. Sinai, they put bounds around the mountain, allowing none but Moses to go up and speak with Jehovah. There is no fence around the mountain any more, and the road is open to all.”⁸³ The existing educational theories also did not recognize the power of proper priesthood authority and that “the

Spirit of God manifests itself through the channels of inspiration and revelation; that it is the only source of true religious knowledge, and that the Elders and teachers of the Church have to depend upon such guidance according to the revealed order of the Priesthood.”⁸⁴ Maeser also believed, however, that the system he was launching was not given to any notion of dogmatic completion. “Standing thus unshaken upon the rock of continuous revelation, a light-house to the world, it will gradually develop a system calculated to prepare the rising generation for the blessings of the time that the angels foretold in their song at Bethlehem.”⁸⁵



Maeser portrait. Photo by C. R. Savage, 1882, courtesy of CHL.

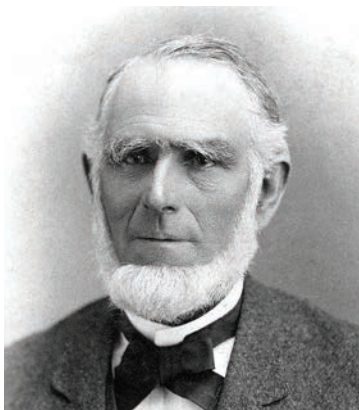
The difference between the system of education inaugurated in the BYA and the systems of the world was primarily spiritual. The Brigham Young Academy was intended to operate on the living principles of continuous revelation. Maeser declared:

Amid the ever changing scenes of development which the B[righam] Y[oung] Academy has passed through, whether holding forth in one single room under makeshift arrangements, or enjoying the benefits of more suitable facilities, whether in rented premises, fitted up for the time being, or in her own palatial habitation, whether laboring according to the humble program of the primary and intermediate grades, or aspiring to academic and collegiate honors, there must go through it all like a golden thread one thing constant: The Spirit of the Latter-day Work. As long as this principle will be the mainspring of all her labors, whether in teaching the alphabet or the multiplication table, or unfolding the advanced truths of science or art, the future of the B.Y. Academy will surpass in glory the fondest hopes of her most ardent admirers.⁸⁶

A Lesson on Pride

The early years of the Brigham Young Academy were filled with sacrifice, trials, long hours, and financial struggles, but its reputation and enrollment grew rapidly. As an attempt to help, Brigham announced on June 1, 1877, that he would deed 1.1 acres of prime real estate in downtown Provo to the academy. The financial value of the property was considerable and would have been a great help to the academy, but Brigham passed away in August before the transfer was completed.

The institution therefore struggled on without the extra support. President Abraham O. Smoot accepted the responsibility for the financial survival of the school. Though the tuition fee was low, few families paid in cash. Wilkinson writes that fees were primarily paid in “grain, fruit, beef, cloth, and other commodities” until the seventh academic year.⁸⁷ Smoot began a campaign throughout the stakes of the Church to help raise the financial backing of the school. Knowing that thousands of dollars were being sent from the east to “to allure our children away from the faith of their fathers,” surely the Latter-day Saints would be willing to make an effort to teach their own children and to prepare their own teachers.⁸⁸



Abraham O. Smoot (1815–95) served as chairman of the BYA board until his death. He saved BYA from financial bankruptcy numerous times at great personal sacrifice. Photo by C. R. Savage, ca. 1875–90, courtesy of LTPSC.

By 1880, there were 313 students crammed into the Lewis Building.⁸⁹ More assistants had been added to the school such as Milton Hardy, Teenie Smoot, Benjamin Cluff, James Talmage, and Caddie Daniels. By 1883 they were in better financial conditions than ever, and Maeser was reported as happier than he had ever been.⁹⁰ The school seemed to be confidently headed to a solid future.⁹¹ Many years later, Maeser noted in retrospect that this sense of security brought on a false sense of self-assurance and pride.⁹²



The Lewis Building on Center Street in Provo. The first building used by the BYA. Ca. 1879, courtesy of LTPSC.

If such an attitude of independent self-reliance did develop, it was ravaged by a powerful lesson on Sunday, January 27, 1884. At 11:15 p.m., the silence of the night in Provo was pierced by the cry, “The BY Academy is burning!” People rushed to the scene; a few reached the burning building soon enough to remove a few items of furniture, some books, the organ, and the piano. Reed Smoot quickly formed a bucket brigade, drawing water from the millrace about a block away, but the amount of water they could provide soon proved insufficient to save the building, and “presently, all that could be done was to watch the sight and listen to the crackling, hissing flames as they crept from door to window and window to roof.” Maeser was quickly on the scene, where a large crowd gathered. Apostle Erastus Snow and President Smoot were also there “doing and saying all that was possible to aid and cheer. Many of the students wept at the sight of the dear old building around which so many happy memories clung going down to ruin.”⁹³ Joseph M. Tanner remembered that there were several jars of nitroglycerin stored in the lab. With some other young men, he entered the burning building and secured the jars, thereby averting a major catastrophe.⁹⁴ As the bell crashed through the debris, it tolled a haunting close of an important chapter. By morning, all that was left was the charred shell of teetering walls surrounding a pile of smoldering ashes. The building was not insured, and the future of the academy looked bleak.

Reed Smoot, the future Apostle and senator, met Maeser on the street the night of the fire and exclaimed, "Oh Brother Maeser, the Academy is burned!" Maeser quickly put it in proper perspective, "No such thing, it's only the building. . . . The Academy lives on."⁹⁵

A crowd of nearly four hundred people gathered at 10:00 a.m. the next morning when Professor Maeser spoke. He said, "My students, we have suffered a heavy loss, and yet it will be all right somehow." He promised that the academy would arise "phoenix-like from its ashes." They quickly made arrangement to hold classes both on the second floor of the First National Bank and in the basement of the old stake tabernacle until more permanent arrangements could be made in the warehouse of Zion's Cooperative Mercantile Institution (ZCMI). Only one day of instruction was missed because of the fire.

Maeser saw the fire as an object lesson and as a great reminder to warn the academy of the danger of pride. "Thus after eight years of life, light and love, we flattered ourselves on having arrived at a firm financial footing, so that there was danger, that henceforth we might rely more upon our established reputation and success, than on the support of the Lord, He gave us an object lesson by fire."⁹⁶

Maeser counseled that this school was to be conducted under direction of its divine Creator. "No one can claim the credit for the standing of the Brigham Young Academy in the hearts of the Latter-day Saints, no one can arise in the spirit of Nebuchadnezzar and point to the 'Babel he had built,' no more than anyone is powerful enough to stay its onward course, for One has been guiding its destinies that will not give His glory to another."⁹⁷ Paraphrasing Paul, Maeser proclaimed that the banyan tree of the Brigham Young Academy had a divine destiny; Brigham may have planted, Karl may have tended, and Abraham Smoot may have watered, but God gave the increase.⁹⁸



The fire on January 27, 1884, could have meant the end of the Brigham Young Academy. The school had no insurance, but Maeser was resolved that only the building would be destroyed. The school would continue. Photographer unknown, 1884, courtesy of LTPSC.

Notes

1. Brigham Young, in Reinhard Maeser, *Karl G. Maeser: A Biography* (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University, 1928), 79.
2. "Death and Destruction," *Salt Lake Herald*, April 6, 1876. See also Journal History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, reel 33, April 5, 1876, Special Collections, J. Willard Marriott Library, University of Utah, Salt Lake City.
3. Brigham Young to George Q. Cannon, in "Brigham Young Copybook," April 19, 1876, 306–7, Church History Library, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City.
4. Brigham Young to Alma Smith, in "Brigham Young Copybook," April 22, 1876, 316.
5. "Terrible Disaster," *Deseret News*, April 6, 1876, 2.
6. "The Explosion," *Salt Lake Herald*, April 7, 1876.
7. See "Institute," *Deseret Evening News*, April 6, 1876, 3.
8. Maeser, *Karl G. Maeser*, 76–77. Reinhard and others implied that Karl Maeser thought his new assignment in Provo would be another proselytizing mission somewhere in the world and that Maeser spent time considering the difficulties that such a mission would have presented. I don't believe that such an implication is warranted from the available evidence.
9. Brigham Young, in *Journal of Discourses* (London: Latter-day Saints' Book Depot, 1854–86), 9:280.
10. Young, in *Journal of Discourses*, 1:334.
11. Brigham Young to Lewis Moench, in "Brigham Young Copybook," April 21, 1876, 312.
12. Young to Moench, in "Brigham Young Copybook," April 21, 1876, 312–13.
13. D. Michael Quinn, "The Brief Career of Young University at Salt Lake City," *Utah Historical Quarterly* 41, no. 1 (Winter 1973): 70.
14. Some have assumed this was really a misspelling of Mill (John Stewart), the economist, but he was referring Edward Miall (1809–1881), the staunch advocate of the British Anti-State-Church Association. Miall wrote, "I think that if the State is to supply a general system of national education, that system must of necessity be mainly a secular system. And when we speak of secular education we mean this—it is not secular in the sense of excluding and denying religion as important; it is only secular in the sense of teaching those subjects which are of a secular character in themselves. No one can say that reading, or writing, or arithmetic, or geography, or grammar, is a religious subject." Arthur Miall, *The Life of Edward Miall* (Shropshire, England: Quinta, 2012), 304. He also wrote, "We remember being told in our youthful days that dog-fanciers succeeded in producing

the race of tiny lap-dogs by administering gin to them while puppies and thus preventing their further growth. . . . The main end of the system of education worked by the clergy seems to be to hinder the free development of the youthful mind and to produce a race of intellectual dwarfs. . . . They lick the hand which smites them, and crouch and whine at the feet of those who kick them” (65–69).

15. Brigham Young to Willard Young, Brigham Young Copybook, October 19, 1876, 579–80, CHL.
16. Later, Willard Young attempted to follow his father’s wishes without success. The Salt Lake Academy was eventually established on a different property, and Willard was appointed to organize the Church University in Salt Lake. However, it was closed due to financial strain, political considerations, and a plea from Joseph Kingsbury to Wilford Woodruff that its doors be closed and that the University of Utah be supported. See Brian W. Ricks, “Closing the Church University in 1894: Embracing or Accommodating Secularized Education” (PhD diss., Brigham Young University, 2012).
17. Arnold Garr, “The History of Brigham Young College” (master’s thesis, Utah State University, 1973), 4.
18. Edward William Tullidge, *Tullidge’s Histories* (Salt Lake City: Juvenile Instructor, 1889), 2:487.
19. Ernest L. Wilkinson, *Brigham Young University: The First One Hundred Years* (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 1975), 1:42.
20. For details regarding the reactivation of the University of Deseret, see chapter 11.
21. George A. Smith, “Our Schools,” April 8, 1872, in *Journal of Discourses* 14:374.
22. Wilkinson, *Brigham Young University*, 1:60.
23. “Brigham Young’s Academy,” *Salt Lake Herald*, October 30, 1875.
24. “Going to Provo,” *Deseret News Weekly*, April 12, 1876, 12.
25. Brigham Young to Board of Directors of BYA, in “Brigham Young Copybook,” April 17, 1876, 296.
26. All three events (the explosion of the armory, Karl’s assignment to Provo, and Reinhard’s mission call) were announced in the *Deseret News Weekly*, April 12, 1876. Reinhard must have known before it was announced in general conference. Brigham wrote Albert Carrington, president of the European missions, that Reinhard had been called. See “Brigham Young Copybook,” February 24, 1876, 221–22.
27. Eva Maeser was born on June 21, 1876.
28. Karl G. Maeser, *School and Fireside* (Provo, UT: Skelton, 1898), 189.

29. Maeser, *Karl G. Maeser*, 84.
30. John Taylor, "The Organization of the Church," *Millennial Star*, November 15, 1851, 13:339.
31. Karl G. Maeser, "Final Address," *Normal*, January 15, 1892, 82, LH 1 .B73 B5, LTPSC.
32. Maeser, *School and Fireside*, 160–61.
33. Brigham Young, in *Journal of Discourses*, 9:369–70.
34. Maeser, *School and Fireside*, 125.
35. Karl G. Maeser, "The Brigham Young Academy," *Normal*, November 13, 1891, 43.
36. At the time, Provo had developed a fairly rough reputation. In 1876, Smoot was still trying to overcome "the old feeling that Provo was the roughest and wildest place in the territory." See Ernest L. Wilkinson and W. Cleon Skousen, *Brigham Young University: A School of Destiny* (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 1976), 63–67.
37. Brigham had planned to attend the opening day, but his poor health prohibited him. Daniel H. Wells attended and offered the dedicatory prayer on August 27, 1876. Brigham did make two official visits to the academy before he died and was pleased by what he observed. See Susa Young Gates, "Dr. Karl G. Maeser," *Young Woman's Journal*, August 1892, 483–84.
38. Wilkinson, *Brigham Young University*, 1:102.
39. Karl G. Maeser, "A Retrospect," *Normal*, January 4, 1892. Burton describes those who opposed the "old Dutchman." Alma P. Burton, *Karl G. Maeser: Mormon Educator* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1953), vi.
40. Gates, "Dr. Karl G. Maeser," 483.
41. See Gates, "Dr. Karl G. Maeser," 482. See also Wilkinson and Skousen, *Brigham Young University: A School of Destiny*, 63.
42. Maeser, "A Retrospect," 68.
43. *White & Blue*, October 15, 1900, vol. 4, no. 1, 12, UA 5328, LTPSC. Alma P. Burton refers to a story told by Ida Steward probably referring to this same experience. Burton, "Karl G. Maeser, Mormon Educator" (master's thesis, Brigham Young University, 1950), 62; see also Ida Steward Peay, "A Story Dr. Maeser Told," *Improvement Era*, January, 1914, 194.
44. "11:15 a.m. Prof. Maser [sic] Principal of Brigham Young Academy, Provo, called and left a prospectus of that institution." See "Church Historian's Journal," July 19, 1876, 130, Church History Library.
45. "Brigham Young Academy Board minutes," July 1, 1876, UA 6, box 10, folder 4, 8, LTPSC.
46. "Up from Provo," *Deseret News Weekly*, July 12, 1876, 1.
47. "The Brigham Young Academy," *Millennial Star*, December 11, 1876, 799.

48. See "Prospectus of the Brigham Young Academy," 1876, M266.5 P966, CHL. No date appears on the prospectus, but it may be the document referred to in the Church Historian's Journal (July 19, 1876, CR100 1, box 4, vol. 34, 130), which records that at 11:15 a.m. "Prof. Maeser, Principal of Brigham Young Academy, Provo, called and left a prospectus of that institution."
49. "Academy Board minutes," July 17, 1876, UA 6, box 10, folder 4, 9, LTPSC.
50. "Territorial Normal Institute," *Deseret News Weekly*, July 12, 1876, 13.
51. "Normal Institute," *Deseret News Weekly*, August 16, 1876, 8.
52. "Register of Studies," October 27, 1876, UA 229, folder 1, 1819, LTPSC.
53. See "Register of Studies," October 27, 1876, LTPSC; see also *Deseret News Weekly*, December 27, 1876.
54. "Education in Utah County," *Deseret News Weekly*, July 2, 1884, 13.
55. "Minutes of Faculty Meetings," September 21, 1876, UA 5, box 1, LTPSC.
56. Melvin M Harmon, "Notes of BYA Normal class," September 5, 1884, UA 100, 177–78, LTPSC.
57. See Harmon, "Notes of BYA Normal Class," September 5, 1884, 177–78.
58. "Register of Studies," a report to the board, June 4, 1877, UA 229, folder 1, LTPSC.
59. "Genuine Education," *Deseret News Weekly*, March 28, 1877, 9.
60. The "priesthood meeting" became a reporting and training meeting for the student leadership of the school. The teaching assistants ("repetitors") and class monitors received instructions and gave their reports to the principal. Later a separate Domestic Department gathered to receive the reports of the seniors assigned to visit the students living away from home.
61. A good description of the proceedings was recorded in the *Deseret News Weekly*, March 22, 1877.
62. Maeser, *School and Fireside*, 161.
63. "Theology Minutes," August 26, 1879, recorded by M. H. Dalley, 174, LTPSC.
64. "Priesthood Meeting Minutes," January 24, 1878, UA 228, LTPSC.
65. Maeser, *School and Fireside*, 339.
66. Cited by George Reynolds in "Among the Children," *Deseret News Weekly*, July 4, 1896.
67. Maeser, *School and Fireside*, 155.
68. "Dr. Maeser's Lecture," June 25, 1892, *Deseret News Weekly*, 21.
69. Maeser, *School and Fireside*, 279.
70. Maeser, *School and Fireside*, 84.
71. Maeser, *School and Fireside*, 279.

72. James E. Talmage, "A Series of Normal Notes Taken by J. E. Talmage from Lectures by Prof. K. G. Maeser, B.Y.A., Provo, 1878-9," MSS 229, box 9, folder 4, 29, LTPSC.
73. Maeser, *School and Fireside*, 84.
74. "Notes from Karl Maeser's theology class 1889, Jan-Feb," Brockbank family, MS 12999, 54, CHL.
75. "Notes from Karl Maeser's theology class 1889, Jan-Feb," 159.
76. "Notes from Karl Maeser's theology class 1889, Jan-Feb," 158.
77. "Salt Lake Conference," *Deseret News Weekly*, September 17, 1898, 25.
78. Journal History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, April 14, 1900, CHL.
79. Maeser, *School and Fireside*, 159.
80. Maeser, "A Retrospect," 67.
81. Maeser, *School and Fireside*, 131.
82. Maeser, *School and Fireside*, 129.
83. Maeser, *School and Fireside*, 57.
84. Maeser, *School and Fireside*, 339.
85. Maeser, *School and Fireside*, 31.
86. Maeser, "A Retrospect," 67.
87. Wilkinson, *Brigham Young University*, 1:109.
88. "Circular of the Brigham Young Academy," issued June 29, 1879, in Wilkinson, *Brigham Young University*, 1:117.
89. Wilkinson and Skousen, *Brigham Young University: A School of Destiny*, 72.
90. Wilkinson, *Brigham Young University*, 1:123.
91. Wilkinson and Skousen, *A School of Destiny*, 73.
92. Maeser, "Brigham Young Academy," 43.
93. "The Fire at Provo," *Deseret News Weekly*, February 6, 1884, 7.
94. "Fire at Provo," *Salt Lake Tribune*, January 29, 1884, 4.
95. Wilkinson and Skousen, *Brigham Young University: A School of Destiny*, 74-75.
96. Maeser, "Brigham Young Academy," 43.
97. Maeser, "Brigham Young Academy," 43.
98. Maeser, "Brigham Young Academy," 43; compare 1 Corinthians 3:6.