Mormonism's Last Colonizer

Smart, William B.

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Hard Times

If life had been hard for settlers trying to scratch out a living in the Uintah Basin’s inhospitable soil—and for William H. Smart himself—it was about to get harder. Six weeks after he left Leota for good, the collapse of the stock market on Black Friday, October 29, 1929, started the Great Depression. In the subsequent bank runs, $140 billion of depositor money disappeared, 10,000 banks closed their doors, and shrinking credit brought widespread foreclosures. Utah was hit as hard as any place, and the basin, where farmers and ranchers were barely holding on anyway, harder still.

Smart’s move to Vernal meant Anna lost her teaching job at Leota. Defaulting payments on various of his land sales meant the Smarts had little income. In November, he mounted his mule and headed west to see what money he could raise, but had little success. He tried to get John Spencer to make at least a small payment on the $600 note Smart had signed so he could buy a threshing machine, but Spencer could not. Smart tried to get one or more of the long-overdue payments on eighty acres of land near Midview he had sold to Raymal W. Beals, but Beals could not pay, and defaulted on the contract. He sold to William H. Gagon his stock in the Roosevelt Realty Company he had founded years earlier, but for forty cents on the dollar and “payable in the future—if he succeeds.”

Though financially stressed and no longer with any leadership role, Smart was still possessed by what he deemed his stewardship to assist Mormon settlement of the basin. He soon found another opportunity. He learned that with Bishop Ernest H. Burgess and others giving up and leaving the area, and most of the remaining members indifferent, the Midview Ward was

1. Smart, Journals, November 8–14, 1929.
about to be dissolved. “This sent a thrill of sorrow thru me,” Smart wrote. “This community was among the first I assisted in founding spiritually and temporally and was one of the best Latter-day Saint communities. . . . I am moved to compassion toward it.”

Ignoring the harsh economic facts of life that drove people from the land, Smart devised a plan he thought could save the ward. Members lived on both sides of the Duchesne River, including those in the nearby Antelope Branch, and he felt that bringing them together to a common meeting house and community center would do it. He spotted a farm just north of the new bridge over the river, and decided this would be the right place.

With his erstwhile optimism and confidence in his persuasive powers, he approached the discouraged and lukewarm Mormon owners, James W. Parker and wife, pleaded with them not to give up and leave the area, “at least until the ward was either saved or disorganized,” and persuaded them to host a special sacrament meeting in their home. The meeting was held, with just thirty people attending. Despite that poor response, he insisted that “I did not feel discouraged,” and proceeded to move his church membership to Midview Ward and to settle, rent-free but fixing his own meals, in a single back room of Raymal Beal’s home. His living there was “very humble,” he wrote, “mostly bread and milk. Meals usually cold.”

During the next two weeks, he visited every family in the Midview and Antelope sections of the ward, urging a spiritual awakening and a favorable vote for his plan at special meetings to be called by the Duchesne Stake presidency. It worked; in meetings held at Antelope and Midview, members voted to continue the ward and to build a common meetinghouse on the Parker farm. With the impending departure of Bishop Burgess, stake president Owen Bennion offered Smart either that position or the chairmanship of both the building committee and, subsequently, the Midview Community Committee. He chose the latter two, urging the calling of Charles W. Smith as bishop.

So, Smart was back in harness. His first task was to buy the Parker farm. That proved difficult, as Parker grew increasingly uncooperative and, in the end, antagonistic. After four months of fruitless negotiations, Smart offered an alternative—exchanging Parker’s Midview farm for Smart’s Roosevelt farm, which by then had been repossessed because the buyer, LeGrand Mecham, could not make payments. Parker immediately accepted, sight unseen, rejecting Smart’s urging that he first look over the

2. Ibid., November 15–20, 1929.
3. Cannon, “Struggle,” 314–17. Nationally, the price of wheat fell from $1.03 a bushel in 1929 to thirty-eight cents in 1932. Utah was particularly hard hit, Duchesne County—the former reservation lands—even harder. Average farm income in the county was $108 below expenses. In June 1934, 71 percent of the Duchesne County population was on federal relief, the highest in the state.
property. Smart saw in the transaction “the hand of the Lord in all things pertaining to this new Midview–Antelope movement. For me, never in all my experiences have I felt the guiding hand of the Lord more than in these matters.”

A few days later, after examining his new acquisition, Parker complained he had been worsted in the deal. Smart’s recorded response was uncharacteristically judgmental: “While I regret his venom and dissatisfaction I did not expect it to be otherwise, and am strongly of the opinion that the Lord in His own way dealt thru me with him according to his deserts and in order to wrest this stewardship from his hands that plans concerning ward may proceed and that he and his companion who are bitter enemies of Bishop Smith may be eliminated from the ward.”

Meanwhile, Smart had labored, with indifferent success, to organize a ward teaching program to look after the spiritual as well as temporal condition of its members, and had worked with the building committee to purchase a couple of buildings to move onto the new ward center. And he had labored, with no success at all, to improve his own finances. He had sold his Roosevelt home, had it returned for non-payment, then sold it again to Dewey Grove, with his wife and six children, on the condition that Anna

4. Smart, Journals, April 3, 1930.
5. Ibid., April 14, 1930.
could continue to live there in a screened-in porch. Despite his promise of “leniency in case of unavoidable failure,” he had to take it back because Grove could not make the payments.6

He sought in vain to find land to lease to start a turkey farm, and asked his old friend, Harden Bennion, chairman of the State Agricultural Commission, to help him obtain a lease with an option to buy state land. He wrote to his three sons, William, Thomas Laurence, and Joseph, inviting them to join him in such a business. The Land Board turned him down. So did his sons, William twisting the knife by stating his conviction that his father’s work in the basin was not worth the sacrifice.7

But Smart had accomplished what he considered the keystone to his plan to save the Midview Ward—securing the Parker farm for a joint church-community center. With that done and with no prospects in that area of any way to rebuild his own finances, he began to think of moving on to save another failing Mormon ward. “I am praying fervently,” he wrote on April 17, 1930, “if it is the Lord’s will that I proceed westward to the Fruitland–Strawberry section under the Strawberry Ward and begin to lay plans thru which L.D.S population may increase sufficiently to justify continuance of that ward, the Stake Presidency contemplating dissolution as last fall they did this Midview Ward.”8

First, he had to dispose of the two farms he now owned in the Midview area. It wasn’t easy. He had sold to two brothers-in-law, Wanless Shields and Marion Ross, the farm Raymal Beal had lost because he couldn’t continue to make payments. The price was $1500, but the new owners were credited with the $500 payments Beal had made before giving up. So the new deal was $150 down and five annual payments of $270, with no interest. Smart consoled Beal on his loss, pointing out that “as I have lost in this land before and am now waving all interest, we are companions . . . in assisting to establish worthy brethren” on the land.9 Even with these incredibly easy terms, though, the “worthy brethren” never made the down payment, and Smart still had the farm on his hands.

In April 1930, he sold it on the same unprofitable terms to Raymal Beal again, but this time the purchasers included Beal’s two sons, Jesse and Austin. “Thus is brot to a termination a long meandering consideration on this Dean farm,” Smart rejoiced, “and it goes into the hands of a pioneer family who I am glad to assist in its acquisition. Thus also is saved from going into improper hands a farm which was once owned by a non-mormon, and into hands of our own people.”10

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6. Ibid., May 19, August 5, and October 19, 1930.
7. Ibid., April 12, 1930.
8. Ibid., April 17, 1930.
9. Ibid., November 12, 1929.
10. Ibid., April 24, 1930.
Disposition of the Parker farm was even harder. Smart approached several potential buyers, reciting his efforts to acquire it as a ward and community center—in effect a townsite—which would make the property more valuable. In that depressed time and place he found no takers. Finally, a soon-to-be-married young man, J. Ervin Pearson, agreed to lease it for $400 a year, and the deal was struck. Overnight, Pearson decided he couldn’t make that payment, but would operate the farm on shares. Smart accepted, because he felt Pearson came from a “good LDS family.”

Even that uncertain arrangement didn’t work out. Hail destroyed Pearson’s crops, and there was no income. Smart searched for meaning in the disaster. Had his methods in obtaining the farm displeased the Lord? Had the lives of its former non-Mormon and unchristian owners desecrated it? Had the Lord “taken this means to purify this place by this devastating storm as well as to permit it to pass thru this tribulation before the foundation is laid for the ward center?” He found no answer. In any event, the lease was terminated in October 1930.

Another Self-assigned Saving Mission

But that was months in the future. For now, with the disposition, he thought, of both of his farms, Smart felt free to ride his mule west to save other failing wards and, hopefully, find some income for himself. In a meeting with George V. Billings of the Duchesne Stake presidency, he summarized his goals: “to engage in temporal matters in Fruitland District for personal revenue with hope and desire also assisting in bringing about residence of more of our people, more water development and a consequent greater land cultivation, and therefore a stronger colony of our people which would assist in bringing about such church organization and civic and other conditions as to make of it a more thrifty and progressive community.” Billings encouraged him to give it a try.

Smart’s quest for personal revenue proved fruitless. He got himself appointed as agent to sell the Brooks Mercantile store and adjacent land in Fruitland, and also contemplated finding buyers for a rival store and post office, owned by a Mrs. Rockhill, “so as to eliminate these undesirable parties who give no support to us and the former eastern non-mormon blood whose business also has name of selling spirituous drink.”

Seeking to find investors to buy out one or both of these businesses and to partner with him in community-building, he met with Lester Stott, one of several Heber sheepmen prospering in the western end of Uintah Basin, and William Coleman, a director of the Bank of Heber City, which Smart had organized and for which he had served as its first president. After consulting with his associates, Stott reported that they had no interest in going

11. Ibid., May 2, 1930.
12. Ibid., May 26, 1930.
into business in Fruitland.\textsuperscript{13} There is no record that Coleman responded at all. So Smart would handle no real estate sales there.

On his faithful mule he spent days exploring the lower Red Creek and Strawberry River region. Many homesteaders had settled there, but over time had left the area as they sold out to Smart’s earlier protégé, A. M. Murdock, who, contrary to Smart’s policies, had consolidated their holdings into a large ranching operation. As stake president, Smart had encouraged “personal family farm homes with smaller ranges,” and it may have been with some satisfaction that he reported that Murdock had mortgaged the operation and lost it all. But Smart’s hopes to attract settlers back to the land never materialized. No one came, and there were no commissions.

Building up the struggling church units without an influx of new members was a daunting task, but he was determined to try. On James Carey’s farm near Fruitland, he found pasturage for his mule and two back rooms for himself—“dirty and well ventilated with openings”—but he swept them out and, as always, dedicated them. Then, on June 1, he attended Sunday services at the Strawberry Ward, comprising the few remaining farm families along the Strawberry River. He presented his membership record to the Strawberry Ward, was accepted by the sixteen members attending, and at this first meeting with his new ward, pronounced the invocation, blessed the sacrament, and spoke at length in Sunday-school class. Then, with the bishop’s approval, he spoke at length on Aaronic Priesthood restoration and tithing, two subjects the General Authorities had urged be treated throughout the church but that were ignored in the Strawberry Ward since, because of its “weakened condition,” no meetings had been held that month. The next Sunday he spoke on the same subjects to a small gathering in the Fruitland Ward, because meetings had been suspended there as well. Clearly, this part of the Lord’s vineyard needed help.

So, financially, did Smart. He found nothing to produce income, but soon found at least a way to survive. Near the confluence of Red Creek with the Strawberry River, he visited the farm of John Mezenen, a baptized but never-active Mormon, where years before Smart had organized a small Sunday school, long-since abandoned as homesteaders gave up. He found Mezenen’s wife near death, and administered to her. After her death, in consoling the widower, he urged him to establish closer communion with God. Mezenen, he recorded, took it kindly and requested Smart to use his influence with Mezenen’s two sons to live a “higher life.”\textsuperscript{14}

The two men also struck a deal for Smart to work as a field hand on Mezenen’s farm in return for a room and one meal a day. Smart chose to do it, he explained, because “I wish to be busy for my own good . . . to assist in expenses,” as an example to the people, and “as a reasonable excuse for

\textsuperscript{13} Ibid., May 30, 1930.
\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., July 2, 1930.
being here while investigating and endeavoring to finally make foundation for self.”

In the first couple of days he hoed potatoes, fixed a buggy, helped repair a dam in the river, ate the noon meal with the family, hauled hay, chopped wood, then took a bath in the river and “ate supper of bread and sweetened water and little of it while my breakfast eaten in field was one egg, bread and water.” So at least his immediate future seemed secure, although this sixty-eight-year-old man found that “not having been at continuous manual labor for sometime I must approach it gradually.”

Then came a shock. Three weeks after his wife’s death and a week after Smart felt he had aroused him spiritually and began working for him, Mezenen dropped dead of an apparent heart attack. At the request of his sons, Smart spoke at the funeral, but only after arising at dawn and hoeing weeds until he finished the work Mezenen had assigned him.

In his funeral sermon, as recorded in his journal, he told the family that, based on his intimate talks with their father, he was now acting as his messenger: “I felt sure he would like them to do what he resolved to do had he lived—to keep in general commandments, to enter temple and get endowments and sealings for himself and wife, and to aid in strengthening ward which is threatened with disorganization thru weakness.” The latter wish must have involved special inspiration on Smart’s part, since Mezenen had told him after his wife’s death that he was discouraged and considering a move to Provo, something Smart pleaded with him not to do.

The family, Smart recorded, expressed gratitude for his helping their father prepare for the hereafter. More immediately important, from Smart’s point of view, was that Mezenen’s son-in-law, Clarence Baum, invited him to work for room and board on his farm a few miles upstream. He went there the next day, finding a spot in a granary where he could put his canvas cot. On Sunday he persuaded the family to go with him fifteen miles downstream to church (“very few there”), then testified of his conviction that the deceased “will use influence in behalf of continuance of this ward and will be near to us.”

But his own labor and influence in that area would soon end. He worked for Baum for a week, hoeing gardens and cutting wood. Then, without explanation other than “feeling impressed,” he left to join Anna, who had vacated her screened-in-porch living quarters in Roosevelt to settle with their daughter Ruth in an old four-room rented home ($15 a month) in Duchesne, where Ruth would teach school. After three weeks he returned to the Strawberry area, and worked for four days helping Baum salvage a hay crop that had been mowed and then was soaked by a heavy rainstorm. “Being unwise in working and lifting too strenuously I strained myself,” he

15. Ibid., July 3, 1930.
complained. “The work has made me very sore but have been blessed with ability to continue.” Then, on August 21, he left for good.

**Mixed Results**

For nine months now he had devoted himself almost exclusively to saving failing wards and strengthening the church in the Midview–Antelope and Fruitland–Strawberry regions. He succeeded in the first, but failed in the latter, not through lack of effort or effectiveness on his part, but because prospering on those lands was problematical in the best of times, and far more difficult under the grim realities of the Depression.

In the beautiful Strawberry Valley today, small, tidy ranches and vacation homes testify to twenty-first-century prosperity, but no community ever developed there, and the Strawberry Ward is long gone. So, too, is the Fruitland Ward. The name is still on the map, on U.S. Highway 40, but no community exists there. In December 2006, a pickup truck coming down the Red Creek road ran the stop sign and hit a semi-trailer truck, which then veered off the highway and smashed into the old Fruitland general store, demolishing the last remnant of what Smart had hoped to establish.

The Midview–Antelope church and community center, for which Smart worked at such financial sacrifice in obtaining the Parker farm, did materialize, but the path was not easy. After hail and poor management drove young Pearson from the land, Smart negotiated a deal to sell the farm to Midview Ward bishop Charles W. Smith. The times were too tough for a purchase, though. Smith took a lease instead, on terms, Smart wrote, “I am allowing him to name.”

Smith also set the price, $75, for a 200-by-200-foot piece of the farm Smart sold the ward for its community center. A small meeting house was moved there, and on March 16, 1931, the ward celebrated with a house-warming. Smart declined an invitation to attend, “not wishing to risk drawing any glory to myself.” For the same reason, he squelched a movement to name the center for him, “desiring no honor for my labors here as I prefer any consideration that may be given me to proceed me to the other side.”

So the ward’s central location was established. But any proper community needs at least one thing more—a post office. Smart took care of that as well. A vacancy existed in the Midview post office, and Congressman Don B. Colton wrote to Smart for advice on who should fill it. Smart replied that he would look into it, and that nothing should be done in the meantime. His recommendation, after several weeks of maneuvering, was a clever one: Helen L. Nielsen was qualified for the post and anxious to assume it, but only if the post office were moved to the new community center by the bridge. His recommendation prevailed. The relocated post office was

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16. Ibid., February 2, 1931.
17. Ibid., January 10, 1932.
named Bridgeland, as were the former Midview Ward and the small town that developed where U.S. Highway 40 crosses the Duchesne River, on what had been Smart’s Midview–Antelope Community Center.

**A Seventy-Year-Old Field Hand**

Ironically, at the same time that he was accomplishing this, Smart himself was again laboring as a field hand. He leased the George Stott farm, adjoining the community center, for $150 a year, then subleased it to a young man, James Wilson, for the same price, on the condition that he could work for Wilson for nothing more than his meals. Leaving Anna in Duchesne for another of their many separations, he rode his mule to the farm, and there “put tent up, placed bed [his canvas cot] and other effects therein. This will be my quarters but will eat with family. . . . I in my night prayer dedicated tent ground and tent home for my use and invoked the Lord’s blessings on labors and my association with this family who have received me kindly.”

If that is not evidence enough of hard times in general and Smart’s slide into poverty in particular, his journal suggests many others. For example, in his absence, Anna wrote to their son William, pleading for some return of the hundreds if not thousands of dollars they had loaned or gifted him. He returned $10. From the $75 Smart collected for the land he sold for the Midview Ward house, he repaid a $25 loan from his daughter Ruth, “fearing that if called upon for it later I might not be in a position to pay it.” Pressed for payment of a $4 assessment for Ouray Valley water, he arranged with son-in-law James Rasmussen to pay part of it through labor on the canal, and gave him a blank check to cover the balance. He offered to give the remaining eighty acres of his Ouray Desert Entry Act land to anyone who would pay the water assessments, because “it would not be right for me to obligate myself for something I had no visible way to pay in the future.” His paid-in-full 10 percent tithing in 1931 was $41.35.

**A Salvation Calling**

In these depressing circumstances, he received a huge psychological boost—a call as president of the Genealogical and Temple Stake Department of Duchesne Stake. Except for his six-month Southern States Mission, it had been nearly a decade since he had held other than what could fairly be called self-assigned church responsibilities. This official affirmation of his leadership capacity, in work he had long cherished, and especially with the opportunity to resurrect an organization he described as being “in an inactive state,” was like a bugle call to action.

He plunged into the work with a zeal reminiscent of the way he had

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18. Ibid., May 10, 1931.
19. Ibid., February 21, March 8, May 31, November 10, and December 31, 1931.
20. Ibid., June 14 and July 19, 1931.
created entire stakes out of the wilderness. He formed a ten-member stake genealogical council, including his wife Anna and, in at least one case, a ward bishop, Charles W. Smith of Midview Ward. He pushed bishops to organize councils in each of the stake’s thirteen wards, and met frequently with them individually and in ward genealogical conventions. He urged the organization of genealogical classes in every ward, and helped recruit teachers for them. He organized committees to hold a “sacred genealogical pageant,” which didn’t happen, and a three-day excursion to the Manti Temple, which did. Smart managed the $15 to pay Anna’s excursion fee, but was able to attend himself only because the stake appropriated that amount to pay his own fee.

Then he launched an undertaking that would tax even prospering, leadership-rich stakes, and that seems incredible in a stake whose wards and their members were struggling to survive. He assigned himself a mission that would take three months during the summer and fall of 1932. He would spend a week in each of the thirteen wards of Duchesne Stake, preaching genealogy, temple work for the dead, proper courtship, temple marriage and family relations, “and such other aid as may appear for consideration.” “I am conveyed by my one-seated buggy (which I used when Stake President traveling over Basin) drawn by my mule Jane,” he recorded, “and shall have my cot and bedding so as not to inconvenience people, and also my saddle.”

In each ward his procedure was the same. He would throw his old saddle on Jane and ride through the area, visiting members and urging attendance at his various meetings. These included a training session for the ward’s genealogy–temple council, four or five cottage meetings among neighbors in the homes of members, and a general public meeting in the ward house.

He stayed and ate with the members, repaying their hospitality with labor. He arose, typically, around 5:30 a.m., worked an hour or so before breakfast, and then off and on throughout the day, either there or at homes he visited. He mostly hoed gardens, pulled weeds, and chopped wood, but on occasion sharpened tools, helped with the milking, mowed, piled and hauled hay, unloaded grain, cut corn, harvested beans, and banked celery.

He reported that attendance at some meetings was “only fair,” and he had moments when “I was depressed and brain tired & weak in body & pled with the Lord to make me fit.” But mostly he wrote of good, attentive audiences, the liberty he felt in speaking, and his gratitude for the hospitality and faithfulness of the members. At the end he called this “the most interesting and profitable of all my missions . . . and I do thank my heavenly Father for it and for His sustaining power.”

21. Ibid., July 18, 1932.
22. Ibid. October 23, 1932.
Smart felt a bit of guilt, though, because during his genealogical–temple mission at his home ward in Duchesne, he had lived at home and hadn’t done manual labor for the members he visited, as he had done in other wards. He assuaged his guilt by spending much of the fall and winter replenishing the woodpiles of widows in the ward.

**Back to Harsh Reality**

No doubt much of Smart’s enjoyment of his simple but strenuous life on the genealogy mission was because it was a respite from worrying about financial cares. That didn’t last. Days after his return home, he learned that Dewey Grove had been unable to pay rent on the Roosevelt home and had moved out, and that the home had been damaged. About the same time, the bank demanded payment or a new note on the loans he guaranteed for his son’s and Morris Buckwalter’s failed sheep venture. “I am much at sea as to finances and how to manage & labor so as to have means to meet obligations & expenses of life,” Smart wrote, “especially as there is general depression over country.”

That Depression brought more bad news to this confirmed Republican. Notwithstanding President Hoover’s election-eve speech in the Salt Lake Tabernacle, his endorsement of Utah’s Senator Reed Smoot, the “great ovation” given by the 12,000 people attending, and Smart’s and his wife’s straight-ticket vote, “the election nationally and locally has overwhelmingly Democratic. While our General Authorities were desirous to have it otherwise . . . even Utah joined the ‘slide’ to Democracy,” he lamented. Not only that, he added, but “there is a sentiment wide spread to do away with prohibition.”

Within a year, that sentiment produced exactly what Smart feared; Utah became the necessary thirty-sixth and final state to vote to repeal the Eighteenth Amendment, prohibiting the manufacture or sale of liquor. Smart was predictably dismayed, especially by what he perceived as church members’ disloyalty to their leaders. “I am impressed with the seriousness of this condition far more on account of the state’s vote in opposition to the advice of our General, Stake and Ward leaders than for the prohibition cause,” he wrote. “I fear it is an ill oman of the signs of the times both for the nation and for Utah.”

Shortly thereafter, he became even more convinced of society’s dangerous drift toward ruin. After attending a couple of movies, he deplored the “drinking of intoxicating liquor, smoking cigarets and licentious sex intercourse. I was pained to note it as a serious sign of the times and could not but associate it with the late elections for repeal of constitutional amendment to National and State Constitutions on liquor.” Moreover, he was told

23. Ibid., November 13, 1932.
24. Ibid., November 8, 1932.
25. Ibid., November 10, 1933.
of and deplored the early stages of a problem that plagues Mormondom to this day: “a secret society with oath of secrecy that is teaching practice of Plural marriage secretly and performing them—members of our church: another sign of the times showing a dangerous falling away.”

For Smart, there was more bad news, closer to home. Their youngest daughter Ruth announced that, after two and a half years of off-and-on courtship, and against her parents’ advice, she was marrying Lloyd S. Pope of Duchesne, a non-practicing Mormon. “Upon his advances for her company we showed her clearly both by our own precepts and revelation the consequences of a worldly marriage,” he wrote, “and warned her against giving her company to him as it may lead to this.”

He had mellowed, though, in the twenty-one years since their first daughter Elizabeth married a lapsed Mormon, James Rasmussen, and was ostracized from the family for a time. James’s subsequent solid citizenship in the church and community,
their happy marriage, and their support of her parents had taught him that things can and usually do work out. So his reaction to Ruth’s marriage was mild; he expressed regrets but wished them well.

Smart had other family concerns, mostly financial. As the Depression deepened, it became clear that his sons would not be able to repay their debts to him. So he made drastic reductions. He reduced by half the $2,600 his youngest son Joseph owed for his backing of the failed produce and livestock business. He figured he had lost $6,000 through his various ventures with his eldest son William. Since they were equally responsible, William’s share of the debt would be $3,000. Smart cut that in half. To his middle son he was even more generous. Including accrued interest, Thomas Laurence owed $3,600 as his share of the bankrupt sheep venture he had started with his brother-in-law, Morris Buckwalter. Smart canceled the interest and halved the balance, leaving $1,500 “to be paid as he can,” without interest.28 All three sons expressed gratitude, and a few modest payments—$10 or $25—trickled in.

Buckwalter was a different case. Although Smart had also halved his debt to $1,500, he declared that he could not pay it and wanted to simply repudiate the debt. Smart’s response was remarkably charitable and restrained: “He wished to know that if he did that I would hold no feelings to which I answered that I should pray to have that spirit and leave judgment to the Lord. . . . While this was one of the bitterest experiences to me I kept my feelings down. . . . I want to have charity and hold it not against him. O Lord help me herein I pray.”29

Chicken Farming and Other Troubles

Both Smart’s Roosevelt farm and his home were now back in his hands, because in those hard times it had been impossible to either make mortgage payments or pay rent. In his search for some way to produce income, he came up with a new idea. Czar Rudy of Roosevelt, struggling to support his six young children, had some training and experience in raising poultry. Smart proposed that they become partners in what they named the Roosevelt Poultry and Dairy Company, operating on Smart’s Roosevelt farm. They would share his Roosevelt home, Smart and Anna occupying three rooms on the west side of the house, and the Rudy family the rest. They would divide gains or losses equally. Smart was made supervisor, and Rudy was chairman. They and their wives constituted the executive committee. The agreement, signed on April 1, 1933, was for three years. “Thus is launched . . . our business,” Smart wrote, “and dedicated to the Lord and His blessings solicited.”

With high hopes, Smart ordered two thousand baby chicks from a

28. Ibid., September 4 and 8, November 25, and December 4, 1933.
29. Ibid., February 13, 1934.
Missouri hatchery. Son-in-law James Rasmussen built chicken coops, his labor credited against his debt for the Ouray Valley farm Smart had sold him. Together they hauled away ashes and rubbish, and returned with sand for the coops. Chicken feed, ordered from Salt Lake City, was delivered on the milk truck.

Ten months later the chickens went to market as capons, less 852 lost, mostly through theft. For the balance, the Utah Poultry Association paid $775, about sixty-seven cents a bird. After months of labor, the result was a net operating loss of $186.60, and that didn’t include the cost of building chicken coops and other improvements around the farm. The way Smart arranged the settlement was typical of his compassion and generosity—and one reason his finances had so rapidly melted away.

Ignoring the $1,263.59 he had invested in the project compared to Rudy’s $53.78, and the Rudy family’s months of rent-free living in Smart’s home, they divided the $186.80 loss equally. Still, Smart worried that Rudy’s wife was dissatisfied. “We had thot with our concessions they would be over-pleased,” he wrote. “We wish right, and hope we are led by spirit of Truth.” Anna worked out the disagreement in a woman-to-woman talk with Mrs. Rudy. For that, for her labors in auditing the books, and “being supporting and faithful to me,” Smart recorded, “this evening I kissed her and expressed my appreciation to her.” Not surprisingly, that was the end of the Roosevelt Poultry and Dairy Company. The partners closed the books and dissolved what was intended to be at least a three-year partnership.39

During this period Smart made a business decision that seems highly questionable for a man who was land-rich but so cash-poor. This was a time of devastating drought, when, in order to save farmers, the federal government was buying and destroying the livestock they could not feed, and when the Depression made cash and credit so tight that Smart and many others could not sell their land, or even lease it with a reasonable hope that payments could or would actually be made. In his first inaugural address in 1933, Governor Henry Blood summarized the grim conditions: “Agriculture is in helpless and almost hopeless distress. Basic farm commodity prices in recent weeks have receded to levels never before reached in modern times. Shrinkage of values is rendering private and public income uncertain. Unemployment [35.8 per cent in 1933] stalks the city streets, and reflects its shadow on rural life.”31

At such a time it is almost inconceivable that Smart would make a deal with a Salt Lake businessman, R. A. Shipp, to exchange his Roosevelt home for an eighty-acre farm Shipp had reclaimed from a bankrupt settler, with Smart to assume the farm’s $1,500 mortgage. On October 2, 1933, the two

30. Ibid., February 15, 1934.
men jointly signed a notarized letter of intent to that effect.

In all their forty-five years of marriage, Smart had recorded no instance when Anna failed to support his decisions. Patiently and without complaint, she had watched their slide into poverty, had moved time and again, almost every time into more humble and difficult living conditions, and had endured his absences and assumed all duties of homemaking for months at a time. As a good Mormon wife, she had relied on and bowed to his priesthood and the inspiration received through his fasting and prayer.

Not this time. Patient Anna put her foot down—hard. She could not and would not accept the prospect of losing her home to obtain a farm they would probably lose as well, because they would have no way to pay off a $1,500 mortgage. She could see no way they would manage anyway, farm conditions being what they were.

Smart didn’t suffer that insubordination lightly. He argued that he planned not to sell the farm’s produce but to feed it to livestock that could be marketed, and that they couldn’t lose the farm because “no doubt it would be sold for more then enough to pay up”—ignoring the fact that livestock were being killed and farms lost because there was no market for either. He warned that “should she not be able to fully harmonize in this matter it were better for her to . . . attend to her [housewife] sphere’s matters and I not bother her in these temporal matters but proceed alone.” He discoursed at length on the fact that their financial distress was due to “our childrens’ failure to make good wherein they fail financially,” because of “disabilities in preexistence [or] because of what we have bequeathed to them in this life and perhaps some acquirements of their own.” He even suggested that, like the Savior who sank in privation, humility and painful sacrifice below all things that he might rise above all and lift up with him fallen humanity, so we, in order to succeed, will find it necessary to get out of our environment of commodious and comfortable home [the three rooms they were presently occupying there] into inexpensive and humble quarters . . . in order to make necessary atonement with hopes of rising above and bringing up with us those who bear the burdens and privations with us.”

He did, however, grant Anna the privilege of choosing where those “humble quarters” would be.

She was unmoved in her opposition, and a week later Smart backed out of the deal, telling Shipp, as if it was his own idea, that “we felt it unjust at our age, with obligations now on us and against the general Council of Church Authority to go into debt further to procure more land and thereby to deprive ourselves of a home. My wife was united on same.” The reversal cost him “a complete emotional breakdown . . . during which I was

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32. Smart, Journals, November 4, 1933.
convulsed with weeping.”

But he was not ready to give up. After his wife’s sympathetic caressing and after taking a little nourishment, he climbed to his altar on the bench north of town and “poured out my soul on this matter rehearsing the present status and pleading that the right way be opened up.” The prayer seems to have worked. On December 29, 1933, papers were signed for a compromise deal. Rudy, his former poultry partner, leased from Shipp the best thirty acres of the farm. Smart got the remaining fifty acres without a mortgage. For this, he gave Shipp not only their Roosevelt home, but also ten shares of Roosevelt State Bank stock. So Smart had one more parcel of land to worry about. Anna didn’t have to look for a more humble place to rent, though; for $9 a month they continued to live in the three rooms of their former home.

Worry about their other non-income-producing lands and their long-past-due debt at Uintah State Bank was a constant. Having traded away his home, Smart decided to sell or lease the farm on which it sat. He found no interest in a sale, but a young man, Clarence Bowden, offered to lease it on a sharecrop basis. Having been burned earlier by such an arrangement, Smart declined. But in those desperately difficult times, he agreed to a lease for payment of taxes and water assessments only, providing no income. Anna found some income, though, by serving as city librarian. Negotiations over her salary illustrate the financial stringency of the times. She had understood from the mayor that the salary would be $25 a month. Later she learned it would be $15. When the appointment finally came from the library board, it was for $10, which she rejected. Mayor Heber Hall intervened, stating that if she could accept $12.50, he would find a way to pay the extra $2.50. Assured that her services were badly needed, she took the job.

Free at Last from Ouray

Drought conditions were especially critical in Ouray Valley. In May, Smart saddled the horse he had traded for his mule and took a trip there. With wells and canals dry, milk trucks were hauling drinking water from Roosevelt. He found that most Leota residents had left their waterless homes and were camping by and drinking from the Green River. Seeing such misery, he and Anna concluded that the $25 per acre for which they had sold Mark S. Woolley eighty acres five years earlier was too high. For that reason—and probably also because they realized that the region’s dim future meant that it made no sense for them to continue paying taxes and water assessments on the unsold adjoining eighty acres—they signed a deed for it to Woolley as a free gift. “This places the 320 acres in the hands of two good families,”

33. Ibid., May 12 and 23, 1934.
34. Ibid., February 21, 1934.
he rejoiced. Prospects of getting mortgage payments from the other good family, that of Lawrence C. Wall, were not good, though. Wall managed to pay $10 in August 1934, but saw no way he could pay more unless he could secure one of the federal farm loans the administration was offering to ease the desperate times. Smart wished him success on that, and took the occasion to bless both families to correct their imperfections, encourage each other, and especially not to fight over the irrigation water that flowed—when it flowed at all—through Wall’s land to Woolley’s.

Apparently Wall’s loan was not approved, because on November 2, 1934, Smart wrote to him that he owed $350 in overdue interest, but that because of the hard times and his wife’s illness, the debt would be reduced to one-seventh, or $50, if paid by the end of the year. No record was found that it was.

The plight of Ouray Valley farmers and the government’s response to it produced one surprising result—a crack in Smart’s ironclad Republicanism. This man who had so lamented the election of Franklin D. Roosevelt now wrote that “the Government appears to be doing all possible, according to judgement of those in power, to relieve the financial stringency which is now aggravated by a drought of wide area.” He particularly approved the New Deal program of buying drought-doomed livestock, including those he owned jointly with his son-in-law James Rasmussen, calling it “a great blessing to people.” Prices were low, he wrote, but “fully up to market prices or better as there is scarcely any market—otherwise these stock mostly would perish. . . . the President has in general the people’s Confidence and hence support. But all are wondering of the future.”

Typical of those who were wondering were Loreen Pack Wahlquist and her husband Fred, who had bought a farm near Randlett in 1928. Fred was promptly called as bishop of the tiny ward, and spent much of the winter in the mountains cutting timber to build a chapel. With three children under four, Loreen later wrote, “I milked nine cows, had twice that many to feed, and had to drive them half a mile to water and chop holes in the ice.” So they were accustomed to hard work, but not to what a depression and drought could do to young hopes. They would soon learn.

We bought this place for $2,800 and within a few years we couldn’t have

35. Ibid., June 24, 1934. Within days after his inauguration, President Franklin D. Roosevelt called Congress into special session to address the plight of farmers, emphasizing that true prosperity would not return until farming was prosperous. Congress passed the Agricultural Adjustment Act of 1933, designed to protect farmers through subsidies and production controls. Under the act, farmers were given subsidies for leaving some of their land idle, with funds provided by a new tax on food processing. Some crops were destroyed and some livestock slaughtered to support prices. In 1936, the Supreme Court declared the AAA to be unconstitutional, but it was replaced by a similar program that won court approval. Federal regulation of agricultural production has been modified many times since then, providing subsidies that still exist. http://www.encyclopedia.com/doc/1E1_AgrAdj.html.
sold it for a tenth of that. . . . We bought that bunch of cows from the folks for a high price just before the depression. The first year our cows did fine and we had high hopes for the future. Then prices started a steady decline. The drought hit us exceptionally hard and we were unable to raise enough hay and grain for our stock. Some years our grain burned completely and there was no harvest. During the year 1931 we had a chance to sell our five best cows for $70 each. The spring before we had lost five cows from eating grasshopper poison and to part with five more of the best cows would leave us with scarcely any cream check but still with a debt of over $3,500, so we turned it down. It was a big mistake, as prices dropped so low we got practically no returns from the cows and we couldn’t sell them at any price. . . . Three years later we sold all but a few of them to the government for sixteen dollars a head because we had no feed for them."

For Smart things weren’t quite that bad, but they weren’t great. He had high hopes of selling the farm he had originally acquired to be the center of the consolidated Bridgeland Ward. The latest renter, Bernard Liddell, reported that his father was ready to loan him the needed cash, and offered $4,000. Smart figured it had cost him $5,750 to acquire the farm, and that it was now worth much more since it was on the highway and the site of the town of Bridgeland. In the ensuing negotiations, Smart was handicapped by the plunge of land prices, and finally settled for $4,750. That agreement became moot when, two and a half months later, Liddell’s father reneged on the loan offer. Deeply disappointed, Smart mustered his long-standing practice of ascribing to the Lord responsibility for his failures as well as credit for his successes. He and Anna had asked the Lord to direct the outcome to be best for all concerned, he rationalized, so “we cannot but graciously accept the result.”

He did get something out of the Bridgeland visit, though. From former bishop Charles W. Smith, he accepted as long-overdue payments on eighty acres of land sold to Smith ten “good early ewe lambs to be delivered next fall somewhere in this Basin.”

**Giving Up at Last**

In his nearly three decades of struggle in the Uintah Basin, Smart had never admitted to more than momentary discouragement. But the more recent years of financial frustration had taken their toll. So had his advancing years. At age seventy-two, he was increasingly suffering from deafness, agonizing tooth problems, and back miseries from a misaligned spine, as well as being concerned about bloating in his legs, feet, and face. In a melancholy scene symbolizing the decline of his usefulness, he had sold the light

37. Smart, Journals, July 1, 1934.
38. Ibid., September 14, 1934.
harness and white-topped buggy he had used for all those years as a stake
president ministering to a vast area,\textsuperscript{39} because they had “finally outlived use-
fulness to me.” Perhaps, although he never said so, his vision of a growing,
prosperous Mormon settlement of the Uintah Basin was finally fading. In
any event, he and Anna decided to leave the basin and that major part of
their life behind.

On October 30, 1934, he wrote to a Salt Lake City realtor, instructing
him to either sell the Roosevelt farm or exchange it for property in or near
Salt Lake City, Logan, or Provo. Without waiting for results, they arranged
with a neighbor to store their furniture, including a large bookcase with
books and his diaries, and on December 1 caught a truck ride with E. H.
Petersen to Salt Lake City. They settled into and promptly dedicated a one-
room apartment in a tall, old-fashioned house in the Eighteenth Ward at
113 First Avenue, rented for $15 a month, and now faced the often-difficult
challenges of retirement.

\textsuperscript{39} Ibid., March 31, 1934. Smart never owned or learned to drive a car, traveling by buggy or
horse- or muleback during most of his ministry. During the latter years, when automobile
travel was common despite the lack of good roads, he had little difficulty finding rides
with associates, neighbors, or truck drivers. Occasionally, he simply waited at one of the
infrequent service stations for someone driving in his intended direction.