In Another Time
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Preface

In 1994 with the approach of the Utah Statehood Centennial (January 4, 1996), Salt Lake Tribune editor James E. Shelledy asked a number of staff members for feature story ideas, in anticipation of the celebration. His experience as editor and publisher of the Moscow-Pullman Daily News and executive editor of the Lewiston Morning Tribune in Washington and Idaho had brought him in contact with several centennial observances, and he well knew the importance of planning in such matters. Something more than a year earlier, he had been struck with the notion that I should write a history series to give readers a better sense of what made Utah tick. I was skeptical. Fortunately, Shelledy was not.

And so, from that notion was born the series of articles called "In Another Time." It was published three Sundays a month from 1993 through 1997, when I retired from the Tribune. The columns varied widely in content and ranged from the sublime (how ninety pairs of English sparrows were imported in 1877 to brighten the Great Salt Lake Valley and feed on the hordes of grasshoppers infesting Utah crops) to the mundane (the color and composition of Utah's early sales tax tokens). Still other articles considered such offbeat topics as the impact of the 1849 California gold rush on the impoverished settlers of Great Salt Lake City and Utah's unusual methods of executing condemned murderers! Of the hundred or so stories that "In Another Time" comprised, forty of the best and most representative are presented here. You will read of John Baptiste, the ghoul who was branded, manacled, and banished for life to an island in the Great Salt Lake in 1859 after he was caught robbing graves, and of Wilford Woodruff, a Mormon apostle who made history as a member of the pioneer company that crossed the plains to found Great Salt Lake City and in the process became the first fly fisherman to test the trout streams west of the Mississippi River.

The sketches from "In Another Time" are framed by the "Centennial Collection Series," a dozen columns published monthly during 1995 as a prelude to the Utah Statehood Centennial, which depict Utah from its prehistoric period to 1996. Through them I attempted to show readers of the Tribune the fibre and sinew of Utah's progenitors. Who were these people who built over the soil and sage of the Great Salt Lake Valley the robust and resourceful crossroads of the West—host to the world in 2002? When Shelledy proposed this series in 1994 (creating perhaps the first newspaper "history beat" writer in America), the ground rules were a virtual carte blanche: "Write what you want, at whatever length is necessary. But tell the story." In the business of journalism, where brevity is the essence, that is an astonishing free pass.

The series was to tell of the people and the deeds, good or bad, that formed the backbone of Utah Territory, to describe the progenitors of today's movers and shakers. With an abiding interest in western history and playing under Shelledy's rules, I was willing to give it a try. Having written Orrin Porter Rockwell: Man of God, Son of Thunder, the biography of a Mormon stalwart; and co-edited a new edition of West from Fort...
Bridger: The Pioneering of Immigrant Trails across Utah, 1846–1850, I felt reasonably prepared. But to the despair of copy readers and page editors, I did knowingly take unconscionable advantage of the elastic limit on space and produced some of the longest feature stories to appear in the Tribune in this century. Shelledy kept his promise and made the room. But, of course, there was always his last word on the subject to be considered: “Do this centennial series right,” he said, “and you won’t have to do it the next time around.”