Territory in Transition

Army Arrives to Stay, Governors and Pony Express Come and Go
1858–1869

By 1860 Utah Territory had absorbed the first shock waves created by the Utah Expedition. The shell of Mormon isolationism had cracked wide open, and the total control once enjoyed by Brigham Young now was trammeled by "Gentiles." Having marched south to Utah Valley in 1858, the expedition, commanded by Brigadier General Albert Sidney Johnston, established Camp Floyd west of Utah Lake and some forty miles from Great Salt Lake City. During the next few years it would become the largest military post in America.

The omnipresent Brigham Young now retreated from public view, preferring to limit his appearances to Sunday church meetings. Most, if not all, of the officers who originally marched with the Utah Expedition chose not to leave on extended furlough without first paying their respects to the famous church leader. Perhaps the most outstanding exception was General Johnston himself. Neither he nor Young would condescend to visit the other. The two principals of the Utah War were destined never to meet face to face. In 1861 Camp Floyd, now renamed Fort Crittenden, was ordered deactivated, its troops dispersed to other garrisons, and its military stores and equipment (valued at $4 million) sold at auction for little more than two cents on the dollar.

W. H. Russell of Russell, Majors and Waddell, the contractors who freighted goods to the army, conceived the notion of a Pony Express, a line of galloppers that stretched 1,966 miles from the Missouri River to Sacramento, California. It has been said that Russell used the express to prove mail could be carried year-round, so he could win an overland mail contract on the central route through Great Salt Lake City. Russell was convinced mail could be carried in winter months because in 1857–58 he witnessed General Johnston's military dispatch riders make the round trip during the worst of winter between Camp Scott and Fort Leavenworth in Kansas. The use of pony relays was a tested system six centuries old conceived by Genghis Khan to communicate with his Mongol hordes as they swept the steppes of Asia in 1206.

With St. Joseph, Missouri, as the eastern terminus and Sacramento the western, Russell calculated it would take riders ten days to complete the run each way. The line was made up of five divisions under the general superintendency of B. F. Ficklin. The division superintendent in Great Salt Lake City was Howard Egan. An investment of $100,000 bought 500 horses ("200 head of grey mares—four to seven years old—with black hoofs") and a string of 190 stations about ten miles apart. Each rider was required to cover three stations as his day's work. Incidentally, the anecdote that Russell had advertised for "riders, young, wiry, preferably orphans" to carry the express sprang
In June 1858, troops of the Utah Expedition marched through a deserted Great Salt Lake City to camp forty miles to the south. Engraving from T. B. H. Stenhouse, *The Rocky Mountain Saints* (1873).

from the fertile imagination of a professional writer in 1935. No such ads ever appeared.

The first rider set out westward from St. Joseph on April 3 at 7:15 P.M.; while his counterpart set out from San Francisco to Sacramento at 4 P.M. (Pacific time). Egan himself rode the final stretch of the first western delivery from Rush Valley in Tooele County to Great Salt Lake City, some seventy-five miles, on the night of April 7, over muddy roads in a heavy rainstorm. It took him five hours and fifteen minutes and apparently was Egan’s first and only stint as an express rider; he preferred his duties as division superintendent.

By mid-July 1860 two things were clear: the Pony Express was operating with clock-like regularity, and it was not profitable, nor would it ever be, given the high cost of postage (five dollars per half-ounce). When the Overland Telegraph Line was completed through Great Salt Lake City on October 24, 1861, the fate of the Pony Express was sealed: the service was officially terminated, riders dismissed, and stations dismantled.

While it was in operation, though, the Pony Express was a sensation. News of the surrender at Fort Sumter in April 1861 had reached Utah in seven days. A Pony Express Club was formed in Great Salt Lake City and headed by Brigham Young, who with a few others and the *Deseret News* paid for a duplicate copy of the California Press service. From it the *News* would get out an *Extra* edition. When an express galloped into the city, the *News* compositors had no rest until the *Extra* was set and printed, usually a six- or seven-hour foray. The club needed at least one hundred members at twenty cents each week to make it worthwhile, so Young directed “no more *News Extras*” until five hundred subscribers (at four cents each) ponied up. They did, and the club lasted as long as the express itself.

With these events, as well as the shuttering of Camp Floyd/Fort Crittenden and Governor Alfred Cumming’s decision not to seek reappointment but to return to Georgia, the territory creaked and groaned with change. President Lincoln’s choice
for governor-designate, John W. Dawson, did not
help the situation. Dawson, a forty-one-year-old
Indiana newspaper editor, stepped from the stage-
coach in Great Salt Lake City on December 7 and
immediately thrashed about in the quicksand of
Mormon politics with a long-winded message to
the legislature in which he urged collection of a
war tax to support the Union and thus vindicate
the Utah community of "disloyalty."
Utahns in general had no abiding interest in
helping the North one way or another in its colli-
sion with the South. The territory had sent no vol-
unteers to the Civil War, and in a Fourth of July
speech that year, Apostle John Taylor had empha-
sized: "We know no north, no south, no east, no
west; we abide strictly and positively by the
Constitution, and cannot by the intrigues or
sophism of either party, be cajoled into any other
attitude." Brigham Young was even more adamant.
"I will see them in hell first before I raise an army
to fight their war." His attitude toward Dawson
was cold as ice.
The governor, still preening in his new role
as chief executive, injected himself into Mormon
society by attending a ball for the legislature.
Evidently he found the company pleasant. But two
days later he was humiliated by Albina Williams,
widow of Thomas S. Williams, murdered in 1860
by Indians in the Mojave Desert. She drove
Dawson from her house with the business end of a
fireplace shovel because, the young widow said, he
made a lewd and vulgar proposition. Brigham
Humiliated, Governor John W. Dawson survived a beating. Utah State Historical Society.

Young was told “Gov. Dawson has threatened to shoot [T. B. H.] Stenhouse if he published anything about [Dawson’s] wishes to sleep with Tom Williams’ wife [or] his offer to [pay] $3,000 for her not to tell.” Wilford Woodruff jotted in his journal, “Dawson cannot hold up his head in the streets and look people in the face.” On December 31, just three weeks after he arrived in the city, Dawson hightailed it on the mail stage “a disgraced, debauched libertine.”

But the worst was yet to befall the former newspaperman. At Eph Hank’s stage station in Mountain Dell east of the city, Dawson prepared to board the stagecoach. Unfortunately for the chief executive, the driver, Wood Reynolds, chanced to be related to the outraged widow. When Dawson approached, Reynolds knocked him down. The governor struggled back to the station, the grim-faced stage driver on his heels. Reynolds left Dawson unconscious, beaten within an inch of his life. Next morning the battered victim and other passengers departed on the eastbound coach. Reynolds returned to the city. From Bear River station near the present Utah-Wyoming border, Dawson wrote a letter to the Deseret News with his version of the attack and naming “the ruffians involved.”

Meanwhile, an affidavit from the widow Williams, describing Dawson’s “insulting behavior” in detail, was finding its way to Washington, where it would cause a minor sensation in the U.S. Senate. That body rejected Dawson’s presidential appointment. And the People’s Press in Bluffton, Indiana, also hinted darkly at Dawson’s
past, lashing out editorially at its fellow Hoosier: "He is a poor, despised and hated ruffian, without a solitary friend of any influence on earth, outside of his own printing office. This is not the first time that [a] community has been sickened and disgusted with the infamy and crime of John Dawson."

As for the rogues named by Dawson as responsible for his rough exit from the territory, their futures were even more bleak:

- Reynolds was fined twenty-five dollars for the assault. He was killed by Indians who attacked his stage in 1863;
- Jason Luce was fined fifty dollars for his part and prior record. He was executed by firing squad in 1864 as a convicted murderer;
- Lot Huntington was killed in a gunfight with Orrin Porter Rockwell in 1862; and
- Moroni Clawson was shot and killed shortly thereafter by police who swore he attempted to escape.

Even in death Clawson could not avoid scandal. Relatives who claimed his body at the Salt Lake City Cemetery discovered his coffin had been plundered by a grave robber. Police arrested John Baptiste for that and a hundred similar crimes. Baptiste was branded, his ears cropped, and he was banished to Fremont Island in the Great Salt Lake.

The territorial court became involved in 1862 with one Joseph Morris, a disenchanted Mormon convert from Wales, who acquired a small following after declaring himself to be the "Seventh Angel" spoken of in the Revelation of St. John. Morris joined the LDS Church in 1849. He was burned severely in an accidental fire in England, an experience, it was said, that unsettled his mind. Emigrating to Utah in 1853, he lived for a time in San Pete and Utah Counties but finally settled in Weber, where he cultivated believers to his claim as a prophet. Brigham Young gave Morris short shrift in his struggle for religious authority. T. B. H. Stenhouse said Young made "a brief and unbecoming reply to Morris's several letters claiming to be the reincarnated Moses."

Over a period of years, Morris's followers (most of them Scandinavians) organized a church of their own and located at Kingston Fort near the mouth of Weber Canyon. When dissidents complained of being held at Kingston against their will, Associate Justice J. F. Kinney issued writs of habeas corpus commanding the parties unlawfully detained be brought before the court. The order
Colonel Patrick E. Connor led a winter attack against Shoshoni Indians camped at the Bear River.

was served but rejected. A second writ, along with arrest warrants for Morris and others, was put in the hands of Deputy Marshal Robert T. Burton, who approached Kingston with a posse of several hundred militiamen and volunteers on June 12, 1862. He gave Morris just thirty minutes to surrender himself and release the dissidents.

When the ultimatum went unheeded, the posse fired a cannon into the fort area. The missile killed two women and severely wounded a third. Gunfire then erupted, inflicting casualties on both sides. After a siege lasting three days, Burton forced a surrender and entered the fort. What followed has been hotly debated. Burton swore the Morrisites rushed him and the two dozen or so posse members with him. Morris’s followers on the scene claimed Burton began firing without cause. Whatever the truth, Morris was shot to death, and his counselor John Banks wounded (he died that night under questionable circumstances). Two other women also were killed.

The Morrisite adventure had cost the lives of two deputies and four women, plus Morris and Banks. Ninety-four Morrisites were arrested on charges ranging from resisting an officer to murder. The following March, some sixty appeared in court (the rest having left the territory). Those charged with armed resistance were fined $100 each; seven were sentenced to prison on the murder indictments. Three days later, Utah Governor Stephen S. Harding, the man appointed by President Lincoln to replace the battered Lothario John W. Dawson, astonished and angered the populace by granting the Morrisite defendants “a full and perfect pardon” for the offenses of which they stood convicted.

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In one fell swoop, Harding "forever exonerated, discharged, and absolved [each] from the punishment imposed on them" and also forgave them the "fine, costs and charges." The governor gave no reason for his action. He was acting in the belief that he was correcting a bad situation provoked by an overzealous posse acting against bewildered farmers. But an earlier effort on his part to stifle Mormon influence in the Utah judicial system had been met by a resolution demanding his resignation. So it appears Harding also seized the opportunity to ruffle Brigham Young's feathers. It was satisfaction short lived, however, since President Lincoln, seeking to assuage the people of Utah, removed Harding from office in May 1863, appointing James Duane Doty in his place. Utah was using up governors at a steady clip.

Yet it was during Harding's tenure in office that it fell to him to greet the arrival of the Third Regiment of California Volunteers and their crusty commanding officer, Colonel Patrick Edward Connor. Connor had marched his seven companies from San Francisco to build Fort Ruby in Nevada Territory while he caught the stage to Great Salt Lake City for a quiet, unannounced "look around" in mufti as he sought a location to base his regiment. The feisty Irishman, who had volunteered himself and his command to fight in the Civil War, had been assigned instead to guard the overland mail route against Indian depredations. Connor also understood his orders to mean he was to "keep an eye on the Mormons."

He returned to Fort Ruby and cut marching orders. On October 17, 1862, they tramped into what remained of Fort Crittenden (old Camp Floyd). Three days later they started off on the final leg to Great Salt Lake City. "With loaded rifles, fixed bayonets and shotted cannon," Connor marched his men to the city's east bench and pitched tents. From its elevated location, the artillery had a clear view of the city and a "perfect and unobstructed range of Brigham's residence ... with their muzzles turned in that direction, the Prophet felt awfully annoyed," chuckled Stenhouse. Connor himself felt the location was admirably suited for his mission. It is "a point which commands the city, and where one thousand troops would be more efficient than three thousand on the other side of the Jordan," he wrote his superior. After planting the flag and creating Camp Douglas (in honor of Senator Stephen A. Douglas), Connor set about his mission of protecting the overland mail. Reflecting on the new military post, Stenhouse said, "certainly no place could have been chosen more offensive to Brigham."

Connor's repeated entreaties to the War Department for an assignment on the fighting front fell on deaf ears. So he turned his attention to watching the Mormons and Indians. For three months his troops had grunted on work details at the post. They leveled parade ground, built barracks, quarried sandstone, and in general did the work of laborers. There were occasional patrols toward the Bear River ferry in northern Utah, where miners and emigrants complained of losing stock to marauding bands.

Major Edward McGarry caught four Indians stealing stock in the vicinity of the river crossing. After demands for the stolen animals were ignored, McGarry ordered the four prisoners summarily executed: "fifty-one shots were fired before life in all of them became extinct ... [proving] the executioners were not good marksmen, or that the unfortunate beings who thus suffered were very tenacious of life," remarked an item in the Deseret News. Indian bands in the region were now truly stirred up, and forays against settlers increased.

Connor, receiving a report of two mail riders downed in a Shoshoni ambush near Portneuf, considered that reason enough to mount an attack. Then, when U.S. Marshal Isaac L. Gibbs asked for troops to help arrest certain chieftains believed responsible for other depredations, Connor saw it as an official matter. He planned a thrust against entrenched Shoshoni a dozen miles north of Franklin and on the outskirts of present Preston, Idaho. For a guide, Connor sought and acquired the services of Orrin Porter Rockwell. Marshal Gibbs asked Connor about arrest warrants for the renegade chiefs. "We won't be needing them," was the reply, "we do not anticipate taking any prisoners."

Both the cavalry and infantry figured in the campaign, which began with the march from Camp Douglas on January 22, 1863, in the most severe winter weather the troops had ever faced.

The infantry moved by day, the cavalry at night to disguise the size of the operation as the troops moved into position. They rendezvoused on
bluffs overlooking the Indian redoubt along a deep ravine on the other side of the river to the west.

The minutiae of the battle from the Indian and army perspectives are detailed in Orrin Porter Rockwell: Man of God, Son of Thunder and Brigham Madsen’s The Shoshoni Frontier and the Bear River Massacre. In essence, Connor’s troops won the day—at a cost of fourteen dead, forty-nine wounded, and seventy-nine troopers with frozen feet (many of whom would eventually be crippled). Once the soldiers broke through into the ravine after four hours of intense combat, much of it hand to hand, the blood letting that followed had no equal among massacres in the history of the West—not Mountain Meadow, not Sand Creek, and not even the Little Bighorn. One Indian who fled up the slope of a small nearby hill was shot fourteen times in the back before he could reach the summit.

There were no prisoners that day. Indian dead according to army reports numbered 224; but an unidentified eyewitness from Franklin counted 386 Indian bodies, as well as many wounded. Ninety of the slain were women and children. The bands that had terrorized Cache Valley had been dealt a staggering blow.

Connor and his men returned to Camp Douglas on the night of February 2, 1863. The following month Connor was notified by telegraph that his Bear River victory had won for him a promotion to brigadier general. In their celebration that night, troops of the Third Regiment fired an eleven-gun artillery salute in tribute to their commanding officer. No one thought to notify Brigham Young. Before the roar of the last howitzer had faded to echo, Young was out of bed, dressed, and surrounded by grim-faced bodyguards ready to protect their prophet. The “false alarm” did nothing to improve relations between the embarrassed Mormons and the U.S. Army. Camp Douglas became Fort Douglas, and Brigadier General Patrick E. Connor continued his career in various posts and campaigns along the Bozeman Trail until the 1870s. Brigham Young and the citizens of Utah, meanwhile, greeted the completion of the first transcontinental railroad in May 1869 as they closed another decade in the struggle toward statehood.