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Browsing through Early Newspapers

A hundred years ago or more, folks looked to newspapers for what precious word there was about the world around them, and for a variety of reasons journalism had a different flavor to it. In many ways those old-timers were much more interesting, with their own style of writing, which was a great deal like reading someone’s mail. Nineteenth-century newspaper stories could be aggravating, though. Reporters and editors never seemed to worry about using first names and completely identifying those they were writing about. “Mr. Jones” was all anyone needed, it seemed, and that was all many readers got.

Browsing through those early papers still invokes a sense of “being there.” And with hindsight what it is, some of the stories bring a smile. For instance, when Colonel R. B. Mason, commandant of the Tenth Military Department, Monterey, California, wrote his official report to Washington, the New York Tribune in December 1848 published his impressions of the gold rush. Colonel Mason put his own interpretation on why members of the Mormon Battalion were leaving the gold fields for Great Salt Lake City and the families they hadn’t seen for almost two years. No one could pass up the easy pickings the Sutter’s Mill discovery had made possible, Mason decided, so this is how he explained the exodus:

Gold is believed to exist on the eastern slope of the Sierra Nevada; and ... at the mines I was informed by an intelligent Mormon that it had been found near the Great Salt Lake by some of his fraternity.

Nearly all the Mormons are leaving California to go to the Salt Lake, and this they surely would not do unless they were sure of finding gold in the same abundance as they do now on the Sacramento.

The Associated Press was still some years in the future and the country’s editors worked a little harder getting a variety of news to their readers. It was a common practice for journals of the day to extract interesting items from other newspapers as part of an informal exchange agreement, with due credit to the paper of origin. Occasionally such an arrangement became a tad convoluted. Consider an item originally published by the Frontier Guardian in Kanesville, Iowa, quoting sources in Great Salt Lake City, extracted and printed by the St. Louis Republican, and reprinted in the New York Tribune of March 27, 1849. The story reported the murders of three men of the Mormon Battalion (Daniel Browitt, Ezra H. Allen, and Henderson Cox) by Indians in the California mountains in late June 1848—nine months earlier. The word was a bit slow making the rounds, but it was news.

Ofttimes even the most innocuous item from the past can have a tantalizing touch to it. It was a policy of the Deseret News in those days to publish for a nominal fee (twenty-five cents) the names of emigrants and travelers passing through Great Salt Lake City and to mail a copy of the newspaper back home. It was a service to the emigrant, plus it circulated the newspaper. The listing not only reported the wayfarer’s progress but also eased the anxiety of family and friends. It was not unusual for a traveler to request an additional word or two—say, “Fat and healthy”—after his name.

So it was that on August 31, 1850, the weekly contained a brief column of names including one “N. P. Limbaugh, Cape Girardeau, Mo., arr. in the city August 8 and dep[arted] Aug. 17” in
a company of Missourians headed for the gold fields of California. Ordinarily that wouldn’t arrest anyone’s attention. But since 1990s radio and television talk-show host Rush Limbaugh has often mentioned that his family, including his 102-year-old grandfather, Rush Hudson Limbaugh (a lawyer still active), reside in their hometown of Cape Girardeau, well, is it possible that this gold seeker could be one of Rush’s ancestors? The Limbaughs can’t be certain, but they don’t dismiss the likelihood, since the family has lived in Cape Girardeau for as long as they can remember, and “N. P. Limbaugh,” might well be related.

Those emigrant rosters contained a number of familiar names. On September 12, 1855, the News listed among the new arrivals Robert Redford.

And then there were the truly short stories. As this succinct squib from the Deseret News of September 28, 1850, testifies: “There has been no trout in the Valley this fall.” That’s it, no frills. One more report from the Deseret News, this from the issue of November 21, 1855:

In September [1855], while excavating in Parowan, Messrs. Pendleton and Barton [there’s that ambivalence with first names again] found a copper medal in cemented gravel eight feet below the surface. It was in excellent preservation. About 1½ inches in diameter and has upon one side in relief, the representation of a town with flanking towers and vessels in the harbor attacked by six ships. Around the border the words: ‘He took Porto Bello with six ships only.’ November 22, 1739. On the reverse, also in relief, are the figures of a man, a cannon, and a ship, and around the border, ‘The British glory revived by Admiral Vernon.’

It makes a reader wonder how long before Utah Territory was settled was that medal lost so that it would collect in gravel eight feet underground, and who might have dropped it. An Indian? A fur trapper? Perhaps an engage of the Hudson Bay Company?

But the compelling aspect of those 19th century newspapers was their outspokenness. When Nevada horse thieves were caught in Utah, the Salt Lake Herald treated the story on September 28,
1878, as an object lesson for aspiring outlaws. Here is the Herald's report:

St. George, Sept. 27. –Jerry Sloan and W.P. Tuttle, horse thieves, with a band of stolen horses from Nevada, were followed to near this place by James Pierson, a deputy sheriff from Pioche, and posse. They were caught and the sheriff started for Pioche yesterday afternoon, and upon reaching Damron valley, twelve miles from here, four masked men took the prisoners from the sheriff and shot them dead. Sheriff Pierson sent back word, and the coroner has gone to examine the bodies.

Unfortunately, there is no way of determining whether the Herald’s approach to crime and punishment had any effect.

FRONTIER MEDICINE

MEDICINE—OR THE LACK OF IT—PLAYED A MAJOR role in settling the frontier West. It’s an accepted fact that the informal “First Families of the West”—those on the Pacific slope of the Continental Divide—were a hardy folk, whether offspring of mountaineers, homesteaders, farmers, miners, ranchers, drifters, or whatever. They had gumption, grit, and backbone: essentials for survival in the great wide open with its attendant perils. They had no national health plan to fall back on, just native intelligence, a robust constitution, and a high threshold of pain to endure ailments and injury.

Early settlers responded to bruises, cuts, and fractures with poultices, splints, needles, and thread. Genuine doctors, when they were available, functioned on the barter system, accepting foodstuffs and products for services rendered. There are plenty of cases of fur trappers and traders who took to the mountains with their city ailments to die, only to discover years later that the rugged life agreed with them.

Just how tough and resilient these frontiersmen and women were is exemplified by Hugh Glass, a fur trapper left for dead by his companions in September 1823 after being terribly mauled by a “she grizzly.” Glass—near death and despite horrific wounds that left him with arms, legs, and body torn open and neck bitten so savagely he could barely breathe—was able, with but the tatters of clothes on his back and without weapons, to claw his way from the Yellowstone River down to the Grand and ultimately the Missouri River to rejoin his astonished brigade camped at Fort Kiowa some three hundred miles away. They had long since marked him off as a fatality of the season.

Another example is Jim Bridger, the celebrated mountaineer, trapper, trader, and guide, who for years carried a Blackfoot arrowhead imbedded in his back, until the medical missionary Marcus Whitman dug it out at the fur rendezvous of 1835 on Horse Creek, a tributary of the Green River, near today’s Daniel, Wyoming.

Women of the early West endured unattended childbirth and in turn later assumed the role of doctor and nurse to their offspring. Beyond that are the heroics of covered wagon women like those of the Donner-Reed party, who suffered the torment of the waterless salt desert crossing and survived the horrors of starvation and isolation in the snowbound fastness of the Sierra Nevada.

Newlywed Lucena Pfuffer Parsons, 28, was headed for California with her husband in March 1850 to settle in Oakland. The wagon train to which they attached themselves was hit by cholera. Her diary entries, as edited by historian Kenneth L. Holmes, record her thoughts; the spelling and language are preserved:

June 23 [1850] Last night visited a very sick boy, son of the first man that died. This morning [wagon train] started early. Passt some beautiful country. All it wants to make it delightful is a little of the arts of civilization. It has rained early all day. Encampt at 3 o’clock on what I call Mud creek from the nature of the stream, having made 18 miles. The boy that was sick died about noon to day on the way coming. These are hard time for
us but harder on the sick. Nothing for their relief at all it seems. Still it rains. Very hot.

June 24 Last evening there was 3 more died out of the same family. One was a young lady & there was another child. The 3 are buried together 2 Spoffords & one Brown. Staid here all day & some of the company did up there washing. . . . Had a meeting in the afternoon to consider whether it is best to travel in such large company or not. We are to remain as we are a short time longer & then split if the sickness continues. Past 5 graves to day of people who had died in another company.

Mormon journals are sprinkled with cures and home recipes for treating colds, rheumatism, toothache, diarrhea, colic, and a list of other "miseries." Usually these remedies were jotted at the back of a journal, almost as an afterthought, with grandpa's favorite blend of cider.

In the late 1860s, eastern newspapers were dotted with ads extolling private convalescent homes for "veterans." It's impossible to tell how many Blue and Gray casualties suffering the agonies of war wounds were placed in these havens by well-meaning families, to be cared for . . . and innocently sentenced to a lifetime of drug addiction. Laudanum and a variety of other potions laced with opium and its derivatives were as available as laxative from the nearest apothecary—no prescription necessary, thank you.

The popular image of frontier pharmacology is a snort of "Dr. Snidely's Miracle Snake Oil" peddled at a medicine show from the back of a wagon. And while that description is stretching things a bit, the truth wasn't far off. For instance, here's a sampling of patent medicines found alongside other sundries on the shelves of a Utah general store at the turn of the century. Included are such nostrums as:

- **Loxol Pain-Expeller** (contains 49% alcohol, capsicum, ammonia, camphor, soap, essential oils). For sore muscles, strains, sprains, bruises, neuralgia, muscular lumbago, chest cold, stiff neck due to exposure, wet feet, nonvenomous insect bites, and for hours of comforting warmth and relief from rheumatic pains. Use externally as a liniment. Price 75 cents.

- **Seven Barks Compound** (alcohol 7%). For dyspepsia, indigestion, rheumatism. Dose: 10 to 20 drops in a wine glass full of water. Price 60 cents.

- **Kickapoo Worm Killer**, made by the Kickapoo Indian Medicine Co. (contains 12 tablets, in the form of candy lozenges, containing santonin, hydragyri, subchloridum, podophyllin, sugar, rice flour, fat, licorice, oil, anise). For worms. Adults take 2 lozenges half hour before supper and before breakfast. Kickapoo Worm Killer is also a laxative and assists Nature in expelling worms. Price 35 cents.

- **Chamberlain's Colic Cholera Diarrhoea Remedy** (contains 48% alcohol, 19 minims of chloroform, 1.99 grains of opium). For pain in the stomach, colic, cholera morbus, summer complaints, dysentery, bloody flux, and bowel complaint in all its forms. The wrapper also carries the aforementioned description in eight foreign languages, including Polish, Dutch, Bohemian, German, French, Swedish, Norwegian, and Italian. Price 25 cents.

- **Egyptian Regulator Tea** (contains "Egyptian Regulator Tea made in America from the original formula"). A remedy for constipation and biliousness. Dose: an ordinary dose for an adult is a teaspoonful of the herbs and a cup of hot water taken every night. Price 35 cents per package.

The first true "drug store" in Utah was opened by William S. Godbe in the autumn of 1855 on East Temple (Main Street) near 100 South. Godbe advertised his new establishment, the Deseret Drug Store, in announcing his return from a buying trip in the East with "a valuable assortment of merchandise—drugs and medicine, chiefly botanical; soaps, oils and perfumeries, gunpowder, [percussion] caps, knives, toys, spices, jams, preserves, cordials, nuts, candies, lozenges, medical liquors." Utah was a step closer to taming its frontier.
TIMELY GULL ON THE GREAT SALT LAKE

As governor of Utah Territory in the 1850s, Brigham Young was prepared for anything from establishing a provisional state to dealing with hostile Indians, from masterminding the systematic colonization of his domain to warding off New Mexican slave traders, from planning an effective mail service to controlling the hordes of gold rushers cutting across Utah on their way to California. But when the waters of Great Salt Lake began rising, Young found himself at sea with the problem of keeping lake islands accessible to the community as herd grounds.

One hundred and thirty years later, another Utah governor, Norman Bangerter, faced with a similar quandary, addressed the challenge by installing $60 million pumps to move the overflow lake water into the western desert. But in 1854, Brigham Young’s answer was to build a boat.

The winter of 1853 saw lake levels swelling almost as precipitously as they did in 1986. Antelope Island was the community pasture for Mormon cattle, ideal for its quiet isolation and protection from marauding Indians, but that isolation was now becoming a serious handicap. The sandbar between the island and the mainland, once easily crossed on foot, was deepening under the briny overflow and increasingly difficult to ford. When conditions did not improve and the shoreline crept higher, Young ordered construction of a boat capable of ferrying livestock to the island.

Aside from the buffalo-hide “bullboats” used by fur trappers in 1825 to explore the inland sea and Captain John C. Frémont’s inflatable India rubber raft of 1843, there had been but two other boats on the lake to 1853: the skiff Mudhen, built to explore its waters in 1848, and Captain Howard Stansbury’s flat-bottom yawl, Sally, employed in the 1849-50 U.S. topographical survey. As historian Dale L. Morgan remarked in his fine book The Great Salt Lake, “it is not known what happened to either of these boats, but neither would have been of much service for ferrying stock.”

Young’s new vessel would be forty-six feet long and designed with the future in mind. Always the visionary, Brigham Young christened the ferry the Timely Gull. The boat had “a stern wheel propelled by horse power,” according to the Deseret News for July 6, 1854. Later the Gull might be converted to steam. A Utahn who went east on business that fall shopped for an engine and fittings to take back with him, making it known that a boat already had been built and was awaiting a power plant. Word was that such a vessel on the lake might in high water run down the Jordan River near the city and connect the capital city with the most northern settlements. But in these early years, the Mormon settlement had better use for steam engines than an occasional ferry.

So it was that after two years service the governor in 1856 ordered Timely Gull fitted out as a sailboat and its “horse power” put out to pasture. As Morgan explained, “It was fortunate that the boat was ready for use by the early fall of 1854. Even during the spring, the lake had been so high as to swim a horse on the Antelope bar, and cattle taken off the island at that time had to swim the greater portion of the way. Spring brought astonishing floods, raising the Jordan to levels higher than had ever been known, and by fall, had it not been for the Timely Gull, livestock on the island would have been marooned.”

In autumn of 1854 and the early spring and summer of 1855, onslaughts of grasshoppers wreaked havoc and devastation on Mormon crops. While the lake might have served as a protective moat against the cricket infestations of 1848, the flying hoppers had little trouble reaching the islands. Great dark clouds of the insects swarmed over patches of green, which disappeared in their wake. When it became apparent the herds would have to be moved or perish from starvation, Young and others took Timely Gull to the island and ferried five hundred head of cattle to the mainland. These were driven to new herd
grounds near Utah Lake, and the following year to Cache Valley, thus managing to stay just a jump ahead of the grasshoppers.

Valiant as its service was, *Timely Gull* came to an untimely end in 1858 when a gale swept the ferry from its moorings at Black Rock and piled it up; the derelict wreckage was visible for years. As for the lake itself, the levels dropped markedly until 1862, then once more began a sustained rise. Until then it was possible to move between the island and the mainland without swimming horses or cattle, but after 1862 barges were necessary to move the stock.
THE GREAT CAMEL EXPERIMENT

Legends are wonderful. Most Utahns have heard of the Bear Lake monster, an Americanized version of Nessie of Loch Ness. But not too many know of Jerry, the Arabian camel.

In September 1936, Charles Kelly, a western history buff of the first magnitude, was adding to his research notes on the Hastings Cutoff to California (his book *Salt Desert Trails* had been published a few years earlier), and he had occasion to talk to William Carter, an early Grantsville, Tooele County, resident. During the conversation, Carter’s wife mentioned a dromedary that chased two frightened horses into Grantsville one Sunday in the early 1900s. She could recall no particular date. “The camel seemed tame,” Kelly jotted in his notebook. “Mrs. Carter says the school children rode it and she rode it in a July 24 parade. . . . It later wandered off and was not seen again. It did not appear to be a young animal. They called it Jerry.”

Kelly made no further mention of the camel, perhaps chalking the story off as folklore. But there is another possible answer; for Jerry, “a ship of the desert,” was not the first such sighting in the parched hinterland of Nevada. Reports cropped up from time to time in those days, and as a matter of record, the Nevada legislature had taken the trouble to pass a law in February 1875 prohibiting camels and dromedaries from running at large on public roads in the state. The act was repealed in 1899.

The business with camels had its impetus about 1850, with the California gold rush in full swing and thousands of emigrants jamming the overland trails for a chance to settle in the land of milk and honey (and mayhaps find a lump or two of placer gold in the bargain). The Isthmus of Panama was choked with rushers who opted to steam to California.

Still twenty years in the future was the transcontinental railroad, and the U.S. military was struggling with the knotty problem of protecting its real estate in the Southwest and lower California acquired in the War with Mexico. How to move people and provisions through hostile Indian country and supply the forts spreading through southern California and the Southwest? That was the question. Pack mules and ox trains were barely adequate in the desert regions. And so was born the great camel experiment.

The military had first toyed with the notion in 1836, but it wasn’t until 1848 that a recommendation came to import a few camels in a test of their worth on the American frontier. Horses are not native to America, but they flourished after being introduced by the Spanish conquistadors in 1540. There is evidence that camels may have been brought to America by a Virginia slave trader in 1701 and to Jamaica about the same time. U.S. Secretary of War Jefferson Davis proposed a military camel corps as early as 1855, but the American Southwest was not the Sahara and there was no Lawrence of Arabia on the horizon.

Still, if there was money to be made in such a venture, the private sector would eagerly pursue it. And so it did, in the form of the American Camel Company, a short-lived New York speculation which sputtered briefly in 1855, before expiring. The army then budgeted $30,000 to “purchase and import camels and dromedaries for the military.”

Major Wayne was ordered to transfer the camels to San Antonio and there to turn them over to a retired U.S. Navy lieutenant, Edward F. Beale, who had served for several years as superintendent of Indian affairs in California. It was he who brought the first California gold east, and he had explored Death Valley with Kit Carson. Beale was a believer in camels for use in the western deserts.

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Secretary of War John B. Floyd, successor to Davis after the election of 1856, ordered a wagon route surveyed from Fort Defiance, New Mexico, to the Colorado River, and Beale was his choice for the task, with collateral orders to test the dromedaries as pack animals at the same time. Thus to Lieutenant Edward F. Beale fell the honor of being the first and last commander of the U.S. Camel Corps.

It was during the transfer to San Antonio that Major Wayne overheard a number of grizzled Texans comment with some cynicism on the camels, allowing that they would have a bleak future in the U.S. They “walked funny” and didn’t look as if they could tote much. Wayne ordered a kneeling dromedary to be loaded with two bales of hay, each weighing three hundred pounds—more than triple what a prime mule could pack. The onlookers murmured in disbelief. “That hoss will never stand with that load!” At the major’s signal, two additional bales were cinched to the beast’s pack saddle—the total: 1,256 pounds! “Impossible! Not a chance in hell. Cain’t be done!” Wayne nudged the camel, which obediently lurched upright and strode off with the load. The crowd broke into cheers. The dromedaries had won their first supporters.

When the grand experiment was over, Beale would prove camels could carry enormous loads, some up to a ton, and walk forty miles in a day for as many as eight to ten days without water over barren country. They could swim—and did, across the Colorado—and function in sand or snow. Their drivers swore “camels would get fat where a jackass would starve to death.” On the strength of Beale’s report, Secretary Floyd recommended the purchase of one thousand dromedaries for the U.S. Army, but the clouds of civil war were gathering, and the experiment was abandoned.

So what has all this to do with Jerry, the Grantsville camel? Well, Beale had turned over twenty-eight government dromedaries to the California quartermaster in 1861. The camel corps story spread throughout the West. (In this century Hollywood would treat this historical footnote dramatically in “Southwest Passage” in 1954 and as a comedy in “Hawmps” in 1976.) The California and Utah Camel Association bought some army animals in 1859 and sold them at auction to a company in Esmeralda County, Nevada, which employed them to carry salt from a marsh there to a silver mill in Washoe County some two hundred miles distant. It was said a party of French men had rounded up twenty to thirty camels near Tucson, broke them to pack, and sold them in Virginia City, where a visiting Yale professor reported seeing camels in 1865.

The dromedaries didn’t receive the same understanding care as they had in the army and suffered from the high alkali content in the region. Neglected by teamsters, some camels died, others ran off into the desert, and still others were sold to mine owners in Arizona to haul ore. Within a decade, the animals had become enough of a nuisance on wagon roads to result in the previously mentioned legislative act prohibiting them to wander at large on Nevada’s public roads.

For years there were scattered reports of camels seen in various parts of the Southwest and

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Nevada and even remote areas of Utah. Those reports usually were accompanied by claims that the "escaped circus animals" were frightening horses, mules, and teamsters. The teamsters, in turn, would open fire in the face of such "vicious creatures." Fortunately, the residents of Grantsville, Utah, were more curious than terrified when Jerry, the camel, visited their town.

MORE ON FIREARMS IN THE WEST

GUNS HAVE BEEN AN INTEGRAL PART OF WESTERN American culture since Lewis and Clark crossed the wide Missouri in 1804. Historian Frederick Jackson Turner launched a career in 1893 when he delivered his now-celebrated frontier thesis. He suggested, among other things, that because frontier settlers fought to hold the land, the weapons they used became their legacy as did the land itself.

Novelist Owen Wister romanticized the mystique of the six-gun in The Virginian, and Hollywood glorified the "showdown" shoot-out through William S. Hart and John Wayne. For better or worse, that mystique is so wrapped up in the western heritage as to be inseparable from it. In Utah, for instance, firearms have been an accepted part of the state's history; although not so rambunctious a part perhaps as in later cattle towns like Dodge City or Abilene, Kansas, where City Marshal Wyatt Earp insisted rifles and pistols be checked like luggage while their owners were in town.

But in Great Salt Lake City, a seemingly innocuous squib like this, in the Deseret News of December 22, 1853, carried significant import:

COLT'S PISTOL.—The Patent Office has refused an extension of Colt's patent firearms, on the ground that he has already made $1,000,000 from the sale. The patent has four years yet to run.

An advertisement in the same newspaper announced a new business in town:

WHO WANTS REVOLVERS, RIFLES, AND HOLSTER PISTOLS?

The subscriber would respectfully inform the inhabitants of this city and adjacent country, that he is putting up machinery for manufacturing the above articles in the Seventeenth Ward, opposite Ames Tannery, and will be ready to supply customers at short notice.

Those who will furnish him with produce, such as wheat, oats, corn and potatoes, onions, butter, cheese, etc. . . . immediately, shall be first served.

Tithing office prices given for all kinds of produce.

/s/ David Sabin

Keeping in mind the news item concerning the patent protections on Samuel Colt's firearms expiring in four years, consider this notation in Brigham Young's "Manuscript History" for March 21, 1857: "Commenced this morning to make revolving pistols at the public works in the new shop which has been put up from a portion of the wheelwright shop. David Sabin and William Naylor were employed at this work." Within two months, newly inaugurated President James Buchanan would approve the Utah Expedition and set its fifteen hundred troops on the march, ensuring the safe delivery of a new governor to succeed Brigham Young. After being stalled by deadly blizzards and sub-zero temperature in winter quarters near the Fort Bridger trading post, the expedition finally moved out and settled into its new quarters at Camp Floyd, west of Provo, in the fall of 1858.

When representatives of the eastern press visited Great Salt Lake City to attend the third annual Deseret Agricultural and Manufacturing Association Fair held in the Social Hall, the New York Times correspondent commented on one "remarkable feature" of the exhibit: "A case of Colt's pistols and rifles, manufactured at the public works of the Church, for the use of the Mormon army." All of which proves little, except that the settlers in Utah were capable and familiar enough
with firearms to produce, as it was subsequently learned, some five hundred Colt’s patent pistols in that arsenal/shop. But just because guns were readily available didn’t mean there were shooting scrapes in Zion every day. In fact a case might be made that fewer arguments reached trigger point because guns were handy. But that’s an irresolvable argument.

Nevertheless, a fracas in Pioche, Nevada, in 1877 proved that pistols should never fall into the hands of newspaper editors. According to an account in the Salt Lake Herald, the principals in this “lively shooting affair” included one Pat Holland, said to be the traveling correspondent for the Virginia Enterprise and formerly proprietor of the Pioche Record, and George T. Gorman, current local editor of the Record. Trouble between the two was sparked by an article in the morning Record critical of its former proprietor. It seems he had written a story about the town of Pioche for the Enterprise and failed to mention the Record. The story in the Record was especially bitter, the Herald reported, and the latter portions “highly embellished with vulgarity,” giving Holland “a bad deal.”

On the afternoon the article appeared, Holland worked up an elaborate poster, written by himself, with highly colored pencillings and containing language, if anything, more vulgar than that in the Record. He fastened it on the side of Pres Wand’s Eldorado Saloon, where it remained for hours, Gorman being out of town. When Gorman returned and saw Holland’s handiwork, he set out to confront the Enterprise correspondent.

It’s fair to remark at this point that both newspapermen should have heeded the adage that the pen is mightier than the sword. For when they forsook the pen, the sword very nearly did them in. The two antagonists met about eight o’clock that evening at the doorway of the Eldorado. Both men had armed themselves with pistols. Six shots were fired, and here is how the Herald reported the ensuing affray:

Holland’s pistol fired prematurely while pulling it from his pocket. Gorman then got in two
shots. Holland's pistol now failed to fire, whereupon he coolly placed it on his knee, rearranged the trigger, and it went off, grazing his hand. The two men were within ten feet of each other for the first five shots and did all the shooting around the center post of the saloon door. Holland ran through the back door, Gorman firing one shot after him.

Besides the wound to his hand, Holland also was slightly wounded in the left side. Gorman apparently went unscathed. The town's sympathy was somewhat divided, but for the most part was with Holland. "Some loud remarks are made against the Record," the Herald correspondent remarked in closing his report. A cursory search of succeeding editions of the newspaper failed to reveal whether the two journalists reconciled their differences.

There's a curious postscript to this minor discourse on guns. For virtually every growing frontier settlement—Deadwood, South Dakota; Tombstone, Arizona; Dodge City; Abilene; Wichita; and any number of border towns in Texas—there survived an ample photographic history of its lawmen and outlaws. The Earps, Bat Masterson, James Butler Hickok, and the rest of the "legends" of the West were captured for posterity on film either wearing or posing with firearms. Not so in Great Salt Lake City or for that matter in Utah.

If portrait photographs exist of Zion's lawmen, the sheriffs and deputies during those rowdy early days—which occurred a good twenty years, incidentally, before the cattle towns and railheads—they are noticeably sans firearms. What's more, the other citizens of this wild West of the Great Basin are not seen with shooting irons, either. Perhaps it was the Mormon influence, but guns and gunsmiths notwithstanding, discretion appeared to be the watchword.

THE BIG CHILL: THE WINTER OF 1857–1858

There is cold weather, and then there is cold weather. In Salt Lake City, the record is minus thirty degrees, recorded on February 9, 1933. That's cold. For the state, the record is substantially lower: a minus sixty-nine in February 1985 at a place called Peter Sinks in Cache County.

The temperature didn't come close to falling that far in 1857 in the Fort Bridger area, but it was low enough to wreak damage and perhaps save Great Salt Lake City from being occupied by the U.S. Army. In those days Fort Bridger, mountaineer Jim Bridger's trading post, was in Utah Territory (Green River County, actually), and as Camp Scott, it became winter quarters for the Utah Expedition, the military force of some fifteen hundred troops ordered to unseat Brigham Young as governor of the territory and install Alfred Cumming of Georgia in his place.

As the soldiers—elements of the Fifth Infantry, the Tenth Infantry, the Fourth Artillery, and the Second Dragoons—made their way west from Fort Leavenworth, Kansas Territory, over the Continental Divide, through South Pass, they ran into bad weather in the vicinity of Hams Fork of the Green River, in present Wyoming, northeast of Fort Bridger. It was November and cold describes it well.

The expedition was under the command of Colonel Albert Sidney Johnston, who hadn't reached the main body yet; that wouldn't happen for a month. The troops were congregating near Fort Bridger, and supply wagons and work cattle (oxen) were at a place designated Camp Winfield on Hams Fork. Such was the situation during that first week of November 1857 as soldiers, teamsters, and supply trains struggled to rendezvous at the trading post, where they would bivouac until the mountain passes to the City of the Saints opened in the spring.

That's when winter set in hard. Not quite as bad as Jim Bridger might describe a cold snap: "When ye'd speak, the words would fall as icicles, and it were necessary to melt the icicles over a campfire afore ye could hear what was bein' said." Not quite as cold as that, but cold enough.
The bad spell closed in on the early morning of November 6 as Companies A and D of the Tenth Infantry joined the regiment at Hams Fork. Before the day was out, the soldiers would call this “the camp of death.” Five hundred animals perished that night, and the march route was strewn with frozen carcasses of horses, oxen, mules, and abandoned wagons. Captain John W. Phelps, Fourth Artillery, noted in his log that of 103 horses to pull his cannon and caissons, more than 60 died during the night and that the Second Dragoons had lost half their animals.

Teamsters made shelters from logs and wagon covers. Private Charles A. Scott, an artilleryman, marched to camp in the teeth of a violent storm that evening and made a mental note for his diary that “horses, mules, oxen were dying in harness by the dozen.” When he finally fell in an exhausted sleep in his tent, Scott did not awaken when a horse toppled over on the tent, bringing the canvas down on its occupants. “We had to crawl out from underneath this morning half froze to find the thermometer at 16 below,” he wrote. “Rather a hard show for the poor horses, no shelter and nothing to feed on but sage brush and but few of them with strength enough left to masticate it. A couple could not stand the pressure, they gave up the ghost,” Scott recorded in pencil. Other diarists and letter writers would have to wait until the ink thawed before penning their thoughts. Outdoors the mud was hard as granite, the snow depth fourteen inches, with a sharp and jagged crust that resisted footfalls until the sun’s rays had played across the surface for an hour or so.

The Mormons fared little better. Major Lot Smith, a young Mormon firebrand in command of a guerrilla company dispatched to harass and worry the invaders, had for some days been suffering from a severe cold, when his company of twenty-six Nauvoo Legionaires, with a baggage wagon, was ordered to duty “on the coldest day I ever experienced.” Howard Spencer had volunteered to go along, but he had a terrible fever sore on his leg and was turned down. “Boys,” he said, “if you ever want to get out of doing anything, just scratch your leg a little.” With that he rolled up his pants leg and filled the gaping wound with hot embers from the campfire.

Smith ordered his men to mount up and head toward Fort Bridger where “the enemy” was
campaigned. “I feared the night more than all the
troops we had seen during the campaign,” said the
guerrilla leader who a month earlier had set
aflame more than seventy U.S. government supply
wagons and forced the army to go on short
rations. “We had a terrible time,” he recalled in
later years. “The men froze faces, ears and feet. I
saw that all would perish if we remained with the
baggage wagon, so I told the teamsters they could
shelter themselves with the blankets and we would
push on to Bear River. I was mounted on a mag­
nificent horse, but the snow was deep and the
wind blew fiercely . . . the men were ordered not to
stop for any reason.” It was so intensely cold that
the riders couldn’t tell if their hats were on without
feeling for them. His men had to be careful in
touching their ears, which were stiff as sticks and
turning black; most of their feet were frostbitten.

In the army camp, Captain Phelps had a new
problem: his surviving animals, wild from the
want of food, wandered in search of warmth. The
officer ordered men to drive the oxen back to
camp. Among them was one pitiful ox wearing a
yoke which dragged its head to the snowpack.

As the morning warmed, the thermometer
budded to a half-degree above the zero mark.
Phelps gazed over the carcass-strewn herd
ground. Two crows and a camp dog chased a rab­
it through the snow. “One of the crows flew
close over and behind, the other was three or four
yards to the rear, and the dog followed at a dis­
tance of a hundred yards.” The chase continued
for some time, the officer noted. Then the rabbit
disappeared. At a nearby wagon, teamsters strug­
gled with its running gear. Some of the wheels
recently greased adhered to the axles so they
slipped instead of rolling. The moisture in the
grease had frozen.

A correspondent for the New York Tribune who
was with the expedition wrote his editor: “While
thawing hands over a campfire, one poor old ox
staggered through the brush, passed between me
and an officer, directly into the blaze, in which it
stood until the hair was burned from its forelegs
and flesh was scorched. Then it retreated a yard or
two, fell and died."

Ultimately, Colonel Johnston would send
Captain Randolph Marcy with a detachment of
volunteers over the mountains to Fort
Massachusetts in New Mexico for replacement
horses and mules. Marcy succeeded, losing but one
man to the elements. When Marcy returned the
following June 1858, the Utah Expedition would
move on to Great Salt Lake City, but by then the
crisis was over. Governor Cumming accepted the
seal of Utah and took over from Governor Young.
The troops moved south of the city. On the eve of
the Civil War, having been promoted to brigadier
general, Albert Sidney Johnston took his leave of
Utah. In time he would join the Confederacy and
would be mortally wounded at the battle of Shiloh.
The terrible winter of 1857–58 and its Camp of
Death high in the mountains of Utah would disap­
pear in the forgotten past.

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**TARTAR THE WAR HORSE**

This is the tale of a war horse named Tartar.
He was purchased by the U.S. Army at Fort
Leavenworth, Kansas Territory, in July 1857 to
serve in Battery B, Fourth Artillery. He was four
years old.

Being part of the frontier army was not an
easy lot for man or beast in the mid-1800s, and it
was especially grueling as an artillery horse; aesthet­
ically, the dragoons, the cavalry, even the mounted
rifles, would have been better equine duty. It cer­
tainly would have seemed more dashing. In any of
those branches a horse would be assigned as a
mount, not a draft animal. But the artillery! The
options were slim and none.

A horse likely would be chosen to pull a field
piece and limber (its ammunition carriage) or a
caisson; and that was exhausting business in the
mountains, even for a horse. Then, of course,
there was the matter of being conditioned to the
roar of cannon fire (which did not include having
its ears stuffed with cotton). All this is moot, how­
ever, since horses had no say in the matter. But it

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happened that Tartar was picked by First Sergeant James Stewart to be his mount: “There was something about the animal. . .”

When the Fourth Artillery was assigned to duty with the Utah Expedition that July 1857, it meant a journey from Fort Leavenworth to Great Salt Lake City of some twelve hundred miles over South Pass of the Continental Divide. Tartar’s first taste of action came when Stewart took him on a buffalo hunt to supply meat for the battery mess. Herds were plentiful in the 1850s, and the sergeant was anxious to test his marksmanship and courage against the celebrated American bison. “Riding up close to a young bull, I shot him in front of the shoulder. As soon as I saw he was badly hit, I tried to drive him toward the battery. But he came for me and Tartar and that settled it. “I gave him four more shots and down he went.” The battery had fine steaks for dinner. After that, Stewart remarked, not a day went by that Tartar and he didn’t bag a buffalo or two for the regiment.

But by October, Tartar came down with “malignant distemper” near Green River in what is now Wyoming. Since the expedition expected trouble from Brigham Young, Captain John W. Phelps, Fourth Artillery commander, ordered that Tartar be abandoned, left to fend for himself, while the expedition moved on. Winter was extraordinarily brutal on the Wyoming plains that year, as the six hundred horses, mules, and oxen the expedition lost to cold and starvation testified.

When spring finally struggled to the surface, Brigadier General Albert Sidney Johnston, commanding the expedition, was short of horses and offered a thirty-dollar bounty for each stray carrying a government brand that was returned to camp. Indians brought in the first horses, one of which Stewart recognized as Tartar. “They said they found him last fall near Green River and had used him all winter to haul tent poles,” the sergeant told the aide-de-camp, Major Fitz John Porter, who paid the reward. Phelps returned Tartar to duty, remarking the horse had fared better with the Indians than other animals had with the battery.

In the summer of 1860, the eight-pounder and twelve-pounder field cannon were left at Camp Floyd west of Provo, and the men of Battery B formed into a provisional cavalry company, serving double duty as mounted infantry in keeping the mail routes open and free from Indian raids between Salt Lake City and Carson City. Tartar’s usual work included forty to fifty miles a day.

Then, early in 1861, in response to the Civil War, the battery marched from Camp Floyd to Kansas, then went by rail to Washington, D.C., and the Army of the Potomac. Tartar and Stewart, now a lieutenant, found themselves at the second battle of Bull Run. In the considerable cannonading that followed, Tartar was struck by shell fragments that tore both his flanks and carried away his tail. Stewart marked Tartar off as a casualty: “I turned him into a small farmyard and left him.” The next morning, the gallant horse had jumped a fence and followed the battery. Tartar, it seemed, liked the army.

At Fredericksburg, Virginia, prior to one of the most ferocious battles of the war, President Lincoln had come to review the troops. He noticed Stewart riding Tartar and commented on the horse’s wound. “Reminds me of a tale,” he joked. Tartar was wounded again at Fredericksburg, and from then on, not surprisingly, it was difficult to get him to stand under musket fire. “The day we reached Gettysburg,” Stewart related, “Tartar was lamed by running a nail into a forehoof and did not go into battle.” In the pursuit of Robert E. Lee after the fight, Tartar could not keep up the pace, and once more Stewart was forced to leave him with a farmer on the road, along with a note explaining what command he belonged to. A month later, Stewart heard Tartar was with another division. It was August 1863 before the officer located his now celebrated horse. “He had no further war wounds but served to the end of hostilities.”

Tartar, who had earned his place in the army with the Utah Expedition and whose record showed service at Camp Floyd, Indian fighting on the Overland Trail to Carson City, several major engagements of the Civil War, and wounds on three occasions, now became one of the most celebrated horses in the military.

He was present at Appomattox Court House when the surrender was signed. “When I was promoted and transferred to the 18th Infantry in 1866,” wrote Stewart, “I left Tartar with the battery, in the 10th year of his honorable and distinguished service.” So ends the tale of this war horse.
Is That You, Pike?

The antagonisms of the 1850s in Utah were painfully slow in easing, so slow some carried over to the late 1880s. A perfect example is the Pike-Spencer affair, an abrasion between Mormon settlers and the frontier army that erupted into attempted murder and murder charges that spanned three decades.

In 1859 the U.S. Army had taken possession of Rush Valley in Tooele County as a government reserve for pasture and hay supply for its horses and mules. However, a Mormon stock company, Spencer, Little & Company, owned a ranch adjacent to the reserve in the north part of the valley. Twenty-year-old Howard O. Spencer with one or two other men employed by the stock company were at the ranch on March 22 to make the spring roundup of cattle. They were stopped by a detachment of infantry from Camp Floyd and ordered off the “government’s range.”

Spencer argued his right to be on the property since he was one of the owners. Because of overriding agreements between territorial officials, settlers, and Brigadier General Albert Sidney Johnston on the part of the army, the question of whether Spencer was right in arguing his position was never reconciled. And the versions of what occurred next are in total conflict.

What is certain is that First Sergeant Ralph Pike, I Company, Tenth Infantry Regiment, with men of his unit, confronted Spencer and his cowboys and ordered them off the pasturage. Spencer had a hayfork in his hand and responded to Pike’s words with a few of his own. They argued. Pike, a veteran of the Utah Expedition and a career soldier, later swore that Spencer attacked him with the pitchfork, while the Mormon’s companions swore he was only defending himself with it.

In any case, Pike, brandishing a musket, brushed the pitchfork aside, and, swinging his weapon by the barrel, brought the gun butt down on Spencer’s head with such force that the pitchfork handle was splintered into three pieces and the rancher’s skull was crushed. It’s possible that the pitchfork handle actually saved Spencer’s life. The soldiers carried him to the ranch house and sent for a doctor, Army Surgeon Charles E. Brewer, who pulled several pieces of shattered bone from the victim’s head and skillfully patched the fracture as best he could.

Spencer, drifting in and out of consciousness, was moved to the home of relatives where it was thought he would soon die from his fearsome wounds. Incredibly, despite the loss of some brain matter, he began to recover. And with his recovery came thoughts of revenge. Under a doctor’s care until June of that year, Spencer, with an ugly, livid trench high along the right side of his head, brooded about his lot in life. It was said that he and friend George Stringham in late summer discussed ways of decoying Pike from the camp to even the score.

At the same time Spencer had taken the matter to law and a grand jury indicted the sergeant for “assault with intent to kill.” When the news was posted on I Company’s bulletin board, Pike’s comrades-in-arms were enraged. Lieutenant Louis H. Marshall, who had been in charge of Pike’s detail, reported to General Johnston that Pike was blameless, that Spencer’s behavior was that of “a perfect bully” who was lucky he wasn’t shot instead of having his head broken.

Nevertheless, on August 11 the sergeant—accompanied by a military escort of four men, who also were to be witnesses in the case, and by Major Fitz John Porter, Johnston’s assistant adjutant general—appeared before Associate Justice Charles R. Sinclair in district court in Great Salt Lake City and entered a plea of not guilty. A noon recess found the defendant with Major Porter and four soldiers in uniform strolling south on the east side of Main Street near the Salt Lake House (about 169 South Main). It was a crowded summer afternoon. Orlando F. Herron remembered there were an emigrant wagon and about two
dozen men on the street. Nearby, Trumbo's Elephant Store, a favorite gathering place in the late 1850s and 1860s, was enjoying its usual steady business.

Leonard Phillips was sitting in the Salt Lake House when he spotted a crowd coming down the street. In front of them were Pike and another soldier. A man came up behind the sergeant and tapped him on the shoulder. "He said, 'Is that you, Pike?"' Phillips remembered. "Pike turned around and the man shot him in the side." The revolver muzzle was about two or three feet from Pike when it was fired, and the man who pulled the trigger stopped for an instant with the smoking pistol in his hand and stared at Pike, Phillips said. "Bill Hickman came up and said, 'Git!'; the man went over the [irrigation ditch] and ran across the street into an alley," he recalled. Phillips also noticed that George Stringham was a dozen feet or so from the gunman.

Pike, clutching his side, wobbled and cried out, "My God! I'm shot!" Phillips sprang out and caught the wounded man. He and a corporal in the crowd helped carry Pike into the Salt Lake House. Pike had been wearing a gunbelt, but his holster flap was buttoned. The bullet struck the bone handle of a Bowie knife on the belt and coursed upward, entering just above the right hip and lodging behind the ribs. A bit of bone from the knife handle also penetrated his body.

As the soldiers moved Pike to a room in the hotel, Hickman, a lawyer with the reputation of a killer and desperado, was seen with a pistol in each hand, chasing the shooter west through an alley between blocks. At the same time he was warning others away from the scene, "Keep back, I'll drop him!" Some thought Hickman was actually hindering pursuit; the shooter jumped a fence into a lumberyard where a saddled horse was tethered and, mounting up, made good his escape.

Pike lingered for two days, long enough to make a dying declaration to Justice Sinclair that Howard Spencer had shot him. Lieutenant G. A. Gordon said, "Pike, are you positive it was Spencer?" "I know it," was the reply. Pike died on August 14, despite the efforts of an army surgeon to save him. He was buried at the Camp Floyd Cemetery.

General Johnston took preliminary measures to keep the situation from becoming explosive, but his order regarding the death of Pike was scarcely calming: "It is with much regret the commanding officer announces to the regiment the death of that excellent soldier, First Sergeant Ralph Pike, of Company I, late last night, the victim of Mormon assassination, through revenge for the proper discharge of his duty."

After the funeral, hell broke loose in I Company. Captain Jesse A. Gove, company commander, had always taken great pride in his men and was especially proud that among other units of the Tenth Infantry Regiment, it was conceded that the "I's have it." On the night of August 15, however, Gove lost control of his fiercely disciplined company. Lorenzo Brown, a Mormon, had quite a different view of the troops. It was the "grandest company of rascals in the command," he said, a bunch that gained for itself very justly the title of "the Forty Thieves—that being their number." That night I Company roared out of the camp, despite orders confining all soldiers to the post, and descended on Cedar Fort, a Mormon settlement some five miles distant. Whooping and
hollering, they set ablaze a number of haystacks. When the townsfolk ran to extinguish the flames, they were greeted by gunfire. A horse was killed; no one else was injured.

Consternation over the raid on Cedar Fort overshadowed Pike’s murder. Although soldiers always kept an eye peeled for Howard Spencer, there was no other concerted effort by Utah authorities to arrest him, and a grand jury, after issuing an indictment for murder, ignored the matter. Spencer lived in the Fourth LDS Ward in Great Salt Lake City and in 1862 joined Colonel Lot Smith’s Utah volunteer battalion to protect the Overland Mail route against Indian depredations.

In 1874 Spencer moved to Kanab in southern Utah to live. His was a life of relative obscurity until August 1888 when U.S. marshals swooped down on Liberty Park in Salt Lake City to round up a number of Mormon men on warrants charging “unlawful cohabitation,” one of the several legal devices used to nab polygamists. Among those snared was Howard O. Spencer. Prison Warden Arthur Pratt, who also was a U.S. marshal, slapped him not only with the cohab warrant but also with the indictment on the twenty-nine-year-old murder. Pratt also arrested George Stringham at his ranch on charges of being an accessory to murder.

Spencer posted $6,000 bail; Stringham was held on $5,000. Trial was scheduled for May 6, 1889, before Third District Court Judge J. W. Judd. A twelve-member jury, nearly all non-Mormons, was to hear the case. Spencer’s lawyers sought and were granted a separate trial; Stringham was to face the music the following week.

Defense counsel LeGrand Young argued that no one actually saw Spencer pull the trigger, and even if they had, “Would it be strange if Spencer was fired by the torture of his wound, and in his demented condition grew frenzied and brought retributive justice to the boastful sergeant who had committed the cowardly assault? . . . And when Pike was brought in he was permitted to go on parade with his subordinates, an armed man flaunting in the face of his victim the position he was in, and boastful of what he had done. Would not a sane man have become uncontrollable under such circumstances? In those days men carried pistols because the law did not afford them protection.” At that point, Judge Judd cut him off. “Stop that. Keep within the evidence!”

The prosecution contended there was no reasonable doubt that Spencer fired the fatal shot and argued that Stringham, Hickman, and a number of others since deceased had conspired to protect Spencer’s escape from the scene of the crime. After three days of testimony, the jury brought in a verdict for acquittal.

It was a decision which sent the Salt Lake Tribune in orbit. In a stinging editorial, the newspaper railed at the verdict: “Hickman, [Jason] Luce, Stringham and the rest, while pretending to be trying to arrest him, were really keeping the crowd back until the murderer should escape. The whole business was as plain as sunlight. All the insanity in the brain of Spencer was there long before he received that blow on the head. He was born with the same insanity that the wolf feels when he is hungry and meets a lamb in his path.”

And the Tribune was not alone in its disappointment. Judge Judd had a few words to say on the subject when the jury announced, “Not guilty.” He quickly gavelled down an attempt at applause in the courtroom, and turning to the panel, intoned: “I want to say to you in reference to the verdict you have rendered, that you have doubtless followed your oath according to your own consciences, and you have doubtless done it honestly. But if this is not a case of murder, speaking from a practice of over 23 years, then I have never seen one in a court of justice. I am now of the opinion that [LeGrand] Young was exactly right when he said in his argument to the jury that the law and courts of justice in this country were no protection to anybody. You may now be discharged,” Judd told the jurors.

Howard O. Spencer lived to be eighty. He died March 4, 1918, after an accidental fall from a bridge in Glendale, Kane County, Utah.
WRITING A BEST SELLER

THIS IS THE STORY OF A SOLDIER WHO WROTE A best seller. A best seller. Over the years his book has outsold any one volume by Tom Clancy, Charles Dickens, Alex Haley, James Michener, and perhaps even Louis L’Amour. This soldier was born in Robertville, South Carolina, May 2, 1837, the son of a distinguished educator and Baptist preacher in South Carolina and Georgia.

Henry Martyn Robert was appointed to the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, New York, in 1853, graduated fourth in his class in 1857, and was brevetted a second lieutenant and assigned to the Engineer Corps. As an assistant professor of natural philosophy, astronomy, and practical military engineering, he taught at the academy for a year and in 1859 was assigned to a wagon road expedition under the command of Captain Henry D. Wallen, Fourth Infantry, with a mission to mark out and open an overland route to “the frontiers of the western states”—specifically, from Fort Dalles in Oregon Territory to Great Salt Lake City in Utah Territory, a distance of some 630 miles.

Lieutenant Robert was part of the engineer detachment. Other officers assigned were First Lieutenant Robert Johnston, Company H, First Dragoons; First Lieutenant Nelson B. Switzer, Company E, First Dragoons; Second Lieutenant David C. Houston, Company A, sappers and miners; Assistant Surgeon John F. Randolph, medical staff; Brevet Second Lieutenant Joseph Dixon, topographical engineers; First Lieutenant John C. Bonneycastle, Fourth Infantry, acting assistant commissary of subsistence and acting assistant quartermaster; and Second Lieutenant Marcus A. Reno, First Dragoons, acting adjutant (who would spend the twilight of his military career defending his performance at the Battle of the Little Bighorn in 1876 under command of another West Pointer, Lieutenant Colonel George A. Custer).

The expedition, 9 officers and 184 enlisted men, armed with Sharp’s carbines, sabres, and Colt’s revolvers presented an imposing picture as it marched out with 154 horses, 344 mules, 121 oxen, 30 wagons, 1 ambulance wagon (light-springed), 1 traveling forge, 132 Mexican pack-saddles (aperejo), and 75 old-pattern cross-treepack-saddles. Along with the necessary guides, teamsters, and civilian packers, Captain Wallen took as supplies 60 head of beef cattle and 4 months’ rations for 319 men.

Wallen’s command left Fort Dalles on June 4, 1859, and bent to its assignment. Several newly named landmarks were added to maps of the region, and Wallen (possibly recognizing the advantages of buttering up the Old Man) named a large salt water lake, twenty miles long and nine miles wide, after Brigadier General William S. Harney, commanding officer of the Department of Oregon. This same Harney was the original commander of the Utah Expedition sent against the Mormons in 1857 and was called “Squaw-killer” Harney—but not to his face—for a punitive attack on the Sioux at Ash Hollow, Nebraska Territory, in 1855. (He got the nickname because so many Indian women and children were slain in the fight.)

After a difficult three months on the trail, Wallen’s detachment finished its assignment when it reached Camp Floyd, west of Provo, Utah Territory, in mid-August and reported to Brigadier General Albert Sidney Johnston, post commander, who resupplied the expedition and offered the camp’s hospitality to Wallen’s men for the four days needed to requisition provisions for the return march to The Dalles. That four days at Camp Floyd makes it possible for Utah to lay an honorary claim, at least, on Lieutenant Robert, though it wasn’t until he returned to Fort Dalles and subsequently was reassigned to duty in charge of defenses at New Bedford, Massachusetts, during the Civil War period, 1862–65, that he began the book that would make him famous. According to his grandson, Henry M. Robert III, he had been

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transferred to New Bedford from more strenuous war duty after a flare-up of tropical fever.

Robert always had been active in church organizations and civic and educational work no matter where he was stationed. But it was without warning in 1863 that he was asked to preside over a church business meeting—and didn’t know how. But he could not refuse. “My embarrassment was supreme,” he later wrote, “I plunged in, trusting to Providence that the assembly would behave itself . . . [But I resolved] never to attend another meeting until I knew something of parliamentary law.” That’s when the odyssey began.

From a small book on another subject, he copied four or five items dealing with “rules for deliberative assemblies” and carried them on a scrap of paper in his wallet for several years. By 1867 he had achieved the rank of major and was assigned to San Francisco. He was now active in a large number of organizations in the bay area and all had the same difficulty when it came to procedure. The major then decided to compile a working outline that would serve all.

It was no simple task, and as each working draft was tried and tested, it seemed there would be new questions to answer. Army duty transfers took him to Portland, Oregon, and Milwaukee, Wisconsin, and at times impaired his research. Finally, when he hit upon a format he believed would serve the purpose, he could find no publisher willing to take a chance. So the officer put up his own money to print four thousand copies of what was to become Robert’s Rules of Order. The two-year supply (he thought) sold in four months. That first edition, issued in 1876, was just the beginning. Robert’s Rules has never been out of print and is sold today. It is recognized as the bible of parliamentary procedure.

Henry Martyn Robert retired from the U.S. military in 1901 with the rank of brigadier general and died May 11, 1923. His small manual of procedural rules is now in its umpteenth printing in various editions. At last count it had sold something more than 4,450,000 copies.

**Horace Greeley Goes West and Sees Brigham Young**

The westbound stage groaned and clattered down the “utterly abominable” Emigration Canyon road just as the hot summer twilight was deepening into night over the Great Salt Lake Valley. Among the several passengers who squirmed from the coach to set an uncertain booted foot to Salt Lake City’s dusty Main Street that July evening in 1859 was a lanky, cherub-faced individual wearing a rumpled road-weary white linen suit under a long white duster. A white hat of plain felt completed his outfit.

He was tall, perhaps 5’10”. A large domed head accentuated his bookish countenance. Contemporaries insisted his blue eyes lacked sparkle, and his critics complained he had no graces; his voice was high and shrill enough to inflict discomfort. He peered through spectacles large and round that clung for safety to the ears and gave him an owl-like look “much appreciated by sketch artists.” This unprepossessing California-bound traveler with carpetbag in hand was Horace Greeley, editor of the prestigious *New York Tribune*, the most prominent journalist in America and perhaps the most influential newspaperman of his time, James Gordon Bennett of the *New York Herald* notwithstanding.

Greeley was on the final leg of a remarkable journey which would take him from New York to San Francisco by rail and stagecoach to “see for himself” this vast country and chronicle his experiences in a series of dispatches along the way. Horace Greeley, at forty-eight, was following his own advice to “go west, young man.”

He had ended his latest letter, dated July 11, 1859, by informing *Tribune* readers that “Salt Lake City wears a pleasant aspect to the emigrant or traveler, weary, dusty, and browned with a thousand miles of jolting, fording, camping, through the scorched and naked American desert.” Then, after another page of descriptive

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reporting, he closed with “But of the Mormons and Mormonism, I propose to speak only after studying them; to which end I remain here several days longer.”

What he did not reveal was that he hoped to write firsthand about the Mormons of Utah—by interviewing their leader, Brigham Young. The New York editor was successful—through the good offices of his Mormon friend in Washington, D.C., Dr. John M. Bernhisel, Utah’s delegate to Congress—in gaining an appointment with the celebrated church leader and colonizer. And while Greeley may not have realized it at the time, his account of that session would make journalism history.

(The interview was quoted extensively in its day and later mentioned in various histories, literary collections and texts, but because of its length would be edited in one way or another. It is published below in full, precisely as it appeared in the columns of the New York Tribune on August 20, 1859. Greeley’s questions covered a wide range of subjects, from Christianity and Mormonism to slavery, the use of tithing money, the Church’s notorious reputation, and polygamy.)

Being a forerunner was nothing new to this Ichabod Crane of the newspaper world. Greeley had made wearing white linen suits, long duster coats, and while felt toppers a personal trademark, along with an ever-present, slightly bowed whalebone-ribbed umbrella. Horace Greeley, if nothing else, was a sight to behold.

A decade earlier, while serving briefly as a fill-in congressman, Greeley had occasion to write Bayard Taylor, an enterprising New York Tribune reporter, urging him to prepare a weekly political column and “sign your own initials or some distinguishing mark at the bottom. I want everyone connected with the Tribune to become known to the public as doing what he does.” This is seen by historians as the first encouragement by a newspaper editor to members of his staff to create “byline” journalism. Greeley himself would sign his editorials “H.G.”

Everything about Horace Greeley was controversial, including the famous remark “Go west, young man, go west!” attributed to him in 1853, when in fact he was paraphrasing an Indiana editor’s expression of 1851. But it is just as true that if others used the phrase before Greeley, no one heard it. When Greeley said it, the whole country listened and thousands acted on it. His influence as a public voice was enormous and his conversation with Brigham Young received global attention. The Mormons had, the year before, been granted amnesty by President James Buchanan for their actions against Brigadier General Albert Sidney Johnston’s expedition in the Utah War. The Latter-day Saints were always good newspaper copy.

James Gordon Bennett, the muck-racking editor of the rival New York Herald, was more than just a competitor, he was Greeley’s nemesis. Both men were giants of journalism in their day. And while Greeley’s two-hour talk with Brigham Young is generally conceded to be the first published formal newspaper interview, the ever-innovative Bennett had an earlier claim to that honor because of his interrogation of a prostitute and madam, Rosina Townsend, while covering the sensational Ellen Jewett murder case in 1836.

The interview with Young took place in the company of several leading church figures including Bernhisel, Heber C. Kimball, Daniel H. Wells, Albert Carrington, Elias Smith, and others, two of Brigham’s oldest sons among them. To keep the question-and-answer dialogue flowing, Greeley did not attempt to transcribe the conversation, but jotted hasty notes and relied on his remarkable memory for the rest. His handwriting, while crystal clear to its creator, was the bane of journalism and had for some years been a standing joke within the craft. Several of his biographers have generously described his penmanship as “notoriously undecipherable” and extended their deepest sympathies to the Tribune’s typographers responsible for making sense of the “frightful scrawl.” Greeley’s sentences had the appearance of words chasing themselves uphill. One of the newspaper’s correspondents, Albert D. Richardson, who later would himself write a book about a western tour, found it necessary to prove the point by including a facsimile page of his boss’s notes, along with his reaction to having witnessed Greeley writing aboard a pitching stagecoach during a rainstorm: “As the air was damp and chill . . . and the vehicle shaken with wind, I fancy The Tribune’s printers will find Mr. Greeley’s manuscript even less legible than usual.”

But beyond his quaint appearance, his standoffishness, the shrill voice which irritated even the
most ardent listeners, and his propensity for being the enfant terrible of editorial pages, Horace Greeley was, once and forever, a crackjack newspaperman. And because of that, the most striking element of his Brigham Young exclusive can be found in the concluding paragraph of his now famous dispatch XXI from Salt Lake City, in which he offered his thoughts on the interview.

Especially noteworthy, in light of 1990s issues, was Greeley's perceptiveness and his ability to get to the heart of a story. The journalist remarked to the church leader as their conversation drew to a close his disappointment with Mormonism's "degradation of (or, if you please, the restriction) of Woman to the single office of child-bearing and its accessories." It was a point no editor, newspaper, journal, or public figure pounced on or reacted to. Greeley almost casually had fired off a telling shot, which went all but unnoticed by his readers. He wrote:

I have not observed a sign in the streets, an advertisement in the journals, of this Mormon metropolis, whereby a woman proposes to do anything whatever. No Mormon has ever cited to me his wife's or any woman's opinion on any subject; no Mormon woman has been introduced or has spoken to me; and, though I have been asked to visit Mormons in their houses, no one has spoken of his wife (or wives) desiring to see me, or his desiring to make her (or their) acquaintance, or voluntarily indicated the existence of such being or beings.

That, Greeley concluded, was polygamy in essence: "Let any such system become established and prevalent, and Woman [sic] will soon be confined to the harem."

An Overland Journey

Two Hours With Brigham Young

Salt Lake City, Utah, July 13, 1859

My friend Dr. [John M.] Bernisel, M.C. [Mormon Church], took me this afternoon, by appointment, to meet Brigham Young, President of the Mormon Church, who had expressed a willingness to receive me at 2 P.M. We were very cordially welcomed at the door by the President, who led us into the second story parlor of the largest of his houses (he has three), where I was introduced to Heber C. Kimball, Gen. [Daniel H.] Wells, Gen. [James] Ferguson, Albert Carrington, Elias Smith, and several other leading men in the Church, with two full-grown sons of the President. After some unimportant conversation on general topics, I had come in quest of fuller respecting the doctrines and polity of the Mormon Church, and would like to ask some questions bearing directly on these, if there were no objections. President Young avowed his willingness to respond to all pertinent inquiries, the conversation proceeded substantially as follows:

H.G.—Am I to regard Mormonism (so-called) as a new religion, or as simply a new development of Christianity?

B.Y.—We hold that there can be no true Christian Church without a priesthood directly commissioned by and in immediate communication with the Son of God and Savior of mankind.
Such a church is that of the Latter-Day Saints, called by their enemies Mormons; we know no other that even pretends to have present and direct revelations of God's will.

H.G.—Then I am to understand that you regard all other churches professing to be Christian as The Church of Rome regards all churches not in communion with itself—as schismatic, heretical, and out of the way of salvation?

B.Y.—Yes, substantially.

H.G.—Apart from this, in what respect do your doctrines differ from those of our Orthodox Protestant Churches—the Baptist or Methodist, for example?

B.Y.—We hold the doctrines of Christianity, as revealed in the Old and New Testaments—also in the Book of Mormon, which teaches the same cardinal truths, and those only.

H.G.—Do you believe in the doctrine of the Trinity?

B.Y.—We do; but not exactly as it is held by other churches. We believe in the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, as equal, but not identical—not as one person. We believe in all the Bible teaches on this subject.

H.G.—Do you believe in a personal devil—a distinct, conscious, spiritual being, whose nature and acts are essentially malignant and evil?

B.Y.—We do.

H.G.—Do you hold the doctrine of Eternal Punishment?

B.Y.—We do; though perhaps not exactly as other churches do. We believe it as the Bible teaches it.

H.G.—I understand that you regard Baptism by Immersion as essential.

B.Y.—We do.

H.G.—Do you practice Infant Baptism?

B.Y.—No.

H.G.—Do you make removal to these valleys obligatory on your converts?

B.Y.—They would consider themselves greatly aggrieved if they were not invited hither. We hold to such a gathering together of God's People as the Bible foretells, and that this is the place and now is the time appointed for its consummation.

H.G.—The prediction[s] to which you refer have, usually, I think, been understood to indicate Jerusalem (or Judea) as the place of such gathering.

B.Y.—Yes, for the Jews—not for others.

H.G.—What is the position of your Church with respect to Slavery?

B.Y.—We consider it of Divine institution, and not to be abolished until the curse pronounced on Ham shall have been removed from his descendants.

H.G.—Are there any slaves now held in this Territory?

B.Y.—There are.

H.G.—Do your Territorial laws uphold Slavery?

B.Y.—Those laws are printed—you can read them for yourself. If slaves are brought here by those who owned them in the States, we do not favor their escape from the service of those owners.

H.G.—Am I to infer that Utah, if admitted as a member of the Federal Union, will be a Slave State?

B.Y.—No; she will be a Free State. Slavery here would prove useless and unprofitable. I regard it generally as a curse to the masters. I myself hire many laborers and pay them fair wages; I could not afford to own them. I can do better than subject myself to an obligation to feed and clothe their families, to provide and care for them, in sickness and health. Utah is not adapted to Slave Labor.

H.G.—Let me now be enlightened with regard more especially to your Church polity [government]; I understand that you require each member to pay over one-tenth of all he produces or earns to the Church.

B.Y.—That is a requirement of our faith. There is no compulsion as to the payment. Each member acts in the premises according to his pleasure, under the dictates of his own conscience.

H.G.—What is done with the proceeds of this tithing?

B.Y.—Part of it is devoted to building temples and other places of worship; part to helping the poor and needy converts on their way to this country; and the largest portion to the support of the poor among the Saints.

H.G.—Is none of it paid to Bishops and other dignitaries of the Church?

B.Y.—Not one penny. No Bishop, no Elder, no Deacon, or other church officer, receives any compensation for his official services. A Bishop is often required to put his hand in his own pocket and provide therefrom for the poor of his charge; but he never receives anything for his services.

H.G.—How then do your ministers live?

B.Y.—By the labor of their own hands, like the first Apostles. Every Bishop, every Elder, may be daily seen at work in the field or the shop, like his neighbors; every minister of the Church has his proper calling by which he earns the bread of his family; he who cannot or will not do the...
Church’s work for nothing is not wanted in her services; even our lawyers (pointing to Gen. Ferguson and another present, who are the regular lawyers of the Church) are paid nothing for their services; I am the only person in the Church who has not a regular calling apart from the Church’s service, and I never received one farthing from her treasury; if I obtain anything from the tithing-house, I am charged with and pay for it, just as anyone else would; the clerks in the tithing-store are paid like other clerks, but no one is ever paid for any service pertaining to the ministry. We think a man who cannot make his living aside from the Ministry of Christ unsuited to that office. I am called rich, and consider myself worth $250,000; but no dollar of it was ever paid me by the Church or for any service as a minister of the Everlasting Gospel. I lost nearly all I had when we were broken up in Missouri and driven from that State; I was nearly stripped again when Joseph Smith was murdered and we were driven from Illinois; but nothing was ever made up to me by the Church, nor by any one. I believe I know how to acquire property and how to take care of it.

H.G.—Can you give me any rational explanation of the aversion and hatred with which your people are generally regarded by those among whom they have lived and with whom they have been brought directly in contact?

B.Y.—No other explanation than is afforded by the crucifixion of Christ and the kindred treatment of God’s ministers, prophets, saints in all ages.

H.G.—I know that a new sect is always decried and traduced—that it is hardly ever deemed respectable to belong to one—that the Baptists, Quakers, Methodists, Universalists, &c., have each in their turn been regarded in the infancy of their sect as the offscouring of the earth; yet I cannot remember that either of them were ever generally represented and regarded by the older sects of their early days as thieves, robbers and murderers.

B.Y.—If you will consult the contemporary Jewish accounts of the life and acts of Jesus Christ, you will find that he and his disciples were accused of every abominable deed and purpose—robbery and murder included. Such a work is still extant, and may be found by those who seek it.

H.G.—What do you say of the so-called Danites, or Destroying Angels, belonging to your Church?

B.Y.—What do you say? I know of no such band, no such persons or organization. I hear of them only in the slanders of our enemies.
H.G.—With regard, then, to the grave question on which your doctrine and practices are avowedly at war with those of the Christian world—that of a plurality of wives—is the system of your Church acceptable to the majority of its women?

B.Y.—They could not be more averse to it than I was when it was first revealed to us as the Divine Will. I think they generally accept it, as I do, as the will of God.

H.G.—How general is polygamy among you?

B.Y.—I could not say. Some of those present [heads of the Church] have each but one wife; others have more: each determines what is his individual duty.

H.G.—What is the largest number of wives belonging to any one man?

B.Y.—I have fifteen; I know no one who has more but some of those sealed to me are old ladies whom I regard rather as mothers than wives, but whom I have taken home to cherish and support.

H.G.—Does not the Apostle Paul say that a bishop should be “the husband of one wife”?

B.Y.—So we hold. We do not regard any but a married man as fitted for the office of bishop. But the Apostle Paul does not forbid a bishop from having more wives than one.

H.G.—Does not Christ say that he who puts away his wife, or marries one whom another has put away, commits adultery?

B.Y.—Yes; and I hold that no man should ever put away a wife except for adultery—not always even for that. Such is my individual view of the matter. I do not say that wives have never been put away in our Church, but that I do not approve of the practice.

H.G.—How do you regard what is commonly called the Christian Sabbath?

B.Y.—As a divinely appointed day of rest from secular labor on that day. We would have no man enslaved to the Sabbath, but we enjoined all to respect and enjoy it.

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Such is, as nearly as I can recollect, the substance of nearly two hours’ conversation, wherein much was said incidentally that would not be worth reporting, even if I could remember and reproduce it, and wherein others bore a part; but as President Young is the first minister of the Mormon Church, and bore the principal part in the conversation, I have reported his answers alone to my questions and observations. The others appeared, uniformly to defer to his views, and to acquiesce fully in his response and explanations. He spoke readily, not always with grammatical accuracy, but with no appearance of hesitation or reserve, and with no apparent desire to conceal anything, nor did he repel any of my questions as impertinent. He was very plainly dressed in thin summer clothing, and with no air of sanctimony or fanaticism. In appearance he is a portly, frank, good-natured, rather thick-set man of fifty-five, seeming to enjoy life, and be in no particular hurry to get to heaven. His associates are plain men, evidently born and reared to a life of labor, and looking as little like crafty hypocrites or swindlers as any body of men I ever met. The absence of cant or shuffle from their manner was marked and general, yet, I think I may fairly say that their Mormonism has not impoverished them—that they were generally poor men when they embraced it, and are now in very comfortable circumstances—as men averaging three and four wives apiece certainly need to be.

If I hazard any criticisms on Mormonism generally, I reserve them for a separate letter, being determined to make this a fair and full exposé of the doctrine and polity in the very words of its Prophet, so far as I can recall them. I do not believe President Young himself could present them in terms calculated to render them less obnoxious to the Gentile world than the above. But I have the right to add here, because I said it to the assembled chiefs at the close of the above colloquy, that the degradation (or, if you please, the restriction) of Woman to the single office of child-bearing and its accessories, is an inevitable consequence of the system here paramount. I have not observed a sign in the streets, an advertisement in the journals, of this Mormon metropolis, whereby a woman proposes to do anything whatever.

No Mormon has ever cited to me his wife’s or any woman’s opinion on any subject; no Mormon woman has been introduced or has spoken to me; and, though I have been asked to visit Mormons in their houses, no one has spoken of his wife (or wives) desiring to see me, or his desiring me to make her (or their) acquaintance, or voluntarily indicated the existence of such a being or beings.

I will not attempt to report our talk on this subject, because, unlike what I have above given, it assumed somewhat the character of a disputation, and I could hardly give it impartially; but one remark made by President Young I think I can
give accurately, and it may serve as a sample of all that was offered on that side.

It was in these words, I think exactly: “If I did not consider myself competent to transact a certain business without taking my wife’s or any woman’s counsel with regard to it, I think I ought to let that business alone.”

The spirit with regard to Woman, of the entire Mormon, as of all other polygamic systems, is fairly displayed in this avowal. Let any such system become established and prevalent, and Woman will soon be confined to the harem, and her appearance on the street with unveiled face will be accounted immodest. I joyfully trust that the genius of the Nineteenth Century tends to a solution of the problem of Women’s sphere and destiny radically different from this.

H.G.

A LENGTHY GALLOWS SOLILQUY IMPEDES SWIFT JUSTICE

Standing in the shadow of the hangman’s noose, the condemned man was asked if he had any last words. As a matter of fact, he did, and it was about his right to choose between being beheaded, shot, or strung up. Thomas H. Ferguson had thought about it along the mile or so from the county jail as he rode handcuffed and ankle shackled in the same wagon with his coffin to the place of his impending demise. A small detachment of Utah militia ordered out for the occasion by the governor joined U.S. Marshal Peter K. Dotson and his deputy, J. F. Stone, who, with Sheriff Robert T. Burton and City Marshal J. C. Little, made up the escort to Great Salt Lake City’s north bench, where, a few hundred yards above South Temple and just east of City Creek Canyon, a temporary gallows had been constructed.

Believing it was Utah Territory’s first execution under a “regular judicial sentence,” officials made every effort to have it carried out properly and with decorum. But memories were a little skewed in that respect. It was not the first legal execution in Utah. Five years earlier two Goshute Indians—Long Hair and Antelope—were indicted on murder charges by a grand jury, convicted in district court after a trial in which they were represented by court-appointed counsel, then hanged near the Jordan River two weeks later, with few spectators other than Lieutenant Colonel Edward Jenner Steptoe and his detail of cavalry acting as official escort.

Now, as the grim procession wound its way to the place “prescribed by law,” it attracted a growing number of spectators, who surrounded the scaffold to hear what the doomed man would say. There for the better part of an hour, Ferguson, convicted of shooting his employer, Alexander Carpenter, in an argument, looked out over the three thousand or so faces collected to watch his execution that autumn morning and told them just what he thought of his trial and sentencing.

The day was October 28, 1859, little more than a month since his arrest for the killing—the law did not drag its feet in those frontier times. But while swift justice may have been laudable in the eyes of many, Ferguson had encountered some other problems. The judge, for one. The Honorable Charles E. Sinclair, associate justice of the Territorial Supreme Court of Utah, Ferguson claimed (and most of the town agreed), was a drunk who had sentenced him to be executed on a Sunday. Moreover, Ferguson complained, he had been deprived of his right under the law to choose the method of his execution:

I was tried by the statutes of Utah Territory which give a man the privilege of being shot, beheaded or hung, but was it given to me? No, it was not!

All Judge Sinclair wanted was to sentence someone to be hung, then he was willing to leave the Territory, he had too much whiskey in his head to know what day he sentenced me to be executed on, and would not have known, if it had not been for the people of Utah laughing at him and telling him it would be on a Sunday. A nice judge to send to any country.

I am not afraid to die, but I would have liked it better if I had had a fair trial; and I would have

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felt better if Gov. Cumming had commuted my sentence to the penitentiary . . . . I hope the next judge . . . will be a temperate judge, capable of tending to business.

He could not have known then, but his “last words,” delivered in a rambling half-hour, more in desperation than purpose, may have been a record of sorts for gallows soliloquy. The condemned man thus spoke his piece, the noose was adjusted around his neck, the knot snugged beneath and behind his ear, a cap pulled down to cover his face, and, at thirty-eight minutes past noon, the executioner cut the rope securing the gallows’ trap. Thomas H. Ferguson, with a fall of several feet, was launched into eternity. He was pronounced dead a few minutes later and “immediately buried near the gallows.”

Public executions were the rule in Utah—as they were throughout most of the West—until well into the 1870s. John D. Lee of Mountain Meadow massacre infamy was in March 1877 shot by firing squad at the scene of his crime, the last prisoner in Utah to be executed in public. Most of the early executions were meted out by firing squad and a few by hanging, but there is no official record of beheadings, although Nelson Slater, an aggrieved California emigrant who spent the winter of 1850-51 in Great Salt Lake City, did claim another emigrant was pursued by the sheriff and two others who believed the stranger was part of the Illinois mob that assassinated Joseph Smith. Slater, who published a whole catalog of complaints against the Mormon citizenry of Utah Territory once he was safely in California, said the posse “came up to [the emigrant], and without trial, judge, or jury, they cut off his head.” Presumably the perpetrators used Bowie knives or the celebrated swords of the Nauvoo Legion to commit the heinous deed. Slater did not elaborate further.

It is true, however, that Utah law on the books in 1852 allowed those condemned to death their choice of the three—bullet, rope, or blade. Utah’s death penalty punishment was predicated on strong Mormon feelings concerning the atonement of sins by shedding an offender’s blood, but because execution by firing squad satisfied that contingency, the third alternative was erased when the laws were updated in 1878. It seems more than coincidence the change in statutes did not come until after the death of Brigham Young in August 1877. He had been an unrelenting voice from the pulpit and in private arguing for the shedding of blood to atone for sins. At the same time, a law was written to eliminate public executions, specifying such punishments must be meted out within the walls or yard of a jail or some “convenient private place” in the district. This also appears to be a result of the Lee execution, in which the prisoner in secrecy was transported by horse-drawn carriage for two days almost one hundred miles from the Fort Cameron post guardhouse, on the outskirts of Beaver City in south central Utah, to Mountain Meadow to be shot.

The San Jose Patriot, commenting in 1876 on Utah’s peculiar criminal law, remarked not on the option for beheading, but that “in capital convictions the culprit has the right to select the manner of the three methods,” namely, shooting, hanging, or decapitation. The California newspaper reflected that “although this favor is granted to criminals, they seldom take advantage of the statutory right, probably because in that solemn extremity human nature cares little for such preferences.” Thomas H. Ferguson’s last utterances on earth that October day in 1859 proved otherwise.
MARK TWAIN IN UTAH

IT'S TIME FOR A LIGHTER LOOK AT UTAH HISTORY, time to turn to Samuel Langhorne Clemens. His alter ego, Mark Twain, got an immense amount of mileage from Utah and the Mormons, using anecdotes about them in his lectures and books until he was all but buried in cash folks paid for such entertainment.

Twain had a way with words, but more often than not he was disposed never to let the facts stand in the way of a good story. In *Roughing It*, his account of travel through the West, for instance, he tells of an Indian attack on a mail coach in 1856 in which the stage driver and conductor perished and also all the passengers but one, it was supposed; but this must have been a mistake, for at different times afterward on the Pacific Coast I was personally acquainted with a hundred and thirty-three or four people who were wounded during that massacre, and barely escaped with their lives. There was no doubt of the truth of it— I had it from their own lips. One of these parties told me that he kept coming across arrow-heads in his system for nearly seven years after the massacre; and another of them told me he was stuck so literally full of arrows that after the Indians were gone and he could raise up and examine himself, he could not restrain his tears, for his clothes were completely ruined.

To set the record straight, Twain erred in the date. He can be forgiven because he was writing from a distance in time. *Roughing It* was published in 1871, and he may have been suffering from spasms of CRS (Can't Remember Scat). There was, indeed, such a mail coach massacre, but it was perpetrated by Sioux in November 1854. Three of the four passengers aboard were killed, including the conductor, a fellow named John Jamison. The lone survivor, one Charles A. Kinkead, partner in Livingston & Kinkead mercantile company of Great Salt Lake City, was struck by a half-dozen arrows but recovered. The Indians rifled the mail pouches, tore open the letters, and took $10,500 in gold—the company receipts—from him before vamoosing.

Twain took a liking to Jack Slade, the notorious Sweetwater Division superintendent for the Overland Stage. Well, it might not have been a liking, exactly, but Slade did provide the humorist with so much material Twain could scarcely not be beholden. That he relished writing about Slade the mankiller, Slade the desperado, Slade the most bloody, is evident in his earliest anecdotes concerning the gunman, whose mortal remains now lay buried in the Salt Lake City Cemetery. Here is how Twain introduces Slade to his readers:

One day on the plains he had an angry dispute with one of his wagon-drivers, and both drew their revolvers. But the driver was the quicker artist, and had his weapon cocked first. So Slade said it was a pity to waste life on so small a matter, and proposed that the pistols be thrown on the ground and the quarrel settled by a fist fight. The unsuspecting driver agreed, and threw down his pistol—whereupon Slade laughed at his simplicity, and shot him dead!

Violence was the rule in Slade's world, Twain insisted. And the author-lecturer reveled in stories about Slade's run-in with Jules Beni, the station keeper who had treated him to the entire contents of a double-barrel shotgun. When Slade recovered and eventually trapped his nemesis, he tied him to a corral gate, and commenced to exact his revenge. Twain wades into the fray with quill poised:

In the morning Slade practiced on him with his revolver, nipping the flesh here and there, and occasionally clipping off a finger, while Jules begged him to kill him outright and put him out of his misery. Finally, Slade reloaded, and walking up close to his victim, made some characteristic remarks and then dispatched him. . . . Slade detailed a party and assisted at the burial himself. But first he cut off the dead man's ears and put them in his vest pocket, where he carried them.
for some time with great satisfaction. That is the story as I have frequently heard it told and seen it in print in California newspapers. It is doubtless correct in all essential particulars.

So what would happen if Twain should meet the protagonist of his tales? He tells of stopping at a stage station for breakfast with "a half-savage, half-civilized company of armed and bearded mountaineers, ranchmen and station employes":

The most gentlemanly-appearing, quiet and affable officer we had yet found along the road in the Overland Company’s service was the person who sat at the head of the table, at my elbow. Never youth stared and shivered as I did when I heard them call him SLADE!

Here was romance, and I sitting face to face with it!—looking upon it—touching it—hobnobbing with it, as it were! Here, right by my side, was the actual ogre who, in fights and brawls and various ways, had taken the lives of twenty-six human beings, or all men lied about him! I suppose I was the proudest stripling that ever traveled to see strange lands and wonderful people.

He was so friendly and so gentle-spoken that I warmed to him in spite of his awful history. . . . The coffee ran out. At least it was reduced to one tincupful, and Slade was about to take it when he saw that my cup was empty. He politely offered to fill it, but although I wanted it, I politely declined. I was afraid he had not killed anybody that morning, and might be needing diversion. . . .

We left him with only twenty-six dead people to account for, and I felt a tranquil satisfaction in the thought that in so judiciously taking care of No. 1 at that breakfast table I had pleasantly escaped being No. 27.

When he wasn’t waxing melodramatic with gunslinging desperadoes the like of the inestimable Jack Slade, Twain the newspaperman-steamboat captain tweaked the Mormons. Scarcely had he put Slade’s station behind him, than Twain rambled on about “taking supper with a Mormon ‘Destroying Angel.’” Here was fodder for his cannon. Salvo upon salvo, who could ask for anything more?

Destroying Angels as I understand it, are Latter-Day Saints who are set apart by the church to conduct permanent disappearances of obnoxious citizens. I had heard a deal about these Mormon Destroying Angels and the dark and bloody deeds they had done, and when I entered this one’s house I had my shudder all ready. But alas for all our romances, he was nothing but a loud, profane, offensive, old blackguard! He was murderous enough, possibly, to fill the bill of a Destroyer, but would you have any kind of an Angel devoid of dignity? Could you abide an Angel in an unclean shirt and no suspenders? Could you respect an Angel with a horse-laugh and a swagger like a buccaneer?

During his brief stay in Great Salt Lake City, Twain had the opportunity of discovering “valley tan,” a potent potable absorbed in some quantity by a fellow traveler named Bemis, who it seems had made one trip too many to the flagon from which this fiery liquid issued. The fact that Bemis had gone to bed with his boots on led Twain to fear that something he had eaten had not agreed with him:

But we knew afterward that it was something he had been drinking. It was the exclusive Mormon refresher, “valley tan.” Valley tan (or, at least, one form of valley tan) is a kind of whisky, or first cousin to it, and is of Mormon invention and manufactured only in Utah. Tradition says it is made of (imported) fire and brimstone. If I remember rightly no public drinking saloons were allowed in the kingdom by Brigham Young, and no private drinking permitted among the faithful, except they confined themselves to “valley tan.”

As you can see, Twain was easily misled. During the period in which Twain, with his brother Orion Clemens, journeyed west in July 1861 and through various peregrinations in Carson City and Virginia City, Nevada, in 1862, and then wandered in the various mining centers of the West in 1864, Utah was occupied by remnants of Brigadier General Albert Sidney Johnston’s Utah Expedition and later by troops of Brigadier General Patrick E. Connor’s command. Which is to say there were saloons all over the place. In fact, Main Street south of 200 South after 1859 was familiarly known as Whiskey Street. And valley tan certainly was not the refreshment of choice; Orrin Porter Rockwell called it liquid strychnine, and other frontiersmen had more imaginative names for this paralyzing intoxicant.

Exaggerations aside, Twain had nothing but praise for the City of the Saints:

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Next day we strolled about everywhere through the broad, straight level streets, and enjoyed the pleasant strangeness of a city of fifteen thousand inhabitants with no loafers perceptible in it; and no visible drunkards or noisy people; a limpid stream rippling and dancing through every street in place of a filthy gutter; block after block of trim dwellings, built of “frame” and sunburned brick—a great thriving orchard and garden behind every one of them, apparently—branches from the street stream winding and sparkling among the garden beds and fruit trees—and a grand general air of neatness, repair, thrift and comfort, around and about and over the whole. And everywhere were workshops, factories, and all manner of industries; and intent faces and busy hands were to be seen wherever one looked; and in one’s ears was the ceaseless clink of hammers, the buzz of trade and the contented hum of drums and fly-wheels.

The armorial crest of my own State consisted of two dissolute bears holding up the head of a dead and gone cask between them and making the pertinent remark, “United, We Stand—(hic)—Divided We Fall.” It was always too figurative for the author of this book. But the Mormon crest was easy. And it was simple, unostentatious, and fitted like a glove. It was a representation of a Golden Beehive, with the bees all at work!

Yes, Twain had stumbled on a mother lode of material. In the Mormons he had discovered the perfect foil for his humor—well, almost perfect. The U.S. Congress was high on his list of targets; he was once able to glean enough for a book and a lecture tour out of one day in the Senate gallery. A perfect goldmine! he exulted. Still, the Mormons proved his bona fides. And he loved the ruffians.

It is a luscious country for thrilling evening stories about assassinations of intractable Gentiles. I cannot easily conceive of anything more cozy than the night in Salt Lake which we spent in a Gentile den, smoking pipes and listening to tales of how Burton galloped in among the pleading and defenseless “Morrisites” and shot them down, men and women, like so many dogs. And how Bill Hickman, a Destroying Angel, shot Drown and Arnold dead for bringing suit against him for a debt. And how Porter Rockwell did this and that dreadful thing. And how heedless people often come to Utah and make remarks about Brigham or polygamy, or some other sacred matter, and the very next morning at daylight such parties are sure to be found lying up some back alley, contentedly waiting for the hearse.

But say what you may about Mark Twain, he was never above making himself the butt of his own stories. Take the time he and Orion, newly appointed secretary of Nevada, paid a “state visit” to the king—Brigham Young—himself:

He seemed a quiet, kindly, easy-mannered, dignified, self-possessed old gentleman of fifty-five or sixty, and had a gentle craft in his eye that probably belonged there. He was very simply dressed and was just taking off a straw hat when we entered. He talked about Utah, and the Indians, and Nevada, and general American matters and questions, with our Secretary and certain government officials who came with us. But he never paid any attention to me, notwithstanding I made several attempts to “draw him out” on federal politics and his high-handed attitude toward Congress.

I thought some of the things I said were rather fine. But he merely looked around at me, at distant intervals, something as I have seen a benignant old cat look around to see which kitten was meddling with her tail. By and by I subsided into
an indignant silence, and so sat until the end, hot
and flushed, and execrating him in my heart for
an ignorant savage. But he was calm. His con­
versation with those gentlemen flowed on as sweetly
and peacefully and musically as any summer
brook. When the audience was ended and we
were retiring from the presence, he put his hand
on my head, beamed down on me in an admiring
way and said to my brother:

"Ah—your child, I presume? Boy, or girl?"

That Brigham, what a card.

**HERE LIES JOSEPH SLADE**

**Jack Slade is one of the West’s many para­
doxes.** He was the Overland Stage Company’s
most feared enforcer, protecting the route from
road agents and keeping the coaches on schedule.
Yet, on the occasion of his death, Slade missed his
connection with the Overland Stage and was fated
to spend eternity in Salt Lake City. A terror to out­
laws, Slade was, by all accounts, a loving husband
and loyal friend, but when drunk, he became an
 uncontrollable, sadistic bully.

Joseph Alfred “Jack” Slade came from a
respected family in Clinton County, Illinois,
served in the 1846–48 Mexican War, and earned a
reputation as a tough man on the frontier. His
story begins in 1858 when Overland Stage hired
him to superintend the Sweetwater Division of the
mail line from St. Joseph, Missouri, to Salt Lake
City. The division ran from the “Upper Crossing”
of the South Platte River to Rocky Ridge on the
east slope of the Continental Divide.

Station keeper at the Upper Crossing was
Jules Beni, a sullen, bear-like French Canadian
also reputed to be the leader of a band of cut­
throats in the vicinity. The town of Julesburg at
the Upper Crossing was founded by Beni, and it
had become a rendezvous for traders, Indian fight­
ers, buffalo hunters, adventurers, bandits, and des­
peradoes who rode into town to divide their loot
and squander it riotously. Beni’s high-handed acts
with company livestock and the constant feuds
arising from them brought Slade and Beni into
open rupture. Jules would not submit to the
authority of the division agent, and Slade would
not brook Jules’s interference.

Beni “sequestered” some of the livestock, and
Slade recovered it for the company. That brought
matters to a crisis. It was a day in the early spring
of 1859 when Slade chanced to be at the Upper
Crossing station. He, the hired hands, and Beni
were all in the corral engaged in conversation.
After a few moments Jules walked away from the
group and entered his adobe quarters. Slade mean­
while headed for the bunkhouse to get something
to eat.

As he was about to enter, one of the hands
spotted Beni emerging from the adobe with a pis­
tol. “Look out, he’s going to shoot!” Slade,
unarmed, turned at the warning and was struck by
three shots from Jules’s revolver. He staggered but
did not fall. With a curse, Beni reached within the
open door for a double-barrel shotgun. He fired
both charges into Slade’s slumping body. “There’s
an empty crate in the barn. You can bury him in
it,” Beni said and walked away.

But in the dramatic tradition of every wild
West yarn ever spun, witnesses that day claimed a
bloody, bullet-torn Jack Slade breathed through
smashed lips and told would-be grave diggers not
to bother, that he did not intend to die, but would
live to even the score with Beni. And he did.

He was taken into the bunkhouse, his
wounds treated, and in a few weeks he was
removed to the family home in Carlisle, Illinois,
where he eventually recovered to return to his
duties on the stage line. The company hands, how­
ever, had decided to settle things their own way.
While Slade was being doctored, they agreed the
world would be better rid of cowards. They tossed
a rope over a beam trussed between two large
freight wagons, put a noose around Beni’s neck,
and pulled him up. It was at this moment that Ben
Ficklin, general superintendent of the line, rode
into the station—in time to cut Jules down before life was extinct. Hearing the story of Slade’s shooting, Ficklin, because there was no legal tribunal at hand, ordered Beni to leave the country or be hanged by an informal court. He took the offer and fled. But he hadn’t reckoned on Slade’s terrible vengeance.

It came in August 1861, two years after the shooting scrape. Slade was riding east on the stage from Rocky Ridge to his home at Horse Shoe, some forty miles west of Fort Laramie in present Wyoming. He had heard Jules Beni was driving stock out of Denver and would be crossing the Sweetwater Division. Slade had been told, too, that if Beni saw him first, he likely would be ambushed. So Slade and a small party of Overland hands waited for Beni and in a running gunfight shot and wounded him.

There are various accounts of what took place next, Slade’s friends denying them, and his enemies swearing they were true. But popular history holds that Slade ordered Beni tied to a corral fence and spent the better part of a day drinking and shooting the unfortunate captive to death by degrees. When he satisfied himself that Beni’s murderous attack on him had been repaid, he put an end to it with a fatal shot, and in a final act of vengeance cut off the dead man’s ears. The Overland Stage Company, which employed him, and a military tribunal at Fort Laramie, the nearest for fifteen hundred miles, exonerated Slade after he reported the shooting.

He became more troublesome than ever after that. His reputation blackened with each succeeding tale, such as how he responded to emigrant complaints seeking lost or stolen livestock by confronting a rancher he suspected of rustling and opening fire through a doorway, killing three ranch hands and wounding a fourth. Stories of hanging men and of innumerable assaults, shootings, and beatings ultimately took their toll with the Overland Company. His violent behavior—he was fond of shooting canned goods off grocery shelves—brought about his discharge from the line.

Such was the reputation he took with him to Virginia City, Idaho Territory, in the spring of 1863. There were problems in that part of the country that were to have a devastating effect on Jack Slade. A gang of desperadoes had been successful in robbing gold shipments with impunity in the region and had reached a point at which a vigilance committee had been organized to deal with the situation. It had been discovered that the leader of the outlaws was the sheriff, Henry Plummer, himself. And the vigilantes set out to correct the matter. They began hanging men suspected of being in league with the Plummer gang. And on January 14, 1864, strung up five at once.

After the summary executions, the vigilantes, considering their work accomplished, having freed the territory of highwaymen and murders, established a provisional court to try future offenders by judge and jury. Jack Slade found himself high on the list of community undesirables. It had become a common occurrence for him to take Virginia City by storm; he and his friends would gallop through its main streets, “-shooting and yelling like red devils, firing their revolvers, riding their horses into stores and destroy the goods within,” while insulting all who stood in their way. Slade had never been accused of murder or even suspected of robbery in the territory. His lawlessness while drunk and his defiance of civil authority led to the belief that as he had killed men in other places, he would, unless he was checked in his wild career, commit the same deeds in Virginia City.

After one of his all-night carouses had made the town a pandemonium—and presumably he had displayed his now infamous shriveled “Jules’s ear” to patrons of the saloons he frequented—a warrant was issued for his arrest on disturbing the peace charges. Slade reacted in expected fashion. He seized the writ, tore it into bits, stamped on it in fury, and set out with a loaded Derringer in search of the judge. The vigilance committee went into emergency session.

One of its principal men was John Xavier Beidler (known simply as X. Beidler among friends), who in his own career had been a store clerk, prospector, pack train operator, freighter, deputy U.S. marshal, and stagecoach shotgun guard and was known for having backbone, despite being scarcely taller than a rifle. On one occasion in Kansas, Beidler was with a party that chased a gang of border ruffians into a blacksmith shop. For want of lead, the posse loaded a small howitzer with printer’s type and fired. Those not killed, he said, “had to pick the type from the bodies of their comrades, and that is the way they first learned to read.”

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Of Slade, Beidler said, “We communed on many occasions as friends. He was an honest man and did not like a thief, but he was a very dangerous man when drinking.” And Slade had been drinking a great deal. With him on the loose and threatening to shoot the deputy and the judge, Beidler made one last effort to avoid what he knew was coming. He asked Slade’s friend Jim Kiskadden to take Slade home, that a party of miners were headed for town with the intention of carrying out the vigilance committee’s order.

Slade reluctantly turned his horse around and began riding out, when he spotted his quarry near a store. With a gun in each hand, he began an insulting tirade against the judge, the deputy, and the store owner, P. S. Pfouts, who also was the president of the vigilantes. At that moment, the miners hove into view with Captain James Williams, a vigilante, at their head. The sight sobered Slade immediately; his only response, “My god!” Williams informed him he had just one hour to live, and if he had any business to attend to, “he had better do it.” Beidler later remarked that if Slade had ridden out when he was told, he would not have been hanged.

A group was sent to find a place of execution and decided on an empty beef scaffold. A noose was thrown over it, and Beidler said, “When Slade’s hour expired . . . he expired with it.” Standing on the boxes beneath the scaffold with the rope around his neck, he pleaded for his life. The crowd responded, “Time’s up.” Williams ordered, “Do your duty,” and boxes were kicked away, plunging Slade into the abyss of death, for having disturbed the peace of Virginia City.

When Virginia Slade, who had been summoned from the ranch some dozen miles distant, rode into the city, she discovered to her horror she was too late. Her husband had been removed to a nearby store, his clothing arranged and prepared for burial. It was March 11, 1864. The bereaved widow cursed the town, took her husband’s body home in a tin-lined coffin, filled, it was said, with a keg of whiskey. She swore he would never be buried in this “damned territory,” and shipped the remains to Salt Lake City with instructions for the coffin to be transferred to an eastbound stage for Illinois.

By the time the roads cleared and the stage reached Utah, it was mid-July, and Virginia Slade’s instructions had become confused. Slade’s body was transferred to the Salt Lake City Cemetery and buried in the Stranger’s Lot, “to be removed to Illinois in the fall.” But no one ever came for Jack Slade. And today his remains—and the whiskey that proved his undoing—still await the stage for Carlisle.

**Creating Camp Douglas**

United States troops ordered to Utah from California during the Civil War were intended to protect the overland trail from Indian depredations, but they instead made it their business to keep a sharp eye on Brigham Young and the Mormons. The founding of Fort Douglas in 1862 on the east bench of Salt Lake City by Colonel Patrick E. Connor and his California Volunteers was the last thing Young wanted, and the incident is riddled with ironies long forgotten in the century and more since.

For instance, when Shoshoni war parties had raided the overland mail route between the North Platte and Fort Bridger with relative impunity that spring, and it had become apparent that President Abraham Lincoln would have to take action, Young wired Washington: “The militia of Utah are ready and able . . . to take care of all the Indians . . . and protect the mail line.” It was Young’s idea that his offer would be seen as a logical answer to the situation and no federal forces would be necessary—what with the Union husbanding its troops to face Southern armies. But Brigham Young was no longer governor of Utah and could not deal directly with the federal government. He had been replaced by Alfred Cumming, who, in turn, had resigned in 1861 to join the Confederacy.
John Dawson of Indiana was then appointed chief executive of the territory. He had barely settled in before becoming embroiled in a scandal that sent him packing just six weeks into his term. Next up was Stephen Harding, another Indianan, who arrived in July 1862 just as private citizen Young was wiring Abraham Lincoln his offer to provide militia. Lincoln was well aware of the church leader’s power and influence. He understood that while Young had not been governor since 1857, the mantle of that office rested invisibly, but securely, on Brigham’s shoulders. The Mormon people would listen only to him. And President Lincoln also knew that Young knew it.

Lincoln authorized him to raise, equip, and arm one company of cavalry for ninety days. Young acted within an hour of receiving his answer. The commander of the militia company was to be Lot Smith—the shrewd guerilla leader of the recent Utah War, that standoff between Brigadier General Albert Sidney Johnston’s Utah Expedition and the Mormon Nauvoo Legion that resulted in the establishment of Camp Floyd west of Provo. (Camp Floyd, its name changed to Fort Crittenden because Secretary of War John B. Floyd had defected to the South, was by 1862 deactivated.) The irony in Lot Smith’s appointment was its complete turnaround from the days
when he raided and burned government supply wagons near Fort Bridger. Now he was charged with protecting U.S. property at all costs. In the long run, Young’s ploy failed, for feisty Patrick E. Connor was on the march for Great Salt Lake Valley and nothing would prevent it. There was a bit of a fuss that October as Connor’s five companies of infantry and two troops of cavalry entered Fort Crittenden. That was where the citizens of Great Salt Lake City wanted the flinty Irishman to station his command, but Connor had no intention of being forty miles from civilization. There were rumors that the dread “Danites,” the so-called Destroying Angels, would prevent Connor from crossing the Jordan River on the outskirts of the city, thus keeping the federal force at a distance.

The challenge—though nonexistent—suited Connor just fine. He had been looking for an excuse to justify marching his men more than seven hundred miles on outpost duty. The colonel let it be known he would cross over the Jordan “If hell yawned below him.” He crossed the river that afternoon without incident, and the following morning struck out due north for the city. But let T. B. H. Stenhouse, who was there, describe the scene: “On the 29th of October, 1862, with loaded rifles, fixed bayonets and shotted cannon, Colonel Connor marched the Volunteers into Salt Lake City, and proceeded ‘to the bench,’ directly east of the city. There, at the base of the Wasatch Mountains, they planted the United States flag, and created Camp Douglas.” In a footnote to his book, The Rocky Mountain Saints, Stenhouse remarked, “Connor could not possibly have selected a better situation for a military post, and certainly no place could have been chosen more offensive to Brigham. The artillery have a perfect and unobstructed range of Brigham’s residence, and with their muzzles turned in that direction, the Prophet felt awfully annoyed.”

Connor named the new camp after recently deceased “Little Giant” Stephen A. Douglas. The following January, Connor ordered his command into the field to punish Indians in the Bear River area near present Preston, Idaho. What ensued
was a massacre of Shoshonis with the toll numbering from 224 to 350, depending on the source. Connor lost 14 dead and scores wounded; he gained a promotion and a reputation as an Indian fighter.

It was after word later arrived at Camp Douglas that Connor had been promoted to brigadier general for his Bear River campaign that exuberant members of his regiment loaded the howitzers with powder and wadding and fired an eleven-gun salute in his honor, rudely awakening Brigham Young. Although express riders were dispatched to rally available fighting men to protect their leader from what they perceived as an “unprovoked military bombardment,” the record is silent regarding Young’s comments on learning the true cause of the artillery barrage. Fort Douglas stands much as it did 135 years ago, mute testimony to Utah’s frontier heritage.

THE DISAPPEARANCE OF JOHN BAPTISTE

The violent deaths of three Mormon desperados at the hands of the law caused a considerable stir in Great Salt Lake City in 1862, yet it was mild compared to the shock value of the aftermath, which began with the arrest of a serial grave robber and ended with the discovery of a headless skeleton three decades later.

A posse had tracked Lot Huntington, John P. Smith, and Moroni (“Rone”) Clawson to Faust’s Mail Station, twenty-two miles west of Fort Crittenden (old Camp Floyd). Huntington was wanted on charges of assaulting former Governor John W. Dawson at Ephraim Hanks stage station in Mountain Dell between Little and Big Mountains east of the city three weeks earlier and additional charges of stealing a cash box from an Overland Mail Company employee two weeks later. Smith was also named in the theft of the cash box. Clawson was charged with participating in the beating of the governor.

All three were headed for California when the posse, led by Orrin Porter Rockwell, caught up with them. Huntington resisted and Rockwell killed him. The other two surrendered. Back in the city, Rockwell turned his prisoners over to police and was tending to his team of horses when gunfire exploded down the street in the direction the outlaws had been taken. At the scene minutes later he found a policeman standing over the bodies of Smith and Clawson. “They tried to escape,” the constable explained.

Both outlaws were laid to rest in the city cemetery, and since no one claimed Clawson’s body, he was buried in potter’s field at city expense. A few days later relatives arranged for his reburial in the family plot in Draper. Then, the unthinkable. When the coffin was opened, the body was naked.

George Clawson, a bitter and indignant brother of the deceased, poured out his anger to Henry Heath, a Salt Lake policeman. “That’s a terrible thing to do—to bury a man like that.” Momentarily taken aback, Heath rejoined with: “No such thing! No pauper ever had better or cleaner burial clothing than ‘Rone.’ I bought them myself!” There could be but one answer, and neither man could bring himself to put it in words. But Heath could, and did, begin an investigation, one that would send a wave of horror through the Mormon community. With Probate Judge Elias Smith’s blessing, Heath with several other officers questioned cemetery sexton, Jesse C. Little, who gave them the name of John Baptiste, for nearly three years the cemetery’s gravedigger.

Baptiste’s wife answered the door of their home on Third Avenue. John was at work, she said, but the officers were welcome to come inside and talk. “There were numerous boxes of clothing stacked around,” Heath recalled in an 1893 interview with the Deseret News. “Imagine our shock and surprise when we discovered these were the funeral
robes of people buried in the city cemetery for several years past." The discovery held a special horror for Heath, who but a short time before had buried "an idolized daughter . . . I feared that her grave, too, had been desecrated and that her funeral shroud was among the motley, sickening heap of flesh-soiled linen we found in the grave-digger's hut."

Heath's "investigation" took a desperate turn. He and his fellow officers set out for the cemetery, but the grim-faced policeman now had murder in his heart: "In my breast rankled the unconquerable determination to kill him there and then should my suspicions be confirmed." Confronting the man, Heath accused him outright of grave robbing, and a terrified Baptiste fell to his knees and sobbed that he was innocent. "Liar!" Henry Heath, shouting, "We found the clothes," became uncontrollable in his rage.

"I choked the wretch into a confession while he begged for his life as a human being never plead before. I dragged him to a grave near my daughter's and pointing to it, inquired: 'Did you rob that grave?' His reply was 'Yes.'

"Then directing his attention to the mound which covered my child's remains I repeated the question with bated breath and with the firm resolve to kill him should he answer in the affirmative.

"'No, no, not that one!'

"That answer saved the miserable coward's life."

If it is true that bad news travels fast, word of Baptiste's arrest flashed like lightning through the city and its environs. The boxes of funeral clothing along with a cache of jewelry and other baubles found in the suspect's home were brought to the county courthouse to be displayed in hopes of identifying the owners. The business of putting Baptiste safely behind bars was another matter. Constables had difficulty getting him to the county jail in one piece. Had the people gotten to him, he would have been lynched outright, an officer remarked. Another officer recognized the broadcloth Prince Albert suit Baptiste was wearing. A storekeeper named Alexander Carpenter, deceased these two and one-half years from the lethal effects of a bullet fired by one Thomas H. Ferguson, was the last owner of that particular suit—in fact, he had been buried in it.

Baptiste's interrogation now began in earnest. Wilford Woodruff made note in his journal that Baptiste admitted plundering graves for more than two years but that he could not accurately estimate how many he had robbed. He said the devil was in him, which I think was true, Woodruff added. "He said his only motive was to sell the clothing," Woodruff wrote.

Police took the man to the cemetery to identify individual graves he had looted, but so many spectators gathered that Baptiste refused to continue after having identified but a dozen. They will kill me, he said, pointing to the muttering crowd. Take me back to jail. He was bundled off in a wagon to screen him from "excited, indignant people" and returned to his cell. This ghoul, who dug graves by day and prowled without conscience among the dead at night, greatly feared death itself.

Policeman Albert Dewey described him as "the most singular human being I ever knew in my life." He hoarded the clothes of the dead about his premises as a miser would his gold, Dewey said. It was not true though that Baptiste sold his plunder to secondhand dealers, contradicting Woodruff's observation; actually the grave robber seldom disposed of any and kept careful watch over his "ill-gotten gains." Baptiste used his victims' coffins for kindling in the winter, Dewey added.

The personal effects were exhibited at the courthouse; long lines of citizens streamed passed the piles of clothing. "There lay the grave clothes of fifty persons or more, some 20 pairs of little children's stockings [60 pairs of children's shoes] and clothing of all ages, male and female which that man had stripped from the bodies of Saints & Sinners," Woodruff confided to his journal. Woodruff also was apprehensive that he might discover something of his own deceased child among the remnants on display.

Baptiste's background was as addled as his behavior. In the 1860 census, his place of birth was listed as Ireland, while Woodruff marked him as having been born in Venice, Italy, in 1814; and Heath, who interrogated Baptiste, said he was a Frenchman who came to America from Australia. "Killing is too good for him," was Brigham Young's response when told of the ghoul's arrest and the extent of his crimes. It was to be a prophetic observation.

Elias Smith, editor of the Deseret News as well as probate judge, had written of Baptiste in his
journal for January 27: “The monster was arrested and placed in jail, otherwise the populace would have torn him to pieces, such was the excitement produced by the unheard of occurrence.” Then, on February 1: “I had Baptiste out of his cell and heard his statements as to how he came to engage in the business of robbing the dead and his confession as to the extent to which he had carried the operation . . . he had robbed many graves, but how many he could not or would not tell.”

Here then was a quandry for the judge. What Baptiste had done and confessed to was a heinous crime, a despicable crime, no question of that. Woodruff at one point—as the parent of a recently deceased child—had fumed that Baptiste had committed one of the most “Damnably, diabolical, satanical, hellish sacrileges . . . ever known or recorded in the history of man.” Some guessed he had violated as many as three hundred graves. But fury and anger aside, Baptiste had committed a felony, not a capital crime. Despite the outraged populace, the grave robber had done nothing punishable by death under the law.

With Elias Smith’s brief journal note, John Baptiste disappears from the record, public and private—at least from recoverable accounts. To comfort his troubled flock, Young, speaking in the Salt Lake Tabernacle a week later, reassured them that Baptiste’s crimes “did not injure the dead in the morning of the resurrection . . . all of the dead will be clothed in the morning of the resurrection no matter how they are buried. As to the punishment of the man Baptiste, to shoot or hang him would not satisfy my feelings at all.” What Young suggested was banishment: “I would make him a fugitive and a vagabond upon the earth. That would be my sentence.”

The church leader had already spoken of the matter in private. He told Woodruff that Baptiste ought to be branded as a robber of the dead and “cropped” and placed on Miller’s (Fremont) Island—turned out of the community and told if he ever came back he would be killed. That would be a fitting sentence, Young said. Here again the story becomes confused. Dewey was one of the police assigned to take Baptiste to the island. “We had to promise we wouldn’t kill him.” The “branding,” according to Dewey, took the form of an indelible ink tattoo across the forehead: Branded For Robbing The Dead.

Dale L. Morgan wrote that Heath remembered Baptiste was kept in jail three weeks, but Morgan thought it was more likely three months. Dewey recalled in later years that the prisoner was taken to the island in “early spring when the lake was very low.” Dewey also insisted there was no “ball and chain or gyves [shackles]” of any kind. The question of mutilation was not raised. It is significant, however, that Wilford Woodruff, who, as a confidante of Brigham Young, was in a position to know of such things, would mention that Baptiste had been “cropped.” That phrase to a cattle rancher means to earmark, or notch the ears; but it had yet another more sinister connotation on the frontier. There are historians who speculate that Baptiste lost more than pieces of his ears to the knives of vengeful Utahns.

The police took him to Antelope Island, where it had been arranged that boatmen would convey Baptiste five miles north to Fremont Island. There the surrounding lake water was deeper and the ghoul was less likely to make an easy escape. The island served as a pasture for cattle, and, according to Dewey, two Davis County stockmen, Henry and Dan Miller, had constructed a shanty and stocked it with provisions for herders. In August, Dan Miller visited the island and discovered that Baptiste had helped himself to some provisions and torn down the cabin, apparently to build a raft. He also had killed a two-year-old heifer.

At that point, Morgan says, Baptiste vanishes from the realm of ascertainable fact. He simply disappears. But that disappearance leaves behind a “whole train of provocative possibilities.” Nearly thirty years would pass before a party of duck hunters found a human skull at the mouth of the Jordan River where it empties into the Great Salt Lake. The hunters brought their grisly find to the city and gave it to R. G. Taysum, a Salt Lake Herald writer, who reported the discovery. An unsuccessful search was made for the rest of the skeleton. Three years later, John Winegar Jr., hunting in the same area, stumbled across the arms, legs, ribs, and vertebrae of a human skeleton, but no skull. Around one of the leg bones was an iron clamp and chain; at the end of the chain, an iron ball.

In a mildly sensational account, the Herald recounted—not too accurately—the gist of the 1862
episode and stated the skeleton was “undoubtedly” that of Baptiste. This seemed to aggravate the rival Deseret News, which huffed, “it is better to hear and shudder over facts than fables.” Then, quoting “reliable sources,” the News went on to publish interviews with the two retired policemen, Heath and Dewey, who in turn concluded that since Baptiste was not shackled, the skeleton probably was that of a penitentiary prisoner who may have escaped in irons years after Baptiste’s banishment. However, use of the ball and chain was not that prevalent, even in the territorial penitentiary, and escapes in shackles rare. More likely is the possibility that the skeleton was indeed that of Baptiste, who may have made it to the Jordan outlet on a makeshift raft before he perished of exhaustion or drowning. As for the skull, it could have been knocked free in later years by floating debris on the river.

More strange is the total absence of a public record on the prisoner. A painstaking search of Salt Lake County probate court minutes and docket books as well as county probate files and the territorial penitentiary warden’s office records fails to disclose even a mention of the man. As Morgan cogently remarked in his The Great Salt Lake:

The whole episode is almost unparalleled in Mormon history. The Deseret News of 1862 had absolutely nothing to say of Baptiste—nothing but the stenographic report of Brigham’s sermon. . . . What of the people who thronged the courthouse; what of the furor that gripped the city? How was it that a newspaper could pass such matters by?

And how is it Baptiste could be jailed—for weeks, admittedly; for months, almost for a certainty—and leave no trace in the criminal records? How could he be given a judicial hearing and not leave so much as a shadow upon the records of the court?

And who, finally, could take upon himself the responsibility for sentencing a man, without trial, to be marooned upon a desert island?

Folklore and history alike have turned their face from Baptiste. His story itself has almost sunk from sight. He is a presence on a lost page of history, the only specter of the Great Salt Lake.

ARTEMUS WARD AND ANOTHER “WILDE” VISITOR TO UTAH

As THE CROSSROADS OF THE WEST, SALT LAKE City in the nineteenth century found itself playing host to some odd celebrities—from comics to tragedians, even the occasional aesthete. But for individuality none could match Artemus Ward and Oscar Wilde.

Ward, the stage name for Charles Farrar Browne, has been described as Abraham Lincoln’s favorite funny man and Mark Twain’s mentor. He was irrepressible, simply incapable of letting a straight line pass unmolested. He was a newspaperman.

Though he made his reputation by creating the persona of a semiliterate sideshowman he called Artemus Ward, Browne actually was a young man of considerable elegance, intelligence, and sophistication. By the early 1860s he was editor of New York’s Vanity Fair. And it can be said he was the first of the stand-up comedians. He came to prominence while writing a regular column for the Cleveland Daily Plain Dealer in which he conceived the character of Artemus Ward, describing his fictional adventures in letters from various towns and cities visited by a sideshow. In a blizzard of bad grammar and misspellings, “Artemus” would write of touring with “wild beests, snails and wax figgers.”

Browne himself was described by a Cleveland contemporary as “young, tall, slender, and cheerful in manner.” Another said he was “tall and thin, his face aquiline; his carriage buoyant, his demeanor joyous and eager.” But his mood would vary as a roller coaster, from high-flying exuberance to such fits of depression he was sometimes afraid to be left alone at night. In essence, a typical journalist.

His newspaper columns were so popular that in 1861 he was persuaded to take to the stage as a
lecturer and by November of that year had thought out the approach for Artemus Ward as a speaker. His “monologue” was not so much what he said, but how he said it. And though there is no written transcript of that fateful debut in Boston, it is enough to say the audience—surprised by this serious young man who seemed to have such difficulty lecturing—was kept in a constant roar of laughter.

By 1864 Artemus Ward was in huge demand both as a writer and lecturer. He was a show business celebrity. His humorous writings were widely circulated. In 1862, however, he wrote about Brigham Young and the Mormons an entirely fictional spoof that convulsed its readers and added to Ward’s celebrity. Because Ward had not actually been to Utah, that satire would come back to haunt him.

As the Civil War battled on, Ward hit upon the notion of a western tour. He persuaded his business manager, E. P. Hingston, to accompany him to California (by steamer via the isthmus of Panama) then return overland “across the Plains and do the Mormons as we return.” Against his better judgment, Hingston agreed. And the dead of winter 1863-64 found the two easterners in a stagecoach, armed to chattering teeth against hostile Paiutes who were burning overland stations, bound for Great Salt Lake City.

It was a precarious journey, but the intrepid travelers made it through safely. Then Ward heard that “a certain humorous sketch of mine, written some years before, had greatly incensed the Saints . . . and my reception at the new Zion might be unpleasantly warm.” Hingston strolled the city to get a sense of the atmosphere and returned to their Salt Lake House rooms, thanking God he never wrote against the Mormons himself.” There is a prejudice against Artemus Ward, Hingston reported gloomily, and advised the performer to stay indoors. “He has heard that the Mormons thirst for my blood and are on the look out for me. Under these circumstances, I keep in.”

They contacted T. B. H. Stenhouse, an Englishman and Latter-day Saint who had Brigham Young’s ear. Stenhouse, an old newspaperman himself, allayed Ward’s anxiety “in regard to having my swan-like throat cut by the Danites, but thinks my wholesale denunciation of a people I had never seen was rather hasty.” Stenhouse read aloud a paragraph which Ward had written, and to which the Saints objected: “I girded up my Lions [sic] and fled the Seen. I Packt up my duds and left Salt Lake, which is a 2nd Sodum and Germorer, inhabited by as theavin’ & onprincipled a set of retchis as ever drew Breth in eny spot on the Globe.” Ward swallowed hard and pleaded that it was a purely burlesque sketch, that the strong paragraph should not be interpreted literally at all. “The Elder didn’t seem to see it in that light, but we parted pleasantly.”

After a bout with mountain fever which put him down for two weeks, Ward asked for and was granted an interview with Brigham Young to seek approval for a performance in the Salt Lake Theatre. Young made no allusion to the Mormon story Ward had written, and the okay was given for a “comic oration.” What he said is not reported (the Deseret News was in the throes of a periodic newsprint shortage and suspended publication from December 1863 through March 1864). But Ward noted that the performance was a sellout and mentioned that among his box office receipts for the night were

- 4 bushels of potatoes,
- 2 bushels of oats,
- 2 hams,
- 1 live pig (Hingston chained him in the box office),
- 1 wolf-skin,
- 1 firkin of butter, and so forth.

Artemus Ward and the Mormons parted company in mid-February, and Ward returned to the East, to write more about his visit to Zion. Charles Farrar Browne died while on tour in England March 6, 1867, at the age of thirty-three, the victim of apparent pulmonary tuberculosis.

Utah’s reception for Dublin-born British writer Oscar Wilde in 1882 was somewhat less frenetic. Wilde (born Fingal O’Flahertie Wills) had gained a reputation for brilliant wit, studied aestheticism (sensitivity to art and beauty), which was to dominate his life, and was a minor celebrity when he made his American tour. His success with novels (The Picture of Dorian Gray) and plays (The Importance of Being Earnest) came later. As did his notorious lawsuit against the marquis of Queensbury for libel and subsequent prison term at hard labor for homosexuality.
Billed at the Salt Lake Theatre April 10, 1882, Wilde was to speak on the subject: “Art Decoration, Being the Practical Application of the Aesthetic Theory to Every-Day Home Life and Ornamentation.” Salt Lakers who attended the performance didn’t know what to make of the lecturer. And the Salt Lake Herald reporter who covered the event devoted more than two columns of front page space to saying as much. It was not a rave review.

The large attendance at the lecture, he said, was due to curiosity. Wilde, he said, is on the whole a jolly good fellow, sharp as a whip, and has enough sense to know how the ducats can best be seduced from the astute American. His costume struck the journalist as “not entirely favorable.” Wilde was dressed in “a black velvet coat somewhat approaching the conventional claw hammer in style, black velvet vest, ruffles at the throat, breast and wrists, black knee breeches, black stockings, and low pumps with pointed toes and silver buckles.” The lecture delivery was “as odd and unpleasant to the ear as his appearance to the eye.” His style was no more monotonous than the delivery, and there was a total absence of gesture, though he occasionally pulled out his handkerchief or affectionately disturbed his long straight tresses, remarked the critic.

In closing his fifty-minute lecture, Wilde told his audience, “Let there be no flower in your meadows that does not wreathe its tendrils around your pillars; no little leaf in your Titan forests that does not lend its form to design; no curving spray that does not live forever in carven arch or window of marble; no bird in your air that is not given the iridescent wonder of its color, the exquisite curves of its flight, to make more precious the preciousness of simple adornment; for the voices that have their dwelling in sea and mountain are not the chosen music of liberty only, or the sole treasure of its beauty.” Commented the critic, “a mere recognition of the close of the lecture was conveyed by the brief and short-lived applause.”

And so, in another time, did Artemus Ward and Oscar Wilde make their marks in Utah.

THE DESERET ALPHABET

In 1869, youngsters in the Utah public school system were being taught a second written language. It wasn’t Spanish and it wasn’t Latin. It was Deseret.

The new language had an alphabet of thirty-eight characters and was an outgrowth of a frustrating effort by the board of regents of the University of Deseret (today’s University of Utah) to simplify English. Failing that, the regents decided instead to “invent an entirely new and original set of characters.” The Deseret Alphabet was the result.

Just why the project was undertaken at all is still a matter of some dispute, but at least one western historian has theorized that greatly expanded missionary activity on the part of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in the 1850s may have precipitated for Brigham Young, governor of Utah and president of the church, a pressing need for revision of the language. Alone in the Great Basin save for the occasional trapper and trading post, the Mormon settlements were swelling with converts from Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Germany, and France, as well as from that “greatest mission field of all, the British Isles,” wrote the late scholar and historian Dale L. Morgan. “These converts presented difficult problems of assimilation. If they were to be knit into the Kingdom of God, they should have to learn to speak and write a common language,” Morgan said. And that’s what Young set out to do.

In October 1853 the board of regents appointed a committee of three—Parley P. Pratt, Heber C. Kimball, and George D. Watt (an accomplished Pitman shorthand reporter or “phonologist”)—to “prepare a small school-book in characters founded on some new system of orthography whereby the spelling and pronunciation of
the English language might be made uniform and
easily acquired." In the simplest of terms, the com-
mittee was to streamline English.

Three months later the committee reported a
setback; it had despaired of reworking English and
instead had opted to "invent an entirely new and
original set of characters." An impossible task? Not
so. By January 19, 1854, the *Deseret News* was able
to report the university regents, in company with
the governor (Brigham Young) and heads of
departments, were adopting a new alphabet of
thirty-eight characters. With minor variations, the
final version was the alphabet determined for use
in the schools.

But "language" was little more than a code.
For an individual to be proficient in Deseret would
require a measure of proficiency in English since it
was based on the sounds found in English gram-
mar. And it was crude, this "shorthand language."
For instance, the Deseret characters (which cannot
be reproduced by a conventional typewriter) for
the First Reader's initial lesson are translated
"Lesn I" and, for the heading, "L u urn [Learn] to
[to] ur e d [read] woo el [well]." The *ur* in the third
word is to provide the "r" sound in English. The *e*
given an "ee" sound, and the *d* is a "d". Makes
one wonder why the regents and Brigham Young
pursued this as they did.

Nevertheless, the regents met in February
1868 and voted to petition the legislature for
$10,000, then to send a practical printer to the East
and have fonts of type cast and cut for the alpha-
bet, and to "publish and import this season, spelling books, primers, readers, &c., to be intro-
duced immediately among our children, and so
continue from year to year, until we have pub-
lished in that alphabet the cream of all knowledge
relating to theology, science, history, geography,
and all necessary educational works."

By April Orson Pratt was engaged in prepar-
ing the first and second readers to be printed in
Deseret. The slim volumes—*The Deseret First Book*
rung to thirty-six pages and the *The Deseret Second
Book* to seventy-two—were illustrated with engrav-
ings from *Willson's Readers* (with permission from
the publisher). *Willson's Readers* were gaining popu-
ularity across America, though they had not yet
outperformed *McGuffey's Readers* in 1868. In total,
twenty thousand copies of each Deseret reader
were printed.

Brigham Young told church members at the
LDS General Conference in October that thou-
sands of the primers were on their way to public
schools. They were offered for sale in Utah at fif-
teen cents and twenty cents each. (In the 1960s the
LDS Church sold remaining copies of the primers
for twenty-five cents each, and today the two little
books in good condition will cost at least $130 a
set from rare book dealers.) But the books did not
take hold. For nearly twenty years Brigham Young
strve to persuade his followers that the new
alphabet would restore purity to the language, yet
there was the inherent flaw in its inception, having
been developed as it was to a degree from Pitman
shorthand and by individuals unfamiliar with the
nuances of orthography and unprepared for the
complexities of language. Explaining this "genuine
difficulty," Morgan pointed out that the alphabet
could be learned, "but except in communication it
was functionless. It provided no access to the liter-
ature of the world, and provided no substitute for
that literature."

More cynical was the editorial comment
some ten years earlier in a *San Francisco Globe*
issue of December 15, 1857, after a sample of Deseret
had crossed the paper's desk:

*The Mormons . . . are a progressive people. They
not only want more wives than is wholesome, but
more letters to their Alphabet. Letters written
with this Alphabet are as incomprehensible as the
movements of woman or the hieroglyphics of the
Chinese and the Egyptians.

The Mormon alphabet consists of about 40 let-
ters, which have been so arranged and named to
cause the greatest possible annoyance to outsiders.
The Saints not only wish to convert Utah into an
oyster, but to close the shell against all knives
except those found in the vicinity of Great Salt
Lake. The Monnons wish to isolate the "genera-
tion of vipers" which are to succeed them. For
this reason they wish to get up a new alphabet, a new
spelling book, and a new language. The idea is
ingenious, but it will not succeed. To get a new lan-
guage in this country is as difficult as to bore a hole
through the Rocky Mountains with a leather auger.

In the long run, for all the effort and money
that had gone into creating the new language, it
was as troublesome to meld into the mainstream
as the metric system in the 1990s. For schools the
alphabet was impractical, and the general public
was entirely disinterested. And as the years passed, the characters of Deseret disappeared even from the occasional lesson feature in the Deseret News. In all the project resulted in two school primers, *The Deseret First Book* and *The Deseret Second Book*; a 116-page volume of *The Book of Nephi* (published in 1869); a 443-page edition of *The Book of Mormon* (also printed in New York in 1869); and some seventy-two articles in the Deseret News from February 1859 through August 1864.

In July 1877 Orson Pratt was sent to England to investigate the possibility of printing Mormon scriptures in Pitman. With Brigham Young’s death that August, Pratt was called home. As Dale Morgan put it, “Mormon experimentation in alphabetic and orthographic reform never again lifted its head.”