In Another Time
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Utah’s entry into the new century was greeted by a colossal roar. A cataclysmic explosion ripped through a coal mine at Scofield, Carbon County, killing two hundred workers in the most devastating mine disaster to that time in U.S. history. A dynamite blast that ignited dense coal dust throughout Winter Quarters No. 4 was blamed for the calamity. It was a horrible debut to the 1900s, and residents of the fledgling state could only pray the catastrophe was not a howl of dire portent.

With federal confiscation of property no longer a threat to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints because of Wilford Woodruff’s manifesto renouncing polygamy as a doctrine, the state’s economy began to pick up. Utah already could boast of a score of millionaires by 1902, most of whom amassed their fortunes through mining ventures. Among the monied could be found the names of Daniel C. Jackling, Thomas Kearns, Samuel Newhouse, Jesse Knight, David Eccles, William Jennings, Joseph Walker, S. H. Auerbach, A. W. McCune, and Elizabeth Bonnemort.

Reed Smoot was elected to the U.S. Senate but immediately became snarled in a four-year struggle to gain his seat. His opponents contended that being a Mormon apostle would conflict with his duty to defend the Constitution as a senator. Smoot ultimately won the fight and went on to serve until 1932, becoming dean of the Senate.

The Lucin Cutoff was completed across the Great Salt Lake in 1903, and three natural bridges...
“discovered” in southern Utah that year were set aside in 1908 as Natural Bridges National Monument.

The American Party, a new anti-Mormon political organization, carried the Salt Lake City municipal election in 1905 and 1907 but was trounced in 1911 and disappeared from the political scene.

Mining burgeoned with the exploitation of low-grade copper deposits in Bingham Canyon and by 1917 produced ore valued at more than $100 million. The first oil wells were discovered at Virgin in 1907. The Western Pacific Railroad was completed between Salt Lake City and San Francisco the following year, and important dinosaur discoveries near Jensen, Uintah County, were declared a national monument in 1915 and enlarged in 1938.

More and more of Utah’s scenic wonders came to light in these growth years of statehood, and the care and maintenance of these resources became a prime concern. In 1909, Nashja Begay, a Paiute, led an expedition to Rainbow Bridge, a work of nature so astonishing it was declared a national monument before a year had passed.

Recognizing that water has always been the lifeblood of Utah, historians have noted that Elias Adams may have been the first Utahn to realize the value of water storage. He built a dam some three miles east of Layton in 1852 and filled it with water from Adams Canyon. Some sixty years later, Strawberry Reservoir, Utah’s first large reclamation project, was completed, allowing water to be diverted from the Colorado River to the Great Basin.

Beginning in 1915, Utah’s administration took offices in the new State Capitol in Salt Lake City. Unfortunately, it was coincidental to the unwelcome glare of international notoriety brought on by the impending execution of Joseph Hillstrom, a Swedish immigrant and labor organizer for the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW). Hillstrom, a balladeer and songwriter, also was known as Joe Hill. He was convicted of
killing a Salt Lake grocer and his teenage son in a January 1914 robbery. The IWW claimed Hill was framed and began an international outcry that involved the Swedish consul and President Woodrow Wilson in unsuccessful efforts to commute Hill's death sentence; he died before a firing squad on November 19, 1915.

By 1919, passage of the Volstead Act blanketed the nation with prohibition, and a new word, bootlegging, was introduced into the language. Ironically, Utah, which had extended prohibition throughout the state as early as 1917, cast the deciding vote in 1933 to repeal the act, recognizing it to be too unpopular, too expensive, and too unenforceable to continue.

As it completed its first quarter of the new century as a full-fledged state, Utah added newly discovered scenic wonders to its array of tourist attractions: Arches was declared a national monument, as was Hovenweep Prehistoric Indian Ruins. Bryce Canyon, Timpanogos Cave, Cedar Breaks, and Capitol Reef soon followed.

An era of land-speed records began on the Bonneville Salt Flats in the mid-1920s with Ab Jenkins setting twenty-four-hour endurance marks and with a clutch of speed records established by names such as Sir Malcolm Campbell, George Eyston, John Cobb, Tommy Thompson, Athol Graham, Craig Breedlove, Art Arfons, Gary Gabelich, and Stan Barrett. These daredevils etched not only their own names in the history books, but that of Bonneville's famous speedway as well.

KSL radio began broadcasting in 1921. In the late 1920s, Utah native Philo Farnsworth was working on a scientific invention that would earn him the title of the father of television.

William Posey, chief of a small tribe of Paiutes that roamed southeastern Utah at the turn of the century, was mortally wounded in 1923 by a posse in the Comb Wash region of San Juan County. Old Posey was, by some accounts, the last "hostile" Indian killed in the United States.

Heavy industry came in 1926 when Columbia Steel Corporation first operated its blast furnace at the new plant in Ironton, Utah County. Smelting, the state's single most important industry, geared for increased production in the years immediately preceding the start of World War II. By 1940, construction was under way on Wendover Air Base and Hill Field, which in time would become Hill Air Force Base, Utah's largest employer. Utah General Depot and Remington Small Arms plant construction soon followed. In the months after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, work was begun on Kearns Army Base, Dugway Proving Ground, Tooele Ordnance Depot, Deseret Chemical Depot, Bushnell General Hospital (which would in postwar Utah become the Intermountain Indian School), Clearfield Naval Supply Depot, Topaz War Location Center, and the Geneva Steel Works (later to be purchased by U.S. Steel Corporation). Fort Douglas was named headquarters for the Ninth Service Command, and Utah Oil Refinery expanded to meet the war effort. In succeeding years, defense industries burgeoned with the addition of Thiokol and Hercules and reclamation projects including Glen Canyon, Flaming Gorge, and the Central Utah Water projects.

In this time, many GIs and war workers became enamored of the state as a place to live and rear families. They stayed on after Japan's surrender, and a majority of these new residents located in Tooele County and along the Wasatch Front, boosting Utah's population more than 138,000 during this period. It was a tremendous time for home builders and subdivisions. It also was the dawn of the atomic age, and heavy emphasis was placed on the development of nuclear energy; that in turn saw the astonishing uranium boom in southern Utah, the growth of uranium mining in the region, and the attendant frenzy in Salt Lake City money markets over penny uranium stocks. The greater Aneth Oil field was discovered in 1956, and mineral extraction from the brines of the Great Salt Lake brought a large new industrial profile to the lake.

With the election of General Dwight D. Eisenhower as president of the United States, two Utahns were appointed to high office in the federal government. Ivy Baker Priest was named U.S. treasurer and Ezra Taft Benson was named secretary of agriculture. Both appointees served from 1953 to 1961.

And on the darker side, two airliners collided in flight over the Grand Canyon, killing 128 passengers and crew in 1956. For its newspaper coverage under the pressure of deadline, the Salt Lake Tribune won a Pulitzer Prize. Six years later, the Deseret News won a similar award for its coverage of
the murder of Jeanette Sullivan, 41, and the kidnap­
ing of her daughter, Denise, 15, at Dead Horse Point.

Utah came into its own as a travel hub when its municipal air terminal became the Salt Lake City International Airport in 1968. And ironically, Utah, known as the crossroads of the West with the completion at Promontory Summit of the first transcontinental railroad in May 1869, experienced a steady decline in rail passenger service because of automobiles and airlines. Congress’s creation of Amtrak in 1970 was of little help, and by the late 1990s passenger railroad in Utah, as well as the nation, seemed headed for extinction.

Medicine and medical research began making great strides in Utah in the 1960s. Willem J. Kolff, who developed the first artificial kidney using parts of a washing machine and sausage skins in his native Holland in 1944, while it was under German occupation, immigrated to the United States after the war and joined the University of Utah faculty in 1967. He brought with him research on an artificial heart. At the university, Kolff surrounded himself with students and colleagues who shared his interest in artificial organs, including Robert Jarvik and William DeVries, who were instrumental in the first permanent human implant of an artificial heart in Barney Clark at University Hospital December 2, 1982. Kolff at 84 is still actively engaged in artificial-organ research and has received major awards in his field. He was named one of the “100 Most Important Americans of the 20th Century” by Life magazine.

Utah’s laboratory of dreams in the 1990s did produce a nightmare called cold fusion. It bubbled into a tempest in a test tube. The latest frontier being blazed in medical science is genetics research at the University of Utah. Spurred in part by the LDS preoccupation with genealogy, it is growing like the proverbial Mormon family.

Not to be outdone by the great strides being made in the sciences and industry in Utah, the state’s cultural scene enjoyed a revitalization with the construction of a new arts complex in 1979 that included a new Symphony Hall (renamed after famed Utah conductor Maurice Abravanel), the Salt Lake Art Center, the Salt Palace, and Capitol Theatre. Committed first and foremost to acoustic excellence, ground was broken for the concert hall in March 1977, a decade to the day after a similar ceremony launched the initial Salt Palace construction project on West Temple between First and Second South. Restored, the Capitol Theatre on Second South was completed and opened in October 1978, and the art museum occupied by the Salt Lake Art Center opened in May 1979.

It wasn’t art in 1957 when West Jordan’s Gene Fullmer slugged his way to the middleweight championship of the world, but the tenacious mink rancher who had classic bouts with Sugar Ray Robinson and Carmen Basilio is the only Utahn in the International Boxing Hall of Fame.

The 1970s was the dawn of discovery for major sports in Utah. It was a time of evolution for professional basketball from the American Basketball Association’s Utah Stars (1970–75) to the National Basketball Association’s Utah Jazz (1979– ). Sam Battistine and Larry Hatfield transferred the New Orleans Jazz to Salt Lake City in 1979, largely due to the success Denver’s Bill Daniels experienced with the Utah Stars, who won the ABA championship in 1971. But Battistine and Hatfield sold the franchise to Salt Lake automobile dealer Larry Miller, whose enthusiasm as a fan and team owner led him to construct the $66 million Delta Center (19,900 capacity) at 301 South West Temple as an alternative to the Salt Palace, which seated only 12,000. In 1992, two members of the Utah Jazz—Karl Malone and John Stockton—were named to the U.S. basketball squad competing in the Olympic Games. The team went on to win the gold medal. Malone and Stockton were named to the team again for the 1996 games in Atlanta.

On the other side of town and a sporting world away, baseball claimed its place in the hearts of Utah fans, a love affair itself almost a century old, harking to the days in 1879 when the city would close its doors to watch its Deserets thump the visiting San Francisco Athletics 22 to 15, and cheer the losers for committing “only 12 errors.” Triple A baseball was first played at Community Park on Ninth South and West Temple in Salt Lake City; then Derks Field (named for Salt Lake Tribune sports editor John C. Derks) at Thirteenth South and West Temple would host teams known as the Bees, the Padres, and the Gulls. In 1987, the national spotlight turned on a Pioneer League rookie team known as the Salt Lake Trappers, who established an all-time minor-league record by winning twenty-nine consecutive games in one season. Derks gave way to Franklin Quest Field, a city-funded $20 million facility housing the Triple A Salt Lake Buzz, baseball’s refugee from Portland, owned by Joe Buzas. In 1994, the team’s first year, Utah fans set a Pacific Coast League attendance record of 715,000.

Recognition of Utah’s Catholic bicentennial was marked by the largest liturgical service in the state’s history, a solemn Mass celebrated by Bishop Joseph Lennox Federal in the Salt Palace on September 26, 1976, and attended by more than thirteen thousand faithful. It commemorated the advent of the 1776 Dominguez-Escalante expedition from Santa Fe into what is now Utah.

On June 9, 1978, the LDS Church struck down a 148-year-old policy excluding blacks from its priesthood, the result of a “revelation from God.” A letter to church leaders from President Spencer W. Kimball and his two counselors, N. Eldon Tanner and Marion G. Romney, noted that for some time members of the church had been expecting such an announcement and that it had come after many hours of supplication for divine guidance to just that effect. Accordingly, “all worthy male members of the church may be ordained to the priesthood without regard for race or color.”

As Utah grappled with growing pains, a more sinister element of its history could not be ignored. The bad men of this century were discovering new ways to horrify and outrage society. In 1976, Gary Mark Gilmore, a troubled, self-destructive parole felon with thirteen years in reform schools and prisons under his belt, journeyed to Provo to find himself. In so doing, he robbed and killed two people and was sentenced to die under a restored death-penalty law. Thirty-six-year-old Gilmore challenged Utah to make good its threats to put him to death: “Firing squad,” said he, “I did it and I deserve to die. Kill me if you have the guts . . . or let me go!” And thus began a bizarre legal battle waged by capital-punishment opponents to save Gilmore from himself, in spite of himself. On January 17, 1977, little more than nine months from the day he was paroled from Marion, Illinois, a firing squad at Utah State Prison exacted the full measure of the law from Gilmore, the first to be executed in a decade. The aftershock was great. Books were written, movies made, and strident voices cried, “Murder, most foul.” After a few months, the furor spent itself.

While the Gilmore charade was playing out for the nation, a monster was loose. A psychopath named Theodore Robert Bundy was murdering women and girls in a homicidal odyssey across the United States. The handsome one-time law student is believed to have assaulted, raped, and killed at least thirty-six victims in Washington, Colorado, Utah, and Florida before he was caught. His arrest in Granger, Utah, on a traffic violation ultimately led to charges of attempted kidnapping, and authorities began to peel away the layers of his depraved forays. (He confessed to killing eight Utah women, but none of the bodies were ever found.) In succeeding months, he was jailed in Colorado and escaped, finally to be captured in Florida after a savage spree in which two college women and a twelve-year-old child were killed. Bundy, after a sensational court trial, was sentenced and executed in Florida’s electric chair on January 24, 1989, ten years after his conviction.

And there was the owlish Mark W. Hofmann, returned Mormon missionary and rare-book and manuscript dealer, who killed two people with homemade bombs to cover his tracks in a document scam. He mishandled a third bomb and almost killed himself. His nefarious schemes involved rare books and manuscripts, items of historical significance to the LDS Church. Hofmann flummoxed document experts, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the highest Mormon authorities, scholars, businessmen, and historians before he was unmasked as a forger, thief, confidence man.
extraordinaire, and killer. His arrest, trial, and last-minute plea bargain made international headlines. The baby-faced criminal forever tainted the field of historical documents with his deceits. He currently is serving a life sentence at Utah State Prison for the two bomb murders.

A string of unusually wet years attributed to the weather phenomenon known as El Niño triggered widespread flooding and earthflows in Utah in the mid-1980s. The wet spell also caused the Great Salt Lake to rise to a modern historic high of 4,211.85 feet above sea level. The high water submerged the evaporation ponds of two mineral-extraction companies, forced Southern Pacific and Union Pacific railroads to raise and reinforce their tracks, and threatened to spill over Interstates 80 and 15. Utah spent $60 million to build giant pumps to transport excess waters to the barren west desert. The pumps started operating in 1986, just about the time the weather reversed itself and a drought lowered the lake level significantly on its own.

It was also in 1986 that I-80 was completed in Utah and four years later the final segment of I-15 linked the state to the massive transportation network that promised swift and unimpeded travel from coast to coast and border to border. A massive rebuild of I-15 through Salt Lake County began in the mid-1990s with hopes of being ready for the 2002 Olympics in Utah.

In the 1980s and 1990s, Utah’s business profile began a sharp turn upward as a computer-friendly state with a multibillion-dollar future when it became home to such electronic heavyweights as Evans & Sutherland, WordPerfect, Novell, Iomega, Megahertz, and Micron Technology.

Then in 1995, Salt Lake City—after two previous unsuccessful efforts—was awarded the International Olympic Committee bid to be host of the 2002 winter games. Thus Utah, after struggling so long and so hard to enter the twentieth century as forty-fifth state in the Union, will greet the next century playing host to the world for the XX Winter Olympiad.