

Elder Marlin K. Jensen delivering his remarks “The Rest of the Story: Latter-day Saint Relations with Utah’s Native Americans” at the Son’s of Utah Pioneers Sunrise Service in the Salt Lake Tabernacle, July 24, 2010.

The Rest of the Story: Latter-day Saint Relations with Utah's Native Americans

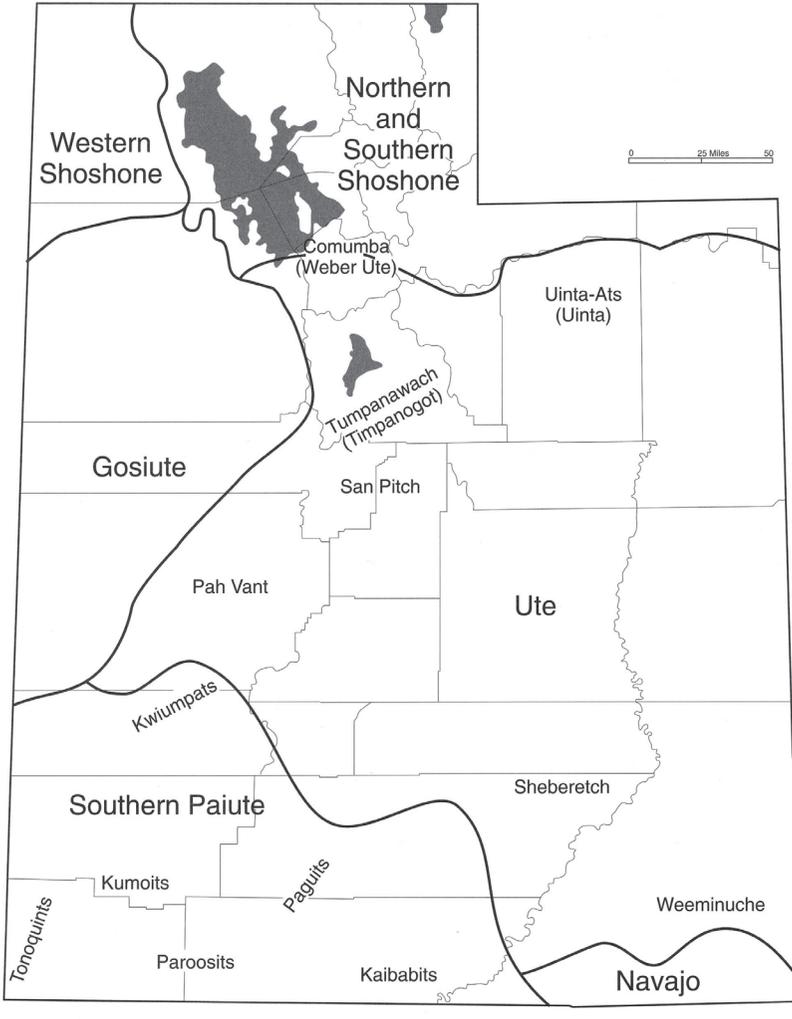
Elder Marlin K. Jensen

The following remarks were delivered at the Sons of Utah Pioneers Sunrise Service in the Salt Lake Tabernacle, July 24, 2010.

On almost every July 24th since 1849 we have commemorated the arrival of the vanguard company of Latter-day Saint pioneers into this Great Salt Lake Valley. That is entirely appropriate. Those resilient and sturdy Saints deserve to be admired and emulated. We ought frequently to pause—as we are doing this morning—to recall and revere their courage and faith in trekking westward to the Great Basin. It is an inspiring and epic story.

There is always much to be gained from remembering our history. Perhaps that's why the Book of Mormon prophet Alma begins his series of soul-searching questions to Church members of his day with the query "Have you sufficiently retained in remembrance the captivity of your fathers?" (Alma 5:6). There is considerable current evidence of interest in our pioneer "fathers" and appropriately, in more recent times, in our pioneer "mothers." The most visited Church history site on the Internet is the Mormon-Overland Travel Site, which is a listing of individuals and companies traveling west to Utah from 1847 to 1868. Even as we are thrilled by the majesty of those whose lives of hardship and devotion we can now hardly comprehend, it behooves us on a day such as this to remember that virtues are not hereditary. They must be earned by each generation in its own time. As President J.

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Map of Utah showing the approximate location of historic Native Americans, published in Thomas G. Alexander, *Utah: The Right Place* (Layton, UT: Gibbs Smith Publisher, 1999), 40.

Reuben Clark eloquently reminded us in 1947 in his masterful talk “Those of the Last Wagon,”

In living our lives let us never forget that the deeds of our fathers and mothers are theirs, not ours; that their works cannot be counted to our glory; that we can claim no excellence and no place because of what they did, that we must rise by our own labor, and that labor failing, we must fail. We may claim no honor, no reward, no respect, nor special position or recognition, no credit because of what our fathers were or what they wrought. We stand on our own feet in our own shoes. There is no aristocracy of birth in this Church; it belongs equally to the highest and the lowliest.¹

Forgotten Part of July 24th

Today, in a departure from traditional Pioneer Day addresses, I wish to point out that often forgotten in our July 24th celebrations is something the late radio newscaster Paul Harvey used to call “The Rest of the Story.” An important and usually overlooked part of the July 24th story is the American Indian perspective on that event. It is seldom given adequate prominence. It begins with the recognition that the Great Salt Lake Valley, at the time of the pioneers’ arrival, was already home to several itinerant bands of American Indians. William Clayton’s journal entry on July 31, 1847, only seven days after Brigham Young’s arrival in the valley, reminds us that the pioneers no more “discovered” the Great Basin than Columbus “discovered” America. When the pioneers appeared, a substantial Indian civilization and culture already existed here. Clayton’s entry reads, “[The Shoshones] appear to be displeased because we have traded with the Utahs and [the Shoshones] say they own this land, that the Utahs have come over the line.”²

The truth of the matter is that the Mormon pioneers had “come over the line” as well. Perhaps only Brigham Young—with his prophetic gifts—could at that moment foresee that the tiny trickle of pioneers coming to the Great Basin would in only a few years grow to a mighty stream of emigrants.

Indian Population when the Pioneers Arrived

If those 1847 pioneers had been blessed with a Google-Earth view of the Great Basin’s Indian population, they would have no doubt been impressed with their new neighbors. Approximately 20,000 Indians then lived in the area now encompassed by Utah’s boundaries.³ Generally speaking, to the north were the Shoshone, to the west the Goshute, in the central and eastern regions the Ute, in the southwest the Paiute, and in the southeast the Navajo.⁴

The Great Basin Landscape

That same high-level glimpse of Utah would have also revealed a mixed Great Basin landscape—mountain ranges, desert regions, and a few fertile valleys. Snow and spring-fed rivers and streams flowed through these valleys on their way to larger rivers, lakes, marshes, and sloughs. Primarily in the valleys, but also in a few more arid locations, usually around water sources where wildlife and vegetation could thrive, were clustered the Indian villages and camps of that time. Though often seasonally on the move to gather food, hunt, and fish, Indians held the land to be religiously sacred and were strongly attached to it. The land and its bounty were economically critical to their existence.

Unfortunately, within the confines of the Great Basin, productive and useful land was scarce. From the day the 1847 pioneers first put their ploughs in the ground, “settlement” for them would mean “displacement” for Indians.

Latter-day Saint Concern for Indians

That consequence wasn’t because the pioneers would be unconcerned about the welfare of their Indian neighbors. Many of the earliest pioneers themselves were a “displaced” people. They had experienced persecution and had involuntarily fled Missouri for Illinois and Illinois for the West. Part of the appeal of the Great Basin as a place of settlement was its isolation and promise of refuge.

There were also doctrinal reasons for the pioneers to view Indians in a favorable light. Indeed, Indians held a distinctive place in Latter-day Saint theology. The Church was barely six months old when the first missionaries to labor with Indians were called to serve. According to the Book of Mormon, Indians were a branch of the House of Israel, and the Lord had made significant promises to them through ancient prophets. These prophecies encouraged a mutually respectful relationship between Saints and Indians. According to Latter-day Saint teachings, neither group would be able to completely fulfill their destiny without the other.

Over time, Brigham Young grew to be an Indian ally. As Church president, and for some years as governor of Utah Territory and superintendent of Indian Affairs, he exerted considerable influence over Indian-settler relations. One of the treasures of the Church History Department archives is a collection of over eighty letters he wrote to Indian leaders during his term as Church president. They provide insight into the positive feelings of his heart concerning Indians. To one Indian leader he wrote: “There [is] no people—no political party, no religious sect—that places the aborigines of this continent so high in the scale of humanity as we do.”²⁵

Original painting (watercolor on paper) of Ute Indian Chief Wakara (Walker) by William W. Major. A note on the bottom of the painting reads: "Taken from Life by W.W. Major Sitting in Council Sept 4 1852." Image courtesy of the Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts. Following the arrival of the Latter-day Saints in the Salt Lake Valley in 1847, Mormon leaders attempted to keep the peace with Wakara and his Ute tribe, but in July 1853, disturbances broke out on both sides, resulting in the Walker War which lasted for about ten months.

Wakara died in 1855.



Two Worlds Converge

The Mormon pioneers and the Great Basin Indians came from different worlds, but after 1847 their futures were intertwined. In the early months after the first July 24th in the valley, Indian-settler relations were peaceful and promising. Some trading occurred, and, unmindful of the cultural implications, the pioneers began to prevent Indian children from being sold into slavery in New Mexico and California by becoming purchasers themselves. When the first winter came, a sizable group of local Indians established a camp near City Creek and the warm springs (on present-day Beck Street) northwest of the chosen townsite.

By the spring of 1849 economic opportunities afforded by the water and land of Utah Valley enticed a number of settlers to venture beyond the point of the mountain at the southern end of the Salt Lake Valley. Fort Utah was established at the mouth of the Timpanogos (now Provo) River on Utah Lake. It was there in early 1850 that tension first arose between Church teachings regarding the destiny of the Indians and the practical realities of settlement. When the pioneers began to occupy and use the best pastures and fisheries and

to displace the Indians, strong objections naturally arose. Feelings escalated, leading to a skirmish later called “the first Indian War,” in which Mormon settlers killed approximately one hundred Indians.⁶

Life at the Individual Level

Despite such deplorable events, most Indians and pioneers worked to find peaceful solutions when conflicts arose. On the individual level the stories of human interaction are often heart-warming, even if told from the white settler perspective.

Velate Richardson, in an interview at age ninety-nine, credited Indians with teaching Mormon pioneers how to survive. Her grandmother, she commented, traveled across the plains to Utah with the Kimball family, married at age thirteen, and had twenty-one children, eighteen of whom she raised. Velate said, “If it hadn’t been for the Indians we wouldn’t have had that big of family. They showed [grandmother] how to live without anything . . . Grandmother praised the Indians. [She said] they wasn’t any meaner than we was.”⁷ Obviously, Velate’s grandmother had learned that all people can have good and bad days, kind and unkind moments.

A story from the diary of Lewis Barney epitomizes the conflict resolution that occurred as two cultures worked to live side by side. It also illustrates the difference in Indian-settler viewpoints that often produced conflict.

In the mid-1850s, near Spanish Fork, white settlers agreed that Indians could glean grain in the fields after the harvest. Because a few Indian women took grain standing in the shocks, some farmers refused to let them glean on their land. After permission had been withdrawn, Lewis writes of this interesting encounter (I note parenthetically that he uses terminology we wouldn’t use today):

It so happened that Several Squaws got on to one of the pieces that the owner refused the privilege. They had gleaned and thrashed about half bushel of wheat before they was discovered by the owner. As soon as he discovered it He went out to them and took their wheat and Scattered it over the ground and order[ed] the Squaws off. They went of[f] to their Camp Crying. I happened to be in the field. Soon after I saw Grosepene, one of the Indian Chiefs, Coming from the wickiups in quite a hurry to wards me. I knew Something was wrong with him. I waited till he Came up. (At this time I Could under Stand a little of the Indians tonge.) He said, “this is our land and this is our water, our grass, our valleys, and this is our wheat. I will have this field and this wheat. Mormon whip my Squaw. Mormons want to do like Mericats; whip kill and take Utah land, Utah water, and Utah grass. you rob our squaws and throw away their wheat. me kill you.” at this he Cocked his rifle.

As his rifle was a long barreled rifle he had to spep [*sic*] back a little so he Could shoot. I was in about 3 feet from him. As soon a[s] he stept back to shoot I Sprung forward and Caught his rifle by the brick And had as good hold of the rifle as the

Indian. he jerked me around and I jerked him around for two or three minutes. I Could not get the gun from him. neither Could he get it from me. Here I had a Struggle with a large and stout Indian for life. after he got out of wind and found I had the best of the scuffle he gave up [and] Stood a minute eyeing me. finely he Said, "let us be ticaboo," and began to laugh. we then agreed to be friends each holding his grip on the gun.

I told him to send the Squaws into the fields and glean all they wanted to and they should not be molested. he then was satisfied and promised to be ticaboo with the mormons. So I made a treaty of peace with the Indian Chief while we Clutched the rifle that was in the hands of the Indian. I then then [*sic*] let go [of] the riffle and he went off to his wickeup Satisfied and Sent the Squaws to the field again to glean. I reported what I had done to the Bishop and requested him to use his influence with the Brethren to let the squaws have the privilege of gleaning in the fields.⁸

This account clearly reveals the differing points of view of settlers and Indians. In the settlers' view, the land was now theirs and the Indians needed permission to go on it and enjoy its fruit. The Indian view was that the land had been and still was theirs; and having given the settlers permission to plant crops, Indians should now rightfully share in the harvest.

Indian-Mormon Relations Evaluated

On balance, it appears that in those early years Indians generally got along better with Mormons than they did with other white men. Indian and Latter-day Saint relations with the United States government provided some common ground. At that time government officials were concerned with the "Mormon question" and the "Indian problem." Some Indians even distinguished between "Mormonees," whom they considered friendly, and other American settlers known as "Merocats."

Turn for the Worse

I think telling the rest of the story requires acknowledging that Indians made sincere and often heroic efforts to absorb the tide of Mormon emigrants and to peacefully and even symbiotically coexist with them. One handcart pioneer wrote, "Indians met us sometimes, and helped pull our carts which was great fun for them."⁹ However, as emigrant numbers reached the tens of thousands and Mormon colonization efforts pushed ever deeper on to Indian lands, sustaining the traditional Indian way of life became difficult. Resources the Indians had relied on for generations diminished, and in time they felt forced to resist and fight for their own survival.

Eventually there was a disintegration of relations. Some Indians offered organized resistance, and the Walker War (1853–54) and the Black Hawk War (1865–68) ensued. As the Utah Territory came more under federal con-

trol, Indian-settler relations deteriorated noticeably and were similar to those of other parts of the West. In the 1870s, federal policy began to provide a more uniform program for Indians, but from a distinctly white perspective. Indian treaties had been the initial policy, but that era was followed by the Reservation Period (1871–87) when Indians were removed from aboriginal lands onto reservations. Next came the Allotment Period (1887–1934), during which the federal government sought to break up reservation lands into assigned plots for individual Indians. This was followed by the Reorganization Period (1934–53), characterized by attempts to establish tribal government by councils acting in accordance with constitutions. This era was followed by the Termination Period (1953–70), when federal legislation was enacted that terminated the existence of some tribes—including Utah’s Paiutes—in an attempt to integrate Indians into mainstream American society. Finally, the Self-Determination Era (1970–94) empowered Indian tribes to create and operate programs serving their own people. Many of these initiatives exist to the present day.¹⁰

The Loss of a Birthright

The mere rehearsal of the history of federal management of Utah’s Indian affairs only adds to the sadness in telling the rest of the story. Regardless of how one views the equities of Indian-Mormon relations in those times, the end result was that the land and cultural birthright Indians once possessed in the Great Basin were largely taken from them. It is important to acknowledge and appreciate the monumental loss this represents on the part of Utah’s Indians—that loss and its 160-year aftermath are the rest of the story. I feel it our duty now—from a distance of 160 years—to work until the rest of the story becomes an integral part of *the* story; until Sagwitch, Wakara, Washakie, and Little Soldier take their appropriate places in Utah’s history books alongside Brigham, Heber, and Parley; until Utah’s history includes Indian history and July 24th commemorates everyone’s contribution to our state’s unique past.

Conclusion

As I prepared these remarks I spoke by telephone with a wonderful young Navajo woman who spent some of her growing-up years with our family. She is now a mother of four, married to a part-Cherokee doctor who practices on the Navajo reservation. She has both bachelor’s and master’s degrees and has served a full-time mission. She is thoughtful, industrious, sensitive, and full of integrity. And yet she frequently encounters prejudice and intolerance—even in Church settings. If we can’t give her—and all like her—their birthright

back, we *can* at least do in our time what God has commanded: “Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them” (Matthew 7:12). For “he inviteth them all to come unto him and partake of his goodness; and he denieth none that come unto him, black and white, bond and free, male and female; and he remembereth the heathen; and all are alike unto God” (2 Nephi 26:33).

In our Pioneer Day celebrations, may we strive to deepen our understanding and appreciation of Indians' roles and seek to treat all people as our own brothers and sisters.

Notes

1. J. Reuben Clark Jr., *Conference Report*, October 1947, 160.
2. George D. Smith, ed., *An Intimate Chronicle: The Journals of William Clayton* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1995), 371.
3. Allan Kent Powell, ed., *Utah History Encyclopedia* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1994), 390.
4. See Robert S. McPherson, “Setting the Stage: Native America Revisited,” in *A History of Utah's American Indians*, Forrest S. Cuch, ed. (Salt Lake City: Utah State Division of Indian Affairs, Utah State Division of History, 2000), 3–24.
5. Brigham Young to Charles Thompson, June 9, 1877, Brigham Young Papers, Church History Library, Salt Lake City, Utah.
6. Jared Farmer, *On Zion's Mount: Mormons, Indians, and American Landscape* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008), 76.
7. Velate Richardson, “99 Years Remembered,” *Mormon Life* 2, no.13 (June 1984): 18.
8. Lewis Barney, *Lewis Barney Autobiography and Diary, 1878–83*, 71, Church History Library.
9. John Parry, *John Parry Reminiscences and Diary, 1857 March to 1867 September*, manuscript (photocopy), Church History Library.
10. See William C. Canby, Jr., *American Indian Law in a Nutshell*, 3rd ed. (St. Paul: West Publishing Co., 1988).