



The Four Corners.

# THIS WAS THE PLACE

*The Making and Unmaking of Utah*

BY JARED FARMER

How many Utahns have driven out of their way to get to a place that's really no place, the intersection of imaginary lines: Four Corners, the only spot where the boundaries of four U.S. states converge. Here, at the surveyor's monument, tourists play geographic Twister, placing one foot and one hand in each quadrant.

In 2009, the *Deseret News* raised a minor ruckus by announcing that the marker at Four Corners was 2.5 miles off. Geocachers with GPS devices had supposedly discovered a screw-up of nineteenth-century surveyors. The implication: no four-legged tourist had ever truly straddled the state boundaries. A television news anchor in Denver called it “the geographic shot heard around the West.” In fact, the joke was on the *Deseret News*. After receiving a pointed rebuttal from the U.S. Coast and Geodetic Survey, the newspaper printed a retraction with this unintentionally amusing headline: “Four Corners Monument Is Indeed Off Mark—But Not by Distance Reported Earlier and in Opposite Direction.”<sup>1</sup>

The confusion stemmed from the fact that geocachers had anachronistically used the Greenwich Meridian as their longitudinal reference, though the U.S. did not adopt the Greenwich standard until 1912. The mapmaker in 1875 who first determined the location of Four Corners actually got it right; he was only “off mark” by the subsequent standard of satellite technology. More to the point, surveyors after him validated his work and made the boundary concrete with an official marker. As America's chief surveyor explained to reporters, “Once a boundary

1 Lynn Arave, “Four Corners Monument is Indeed Off Mark,” *Deseret News*, April 23, 2009.

monument has been set and accepted, it generally does define the forever, even if later found to be not located where originally intended.”<sup>2</sup>

The issue here was not just academic or journalistic. It had economic ramifications. Tourists won’t come to Four Corners unless they have faith in the rightness of imaginary lines. This matters to Navajo jewelers, hoteliers, and gas station owners. The land where Utah meets three other states belongs to the sovereign Navajo Nation. To refute the *Deseret News*, the tribe fired off a press release: “Four Corners Monument Still the Legally Recognized Landmark Despite Reports.”<sup>3</sup>

This little story of place-making has a big moral: U.S. states such as Utah are examples of the make-believe made real. And like all imagined things, they have histories.

“Landscape is history made visible,” wrote the discerning critic J. B. Jackson.<sup>4</sup> What did he mean by that? Think about discoverers, conquerors, invaders, colonists, settlers, migrants, pioneers, and other people on the move: all throughout the past, in all four corners of the world, people have encountered unfamiliar spaces and then transformed them, familiarized them, into places. People give meaning to landforms and thereby make landmarks. They place names on mental maps and tell stories about those named and mapped places. They burn, cultivate, build, and otherwise remodel the terrain: they turn land into landscape. This endless process—simultaneously local and global—can never be harmless. Outside of Antarctica and scattered islands, there has been no true *terra incognita* (land unknown) or *terra nullius* (land unoccupied) for millennia; no uninhabited, unstoried, unmeaningful terrestrial space. Thus every act of place-making has on some level been an act of remaking, if not displacement—an act of cultural encroachment, even violence. Or, to drive the point home: the making of our Utah involved the unmaking of older Utahs.

My purpose in this essay is to get you thinking, through various examples, about place creation and landscape loss; and, along the way, to unsettle your mental geography, and adjust—ever so slightly—

2 Ibid.

3 Navajo Parks and Recreation Department, “Four Corners Monument Still the Legally Recognized Landmark Despite Reports,” April 22, 2009, accessed April 4, 2014, [http://navajonationparks.org/pr/pr\\_4Cmarker.htm](http://navajonationparks.org/pr/pr_4Cmarker.htm).

4 John Brinckerhoff Jackson, *Landscape in Sight: Looking at America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 10.

your inner compass.



The making of Utah was related to a larger U.S. project: the national map. And this national map was a product of the so-called Rectangular Survey. If you take the perspective of, say, Dead Horse Point, it seems preposterous that surveyors drew straight lines over jumbled topography to create legal boundaries. Nature abhors squares. But the United States—indeed, even its precursor, the Continental Congress—fell in love with the rationality and mathematical purity of the grid: a nation composed of squares within squares. The basic cartographic building block is the section, or one square mile. Put together thirty-six sequentially numbered sections and you have a township of six miles squared. After the Civil War, U.S. surveyors took this quadrilateral thinking to the next level and mapped out a series of more or less rectangular territories and states adjoining one another. Today, easterners often confuse Wyoming with Colorado, and Utah with Arizona and New Mexico (much like westerners transpose Vermont and New Hampshire). From an East Coast point of view, the big western rectangles seem more or less interchangeable.

In fact, boundary lines matter. Even though they are invisible on the ground—even though they are social artifices, environmental lies—they create reality. They can engender or reinforce differences, inequalities, and conflicts. Consider the Mason-Dixon Line, the Radcliffe Line, the Berlin Wall, the DMZ, the West Bank Barrier, or the U.S.-Mexico border. Or, on a local scale, think about the Salt Lakers who cross over to Evanston, Wyoming, for fireworks (or now to Colorado for marijuana), or who drive the opposite direction on I-80 to West Wendover, Nevada, for gambling and other adult entertainments. Some residents of Logan travel from one part of Cache Valley to another—to the Idaho side—for lotto tickets and malt liquor. Three hundred fifty miles to the south, just over the Arizona border, members of the FLDS church still practice polygamy. Colorado City’s location was chosen in part to elude Arizona law enforcement. Because of the awesome barrier of the Grand Canyon, the state government in Phoenix historically found it difficult to enforce antibigamy laws in the Arizona Strip, a swath of land effectively in Utah.

Borders are as mutable and arbitrary as they are important. Recall how the map of Europe changed in 1918 and again in 1945 and again in 1989. Look

at Africa before and after decolonization. Compared to Africa, the map of North America has been quite stable for over a century. But go back to the nineteenth century, and you see the U.S. national map in a constant state of flux, as the republic gained new lands and states through purchases, wars, treaties, and referenda. Prior to the western states came the western territories. For example, the original Oregon Territory included all of present-day Washington State as well as Oregon. Mormon settlers, newly ensconced in their Great Basin headquarters, proposed a state called Deseret that would have stretched from the Sierra to the Rockies. Even though Congress spurned that proposal, it created a Utah Territory much larger than today's state. During the long probationary period that ended only after the LDS church promised to give up polygamy, Congress repeatedly sawed off chunks of Utah, awarding them to Nevada and later to Nebraska and Colorado; it even entertained the idea of shrinking Utah to a narrow strip or dividing Salt Lake City right down the middle. Thus the current semirectangular shape of Utah was the result of happenstance and politics as well as the grid. It had nothing to do with nature.

Borders and boundaries are not the only invisible lines that create reality. There's also the issue of metageography, a word that refers to large-scale geographic concepts such as continents. Students today learn that the world has seven continents; Wikipedia agrees. But go to the library stacks (or Google Books), and you can readily find learned authorities of yesteryear presenting the plain facts that the continents numbered four—or five, or six. If you follow current events, you see almost daily how the metageographical informs the geopolitical and vice versa. Think about the enduring power of concepts such as “the Third World,” “the Middle East,” and “the West,” to name just three.

Utah, like other nations and U.S. states, can be grouped into or divided among larger metageographic regions. Textbooks divide the Beehive State into three physiographic “provinces”: the Great Basin, the Colorado Plateau, and the Rocky Mountains. Like most simplifications, this tripartite division can be misleading. From a geologist's point of view, the Uintas are the *only* mountains in the state that rightfully belong with the Rockies because of their shared origin in a wonderfully named tectonic event, the Laramide Orogeny.

The borders of Utah also overlap with areas of cultural metageography. For instance, many Ger-

man tourists come to Monument Valley on the Navajo Nation to experience the “Indian Country” of the Southwest, of which Utah's largest county, San Juan, is one small part. Other tourists come to Salt Lake City to see something that seems equally exotic: “Mormon Country.” Geographers call it the Mormon Culture Region, which, for them, includes southeastern Idaho, southwestern Wyoming, southeastern Nevada, and the valley of the Little Colorado in Arizona.

When contemporary Utahns appeal to a supraregional identity, they tend to speak of the Intermountain West, the Mountain West, or the Rocky Mountain Region. The locution Intermountain West originated around 1900. A coalition of boosters, LDS and non-Mormon alike, promoted Salt Lake City—the “Mormon Metropolis”—as a regional capital. Given that Las Vegas was barely a cow town, and Boise not much more, these hopeful Salt Lakers had a point. In the same era, Spokane, Washington, billed itself as the hub of a rival “Inland Empire.” With the coming of freeways and airports, these geographic inventions (based on railroad networks) became passé. Today, the best-known Inland Empire (or “I.E.”) is in Southern California. The preferred metageographical container for Utah has become Rocky Mountain.

The current regional identification with mountains—our high country bias—replaced an earlier hydrological emphasis. In the nineteenth century, Mormon settlers in Great Salt Lake City (as it was called) emphasized that they were a Great Basin people. Outsiders agreed. Tourists flocked to “America's Dead Sea”—a national attraction, a natural curiosity, and a sublime landscape worthy of towering artists such as Thomas Moran. Now, by contrast, hydrography hardly matters to outsider or insider conceptions of Utah. Except when the Great Salt Lake threatens the capital with flooding—as it did after the 1982-83 El Niño—modern residents of the Wasatch Front evince little awareness that they live on the edge of a vast interior drainage basin. During the 2002 Olympics, the global media reinforced the symbolic connection between Utahns and mountains. The standard blimp's-eye-view showed downtown buildings, including the LDS temple, backed by snowy peaks. On NBC, Utah looked much like any other Winter Olympics venue: a generic Alpine or Nordic landscape. For their part, city officials did nothing to turn the camera's gaze from east to west, from the mountains to the lake. Once a font of curiosity, the city's namesake had become a reservoir of indifference.

Salt Lakers are Wasatch people, but it wasn't always so. The term Wasatch Front arose from the glossaries of geologists, and it took time to catch on. It didn't become the standard descriptor for the state's main population corridor until the last quarter of the twentieth century, when I-15 tied together instant communities even as it disrupted historic community centers. Before the interstate, one had to travel US-89 (that is, State Street) through every small downtown. As recently as the 1970s, it took a long time to get from Salt Lake City to Provo, and Point of the Mountain felt like a true divide. The state prison, surrounded by horse pastures, seemed oddly rural, even remote. Today, of course, subdivisions line the freeway from Santaquin to Brigham City, two towns once known for their fruit orchards. The Wasatch Front has become Utah's equivalent to Colorado's Front Range, where development along I-25 is creating a suburban megalopolis. Someday Tooele and Cedar valleys—maybe even Cache Valley—may merit inclusion in the greater metropolitan area. Residents of the Wasatch Front are united primarily by dependence on I-15, secondarily by earthquake hazards, lake-effect snowfalls, and world-class inversion.

Surprisingly, natural attractions can have very short cultural lifespans. In the nineteenth century, northern Utah's lionized sights included Echo Canyon, Devils Slide, and Black Rock. Relatively few people care about these places today. Or consider Castle Gate, which once consisted of two pillars on either side of the canyon of the Price River. For late nineteenth-century railroad tourists traveling west from Colorado, this "natural wonder" marked the entry into the real Utah. Alfred Lambourne, Utah's first noted landscape painter, made Castle Gate his subject, and countless photographers sold collectible views. By 1966 the rock formation had fallen so far in stature that the Utah Department of Transportation (UDOT), without qualms, dynamited half of it to make room for a wider highway.

Over the first half of the twentieth century, as cars replaced trains as the primary form of transportation, the geography of Utah tourism changed. As of 1900, the leading attractions were built landscapes in the north: the resorts of the Great Salt Lake, Salt Lake City's warm springs, and the Mormon sanctum sanctorum, Temple Square. Sightseers traveled to the "Center of Scenic America" by railroad, most often through Ogden, the undisputed second city. Gradually, interest shifted to the more unsettled landscapes of southern Utah, especially its remarkable sandstone canyons. By 1950 tourists for the most part came by private automobile on newly paved roads. The sites for which Utah is now world-famous—Zion, Bryce, Arches—were commercially undiscovered until the automobile age.

The attractiveness of natural attractions depends significantly on media attention. In the mid-twentieth century, Hollywood filmmakers and New York City advertisers recast Monument Valley, an inhabited Navajo landscape, as wild American scenery. More recently, Delicate Arch has become Utah's most branded landmark besides the Salt Lake Temple. Throughout the first half of the twentieth century, this freestanding arch, which went by various names, was virtually unknown beyond Moab. It was exponentially less renowned than Augusta Bridge, a place few contemporary Utahns could identify (even by its current name, Sipapu), though a heroic canvas of "Utah's Greatest Scenic Wonder" hangs in the ceremonial Supreme Court chamber at the State Capitol, and a near-identical painting was presented to U.S. president William Howard Taft.<sup>5</sup> Only in 1996, Utah's centennial year, did Delicate

In addition to the Wasatch Front, Utah contains various other large-scale topographical subregions, some of which also function as social subregions. Consider the Uintah Basin, Emery County's Castle Valley, Sanpete Valley, Sevier Valley, or Dixie. In Utah Valley, the coinage "Silicon Slopes," invented by Google in 2013 upon announcing that Provo would be the third city in the nation to receive a Google Fiber network, has been picked up eagerly by business leaders to replace a moribund branding initiative from the 1990s: "Software Valley." At the scale just below the state, Utahns resort to vague descriptors based on cardinal directions: the west desert, northern Utah, eastern Utah, southeastern Utah. The popular phrase "southern Utah" is particularly elastic. Today, it often serves as a metonym for red rock or slickrock. Moab seems like classic southern Utah, whereas Beaver, located farther south, does not. Since the 1960s the Utah Travel Council has valiantly tried to create touristic subregions by lumping adjacent counties into groups: Color Country, Panoramaland, Dinosaurland, and so on. These names have never really stuck. A few evoke heritage, such as Bridgerland, Golden Spike Empire, and Mormon Country (since renamed Great Salt Lake Country), but the majority call attention to Utah's abundant and seemingly timeless natural attractions.

5 H. L. A. Culmer, "Who Shall Name Our Natural Bridges?" *Western Monthly* 11 (February 1910): 38–41.

Arch first appear on license plates. Someday, inevitably, the arch will collapse like New Hampshire's Old Man of the Mountain. Another one of Utah's formerly celebrated landscapes, the Bonneville Speedway, may be as fleeting as the Mormon Meteor. The salt flats have shrunk in thickness and area because its sustaining brine flow has been partly captured by a nearby mining operation.

One of the Beehive State's most extensive landscape losses has happened virtually without comment: the disfigurement of Pleistocene topography. Landmark shorelines of Lake Bonneville have recently been used as platforms for cookie-cutter suburbs, cheap McMansions, and prefab temples. Laws protecting antiquities do not as yet extend to geoaquities. No matter that geologists and geomorphologists rate the benches of the Wasatch Front as world-class features. Grove Karl Gilbert, one of the geological geniuses of the nineteenth century, marveled at the "great embankment" at Point of the Mountain, a magnificent sand and gravel bar. In its own way, it was more impressive—and more evocative of the deep past—than any ziggurat or pyramid. But where geologists saw epic earth poetry, others saw real property. Gravel companies gouged out the point from Point of the Mountain, and advertisers erected billboards upon the wreckage.

Utah's imperiled heritage includes more than geosites. Practically all of the state's ancient and historic indigenous ruins and burial grounds have been looted if not obliterated; much of its exquisite Native rock art continues to be vandalized; and most of its settler-era scenes have been bulldozed to make room for tract houses and big-box stores. Only in a few locales, notably Sanpete Valley, can you still see vestiges of the old Mormon landscape that has vanished from the Wasatch Front. Unlike the New England village or the Santa Fe style, Utah's vernacular architecture was neither codified nor protected by historic preservation law. For every Brigham Young Academy saved, three Coalville tabernacles have been torn down. Furthermore, land trusts and conservation easements have struggled to gain traction in Utah's terrain of property-rights fundamentalism.

Paradoxically, beliefs and practices about sacred space do not necessitate a land ethic. When I consider the contemporary Mormon Culture Region, I'm struck by the disjunction between the cultivated sense of place and the stunted sensibility of place. Utah's leading real estate developer and its greatest shaper of community standards, the LDS church, does little to promote stewardship and sustainabil-

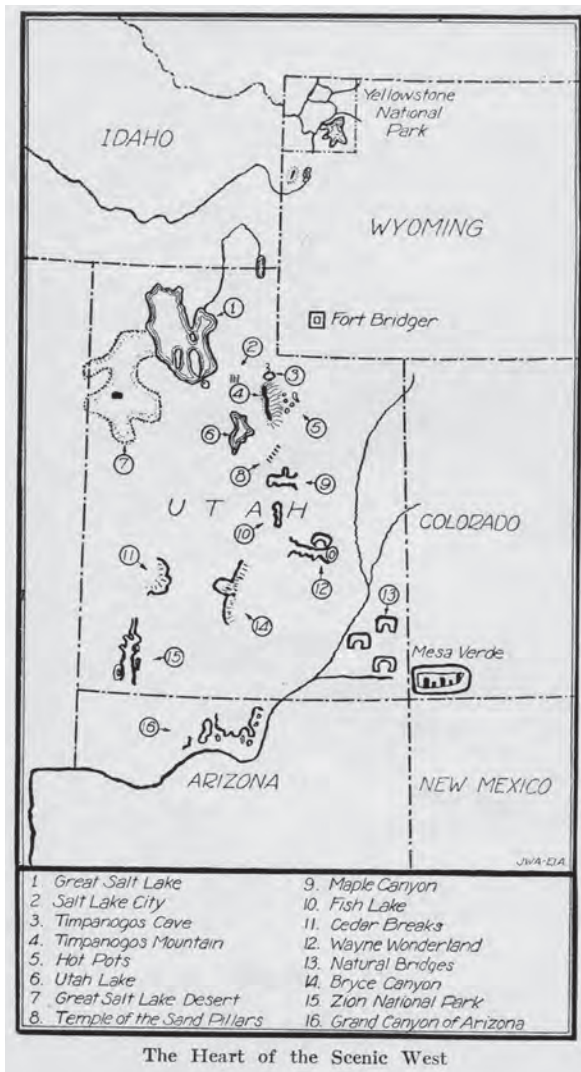
ity or to preserve historic landscapes or to nurture place-based aesthetics. Instead the Corporation of the President erects edifices by the numbers—ample parking included—according to centralized master plans. Church architecture has gone from artful stonework built to last through the millennium to a stuccoed simulacrum. In urban Utah, even as the interior sacred space of Mormonism has expanded with the construction of new temples to serve growing populations, the exterior sacred space—farms and fields and orchards, former sites of sacralized work—has contracted to virtual oblivion.

For various reasons, then, the traditional, idiosyncratic, somewhat shambolic Mormon landscape—a legacy of local craftwork—is largely doomed. The sturdy buildings made of adobe, brick, and rough-hewn native stone; the cockeyed wood-and-wire fences; the rows of upright poplars; the use of cottonwoods as ornamentals; the compact villages with double-wide streets on a grid; the close mixture of church lots and civic lots and vacant lots; the backyard gardens and the outlying fields: this distinctive geographical matrix will soon be a memory or perhaps even a lost memory.

I don't mean to suggest that Utah is culturally out of line. Quite the opposite: when it comes to land use and real estate development, Utah long ago joined the mainstream. It is locales and regions like Santa Fe and New England that seem peculiar now. In these United States, where consumer capitalism is the de facto state religion, landscapes are generally more cost effective if they are mass producible, mass destructible, fungible, and irreverential. For better or for worse, the story of our nation's built environment—especially in the post-WWII era of car-based suburbanization—has been more about disposability than durability.

To reinforce my theme of geographic impermanence, I want to share one of my all-time favorite maps. It comes from a book with a charming title: *Through the Heart of the Scenic West*.<sup>6</sup> What's interesting about this map is its time-boundedness. Only in the 1920s, the onset of the age of auto tourism, could this map have been drawn. How many living Utahns, I wonder, have heard about these map features: Wayne Wonderland? Temple of the Sand Pillars? Today, these places don't exist as such. As for beautiful Maple Canyon, it hasn't gone anywhere, but relatively few folks (besides Sanpeters and rock climbers) go there. If you asked the Utah

6 J. Cecil Alter, *Through the Heart of the Scenic West* (Salt Lake City: Shepherd, 1927).



*Through the Heart of the Scenic West.*

BY J. CECIL ALTER

Travel Council to produce a map like this—well, that’s what they do, isn’t it? But their current maps feature a wildly dissimilar list of landmarks and attractions. It’s even more interesting to imagine an analogous map produced in the nineteenth century. On that map, there would be no Zion National Park, because it didn’t exist. There was a chasm known locally as Little Zion—also Mukuntuweap—but it wouldn’t have merited attention. Neither Bryce Canyon nor Natural Bridges nor Mt. Timpanogos would appear. In the nineteenth century, Utah was recognized as a land of lakes more than canyons or even mountains. People came to northern

Utah to bathe in sulfur water and float in salt water. Currently, of course, the Wasatch Front is more about “Life Elevated®” and the “Greatest Snow on Earth®.” Salt Lake City’s once-famous hydropathic resorts—the warm springs and the adjacent Hot Springs Lake—were long ago blotted out by a gravel mine and an oil refinery. In the hearts and minds of twentieth-century Utahns, the lowland Great Basin underwent a great desiccation.

I’ll illustrate the drying out of Utah’s old water-world with a short history of the place-name Utah. Place-making is an act of power, and it begins with words. It starts with naming. Today, Utah’s capital and social center is Salt Lake City in Salt Lake Valley. It didn’t use to be that way. It’s no coincidence that Utah Lake occupies the center of Utah Valley, which occupies the center of Utah County, which occupies the near-geographic center of Utah. The names are concentric for a reason. In the nineteenth century and for untold ages before, this lake and its fishery defined a people. *This was the place.* In its original usage as a toponym, Utah signified the lake-side home of the “Utahs.” Now we would call them Utes; in earlier times, these Utes of Utah Lake were also known as the Fish-Eaters, the Lake People, and the Timpanogos.

In 1850 Congress created something semantically new: Utah Territory. Mormons had previously applied for territorial status under the name of their choosing, Deseret, as engraved in the ceremonial stone donated to the Washington Monument. Congress overruled the choice. Until this moment it had been customary for the national legislature to affirm local usage. More often than not, American settlers called their region by the name of the major river—which usually carried a variant of a Native name—or by its major indigenous group. “Deseret” did not follow that pattern. The name wasn’t Native; it wasn’t even from a language spoken in America. The word came from the Book of Mormon, which Joseph Smith had translated from “Reformed Egyptian,” in which Deseret means honeybee.

The word Utah has its own exotic origin in Spanish New Mexico. It derives from *Yuta*, a Hispanicized version of a Native word—possibly Western Apache for “one that is higher up.” A nineteenth-century authority defined *Yutas* as “they who live on mountains.” In English-language sources, the word appeared in various spellings—with a first letter *e*, *g*, *j*, or *y*—before stabilizing as a four-letter word starting with *u*. Whereas Spaniards used *Yutas* to refer to all Utes (called *Nuche*, or “the People,” by them-

selves), pioneer Mormons used Utah exclusively to refer to the Fish-Eaters who lived around Utah Lake. The U-word also gained geographic referents for four coextensive entities: a lake, a valley, a Mormon stake, and a territorial county. For instance, in 1853 Brigham Young reported to Salt Lake City residents, “It is only the Utah who have declared war on Utah.”<sup>7</sup> Translation: only the Lake Utes have raided the settlements of Utah Valley.

At the national level, “Utah” took on a very different meaning after 1852, when Mormons publicly announced—and stoutly defended—their practice of plural marriage. To easterners, the name now brought one thing to mind: “the Mormon Problem.” The conflict first came to a head in 1857. President Brigham Young told his followers that President James Buchanan had dispatched troops to put down the saints and blustered that “they constituted henceforth a free and independent state, to be known no longer as Utah, but by their own Mormon name of Deseret.”<sup>8</sup> His words turned out to be hot wind: in the aftermath of the so-called Utah War, Mormons pursued statehood in the regular way. Multiple Deseret constitutions went to Congress, where they faced intransigent anti-Mormon opposition. In 1872, at yet another constitutional convention, LDS delegates debated the wisdom of retaining Deseret when this name “might be made a basis of prejudice.” Others worried that the name could be confused with “desert.” The delegates stuck with the familiar because it referred to honeybees, whereas the alternative brought to mind a “dirty, insect-infested, grasshopper-eating tribe of Indians.”<sup>9</sup> Talk about prejudice.

Needless to say, by the time of statehood in 1896, Mormons had closeted polygamy and abandoned Deseret—both the political idea and the place-name. The idea became a half-forgotten lost cause, and the name became, in Maurine Whipple’s observation, “merely a colorless term with which to entitle laundries or places of business.”<sup>10</sup> After reconciling with the once-despised name Utah, Mormons gave it new significance. In 1923 Levi Edgar Young, the head of the history department at the University of

Utah (and a general authority in the LDS church and a relative of you-know-who), published a chronicle of the state in which he asserted that the Indians “tell us that their forefathers called this the land of ‘Eutaw,’ or ‘High up.’ ‘Utah’ means ‘In the tops of the mountains.’”<sup>11</sup> This was a crucial semantic shift. Whereas *Yutas* had originally been a Hispanicized word referring to Indians who lived in a mountainous region, Utah became an Anglicized word for the region itself. Professor Young’s definition, “in the tops of the mountains,” had scriptural resonance, as in Isaiah 2:2: “And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the Lord’s house shall be established in the top of the mountains.” Moving full circle from Deseret, contemporary Mormons have been known to spread the faith-promoting rumor that Congress unwittingly fulfilled prophecy by imposing the name Utah.

As for the actual Utahs—the Timpanogos people—they tried for one generation to coexist with Mormon settlers in and around Provo. In practice, hostility supplanted harmony. Settlers and Indians clashed repeatedly at the mouth of the Provo River, the best fishing site at Utah Lake. Ultimately, with the federal government’s blessing, the Mormons in 1865 forced the starving remnants of the Timpanogos to sign a treaty and move to a distant reservation.

Having displaced the Utes of Utah Lake, the settlers and especially their progeny went on to create a substitute totem out of a previously unnamed and uncelebrated local landform: Mt. Timpanogos (colloquially shortened to Timp). In the frontier period, nobody saw this massif as a discreet landform. It never showed up on maps. A mountainous space existed, but the mountain-place Timp did not. Thanks to a 1920s civic booster project—including a huge annual community hike—this once “invisible” mountain became conspicuous, beloved, and the site of a national monument. Meanwhile, the invented landmark began to function as a signifier of Indianness thanks to the power and pervasiveness of the “Legend of Timpanogos.” Since the 1920s, people in Utah Valley have repeated and enacted this pseudo-Indian folklore about an Indian princess petrified in profile.

In the same era that Timp became visible, Utah Lake became overlooked. Due to overuse and mismanagement, this haven for native cutthroat trout degenerated into a sewage-laced carp pond

7 Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, *Journal of Discourses*, vol. 1 (London and Liverpool: Latter-day Saints’ Book Depot, 1855; reprint, Salt Lake City, 1967), 1:167.

8 “The Utah Expedition; Its Causes and Consequences,” *Atlantic Monthly* 3 (March 1859), 361–75, quote on 368.

9 Quoted in Dale L. Morgan, *The State of Deseret* (Logan: Utah State University Press, 1987), 113–14.

10 Maurine Whipple, *This Is the Place: Utah* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1945), 56.

11 Levi Edgar Young, *The Founding of Utah* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1923), 3–4.



by WWII. In the postwar period, even as the lake became differently polluted and additionally scorned because of a massive steel plant built on its shores, the mountain earned new honors through the designation of a wilderness area and the siting of Robert Redford's Sundance Resort. Various schools, hospitals, and even an LDS temple were named after Timp. These various geographic changes accompanied—and contributed to—a revision in collective memory. As early as 1950, the historical Timpanogos people in the watery lowlands had been entirely supplanted in collective memory by a fictional Princess Timpanogos in the rocky highlands. In short, the modern sense of place surrounding Timp concealed a double displacement from the past: the literal displacement of native inhabitants and the symbolic displacement of their landmark lake.<sup>12</sup>

Thus I circle back to my initial point: the making of our Utah cannot be separated from the unmaking of earlier Utahs—"Utahs" with an s, plural—both a homeland and a people.



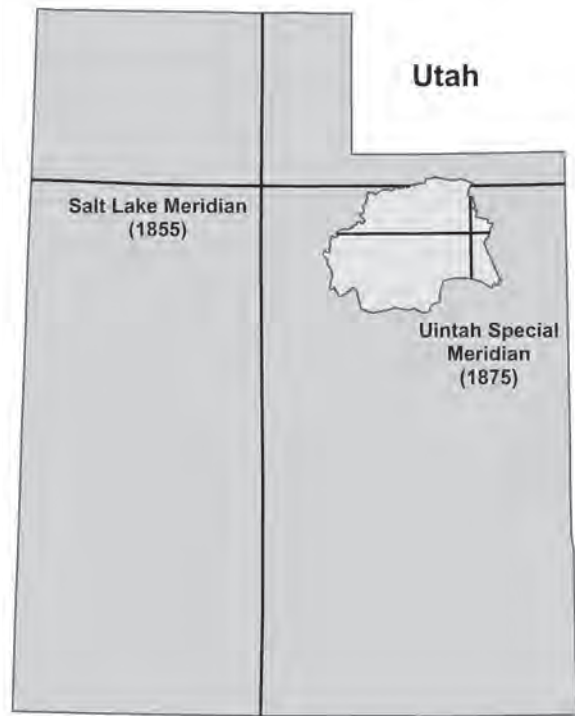
Now for a coda.

In your mind, picture a feverish Brigham Young—suffering most likely from a tick-borne infection—looking down from Big Mountain. At the time he reportedly “expressed his full satisfaction in the Appearance of the valley as A resting place for the Saints.”<sup>13</sup> His exact words are unknown. Forget the folklore; never mind the monument at This Is the Place Heritage Park; no one on July 24, 1847, recorded the legendary utterance, “This is the right place; drive on!” However, Young did say something similar on July 28 during an evening meeting on the valley floor. As one pioneer wrote in his diary,

the camp was called together to say whear the City should be built. After a number had spoken on the subject a voat was calld for [and] unanimosiley aggreed

<sup>12</sup> See Jared Farmer, *On Zion's Mount: Mormons, Indians, and the American Landscape* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008).

<sup>13</sup> Scott G. Kenney, ed., *Journal of Wilford Woodruff, 1833–1898 Typescript* (Midvale, UT: Signature Books, 1983), 3: 234.



Principal meridians and baselines, adapted from a Bureau of Land Management map.

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UTAH DIVISION OF STATE HISTORY

that this was the spot After that Pres Young said tha[t] he knew that this is the place. he knew it as soon as he came in sight of it and he had seen this vearey spot before<sup>14</sup>

After the vote, Orson Pratt, the closest thing to a scientist in the Pioneer Camp, immediately went to work establishing a so-called initial point for surveying the City of the Saints. While the national map has one master meridian, the historic rectilinear mapping of the trans-Mississippi West occurred unevenly, much like settlement. Initially, many settlement zones were anchored cartographically to temporary locations where a regional east-to-west “baseline” intersected a “principal meridian.” In the Far West, these “governing” points of intersection were typically prominences. Had U.S. surveyors gotten their choice, they probably would have picked Mt. Nebo as Utah’s initial point. But Mormons got to choose first because when they arrived, the Great Basin still belonged to Mexico.

<sup>14</sup> Levi Jackman, Diary, MS 79, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah.

Pratt went ahead and created a “Great Salt Lake Meridian” with the future Temple Square as the initial point. In other words, every plat made by Mormon settlers would have as its reference point a religious site. Every gridded street in Great Salt Lake City would be measured and numbered according to its precise distance from the sacred place where the House of the Lord would rise to welcome to the imminent Second Coming of the Messiah.

When “Gentile” surveyors got around to officially mapping Utah Territory in 1855, they accepted and used this established initial point, even though it didn’t make utmost cartographic sense. The U.S. Coast and Geodetic Survey later constructed an official meridian base at Temple Square—a little piece of federal property within the holy walls—where it still stands, though most visitors miss seeing it. More noticeable is the unofficial marker (actually a replica of the original) at the outer southeast corner of Temple Square. This waist-high sandstone obelisk doesn’t look impressive compared to the temple or the Church Office Building or the Capitol, but, just as much as those edifices, it represents the making of Utah: a story of settlers (albeit peculiar settlers on a delayed timeline) colonizing Indian land, organizing a territory, dispossessing natives, disposing property, and achieving statehood. Overall, the story couldn’t be more American.

I must tell you, as my terminal point, that the Salt Lake Meridian at Temple Square does not cartographically govern every part of Utah. There is one anomalous sector of the state where the original cadastral maps corresponded to a separate base and meridian. Back in 1875 (the same year Four Corners was marked out), the U.S. government established the Uintah Special Meridian to survey the Uintah Basin reservation where the Lake Utes and other Nuche bands had been relocated. This cartographic project later facilitated the government giveaway of tribal property—a communal disaster for the People. As a result, the greater part of the Uintah Basin within the boundaries of the Uintah and Ouray Reservation now belongs to non-Indians as private land. Having served this dispossessing purpose, the initial point on the reservation was literally buried and paved over in the 1950s when UDOT improved State Route 121. In 2009—the same year, by apt coincidence, as the Four Corners brouhaha—the survey marker was ceremonially exhumed and replaced. Larry Cesspooch, a noted Ute historian, came to the site for the occasion. He offered a prayer with the aid of an eagle feather and a sweet grass braid. “I’ve struggled with what to say today because this

[marker] is not a good thing for us,” Cesspooch said. “It’s like showing you something that’s always going to remind you what happened.”<sup>15</sup>

That’s what landscapes do when we look deeply. They haunt us. They remind us that the past—as inscribed in our present landscape—is a record of tragedy, hope, and considerable irony. Think about the Nuche of 1847, and think about the saints. For all the remarkable successes of the pioneers, they failed in their larger project to redeem the desert and to build a self-contained kingdom for the End Times. Consider that most of the acreage within the old proposed boundaries of Deseret is uninhabited and unredeemed—indeed, much of it wild by the definition of the Wilderness Act—and belongs to the feds. Brigham Young would not be pleased. And he wouldn’t be alone in disappointment. If you scrutinize a rectangular survey map of the Beehive State, you can see how history did not turn out as *anyone* in the nineteenth century wanted or expected—not for Mormons, not for anti-Mormons, and not for any of the region’s indigenous peoples. Utahns today, not unlike the Yutas in 1847, inhabit a place in a state of fateful transition.

15 Brandon Loomis, “Bittersweet History Revisited in Eastern Utah,” *Salt Lake Tribune*, September 18, 2009.

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