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Changing Times: A View from Cache Valley, 1890-1915

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by
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60th Faculty Honor Lecture
Utah State University
Logan, Utah
November 1979
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Charles S. Peterson was selected by the committee to deliver the Annual Faculty Honor Lecture in the Humanities. On behalf of the members of the Association we are happy to present Professor Peterson's paper.

Committee on Faculty Honor Lecture
CHANGING TIMES:
A VIEW FROM CACHE VALLEY,
1890-1915

by
Charles S. Peterson*

For a quarter of a century I have been pursuing, in what I sometimes fear is a muddling quixotic way, the identity of Utah and of regions within it. This quest entered a new and direct phase a few years back when I was asked to write the Bicentennial History of Utah. As I toiled over the book, one of those obvious truths that now and then surface in the consciousness of each of us struck me with great force; in 1776 Utah had no practical existence whatever for Americans. Of course, the geographical region existed, but in what I called a process of becoming Americans responded to the possibilities and limitations afforded by nature in the decades after the Revolutionary War to create a part of the United States. Utah first became a region in the comprehensions of a handful of mountain men; then, as it took on political meaning, it became a territory; and by 1896, a hundred and twenty years after the Revolution, it had become a state with clear social, political, religious, and economic meanings. For me, at least, a coherent identity had become apparent for Utah in the American context. Then, as I turned to the twentieth century, the consciousness of the state’s distinct identity seemed gradually to slip away. As Richard C. Poulsen, a

*In part the research for this paper was carried out with the Ronald V. Jensen Living Historical Farm under an NEH grant.
perceptive reviewer, wrote in summing up my efforts: "Utah became in the years between 1776 and 1900—since then... Utah has been un-becoming, so to speak." Thus, prompted by a sense that twentieth-century identities have eluded me, I turn this evening toward a better understanding of Utah's becoming as it is reflected in the Cache Valley region during the years from 1890 to 1915.

My interest in this quest grows from two impulses. First, as an American I feel a need to define the state and its subregions. Along with democracy and human rights, federalism seems important. Its manifestations, including regional distinctions, are worth defining and preserving.

In the second place, I sense and am aware that others sense that differences do exist. There is much talk of our seamless, homogeneous culture. Salt Lake City, like Toledo and Sacramento, is an asphalt and concrete jungle overshadowed by the golden arches of McDonalds. But the feeling that distinctions are real persists. Somehow the process of becoming goes on—Utah adds up to something different. And at the level of personal preference and in the sense of place that each of us harbors it is also apparent that the regions within the state add up to something different. For example, let me refer to a Carbon County story. It is said in those parts that a certain Italian immigrant went from Helper in the 1930s to work on the highway through Spanish Fork Canyon. Quickly homesick, he went to the paymaster after two weeks and demanded his pay, saying, so the story goes, "Son of a Beech! I no laka thesea Uniteda States. I wanna go back to Helper." True or not, the story reflects a strong awareness of regional distinction at the folk level. As I struggled with the Bicentennial History, I recognized that I lacked the ability and methods to make many of these distinctions historiographically. Thus, in part, my quest has been for a method to get at the substrata of the past by which commonly perceived distinctions can be identified historically.

But, I have asked, by what method are such distinctions measured? How does one get at the substrata of history that reflect themselves in the consciousness of regional distinction? I have looked in various places. In folklore. In geography, in

1Western American Literature, 13 (November 1978), 279-80.
sociology, literature, ecology. It is rare, however, that I have found evidence clearly measurable in the traditional parlances of history. Yet I have found bits and pieces of method in my work at the Western Historical Quarterly, where in the last few months three outstanding articles have crossed my desk that seek to grapple with the problems of regionalism in history. Important direction has come too from the work done in statistics and oral history by my colleagues and students in the Department of History and Geography.

With such help, a method of analysis has been taking form in my mind. I have accepted the idea of regional distinction as a basic and important tool. In its application to Cache Valley I acknowledge also two further tools. To all who are acquainted with Utah these are commonplace. First, turn of the century Cache Valley was Mormon. Second, it was agricultural. In addition to regionalism, Mormonism and agrarianism, a number of lesser factors promise to be useful. Among these are matters of physical location and natural determinants, immigration, the influence of economics and politics and certain values and attitudes that appear to have been related to both the agrarian and Mormon character of the valley. The pages that follow seek to apply this method to Cache Valley in the turn-of-the-century decades.

Because much has already been written about Cache Valley Mormons, only a few points need to be reemphasized here. In the first place, Cache Valley's population was overwhelmingly Mormon. This fact is borne out by Jeff Simmonds' skillfully conceived book on gentiles in Cache Valley during the late nineteenth century that finds its chief story among people who had left the Mormon fold rather than among other groups.² It is also important to note that Cache Valley Mormons looked to Salt Lake City and tied the valley into a Mormon cultural area that was headquartered there. A third point of emphasis has to do with the fact that by the quarter century beginning in 1890 the

church's great creative periods were past. Joseph Smith had laid the doctrinal and physical foundations, and Brigham Young had created a semi-autonomous kingdom. Now Mormons had been forced to abandon their more nonconforming customs. Without surrendering belief in the ultimate victory of their system, they worked at the less creative business of adapting to free enterprise and partisan politics and rediscovering values and attitudes they shared with the larger community.

In the pages that follow the importance of Cache Valley's Mormonness will appear and reappear, but as we shall see regional factors and agriculture also helped mold the community.

Less commonly recognized than Cache Valley's Mormon connection were a number of regional considerations. In a broad geographical sense the valley lies at the southern edge of a transitional region between the American Northwest and the Southwest. Almost forgotten to moderns, this transitional character has long been apparent historically. It was apparent in the Adams-Onis Treaty of 1819, which drew the northern bounds of the Spanish empire along the 42nd parallel, a line that now divides Cache Valley as well as Utah and Idaho. It was also apparent in the fur trade when trappers from the Columbia River, Santa Fe, and St. Louis converged in Cache Valley and Britishers from the Hudson's Bay Company undertook to halt the American advance by trapping a fur desert extending across what they termed the "Snake River Country" to Cache Valley.³

This transitional character may also be seen in the early Mormon response to Cache Valley. Cowed by its hard winters, they first hesitated, and then as their strength developed they entered the valley in an individualistic rush that had little in

³Good treatments of this broad regional geography are found in Dale L. Morgan, The Great Salt Lake (Indianapolis & New York, 1947), and especially in Carl I. Wheat, Mapping the Transmississippi West 1540-1861 (San Francisco, 1958), II: 117 passim.
common with the characteristic Mormon colonizing mission. It was no accident that settlement in Cache Valley coincided with the opening of the northern Idaho and Montana gold fields in the early 1860s. Indeed, it may be said that Mormons followed the gold rush into Cache Valley in quest of markets. From the beginning, Cache Valley was a minor wheat belt and its people were dependent upon influences of the market place as well as upon Mormon economic self-sufficiency.

Implicit in this development is the fact that culturally, as well as climatically and topographically, Cache Valley and the farming districts in neighboring Bear River Valley lie at the extreme southern margin of what by 1900 had become the northwestern wheat belt. It is thus no happenstance that by 1912 Cache and Box Elder counties between them were producing more than 46 percent of all wheat raised in Utah and nearly three-quarters of the dry-land wheat. In the process of this development the characteristic village landscape of rural Utah was strikingly altered by homestead and wheat belt patterns. Northern Utah was, in short, not only a Utah region, but an extension of the wheat belt. In it two regions met, and the values and customs of Mormon self-sufficiency interacted with the values and customs of the wheat belt's commercial farming to give a subregional texture quite its own.

Within the state of Utah, Cache Valley may be regionally distinguished too. Among other things, it was apparent that it was not part of the Wasatch Front. Although the Mormon connection tended to obscure this fact, it was physically removed; a valley chamber isolated by a range of mountains and other physical conditions including better water supplies, lack of


*Facts and Figures Pertaining to Utah, compiled by the State Bureau of Immigration, Labor and Statistics (Salt Lake City, 1915), 58.

*I have discussed the concepts alluded to briefly here in some length in “Imprint of Agricultural Systems on the Utah Landscape” in Richard H. Jackson, ed., The Mormon Role in the Settlement of the West (Provo, 1978), 91-106, and in “The Valley of the Bear River and the Movement of Culture Between Utah and Idaho,” Utah Historical Quarterly, 47 (Spring 1979), 194-214.
mineral resources, and remoteness from major traffic lanes. In addition, Cache Valley overlapped the Idaho border and, as one of the major valleys of the Bear River, served as a conduit through which cultural movements passed to and from Utah. In this respect Cache Valley varied sharply from the Wasatch Front, whose historic role was to maintain its own and Mormon insularity, and whose population stood safely removed from borders and so had limited possibilities for interaction with the populations of neighboring states.

This raises the third major point for interpreting Cache County's history during the turn of the century years. Simply put, it was a farm county. This was true from earliest times, yet its comparative position in the Utah farm scene strengthened progressively until by 1915 it was the most agrarian county in the state. Cache Valley's agricultural advance was most rapid in the years after 1890, and together with the northern part of Box Elder County, which responded to many of the same dry farm and market influences, it comprised by all odds the largest and most productive agricultural region in the state. Depending on agriculture, northern Utah also shared many of the interests and qualities known to farming regions elsewhere.

Cache Valley's strengthening position among Utah's counties may be traced in the Agricultural Reports of the various censuses. Other major farm counties included Davis, Salt Lake, Sanpete, Utah and Weber. Of the group, Cache was settled latest and by some indexes showed a relative lag in production. With a small total acreage, Davis County was the most intensively cultivated. Utah and Salt Lake County had more farms than Cache until the years after the turn of the century and, in some indexes, continued to. Farms generally were smaller in several of these counties than in Cache. This was particularly so in Salt Lake County. In the pre-dry-farm period, Sanpete often competed heavily with Cache County in wheat production and continued to do so in terms of irrigated wheat. But as dry-farming developed, Cache County far exceeded Sanpete as did Box Elder where, because of the Bear River canal systems and the dry-farming, it developed even later than Cache County as a major factor in agriculture. See U.S. Census Report, Agriculture, 1870, 1880, 1890, 1900, 1910, 1920; also Facts and Figures Pertaining to Utah, 17-199. Ricks and Cooley, The History of a Valley contains important information on agriculture's development as do Charles Hillman Brough, Irrigation in Utah.
In making this statement, however, one must remember that Utah's total farm acreage was small. In 1910, for example, it was only about one-fifth as great as in California and less than half as much as in Colorado, Oregon, or Washington. The number of farm owners as compared to total population was also small. In 1890, only five persons in a hundred owned farms. During the next two decades this ratio strengthened somewhat before decreasing again sharply. However, it should be borne in mind that with about 30 percent of the total, agricultural workers comprised the largest labor force in the state. They were followed by mine industry workers, who accounted for less than 10 percent of the total. Although data is lacking to indicate what percent of Cache Valley's work force was employed in agriculture, it is apparent that 12 percent of its population owned farms, almost doubling the statewide rate and placing it behind only Davis County, where the rate was 13 percent. Amazingly, census data from 1900 for Hyde Park and Mendon, two of the valley's traditional farm villages, show 91 percent and 75 percent respectively of all persons listing occupations as being directly employed in agriculture. Percentages were doubtlessly

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9U.S. Census Report, Agriculture, 1890, p. 218.
10*Facts and Figures Pertaining to Utah*, p. 324.
11Ibid., pp. 62 and 331.
12Transcriptions of Manuscript Census, Twelfth U.S. Census, 1900, for Hyde Park and Mendon. Prepared by Charles Hatch, research assistant and graduate student, Department of History and Geography, Utah State University. Hatch has developed a major source of data from the Manuscript Censuses for 1870, 1880 and 1900. He has generously shared much of this with me, including the two transcriptions cited here. These materials and others referred to under his name are in his possession.
much lower for the county generally, but it seems likely that it was a rare worker who had not had some experience in farm work or closely related businesses.

I was unable to find a compilation of the value of farm products by county, but the various agricultural censuses show Cache County topping the state in value of cereal grains, dairy products, forage crops, and horses. Interestingly, one state source indicates that the number of all cattle in Cache County in 1914 exceeded all other counties including San Juan, where a few years before, as one writer has pointed out, there were forty-seven "head of every man, woman and child."\(^\text{13}\)

Comparative data for sugar beets is available only for 1900, which was before the first of several sugar factories was erected in the county. However, a promotional booklet suggestively entitled *Cache Valley: Utah's Eden*, which was published about the end of World War I for the purpose of attracting "more people to dig from the soil its wealth," proudly proclaimed that 1,500 farmers had contracted to plant 20,000 acres, which it was estimated would produce no fewer than 260,000 tons of beets.\(^\text{14}\)

This statistical evidence of Cache Valley's dominance in agriculture may be backed up by impressive evidence of a negative nature. Other counties in the state developed other industrial and commercial enterprises, and as result, more complex and flexible cultures. Transportation, mining, manufacturing, tourism, and governmental installations all became important elsewhere. Much of this activity was concentrated in Salt Lake City and Ogden, but mining and tourism added important economic and cultural dimensions to such rural hinterlands as Washington and San Juan counties. Cache County, on the other hand, simply did not develop nonagricultural dimensions; thus its economy as well as its customs and values remained strongly farm oriented.

It is true two railroads served the county, but by contrast to the shipping centers at Salt Lake City and Ogden, they brought


little change beyond their obvious usefulness in marketing crops. With the exception of a few struggling lead mines and one rather boisterous but abortive silver boom at La Plata, mining made no show in Cache Valley. Consequently, there was no smelting or mining-related commerce, and manufacturing was almost totally limited to milling wheat, processing milk, and to relatively limited production of textiles and lumber. Without industrial activities to back them business and financial institutions too focused on agriculture and land developments. Ogden was occasionally able to challenge the control Salt Lake City had over politics and its spoils, but there was little spillover for Cache County. The single dimension character of the valley's development was apparent even in its approach to livestock, since farm flocks and herds including dairy cattle and draft horses, unequalled in the state for quality and number were more important than the range livestock industries.

As convincing as they are, even these considerations fail to convey the full picture of agriculture's importance in Cache Valley. Image makers of various kinds completed the hold farming had on the county and its people by painting and repainting pastoral views which were widely accepted as being more or less in conformity with reality.

The process began before the valley was settled. In reporting his 1843 exploration of the Bear River, John C. Fremont noted

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\textsuperscript{9}For a general overview of mining see Ricks and Cooley, \textit{History of a Valley}, pp. 236-39; a contemporary assessment is found in Albert F. Potter, "Diary of Albert F. Potter's Wasatch Survey, July 1 to November 22, 1902," Region IV Papers, Record Group 95 (National Archives, Washington, D.C.), copy at Special Collections, Merrill Library, Utah State University, hereafter ML USU. On La Plata see David Lewis, "La Plata, 1891-1893: Boom, Bust and Controversy," ML USU.

\textsuperscript{10}The relative number of milk cows and "other" cattle appears in the various Agricultural Reports of the U.S. Census as do statistics for horses. See also Facts and Figures Pertaining to Utah, p. 365 and John T. Caine III and H.J. Frederick, "Improvement of Utah Horses," \textit{Utah Agricultural College Experiment Station}, Bulletin No. 107 (Logan, 1909).
“excellent water . . . soil good and adapted to . . . grains and grasses” and concluding that it was “truly a bucolic region” called for “a civilized settlement.”17 A few years later Howard Stansbury, another government surveyor, extolled the flattering appearances and great “advantages offered by this lovely valley.”18 Visitors who came in the decades after settlement also reveled in its pastoral scenes and evidences of tranquil prosperity. In 1882 the English journalist, Philip Robinson, portrayed Cache Valley as a “veritable idyll” filled with “delightful farmsteads” and “the perpetual charm of crops.” Scarcely able to contain himself, he marveled at its “placid cornfields” which were “not more tranquil than the lives of the people” and saw in its “tree-crowded orchards and stack filled yards” eloquent testimony of “simple country life, or mutual confidence, and universal security.”19

At the turn of the century Ray Stannard Baker, one of the era’s noted muckrakers, was profoundly impressed with the valley’s “high cultivation, fruitfulness, and civilized habitation” and in an article for the Century Magazine contrasted it with the wretched conditions industrialization was producing elsewhere. Farmers, he wrote,

\[\text{go out cheerfully in the early morning to their fields, often miles distant, and returning after dark. Some who live far from their farms leave their village homes for weeks at a time in the busy season, and dwell in tents in their fields. All this is unfamiliar and interesting to Eastern eyes, and very different from the detached and evenly distributed groups of farm buildings in the agricultural regions of the East and Middle West.}\]

17John C. Fremont, Report of the Exploring Expedition to the Rocky Mountains in the Year 1842, and to Oregon and North California in the Years 1843-'44 (Washington, 1845), 160.

18Howard Stansbury, An Expedition to the Valley of the Great Salt Lake of Utah: Including a Description of Its Geography, Natural History, and Minerals, and an Analysis of its Water (Philadelphia, 1852), 95.

19Philip Robinson, Sinners and Saints: A Tour Across the States and . . . Three Months Among the Mormons (Boston, 1883), 134-35.
Although he thought Cache Valley farmers less well-educated than their Ohio counterparts, he found that agrarian values cut across the arts and education and that they were thoroughly intermixed with Mormonism. At Logan’s Tabernacle he listened to a “handsome white-haired old man” preach a “rambling, monotonous” sermon through the early parts of which “several farmer boys who sat near me went to sleep and snored loudly.” Warming to his task, the preacher veered from love of God to “harvesting alfalfa” and “good prices . . . for cattle,” whereupon “my neighbor farmer boys suddenly woke.” It was, he said, a strange mingling of religion and “advice as to alfalfa and fat cows.”

Contrasting images were notably lacking. Government explorers who came after Fremont and Stansbury were more interested in science and natural wonders, and from scientists like John Wesley Powell and the host of journalists, photographers and railroad advertising men that followed came images of wilderness and grandeur. An outpouring of books and a bombardment of illustrated articles gripped the public mind and spawned a dozen national parks and monuments in southern Utah to say nothing of Yellowstone and the Grand Teton National Park to the north. A broad regional image of


22For example the National Geographic magazine carries articles on the Utah parks and monuments in 1904, 1907, 1910, 1911, 1914, and 1923 and on Yellowstone in 1912, 1913 and 1916.
wilderness and natural wonders had been established and with it the tourist industry. Cache Valley was largely passed over in the process. Its image remained one of farm life and pastoral comforts and had little tourist appeal.

Another dimension of this same question has to do with the fact that Cache Valley and the agriculture upon which it depended received extremely small coverage in the urban newspapers of the Wasatch Front during the turn of the century years. In part this appears to have been a regional matter, for Logan received far less attention than towns all along the Wasatch Front.

But the short shrift given Cache Valley was also related to the fact that agricultural affairs were outside the promotional interest of the Salt Lake dailies, which focused mainly upon political controversy and economic development including mineral exploitation and transportation. Most of the dailies had regular feature sections on business, mining, and sports, and the Sunday editions had a variety of special sections including ladies, home, and literature. By contrast, agriculture received only occasional reporting and then mostly in the form of statistics, farm item fillers—borrowed from farm periodicals in the Midwest, and items dealing with the bizarre or catastrophic. When during one period the Tribune did make an effort to run a biweekly farm section and later the Deseret Farmer stepped into the breech of farm reporting under the editorship of John A. Widtsoe, the dismal results suggest that, initially at least, even these farm papers lacked either staff or know-how. By contrast some, but by no means all, country weeklies were successful mirrors of farm affairs. Ironically, Logan's turn-of-the-century papers often appear to have been so bent on imitating the urban publications that they too failed to keep farm developments in the news. 23

Thus limited largely to agriculture, it is not surprising that the county was sensitive to farm markets and that it suffered many of the tensions characteristic to farm regions. From the first the valley looked to an economy beyond its control as it

23These observations rise from my own research in the Salt Lake dailies with farm items in mind. A research assistant, John Lamborn, also examined them to confirm my assessment.
freighted wheat and farm produce to the mines of Idaho and Montana. Later the wheat-pricing mechanisms of the nation stood with grasshoppers and drouth as the chief inhibitors of prosperity. For decades as farmers expanded on the dry land benches, wheat was the primary cash crop. By 1890, however, dairy manufacturing had begun, first at mountain dairies in Blacksmith Fork Canyon and near Beaver Dam, where dozens of Scandinavian milkmaids were employed. Thereafter, dairying joined wheat as a major source of cash income, and with manufacturing plants at Wellsville, Paradise, Logan, and Richmond, milk products were shipped to and priced on national markets.24 As we have seen, sugar beets added further flexibility after 1900, and horses and range livestock rounded out a remarkably balanced and diversified agricultural thrust.

A major point here is that, limited by natural and other circumstances from developing a multidimensional economy, the valley was aggressive in pursuing new markets and gearing its crops to meet the challenge of a nationally-priced agricultural system. Indeed, a wide range of social factors were mobilized to that end. Included were the size and working patterns of families, educational expectations, neighborhood harvesting and breeding pools, manufacturing developments, land and cropping patterns, water utilization, and the resources of the Agricultural College.25 Thus the county geared its institutions and customs to maximize profits and maintain reasonable standards of living in a state and nation that generally speaking had more latitude for growth and more flexibility to absorb setbacks in one sector or another of a complex economy.

No less important than the natural environment in determining the conditions the image makers reported were the


25 A careful and informative study of farm management is Edgar B. Brossard, "Some Types of Irrigation Farming In Utah," Utah Agricultural College Experiment Station Bulletin, No. 177 (Logan, 1920).
people who had migrated to Cache Valley. To get at the impact migration has had upon the character of the valley it seems wise to look momentarily at some broader patterns. Historically, American migration moved from east to west in increasingly intermingled waves of native-born Americans, Britishers, northern Europeans, and southern Europeans. The native-born tended to migrate directly west, with northerners, mid-Atlantic migrants and southerners extending the cultural patterns of their native regions in latitudinal belts across the country. Until 1880 British and northern Europeans also tended to move west through the northern and middle states, and French and Spanish moved in more southerly courses. After 1880 much of this regularity broke down, and southern Europeans followed opportunity to urban centers and areas of mining and construction, thus making for cultural diversity and increasing ethnic frictions. 26

In considering what immigration has meant in Cache Valley it may first be noted that Utah's physical conformation checked the east-west flow of the national movement and temporarily turned it north and south. In this context Cache Valley became an avenue through which migration moved from one state to another. Through it flowed cultural influences leading to social and political conflicts in Idaho and producing change in settlement patterns and economic orientation in northern Utah. 27

However, these changes and frictions cannot obscure the fact that Cache Valley's society was remarkably homogeneous. The immigrants from which it grew were almost all of native-born American, British, and northern European stock. They were of the same general economic and social backgrounds, and practically speaking, there was neither racial diversity nor ethnic discord during the turn-of-the-century years. Blacks, Orientals, southern Europeans and people of Mexican background cer-


27 For a fuller discussion of the role of the Bear River valleys as a two state cultural region see my "The Valley of the Bear River and the Movement of Culture Between Utah and Idaho" Utah Historical Quarterly, 47 (Spring 1979), 194-214. Also Merle Wells, Anti-Mormonism in Idaho 1872-92 (Provo, 1979).
tainly totaled less than a hundred or so in a population numbering over 20,000.

This homogeneity was largely the product of the selective process of the Mormon gathering. However, the valley’s agricultural character invited few southern Europeans and the adequacy of local labor supplies kept Mexicans and Orientals out. In addition the process by which new opportunity was developed lacked the “all-comers-welcome” character of farm promotions elsewhere. Cooperative irrigation projects and dry farming became in effect the local substitutes. Developments of both kinds tended to limit migration to Mormons and other experienced farmers. Water development particularly, sifted out the uninitiated and the easy-buck artists, as the embattled farmers of the Oneida Irrigation District could have testified after twenty years of debt, bitter infighting, and almost unbelievable labor to open a few thousand additional acres.28

However, within the broad cultural similarities that characterized Cache Valley’s population, immigration made considerable difference. Most directly it made for a society in which the proportion of foreign born was surprisingly high. Indeed, during the 1870s and 1880s the foreign born varied from 73 percent to 65 percent of the total adult population.29 In 1880 people of British birth accounted for 34.2 percent of the total, Scandinavians for 26 percent, and Swiss for 2.7 percent. Americans, well over half of whom had been born in Utah, accounted for no more than 35 percent of the adult population. Put in another way, this meant that during the 1870s and 1880s two out of every three people over 18 years of age spoke with a foreign brogue or a British accent. The percentage of the foreign born remained surprisingly high during the turn-of-the-century years, at least in some parts of the county, as may be seen in the fact that the census of 1900 shows that 54 percent of Hyde Park’s households were headed by foreign-born individuals and 41 percent of Mendon’s.30

28John D. Nash, “Oneida Irrigation District.” ML USU.
29Charles Hatch, Place of Birth Studies for Cache County, 1870: and Place of Birth Study for Cache County, 1880.
30Charles Hatch, Transcriptions of Manuscript Census, Twelfth U.S. Census, 1900, for Hyde Park and Mendon.
Among the American- and British-born adults, males slightly outnumbered females in the 1870s and 1880s. Among the Scandinavian immigrants, however, females predominated, especially among the Swedes, where they outnumbered males by 25 percent.\(^{31}\) One effect of this situation is the large number of single women with Scandinavian surnames listed in the Mendon and Hyde Park census of 1900.\(^{32}\) More important was intermarriage, often into polygamy. George A. Farrell of Smithfield, for example, married women of four different nationalities.\(^{33}\)

In Cache Valley the original American-born immigrants and their sons and daughters were the command group. They were favored in religious and political position as they were in the proportion of property they held. But the dominance of their position was also related to the fact that Mormonism, like Mormons themselves, was a product of the American Northeast and Midwest, and although most of them were converts to the church they were natives to many of its values and teachings. Under these circumstances their conduct as well as their decisions became standards for others to follow.\(^{34}\)

Also deeply ingrained in them were agrarian values. Like Thomas Jefferson, they believed that agriculture raised up few conflicting loyalties to complicate life and interfere with independence, and as a consequence, had favored agriculture over mining or business as the basis of their social system.\(^{35}\) Improving

\(^{31}\) Hatch, Place of Birth Study for Cache County, 1880.

\(^{32}\) Transcriptions of Manuscript Census, Twelfth U.S. Census, 1900, for Hyde Park and Mendon.

\(^{33}\) George H. Farrell, Transcriptions, 1937, Kimball Young File, on Polygamy, at Huntington Library, San Marino, Calif.

\(^{34}\) The dominant position of American born families could hardly be more apparent than it was in Cache Valley. Included were families of Peter Maughan, E.T. Benson, Hezekiah Thatcher, William Preston, William Hyde, Samuel Rosskelly, Marriner W. Merrill, L.H. Hatch, Brigham Young, Jr. (who lived in the Valley during the 1870s) and many others.

\(^{35}\) As far as I know the role of agrarian thought among the Mormons is nowhere treated in depth. For a brief analysis see my own Take Up Your Mission: Mormon Colonizing Along the Little Colorado River 1870-1900 (Tucson, 1973), 154-60.
on Jefferson, they were committed to the idea that the yeoman farmer was the backbone of the commonwealth whether it was the Kingdom of God or the American Republic. Like Mormon Apostle Erastus Snow, they believed “our people are an agricultural people” and that in farming they would “learn the art of self preservation and defense.”36 With Daniel H. Wells of the church presidency they saw “land” as the “nucleus of . . . prosperity, wealth, and . . . independence.”37 To them Apostle Orson Pratt’s effort to calculate the number of acres each “lawful heir” would receive in the “glorified earth” doubtlessly made good sense. And most of them would have been comforted by his assurance that the new world would contain “ample room for the delightful pursuits of the agriculturist.”38

At the same time the spirit of capitalism moved them. As stewards of the earth they looked for cash sales and, as we have seen, were quite willing to exploit nature for their own advantage. Finally, like other Americans they favored public education and were deeply moved by the idea of an informed citizenry and saw education and professional life as new frontiers.39

British immigrants to Cache Valley spoke the same language as their American counterparts and accepted Mormon teachings fully. Yet one suspects that their background made a difference. Most of them came from the industrial cities of Great Britain during times of social upheaval. The Babylon from which they fled was urban. The Zion to which they came was rural. Few of them, it would seem, really wished it to be otherwise. As Englishmen they were no strangers to the impulses of imperialism, and the Mormon Kingdom that had been cut as a stone from the mountain and was rolling forth to fill the earth was in principle and sentiment familiar to them. Finally, they partook of the values of Victorian England and brought with them something of its sense of morality, its attitudes towards

37Journal of Discourses, 19 (Liverpool, 1878), 369.
38Journal of Discourses, 1 (Liverpool, 1855), 333.
39I have addressed this question from a different direction in a paper entitled “A Mormon Awakening: The Emergence of an Educators’ Community” read before the Mormon History Society at San Francisco in 1978.
women, and its commitment to law and convention as well as something of its formality and pomp. While many were well educated they lacked the strong sense for an informed citizenship that actuated the native Americans and few foreign-born Britishers made lasting contributions in that field.  

Scandinavian immigrants too left their country in time of upheaval and widespread poverty. Unlike the English, however, they came from farms and villages, bringing customs and attitudes that belonged to the land. Few had much education and like British immigrants most lacked the vision of its potential for the common man until they learned it from their American associates. They were tradition-oriented and accepted the Mormon demand to subordinate their language and culture quietly. Folklorist, Richard Paulsen, has recently argued that the material culture of Scandinavia was also repressed, but it has been the writer's own experience that Scandinavian farm layout and building habits had a noticeable impact on Cache Valley farmscapes. Indeed, until a year ago the farmstead of Peter Larsen in North Logan was a classic example of Danish influence transplanted to the United States. Unfortunately, Utah State University acquired the land and with surprising insensitivity tore the place down without an inquiry into the cultural impact of the action.

There is a final element to what the movement of people meant historically in Cache Valley. Recent demographic studies by University of Utah historian Dean May and others have suggested that society here was remarkably stable. Basing their calculations on the locations where major vital events occurred in the lives of more than a million Utahns, May and his colleagues have found that Utah's population generally was much more

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40P.A.M. Taylor, Expectations Westward (Edinburg and London, 1965), is the best study of the Mormon migration from Great Britain.

likely to stay in the same place than populations in many regions. For example, one midwestern town had a persistence rate (roughly the proportion of people remaining in a place) of only 21 percent for the decade of the 1860s. By contrast May found that 67 percent of Utah’s population between 1850 and 1910 lived and died in Utah and had no vital event elsewhere.

Fortunately, May has given us some guide for Cache Valley by studying Hyrum, where he found a lifetime persistence rate of 23.3 percent, which compared with 11.8 percent in Kanab, 20.6 percent in Lehi, and 30.5 percent for Salt lake City. Diaries and oral histories point to a good deal of movement away from Cache Valley to Idaho and other northwestern states in the turn of the century years. But May’s study suggests that in the larger perspective outmigration was relatively limited. Taken in this broad sense, this is another telling evidence of a homogeneous society that was little given to change.

It is apparent in the foregoing that the thought patterns and values of turn-of-the-century Cache Valley people were strongly oriented to the Mormon tradition. It is also apparent that Mormon values were overlaid and supported by a variety of farm values. Strong among these was a sense for the family farm. Throughout the entire period the overwhelming majority of farms were operated by owners. In 1910, for example, 92 percent of all farms were owner operated, and only twelve out of a total of nearly two thousand were run by managers. However, as Ray Stannard Baker noted, many farmers lived in the villages and commuted to farms consisting of as many as a dozen scattered plots. This traditional practice, however, became less

42Dean May, “‘Once I Lived in Cottonwood’: Population Stability in Utah Mormon Towns, 1850-1910.” This paper was read at a Social Science History Meeting in Columbus, Ohio, during 1978 and reflects work done by Dean May, Lee Bean and Mark Skolnik.
44“The Vitality of Mormonism . . .” The Century Magazine, LXVII (June 1904), 171.
predominant throughout the turn-of-the-century decades, and new farmstead districts developed including North Logan, College Ward, and Petersboro as people moved to the land.

Farm families were large and provided the main source of farm labor. For example, a College Ward study of thirty-six families shows that twenty-six families had seven or more children for an average of more than ten per family. On the other hand the child-bearing period was extended over many years and the average number of children at home at a given time was far smaller. Indeed, Hyde Park studies for 1900 and 1914 show that farm households averaged only about four and a half persons, suggesting that the average number of children at home was somewhere around two and a half.

There can be no question, however, that family size was related to labor needs. Like water supply and soil and market conditions, family labor was an important element of management in both the diversified farming of the villages and the wheat culture of new districts. As children matured who had earlier been busied in the beet fields or the dairy barn, they often opened new branches of industry, such as hog production, on their farms, or did custom work or entered neighborhood threshing cooperatives. One result of this full utilization of the family was that itinerant workers as well as labor organizations and attitudes were almost totally excluded.

Various and sometimes contradictory values are apparent in other facets of family relations. Women and children were loved and provided for but sometimes controlled and driven by autocratic men for whom the vaunted ideal of farm independence was a matter for adult males only. Families settled in clusters in farm villages and on the countryside. They arrived in Cache County in family groups, and left it for dryland districts in Idaho or for other opportunities in family groups. Polygamists extended the family group beyond its normal reach, mixed town

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43 Dean May and Charles Hatch, College Ward Study, 1979.

and country as they parcelled out wives and families, and a few of them established what Samuel Taylor has fittingly called "family kingdoms."47 Such a one was Richmond's Marriner W. Merrill, who married eight wives of four nationalities, fathered forty-six children in six decades and in two centuries, and became an apostle and temple president. In addition he directed his family, almost as if by divine right, as they operated numerous farms, mills, and dairy plants, controlled social affairs locally, and infiltrated the state's growing educational system.48

Nothing underwent more drastic changes during this quarter century than debt level. In 1890 little indebtedness of any kind existed, and with remarkable consistency of values and conduct Cache Valley farmers both abhorred debt and eschewed it. But times changed and attitudes became confused. In no small part this was the result of the collapse of Mormon resistance in 1890, which not only resulted in Mormons turning to more conventional forms of marriage, education, and politics but also to quick, and in many cases premature, espousal of national economic values and spending practices.49 As measured by farm mortgage on a statewide basis, change was impressive. In 1890 no more than 5 percent of all farms were encumbered in any way. By 1920 nearly half were. In 1910, when 22.7 percent of the farms in the state were mortgaged, a third of all Cache County farms carried debt.50 These figures suggest that the county may have moved ahead of the state as the debt load increased.


49 There is no adequate study of the impact the collapse of Mormon resistance after 1890 had upon Mormon economic patterns. Leonard J. Arrington, Great Basin Kingdom: Economic History of the Latter-day Saints, 1830-1900 (Cambridge, 1958), includes an informative chapter on this topic and Ronald Walker of the Mormon Church Historical Department is currently doing a study of Heber J. Grant's role that will throw much light on their entry into investment finances. No one, however, has tried to assess how the rank and file reacted in their spending habits. My own impression is that they were quick to "conform" with the larger society in this respect and that many of them suffered seriously from debt as a result.

Certainly it was a time of increased expenditures in Cache County as expectations mounted. Farms were enlarged, the generation of barns that are now collapsing were built, and homes were equipped with a growing number of conveniences. Much more was also expected in the way of education and public services. In general much progress was made, but during times of panic especially, old fears reasserted themselves, and the tension produced was almost intolerable. Isaac Sorensen, pioneer historian of Mendon, reflects the clash of values in his account of the Panic of the 1890s:

It is not the amount produced . . . that enriches the family, but it is the economical way in which means . . . are spent . . . that makes the progress . . . any farmer should be able to make. As where there is no progress there cannot be . . . satisfaction or happiness . . . No one thought of a change so soon to take place, hence credit was largely indulged in . . . What book agents failed to lay before the people to induce them to give their Note . . . the farm implement Agent would not be slow to make up and what he left, the Organ dealer would supply and Carriage and Buggy Agent carts, spring Wagons, . . . to say nothing of the merchant who of them all dealt the heaviest blow. Where heretofore men had been reluctant to go into debt 5-10-15 dollars, they would go into hundreds . . . The cry of hard times, he continued, was everywhere heard. Crops were poor, prices down, and “much interest had to be paid.” Tightening their belts, people fell back “somewhat to the old way of living . . .” As Sorensen makes clear, the panic brought only a temporary return to the old patterns of spending. But Sorensen and his kind continued to feel insecure. Many of them hedged against the feeling in various ways.

For many security still lay in the land. Some worked on new canal systems and took water shares in pay, which then became an opening stake in new farming districts. Others freighted or worked on construction to buy a few acres of new land. Among these was Wellsville’s Frank Wyatt, who after freighting for

several years began accumulating the land that became Utah State University’s Ronald V. Jensen Living History Farm by buying twenty-nine acres in what had formerly been the Wellsville town grazing ground.52

Another strategy frequently employed to stay near the land was to buy larger farms as families grew. Alfonse Brossard, for example, raised a large family in the turn-of-the-century years on an expanding Oxford, Idaho, farm.53 Joseph Watkins, Sr., bought first at Beaver Dam in 1890, enlarged his holdings, built successive homes, and as centrifugal forces tugged at his boys sought to keep their interest by purchasing the 2,200 acre Spring Creek Ranch northeast of Mendon. This the family ran with decreasing enthusiasm for several years before the old man bitterly acknowledged he had never bought a farm for himself and sadly watched his family leave.54

Hundreds, perhaps thousands, looked to homesteads in Box Elder County or Idaho. Movement of this sort appears to have varied from place to place in the valley in response to what were at least partially geographical determinants. The tradition of Idaho homesteading, for example, was not strong in Hyde Park, which was located midway in the valley and backed by mountains through which there was no convenient pass. Many were the sons and daughters of Mendon, on the other hand, who moved a few miles or a few score of miles through the easy and convenient pass at Beaver Dam to homestead in the decades after 1890.55

A most revealing story in terms of values that kept people near the land and of the sacrifices and ironies involved comes from neighboring Ogden Valley and the gifted pen of Fawn McKay Brodie. Brodie’s grandfather owned a farm which as she described it may have seemed a hodgepodge—fine green squares of irrigated truck farm on the valley floor, pastures crisscrossed

52Beth Wyatt Winn Oral History, 1973, ML USU.
53Edgar B. Brossard, Alphonse and Mary Hobson Brossard (Salt Lake City, 1972).
54Joseph Watkins, Jr., Oral History, 1974, ML USU.
with swamps, undulating acres of dryland grain in the
foothills, and a wide swath of rangeland...But in the
primitive pioneer economy it had been an almost self-
sufficient unit, with each part contributing uniquely to
the security of the family. Hay and grain fed the range
stock in the winter; the lower pastures kept the milk
cows fat; and the irrigated acres filled the cellar with
vegetables and fruit.

Then in an act that “brought hopeless disorder” the old
gentleman quartered his holdings between his four sons.
Romantic and optimistic and in all likelihood aware of the old
man’s quest for a deeper security, they saw “dismemberment not”
as “tragedy” but as “challenge.” To keep the place together the
brothers cast lots and Brodie’s father, Thomas E. McKay, “who
would have been happier to try his luck in city politics,” mort-
gaged the place and paid the brothers off. “Neither crafty nor
careful” they straightway lost it all in “Arizona cotton” and
“Canadian wheat” bubbles. By “the flick of a pen”... shelter,
security and... goodness of life” became in Fawn Brodie’s
memory burden and sacrifice.56

One suspects, however, that beyond the burden and sacrifice
was a quest for a deeper kind of security for the families of
Thomas McKay and his brothers. By the cast of a lot he had
accepted the obligation of hedging against the unknown as the
family began the process of uncoupling itself from a frontier
farm tradition that experienced something of famine and
something of the agrarian dream. Whether or not Thomas E.
McKay accepted burdens to ease fears or to fulfill yearnings for
lost Edens, there can be no doubt that security was seen to lie in
the soil and uncounted and perhaps uncountable numbers who
stayed with Cache Valley farms sacrificed shortrun opportunity
for what they perceived to be deeper values.

The farm that Thomas E. McKay struggled to maintain was
also the base from which David O. McKay, one of the brothers,
launched a significant educational career and a truly notable one
in church leadership. If land was seen as a hedge against hard

56Fawn M. Brodie, “Inflation Idyl: A Family Farm in Huntsville,” Utah
Historical Quarterly, 40 (Spring 1972), 113.
times and a link with the past, it was also a springboard for new opportunity. As Utah State University professor of sociology Joseph Geddes recognized a generation ago, education and professional positions in distant centers were the new beginnings turn-of-the-century farms provided for many of Cache Valley's young. With a bitter twist Bear Lake poet David L. Wright wrote of what became a continuing exodus:

... they talk gently
of sons and grandsons making more money in a month
than they in a year;
one a biochemist for the USDA,
another, executive for ibm
but saying nothing of . . .
sacrifices for offsprings
whose fortunes had to be sought apart from the heritage,
... selling cows, sheep, ancestral lands . . .
wise, these old, to see the cast
of the world's change did not lie with villages . . .
educate them — the only way . . .
help them "get started" (sell another cow). 58

In the set of mind that instinctively exploited the farm to start a new life, Cache Valley shared not merely the traditions of other farming regions but indeed the nation. But its political responses reflect the fact that it was solidly in the Mormon region and that as agricultural as it may have been it was at the far margin of a distant wheatbelt. Basically conservative, Cache Valley's people sought to conform to the system not to reform it as did Great Plains farmers of the era or Oregon's Progressives. Forced to set the most active and creative elements of the Mormon reform agenda aside but with the principles on which those reforms rested still deeply engrained in their thinking habits, they were essentially in a holding pattern unable to act on their own enthusiasms but too distant in space and values to join farm movements elsewhere.

Thus the turn-of-the-century years were certainly no time of political ferment, but a few Cache Valley residents did borrow tentatively from various thinkers of the time including Herbert Spencer and Henry George. Like other Americans they talked of social ills, robber barons, corrupt politicians, and various remedies. But they joined few protest movements, labor unions, or radical groups, and they divided their votes fairly evenly between the Democratic and Republican parties. Generally they pursued a colorless and predictable middle-of-the-road course.

This stodginess, notwithstanding, one detects here and there evidence of the farmbelt's affinity for maverick personalities and programs on the one hand, and rock-ribbed conservatism on the other. There is more than a touch of the maverick, of course, in Moses Thatcher, Logan's "fallen apostle," who more than toyed with Herbert Spencer's social Darwinism and who with his friend Charles Nibley turned Henry George's theories of land and single tax into an argument for making land a public utility owned and managed for the good of all by the church. Persuasive, fluent, and independent of thought and action, Thatcher was doubtless the most influential leader in the valley before he was dropped from the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles in 1896 for refusing to let that body determine what his political activities should be.

A more typical manifestation of the farmbelt political style may be seen in the presidential candidacy of Parley P. Christensen in 1920. Born at Weston, Idaho, in 1872, he was of the dissenting gentile group who concentrated near the state border. He became a member of the state constitutional convention and held various posts in Salt Lake County. His nomination as the presidential candidate for the unlikely accumulation of farm and labor interests that comprised the

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60 Temple Lectures: A Series of Lectures Delivered Before the Temple School of Science During the Years 1885-86 (Logan, n.d.), 38-51; 74-90; 123-33.
Farmer-Labor party points to elements in the political character of Utah and Cache Valley that need continued analysis. ⁶¹

But a maverick politician doth not a farmbelt make. Recognizing this, I may conclude by inquiring—What has come of my effort to examine Cache Valley in the turn-of-the-century years? It is apparent that the broadened approach permitted by looking simultaneously at Mormonism, regionalism and agriculture brings numerous perspectives and insights into view. As for the methodological features themselves, it is clear they need refining and further work. Comparisons are needed that contrast the Cache Valley experience with its neighbors and set it in the broader perspective. After seeing, recently, a beautifully done book of the rural photographs of Springville’s turn-of-the-century photographer, George E. Anderson, I was reminded that, like his photos, the perceived distinctions that set regions apart in the minds of people are not easy to improve upon in the written word. ⁶²

Nevertheless a few observations emerge. Important among these is the uniform character of Cache Valley society. While variation in place of origin did exist, background, common religious and economic interests and shared experiences in the valley itself drew this society together. Closely related is the unchanging character of Cache Valley life at a time when complexity and transition were evident throughout the nation and Utah. Agriculture was and had always been the dominant economic activity. Technology wrought no quick change and urban ills did not beset the county. Transition and growth were underway but they came from predictable directions and produced few critical problems. Years ago Leonard Arrington referred to this period as Cache Valley’s “golden age.” ⁶³ It may not have been a golden time, but it was a time when traditional


⁶²Rell G. Francis, The Utah Photographs of George Edward Anderson (Lincoln, 1979).

economic activities prevailed and when a well-integrated hard-working society knew what was expected of it. Although farming was as important to life as it was in many farmbelt regions, Cache Valley was also Mormon and lacked the scope and close ties to a large farming community necessary for the interests and style of agriculture to dominate life at its visible and public points. On the other hand, its rhythms and habits permeated life at the most fundamental level. Regionally the valley was part of Utah and dominated by Mormon influences, yet was set apart internally from the Wasatch Front and externally reached beyond to historical and cultural bonds with the Northwest.