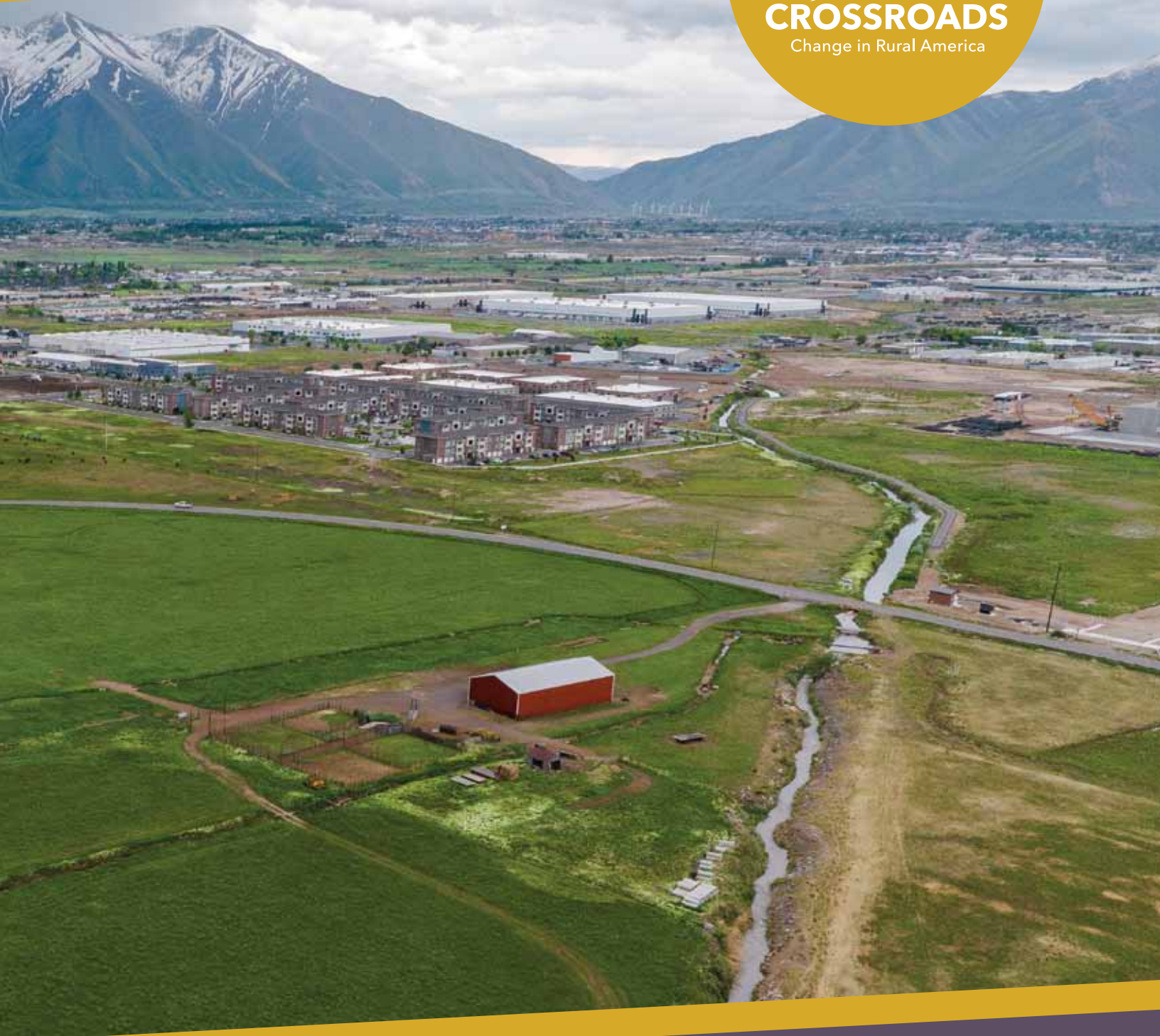


RURAL UTAH AT A CROSSROADS



AN ESSAY BY GREGORY E. SMOAK,
NATE HOUSLEY & MEGAN WEISS

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Ideas in Action



EVERY RURAL PERSON AND PLACE HAS A STORY.
CHANGE IS PART OF THAT STORY.

Crossroads: Change in Rural America is a traveling exhibition that provokes fresh thinking and sparks conversations about the future and sustainability of rural communities. *Crossroads* offers small towns a chance to look at their own paths over the past century - to highlight changes that affected their fortunes, explore how they have adapted, and think about what's next.



Crossroads: Change in Rural America is part of Museum on Main Street, a collaboration between the Smithsonian Institution and State Humanities Councils nationwide. Support for Museum on Main Street has been provided by the United States Congress.

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Utah Humanities strengthens Utah communities by cultivating connections, deepening understanding, and exploring our complex human experience.

Utah Humanities acknowledges Utah's Indigenous communities as the original peoples of these lands. We honor their stewardship, respect their resilience, and celebrate their traditions and living cultures. We foster respectful connection to Utah lands and first peoples through our programming and call for a brighter future together – one human interaction at a time.

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EVERY RURAL PERSON AND PLACE HAS A STORY. CHANGE IS PART OF THAT STORY.

Understanding the story of change in rural Utah requires an appreciation for the tension between the ideals and realities of rural life.

INTRODUCTION

Utah is an urban place with a rural heart. The vast majority of our state's population lives in the densely populated cities of the Wasatch Front. Over one third of all Utahns live in Salt Lake County alone! Yet, if pressed, many of those urban dwellers might hesitate to think of themselves as city folk. That is because rural life holds deep and resilient meanings for many Americans, especially here in Utah.

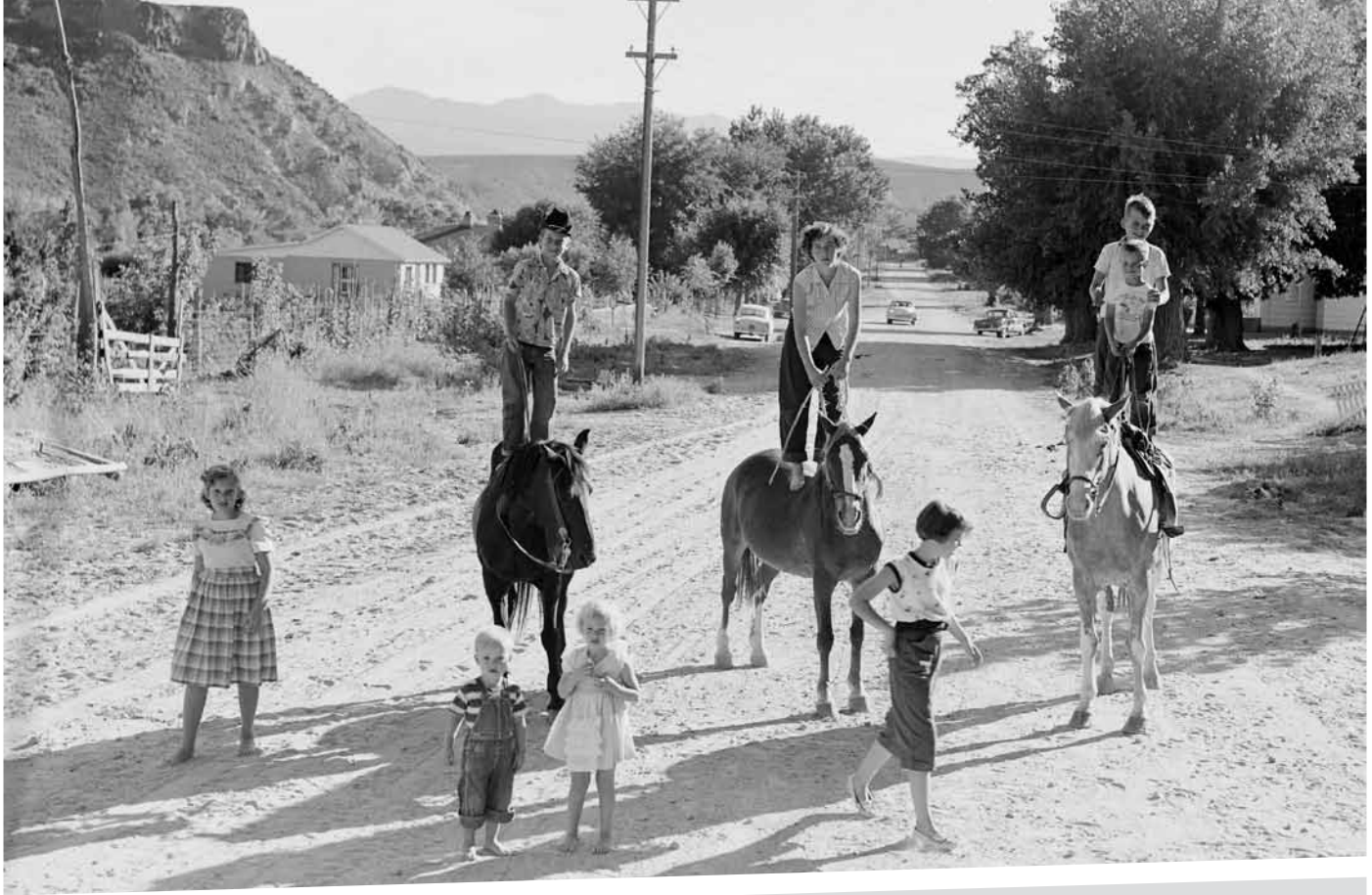
So what does rural mean? The United State Census Bureau defines "rural" as any place with fewer than 2,500 residents. If you live in a smaller community, or on the land in between, congratulations you are officially "rural"! Well, at least according to the Census Bureau. Other federal agencies use different standards while Utah's own state offices follow over a dozen different statutory and administrative definitions. Such official measures might guide government programs, but they can never capture the reality or the meaning of rural life.

It is more valuable to ask, "What does rural mean to you?" Many Utahns hold cherished ideals of rural life. Some might view small communities as a link to family heritage, or as a connection to the land itself, or as the wellspring of American values like self-reliance, hard work, simplicity, honesty, and caring for your neighbors. Small towns are the cornerstone of our political culture and freedoms. They are places of family and stability. Indeed, notions of identity and heritage are far more powerful in shaping how we think of rural Utah than any objective definition.



Dorothea Lange, *Neon Cowboy "This is the Place"*, n.d., photonegative. Wendover Wil, positioned on the Utah-Nevada border pointing to Utah - "this is the place" - embodies the cherished image of the cowboy, an individual laborer redeeming the American West. Image courtesy Oakland Museum of California, City of Oakland, gift of Paul S. Taylor.

While there is certainly some truth in our idealized visions of rural life, the reality has always been more complicated. The perseverance of the pioneers and the resilience of small towns is to be celebrated,



Dorothea Lange, *Horseplay, Gunlock, Utah*, 1953, photonegative. While there is truth in our idealized visions of rural life, the reality has always been more complicated. Image courtesy Oakland Museum of California, City of Oakland, gift of Paul S. Taylor.

but the reality could also include wrenching poverty, overwhelming challenges, and sometimes failure. Moreover, success could come at the expense of others, particularly Utah's Native peoples. And while independence is a prized value in small communities, government intervention has also shaped rural Utah, like much of the West. Understanding rural life requires us to think about both the ideals and the realities - where they intersect and where they diverge.

Utah's rural experience is unique. For one thing, "rural" looks different in Utah and the Intermountain West than it does in the East. Utah is an arid place, and the agrarian life possible in places like Georgia or Ohio is not feasible here. With land plentiful but water scarce, Utah agriculture developed differently. In the East, irrigation is rare. Here, it is essential. Yet environment was not the only factor that shaped life in rural Utah. The values and goals of early Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS or Mormon) settlers were an equally powerful force. The lives and labor of those first generations are still visible on the landscape today.

Still, rural life in Utah has always encompassed much more than farmland. Mining and other industries have sustained many rural communities, even if they have never held the same beloved place in Utah's rural heart. Equally critical have been the decisions and the actions of the federal government. Most of Utah is public land, administered by the United States government for all Americans. That means National Parks and Forests, but it also means millions of acres of land used for grazing, mineral development, and other economic pursuits, as well as vast swaths of military lands.

The stories of rural Utah that follow are complex, and they are stories of change. It might be tempting to think of rural life as slow-paced, "behind the times," perhaps even unchanging. Nothing is further from the truth. Rural Utah has always existed at a crossroads, and change has been a constant. The changes and challenges facing small communities today are not unprecedented, and considering the ways Utahns have navigated historic crossroads might help us think about the future of rural Utah.

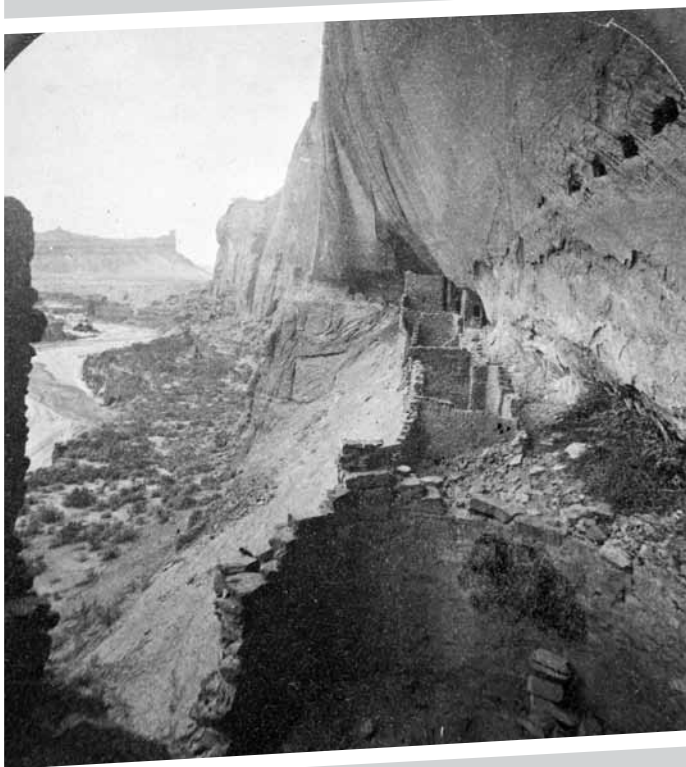


IDENTITY

Identity has long informed the way that Utahns have used the land. In turn, working the land has influenced the ways we think about ourselves.

For many, rural identity is synonymous with one particular use of the land: agriculture. In many places across the state, rural economies have historically depended on agriculture and continue to do so today.

Yet rural Utah as a whole has always relied on much more than agriculture. Mining and other extractive industries have often been more important to community survival, even if they contrast with the idealized image of the independent farmer. Unpacking the influence of identity on rural land - and the tension between ideals and reality - can be a complex task. To begin, we must examine how agriculture has long held meaning beyond the food that it produces.



William Henry Jackson, *Cliff Dwelling Ruins*, 1875, albumen print on paper. Ancestral Puebloans grew maize and stored grain, making them the original farmers of the land we now know as Utah. This "Poncho House" complex, built in the 12th century, is the largest in Utah. Courtesy National Park Service, Museum Management Program and Scotts Bluff.

Among the earliest British settlers in North America, farming implied something very important about their society. Cultivating the land and "improving" it, according to their particular definition, was a marker of civilization that set them apart from the continent's Indigenous peoples. By the time of the American Revolution, a rural, agrarian way of life carried additional social and political meanings which are still fundamental to our national identity.

The Mormon settlers who entered the Salt Lake Valley in the summer of 1847 shared many of these beliefs. But, they were also motivated by distinct religious beliefs and goals as a society informed by their unique faith as members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Here in the Great Basin, they developed a particular type of farming that was an adaptation to the place as well as a reflection of their own identity as both Mormons and white Americans.

Rural identity consists of more than just farming. Other uses of the land, particularly mining, have played an important role in Utah's history, yet we tend not to romanticize these types of extractive industries in the same way that we do agriculture. If farming was a marker of "civilization" relative to Indigenous peoples, agrarian life also served as a remedy to the ills of the industrialized city. Mining brought the kind of dangerous wage labor to the countryside that homesteaders sought to escape. As a result, farming tends to overshadow extractive industry in our ideals of rural life.

NATIVE HOMELANDS

People's attachment to the land pre-dates the arrival of white settlers and the concept of "rural" and "urban" spaces. Utah's Native Americans always linked their identities to the land itself. Today, many tribes in Utah are "rural" because reservation communities are in rural places, but they have always been land-based peoples. There was no "Utah," and the concept of a distinct "rural" identity was meaningless. The land

was their homeland. It was where the bones of their ancestors were buried, where they were born, and where they too would return to the earth.

One story that echoes across Numic (Shoshone, Goshute, Paiute, and Ute) cultures is that of the trickster Coyote, who finds two women living on an island in a lake. Soon after his arrival, the women began giving birth to many children. One day they gave him a basket and told him to leave, warning him to not open it. But as he walked he inevitably lifted the lid out of curiosity. Each time he did this, some of the women's children would leap from the basket and run out across the land. They became the Shoshones, Utes, Paiutes, and Goshutes. The Goshute people, indigenous to the West Desert south of Great Salt Lake, say they were the last in the basket, tougher than the rest and covered in dust. For them, the harsh environment of the Great Basin desert was central to their identity and origin.

Newe peoples (Shoshones) called their homelands *debia*, translated as "native land." While Newe groups might travel hundreds of miles each year to access resources, they always returned to winter camps in their *debia*. For the Diné (Navajo people), identity was also intertwined with the land. Four sacred mountains mark the boundaries of *Diné Bikéyah*, their homeland. In their origin story, this place is where the people first emerged and where they were destined to remain.

Over many centuries, Indigenous peoples developed deep understandings of their homelands which led to a diverse range of land uses and management practices. Ancestral Puebloan and Fremont peoples grew corn in irrigated plots. Later, Paiutes planted gardens in some of the same fertile bottomlands.



"Agriculture... is our wisest pursuit, because it will in the end contribute most to real wealth, good morals and happiness."

– Thomas Jefferson to George Washington, August 14, 1787

Navajos planted orchards and raised sheep obtained from Spanish colonists. Utes, Shoshones, and Goshutes traveled throughout their homelands hunting, gathering, and fishing.

THE JEFFERSONIAN IDEAL

The colonizers who came to Utah in the mid-nineteenth century brought radically different ideals. They viewed Native lifeways as primitive and inferior and believed the land could be taken and put to better, mostly agrarian, uses. Eventually, this agrarian identity guided their attempts to remake Indigenous peoples in their own image.

An agricultural life was supposed to be the wellspring of values that would sustain the American political system, in addition to serving as a way to distinguish colonizers from Native Americans. This concept has deep roots in American history. For many in the nation's founding generation, it was an accepted fact that an agricultural way of life was indispensable for a stable democracy. Thomas Jefferson was the most notable proponent of this idea. For Jefferson, the very survival of the republic hinged on the existence of an independent, virtuous citizenry that worked the land. In his reading of history, farming, rather than industrial development, offered the surest path to avoiding corruption and sustaining the American experiment. "Those who labour in the earth are the chosen people of God," he wrote, "if ever he had a chosen people."

Thomas Jefferson's articulation of a "yeoman" ideal – one in which an individual owned and worked his own land with his family – served as the framework for land policy through the 1800s. As the United States expanded westward, the nation expected farmers to be the self-sufficient backbone of democracy. Viewed as being free from economic coercion, these farmers would set aside their own interests and vote for the common good. Economic freedom and political freedom, for Jefferson, went hand in hand.

In pursuit of this vision, the nation adopted policies that would transform public lands into the private property of capitalist citizen farmers. Dividing the land for distribution was the first step. To better accommodate this, the United States instituted a rectilinear survey system that organized natural landscapes into an arbitrary gridwork – straight lines and right angles on maps can make little sense on the ground as they cut across a variety of land features. Begun in 1786, this grid of ranges, townships, and sections is still in use today. Other laws provided

Mountain Man: a Romanticized Symbol

The “mountain man” is a potent symbol of Western self-reliance and masculine identity. While these independent fur trappers were present in what is now Utah in the 1820s and 1830s, their history does not inform Utah identity to the same extent as the ideal of family farmers.

Notable explorers such as Jedediah Smith and Jim Bridger made their way to the Great Basin. Ogden and Provo are both named for trappers, and three of the fabled “Mountain Man Rendezvous” took place in the Cache and Bear Lake valleys. Rendezvous were trade gatherings where trappers exchanged their pelts for needed goods and camaraderie – an important break from the isolation and loneliness of their work.

The mountain men developed survival skills that were necessary for withstanding the harsh winters in the Rocky Mountains, largely by themselves. This romanticized symbol of independence, exploration,

and adventure continues to inform ideas about the West and land use. But fur traders did not intend to permanently settle the West. Their goal was to extract a resource from the land and move on.

Fur traders made their living where Euro-American and Native American societies met. Natives were invaluable guides for the trappers, exchanging their knowledge of the landscape and means of survival for valuable goods that the French and Anglo trappers brought with them.

The fur trade represents another period of Indigenous contact with Europeans in the US West that began with Spanish exploration in the seventeenth century.

As trappers decimated beaver populations throughout the country, the market became saturated with



William Henry Jackson, *Mountain Men* - 1830, c 1905. Image courtesy Utah Historical Society.

pelts by 1840. The profitability of trapping had ended. Still, the reports from these adventurous mountain men informed later groups like the Mormons who would travel West for permanent settlement – made possible by agriculture in the valleys.

ways for Americans to purchase or claim individual parcels of the public domain and create their own homesteads. Together these laws not only defined economic democracy and opportunity, they also encouraged settlement patterns marked by individual family homesteads scattered across the landscape.

The reality actually often fell short of Jefferson’s idealized vision. The so-called “free lands” of the frontier were supposed to sustain the agrarian republic. However, the frontier already supported thriving Indigenous nations, so colonizers carved the “Empire of Liberty” from Indigenous homelands. Meanwhile, laws intended to ensure an equitable distribution of land to “bona fide settlers” often faltered, allowing some to amass great fortunes through land speculation. And finally, the promise was not open to all Americans, including the enslaved persons who worked in fields on Jefferson’s estate in Virginia, nor those who worked here in Utah.

When Mormons were settling what was then Mexican territory, this notion of seeking freedom and prosperity in the West had already become central

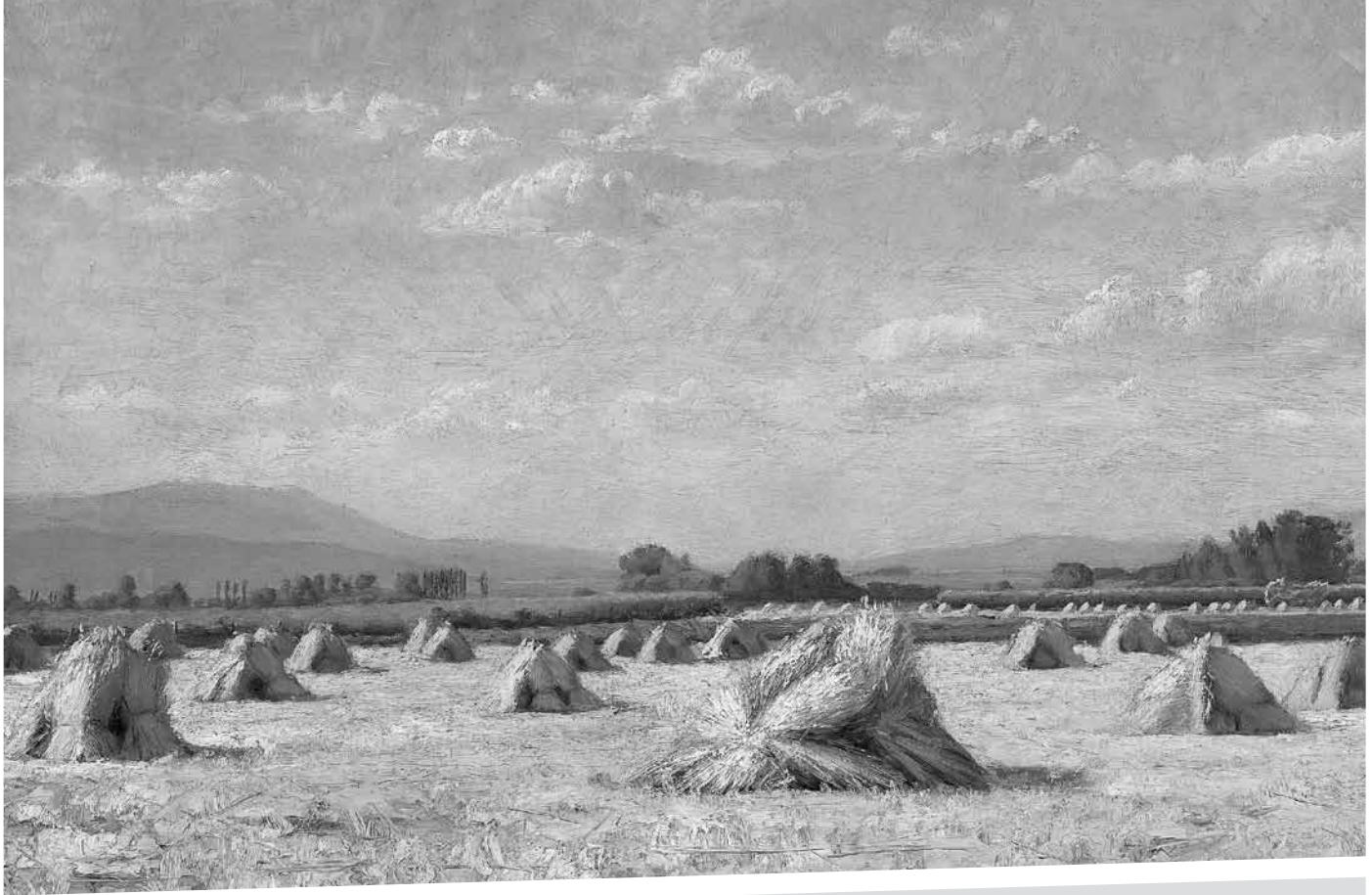
to American identity. LDS settlers carried this notion with them, but they also brought their own distinctive beliefs and motivations.

MORMON DIVERGENCE FROM JEFFERSONIAN IDEAL

The Mormon colonists who came to Utah in 1847 shared ideals with other nineteenth-century Americans, but they also attached their own layers of social and religious meaning to rural life. In this way, they shaped a distinct Utah identity.

For the early Mormons, an agrarian life was both a necessity – the first contingent planted potatoes the very day they arrived in the Salt Lake Valley – and a means to build a communitarian society that would sustain their faith. As LDS apostle and agricultural expert John A. Widtsoe would declare in the 1900s, “We Latter-day Saints are a land-loving people. We believe in the land. We are a land-using people.”

The Mormon pioneer identity is fundamentally about



John B. Fairbanks, *A Summer Harvest*, 1895, oil on canvas. Fairbanks was among a group of Utah painters sent to Paris in the late 1800s to learn romanticism and impressionism. Upon their return, these artists often depicted an idealized image of rural Utah. Image courtesy Springville Museum of Art, gift of Michael & Lois Woods, in memory of Helen Richards Taylor Woods.

overcoming the hardships of an unforgiving land. The life of a homesteader anywhere involves plenty of difficult work, but the perils of crossing a continent and irrigating an unfamiliar high desert environment posed additional challenges that became a source of pride for rural communities across Utah. Despite the immense changes those communities have experienced, this heritage remains integral to the way many Utahns, both rural and urban, understand themselves today.

For Mormons, there was little distance between their religious, economic, and political understandings of the land. Their identity drew from religious ideals, such as the Biblical prophecy that the “desert would blossom as the rose,” as well as the practical necessity of cooperating as a community. Working together, rather than alone, literally shaped Utah’s landscape.

COMMUNITARIANISM

While the Jeffersonian Ideal influenced Western settlement, including that of the Mormons, Utah’s history is unique because of its divergence from that ideal. Where Jefferson emphasized private ownership, early Mormons set aside absolute private

property rights in favor of communitarianism. In the first decades of Mormon settlement, the LDS Church owned common resources, redistributed the products to the community, and assigned labor. As LDS leader Brigham Young decreed, “There shall be no private ownership of the streams that come out of the canyons, nor the timber that grows on the hills. These belong to the people: all the people.” Church leaders initially distributed land by casting lots, and farmers worked individual plots watered by collective irrigation works and enclosed by a single fence. It was not until 1869, when United States land laws were finally extended to Utah, that truly private ownership became possible. Settlement patterns also diverged from the Jeffersonian model of isolated homesteads. For a communitarian society to thrive, the people had to live in a community. As a result, compact settlements surrounded by planted fields became the norm.

While Mormon collectivism grew from a religious desire for a unified community, the realities of Western agriculture reinforced the pattern. Utah did not get enough rainfall during the growing season to sustain agriculture without irrigation. While a farmer in a place like Kentucky saw ample rainfall and therefore might achieve self-sufficiency with household labor alone, the

typical farmer in Utah had to rely upon the community to build and maintain irrigation works. Putting water on the land required either major capital investment or many hands working together. Mormon settlers had little of the former and so relied on the latter. Even in later decades, agriculture in Utah and the West still demanded some measure of cooperation as farmers depended on the same, limited water sources. Over time, shares in irrigation companies and districts that managed diversions and delivered water supplanted the physical labor of community members.

FORCED NATIVE ASSIMILATION

While Mormon communitarianism diverged from national ideals in some ways, one notion the LDS settlers shared with other Americans was a belief that agricultural society was morally and socially superior to Indigenous lifeways. In an early meeting with local Shoshone leaders, Mormon apostle Heber C. Kimball dismissed their demands for compensation and declared, "The land belongs to our Father in Heaven,

and we calculate to plow and plant it." Despite the very successful adaptations of Native Americans in the arid Great Basin, Mormons never had any question about what people should do with the land - they should farm. This was partly because that was what the Mormons knew, but their plans also rested on their belief that "civilization" could not exist without agriculture.

Mormon leaders and settlers therefore shared the widespread American belief that agriculture could be a tool for "civilizing" Native peoples. Agricultural assistance from the federal government had been part of federal Indian treaties dating back to the early republic, and LDS Church leaders adopted a similar approach. Beginning in 1851, with federal help, the church established a series of "Indian Farms" near Spanish Fork, Manti, and Fillmore. This approach aimed to teach agricultural methods and transform Native Americans - despite the fact that the Mormons were, themselves, newcomers to irrigated farming in the arid West and had struggled with the practice. While some Shoshones were amenable to

Power of the Farmer Identity

The idea of being an individual yeoman farmer in America has so much cultural significance that Utah's most marginalized populations became land-owning farmers in the hopes of gaining economic power and building community in the face of prejudice.

One example of this was the town of Iosepa, founded in 1889 by Hawaiian converts to Mormonism. In the bone-dry climes of Skull Valley, residents planted crops, raised pigs, and even farmed fish in their community reservoir. Their agricultural work and celebrations often adhered to Western norms, but they also maintained their own Islander culture and identities. Fluent in English, most still continued to speak Hawaiian, and all Iosepa streets had Hawaiian names. Residents also found ways to replicate familiar foods by harvesting algae from the reservoir as a substitute for seaweed and using corn husks instead of *ti* leaves to wrap food for cooking.

Similarly, African Americans brought to Utah as enslaved people used farming to cultivate community and gain economic independence in the aftermath of the Civil War. With slavery abolished in Utah in 1862, many Black residents gained the opportunity to acquire land. They looked outside Salt Lake City to the areas now known as Cottonwood Heights, Fort Union, and Millcreek to build bountiful orchards and farms. Families lived close together, intermarried, and helped one another adjust to their new lives after enslavement. Later in life, children of these Black homesteaders fondly called the Millcreek farm area "The Hill" and remembered riding up to it from Salt Lake City's State Street in a horse-drawn buggy.

Although these communities used agriculture to find social support and economic independence, they still



Iosepa residents celebrate Pioneer Day at their settlement in Tooele County, 1913. Iosepa was settled by Hawaiians in 1889 and abandoned by 1917. Image courtesy Utah Historical Society.

faced difficulties achieving the same status as their white counterparts. In Iosepa, harsh seasons, disease, and a new Mormon temple built in Hawaii caused residents to return home after twenty-eight years. In the case of African Americans from the Hill, other systemic obstacles such as red-lining and segregation kept their descendants from fully enjoying the economic freedom and social equality they hoped farming on their own land could bring.



Ute leaders meeting with Colonel William Frederick Milton Arny, 1867. As Utah's tribes met with government officials, many did not realize that the reservation system would require their permanent confinement and assimilation. Image courtesy Utah Historical Society.

the program, most Ute bands resisted and treated the farms, led mostly by Mormon missionaries, as supplements to their traditional subsistence rounds.

By the early 1860s Native Americans had abandoned the farms, and both Mormon and federal officials focused on removing Native peoples to reservations. With the creation of the Uintah Valley Reservation in 1861, Ute peoples came under increasing pressure to leave their ancestral homelands along the Wasatch Range and Plateau. While the Uinta Basin was traditional Ute territory, few people actually remained on its marginal lands year-round. Moreover, the basin's aridity meant that agriculture there was all but impossible without irrigation. Yet, it was there that the Utes were supposed to become farmers.

ALLOTMENT DRIVES DISPOSSESSION

Not long after the forced relocation of Utah's Native Americans to reservations in the 1870s, the United States Indian policy of assimilating Native peoples into Euro-American culture and society reached its peak. The process of allotment involved breaking up reservations that were owned in common and distributing plots of land to individual tribal members. Congress enacted the policy in 1887 as the Dawes General Allotment Act. The long shadow of the Jeffersonian yeoman ideal hung over the policy. Proponents assumed that once "freed" from their tribal relationships, Native people would be transformed by the power of private property and become indistinguishable from any other American farmer.

In 1905, Congress forced allotment upon Utes on the Uintah-Ourray Reservation in the Uinta Basin. Once the initial distribution of land to the Utes was made, most remaining reservation lands were deemed "surplus" and opened to white settlers, who flooded into the basin, founding the towns of Roosevelt, Myton, and Ballard.

The reality of allotment devastated Native communities in Utah. Private land allotment forever changed the ceremonies, seasonal rounds and practices, and environments so important to many of these Native communities. Even though they still technically owned some land, *how they used it* was manipulated by the federal government in an effort to fundamentally change their community culture and assimilate them into the values of rural America. In the early twentieth century, a number of Utes did turn to farming, but largely the people rejected what was an alien way of life. For many, the Sun Dance became an increasingly important spiritual movement that asserted the survival of Native peoples and their culture. On the Uintah-Ourray Reservation, as with every other reservation where the program was implemented, allotment failed to fully assimilate Native people but succeeded in dispossessing them.

INDUSTRY IS UTAH'S STATE MOTTO

The outsized influence of the agrarian ideal distorts how we think about rural identities. Despite the place of the idealized individual farmer in American culture,



Ontario Mines drain tunnel, Park City, Utah, c 1890. Although the individual family farm is a symbol of rural life, extractive industry and all the dangers associated with it are also a part of rural Utah's story. Image courtesy Utah Historical Society.

Divergent Identities Leads to Divorce

The creation of Carbon County in 1894 resulted from a rift between Mormon agriculturalists and non-Mormon miners, illustrating the struggle over identity in rural Utah.

Beginning in the 1880s, the development of coal mines brought an influx of immigrant workers to Helper and Price in what was at the time northern Emery County. By the turn of the twentieth century, Helper was the most ethnically diverse community in Utah, with miners drawn from Latin America, Europe, and Asia. These miners arrived not long after the first Mormon families immigrated to the area in 1878,

but the culture of mining towns was markedly different from the agricultural communities in the southern end of the county.

Helper, along with Price, was infamous for saloons and brothels. While these towns were also home to many families, businesses, and churches, the agricultural towns farther south saw only the unsavory social corruption of extractive industry. The mining towns, for their part, felt the county government in Castle Dale ignored their interests.

The solution to the dilemma came with new county boundaries. Carbon County was born, named for the primary element



Main Street, Helper, 1910. The booming coal industry brought new businesses, including saloons and bars like these ones advertising "pure whiskey." Image courtesy Utah Historical Society.

in its major industry: coal. Through the redrawing of political boundaries, these disparate communities developed on their own terms rather than having to fully reconcile their differences.

"rural" does not always mean agricultural, especially in Utah. Extractive industries such as mining and timber cutting have long been the lifeblood of many small Utah communities. In many small towns agriculture and extractive industries have even existed side by side, although not always without tension.

Extractive industries did not fit the Jeffersonian ideal of small-scale, independent capitalism, nor with the goals of the LDS Church. The yeoman farmer was supposed to be the antidote for the evils that piled up in cities: vice, civil unrest, and deep class divisions. Yet mining seemingly brought these very things to Utah and the West. Mining was an expensive endeavor dominated by corporations and inextricably tied to external financing and markets and, therefore, prone to boom-and-bust cycles. The ghost towns that dot rural Utah bear mute testimony to this fact. The work itself was dirty and dangerous and relied on a largely immigrant working class, many of whom were young, single men. Mining camps featured saloons and brothels, often fueled by alcohol abuse and human trafficking. Miners' unions, when they were able to form, brought class antagonism to the frontier. Utah's vision of political independence and economic self-sufficiency has leaned heavily toward an agrarian identity, but the reality has been more complex.

"Industry" is, after all, Utah's state motto. Brigham Young understood that homegrown industry was essential for Mormon self-sufficiency and autonomy, though he also discouraged the first LDS settlers from prospecting for precious metals. He feared that a gold or silver rush would drain precious labor from agriculture and attract non-Mormons to the territory.

As Mormons established their economic center in Salt Lake City, they began to survey the region for other resources, either to support their own development or to trade as commodities. For example, after the discovery of ore deposits Young dispatched the "Iron Mission" to southern Utah in late 1850. By necessity the iron workers were also farmers, and when they were not extracting iron ore, limestone, and coal or operating the blast furnace, they worked their fields to feed themselves and their families. Although iron production ceased in 1858, the effort led to the founding of permanent communities including Parowan and Cedar City and gave Iron County its name.

Mormon leaders held an ambivalent view of mining - they needed the raw materials, but were wary of outsiders, either in the form of external investment or migrant workers. They feared that a boom-and-bust mining industry attracting young, single men

Representing Utah: What's in a Symbol?

You've probably heard of official Utah state symbols such as the Beehive, the Seagull, and the Segoe Lily. State symbols are meant to reflect Utah's unique culture and identity, and they are intertwined with the history of rural Utah. The official state cooking pot is the Dutch Oven, the cast iron three-legged kettle used by mountain men and overland trail emigrants. Square Dancing is Utah's official folk dance, and honors the traditions of Mormon settlers who danced as a respite from harsh frontier life. The state's official snack is Jell-O because of its prominence in Utah folk cuisine.

But the choice of Utah's state vegetable arose as a source of contention in 2002! This debate reflects Utah's complex connection to agriculture, food, and rural identity. It came down to a tussle between the Spanish Sweet Onion and the venerable Sugar Beet. The sugar beet may seem an odd choice for a state symbol. After all, the sugar industry is



Sugar beets await processing, c. 1920. The girl holds a cleaned beet and a jar containing the amount of sugar a single beet will yield. Image courtesy Utah Historical Society.

often associated with the plantation culture of the South or "big business" corporate crops. But farmers in the Intermountain West were some of the key sustainers of the US sugar economy between 1890 and 1920, and they played an important role in economically integrating Utah into the Union. Because of Utah's beet crop, our economy was catapulted to a national system that forced farmers

to rely on external markets and stock holders, making the beet a symbol of agricultural work as well as Utah's Americanization.

In the end, the Spanish Sweet Onion won the day to become the state's official vegetable, but the Sugar Beet was also recognized as Utah's *historic* vegetable, the only such designation in the country.

working for wages would disrupt their ideal of long-lasting communities built on family and community labor. Despite their wariness, commercial mining in Utah took off in the 1860s. The completion of the transcontinental railroad at the end of the decade brought much greater interest and investment. Discovery of minerals led to the rapid development of operations in the Cottonwood Canyons, the Oquirrh Mountains, around Park City, and in the Tintic district southwest of Utah Lake.

Coal and metals mining, fueled by outside money and wider-ranging railroads, began to transform Utah's population by the 1880s. Labor was a precious commodity in territorial Utah, and mining jobs drew workers from around the world. The first arrivals were Welsh, Cornish, Irish, and Chinese. By the 1890s, most immigrant miners were coming from southern and eastern Europe, in addition to smaller numbers from Japan and Mexico. As a result, mining districts became the most ethnically diverse places in Utah. Neighboring

towns greeted these workers with nativism and racism, although today many Utah communities have started to celebrate their diverse heritage.

DIFFICULTY OF RURAL INDEPENDENCE

For Mormon settlers in what became Utah Territory, the agrarian ideal promised autonomy. Their hope was that the agrarian way of life would allow them to provide for themselves and thus maintain their own culture and faith - their own identity - apart from the larger United States. In truth the ideal was never fully attainable. Even in the earliest years of settlement, the Mormons depended to some degree on trade with outsiders. The completion of the transcontinental railroad in 1869, with the "Golden Spike" driven in Utah at Promontory Point, opened up the territory to greater American markets and cultural influence.

At the time of statehood in 1896, Utah was undergoing a process of "Americanization," becoming more aligned with American cultural

norms and more interconnected to broader economic markets. While this was perhaps most acutely felt in Salt Lake City, home to a growing non-Mormon population, even the state's farmers were beginning to plant their crops according to the demands of external markets, rather than contributing to the goal of economic independence.

If complete autonomy in rural America was difficult to achieve in the past, it is downright impossible today because of the deep interconnections of rural and urban life. Urban dwellers depend on important resources that come from the country: food, fuel, timber. At the same time, rural communities cannot survive without urban dollars. In terms of planted acreage, Utah's biggest crop is alfalfa hay, which humans do not consume and which depends on an export market for cattle as far away as China. Like alfalfa, the other products of rural Utah are either sold as raw materials or processed into finished products for predominantly urban consumers in Utah and around the world: beef steaks, frozen turkeys, lavender oil, mink furs, gasoline, or wool yarn. Yet self-reliance and independence remains an important value for rural Utahns today. It is a part of their identity rooted in history and seemingly challenged by the rapid changes facing their communities.

Increasingly, newcomers who derive their incomes not from the land but from remote offices are reshaping life in rural Utah. With the flexibility to



Fruit packing, Hurricane, Utah, c 1935. Despite the Jeffersonian ideal of the individual yeoman farmer, most rural Utah communities relied on shared labor for successful settlement. Image courtesy Utah Historical Society.

work remotely, they are attracted to rural places to escape the congestion and problems of city life. The use value of Western land, for many today, does not lie in coal, cattle, timber, or hay. Rather, it comes from the land as a site for recreation and the pursuit of a particular idealized lifestyle. While rural identity contributes to the mystique of Western land, an influx of people with urban jobs is challenging that very identity, as well as the policies and culture that govern land use. This is just one way in which rural Utah is at a crossroads.



Tracing Change



John K. Hillers, *Paiute Women Seed Gatherers*, 1873, albumen silver print. Image courtesy Amon Carter Museum of American Art.



Goshute farmer, c 1900. Image courtesy Utah Historical Society.

In these two images, likely taken only thirty years apart, the impact of Native American tribal land allotment and assimilation is clear. Whereas before Native women and girls provided food through strategic traveling and foraging, some tribes later adopted the Western model of single landowning men working fields while women worked domestically.

LAND

Utah's land is extraordinary - a singular confluence of alpine mountains, salty deserts, and sinuous red rock. But Utah's land also causes division. Conflicting ideas about whether it should be managed privately or publicly define life in rural Utah.

Owniing land is an important part of many Utahns' identities. Yet, the vast majority of Utah by land area is public - owned by the state or federal governments rather than by individuals. For this reason the history of public lands and the history of rural Utah are intertwined.

TRANSFORMING SPACE INTO PLACE

Relationships with the land underlay all communities, rural and urban. Yet, rural communities are often tied to the land in more intimate and obvious ways. Rural Utahns engage with the land on a daily basis. They might work the land to make a living, or drive long distances to visit larger towns for shopping or health care, or enjoy outdoor recreation at their doorstep. While all of this might be true anywhere, rural Utah's relationship to the land is distinctive and has been shaped by Utah's beautiful environment.

From awe-inspiring National Parks to towering snow-capped peaks to the desolate and expansive West Desert, Utah's landscape is unique and diverse. For the generations that have called rural Utah home, the land has been both an inspiration as well as an obstacle. Landscapes of transcendent beauty can be difficult places to make a living and build communities. And so understanding how rural Utahns adapted to the state's aridity and rugged topography is important.

Part of the story begins with how we talk about the land. Instead of being simply "space," the land around us transforms into a "place" because of the meanings, memories, and feelings we assign to it as communities. For some rural Utahns, the smell of sagebrush or an alfalfa field can transform Utah land into a place associated with their family or way of life. For some, the expansive sky of a bluebird ski day or the first snowfall of the year is assigned meaning and a sense of feeling "at home." An especially important part of this is the built environment: roads, signs, and buildings also make rural Utah towns distinct and special for those who live there.

For many artists, poets, and writers, Utah's land has been a source of inspiration and identity. Native Americans across Utah believe this land is the birthplace of their people, and the land defines many of their cultural practices and how they interact as a community. For the Mormons, the Utah landscape was seen as "Zion" - a place where they would create a more perfect world and society.

Many of these beliefs and feelings of belonging echo through to today. Nineteenth-century artists painted in the style of "Romanticism" to portray Utah's steep cliffs, tumbling rivers, and alpine vistas in a way that was awe-inspiring and sublime. Twentieth-century artists such as Everett Ruess captured the stark shadows and curved shapes of Utah's other-worldly desert landscape with simple woodblock prints. Today, thousands of poets and writers try to put words to the sense of peace and belonging that Utah's land gives them.



"I trace my genealogy back to the land. Human and wild, I can see myself whole, not isolated but integrated in time and place. Our genetic makeup is not so different from the collared lizard, the canyon wren now calling, or the great horned owl who watches from the cottonwood near the creek."

– Terry Tempest Williams, writer
& rural Utahn, 2001



Alfred Lambourne, *Temples of the Rio Virgin, Southern Utah*, 1876, oil on canvas. Nineteenth-century painters were drawn to the dramatic vistas of Utah's canyon country, often motivating Easterners to migrate to the rugged West. These same landscapes continue to inspire artists today. Image courtesy Springville Museum of Art.

Yet, as much as each Utahn may feel a personal and cultural connection to Utah's land, different ideas about land management cause tension in rural Utah's communities. The heated debates that arise today over federal land policy tap into long-held ideas and identities that relate to use of the land.

UTAH'S LARGEST LANDLORD

The United States federal government controls about 65% of land in Utah, making it Utah's "largest landlord." The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) is responsible for two-thirds of that land, but the US Forest Service, National Park Service, Fish and Wildlife Service, and Department of Defense also control substantial acreage in the state.

Federal management of public land has changed over time. Utah developed at a point in history when the goal was to convert the public domain into private property. A Western identity which developed along with the claiming of "free land" on the frontier endures to this day. Ownership meant self-determination, and from this point of view, federal regulation of public land strikes many in rural Utah as an imposition. The history of Utah's public lands, however, demonstrates that a public commons played a vital role in the state's development. At one point, a coalition of Utah leaders even asked for more federal regulation in order to maintain public lands for their benefit.

As Utah's population has grown, and as use of the state's public lands has changed, federal management has become a hot-button topic. The complex goal of maintaining public land for all of the public's various uses tends to polarize Utahns. The federal government's massive role in shaping rural Utah life through the twentieth century encompasses considerable investment and regulation – making the issue more complex than any simple characterization will allow.

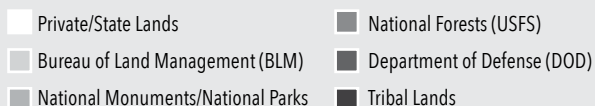
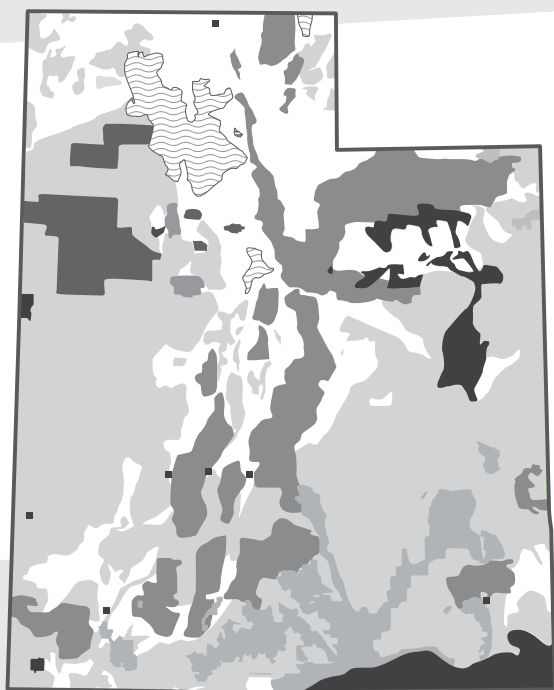
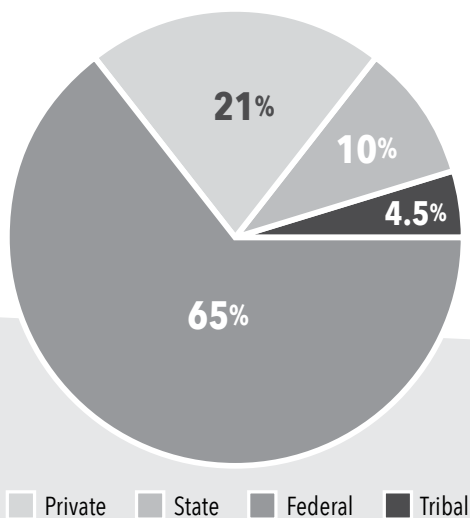
PRIVATE PROPERTY & PUBLIC COMMONS

In the nineteenth century, federal land policy aimed to turn public lands into private property. Any land in the public domain was freely available to anyone willing to work the land, with few restrictions or regulations. In order to facilitate the expansion of the individual yeoman farmer ideal, Congress passed numerous laws such as the Preemption Act (1841) and the Homestead Act (1862) to give citizens private plots of land. The Mining Law of 1872 encouraged the rapid development of mineral resources by private companies by outlining an easy process for making claims.

Western aridity proved to be an obstacle as settlers moved west. Privatized land for mining came easily, but the Jeffersonian vision of independent family farms often failed to take root in the arid environment and unforgiving landscapes. Because Utah is so dry,

families with individual plots of land found it difficult to irrigate, raise cattle, or herd sheep all on their own. The Great American Desert, as it was known in the 1800s, did not receive enough rainfall to support a farm. Settlers in Utah, as in the rest of the Interior West, would need to adapt.

UTAH LAND OWNERSHIP



Rather than claiming or buying private pastures - which would be prohibitively expensive and impossible to fully irrigate - Utahns (like other Americans in the West) developed a system which treated the unregulated and unclaimed public domain as a commons. Ranches were centered on parcels of private land that might include the family farm and hay fields for supplemental feeding, but throughout most of the year livestock grazed freely on public lands. The system boomed in Utah in the late nineteenth century. Between 1870 and 1900, the number of cattle in Utah rose by 860%, while the number of sheep soared from under 60,000 to more than 3.8 million - a 6,300% increase!

However, problems began to emerge by the end of the 1800s. Millions of sheep and hundreds of thousands of cattle had a profound impact, stripping the hillsides of vegetation and destabilizing watersheds. Unsustainable timber harvests made matters worse. The meadows and forests of the Wasatch Mountains and Wasatch Plateau were among the most heavily grazed lands in nineteenth-century Utah. As a result, devastating floods and landslides began there in 1881 and increased in frequency and severity into the twentieth century. For example, mud and debris flows struck the area around Manti nine times between 1888 and 1904.

The federal government responded to the degradation of mountain watersheds, caused by timber cutting and overgrazing, by creating forest reserves - the first meaningful federal regulation of the public commons. Congress passed the Forest Reserve Act in 1891, and Utah obtained its first - the Uinta Forest Reserve - in 1897. Ten more reserves followed in the next decade. Today these have coalesced into Utah's five major National Forests.

Far from opposing the forest reserves, local residents lobbied for their creation. In 1902, forester Albert Potter worked with Sanpete County residents to advocate for a forest reservation on the Wasatch Plateau. President Theodore Roosevelt heeded their call and set aside the Manti Forest Reserve in 1905. A similar dynamic played out in the creation of the Cache Forest Reserve. The forest reservations alone could not instantly reverse the damage already done, and deadly flooding continued in the 1920s and 1930s. But the creation of the reserves foreshadowed expanded conservation efforts. Most importantly, this history shows that Utahns were not always averse to federal regulation of public lands.

Utah Rejects the White Elephant

Benjamin Kiser



Cattle grazing, LaSal Mountains, 1961. For settlers, making use of public lands through ranching was an important part of adapting to the arid West. Image courtesy Utah Historical Society.

The unregulated use of the public domain in Utah and other western states led to a crisis of overuse by the early twentieth century. In what might seem like an odd move today, in the early 1930s Utah's leaders rejected a proposal to turn federal lands over to Western states and advocated instead for a greater federal role in land management.

In response to the Great Depression, President Herbert Hoover supported a plan to transfer the surface rights of the public domain to the Western states with subsurface mineral rights remaining

with the United States. In 1932, Utah Governor George Dern traveled to Washington, DC to lead opposition to the bill. Despite being an ardent states' rights advocate, Dern said of the law, "Comes now the Government of the United States, tentatively offering us what looks at a distance like a large, fine horse. As we get closer we have some difficulty in discerning whether it is actually a fine, large horse, or a fine, large white elephant" (a colloquial term for a useless gift). Federal management, not state control, he argued, would best maintain Western lands for productive use.

Leaders like Dern had seen firsthand the consequences of an unregulated use of the public domain. John M. Macfarlane, president of the Utah Cattle and Horse Growers' Association, also rejected the proposal and argued for a greater federal role in range management to prevent the kind of disasters Utah had already experienced. Other Utah ranchers, politicians, and university professors all spoke in favor of bureaucratizing management of the unreserved domain under the US Forest Service or a new executive agency.

Rural Utahns were key players in the institution of federal management of Utah's public domain. The Hoover administration's transfer bill ultimately died in committee, the result of Utah and other Western leaders' efforts to defeat it. Following the bill's demise, Representative Don Colton of Utah introduced a bill to manage the unappropriated public domain. While his bill failed, Representative Edward Taylor of Colorado successfully revived the idea and in 1934 the Taylor Grazing Act became law, instituting federal management of grazing on the unregulated public domain for the first time.

PROGRESSIVE ERA CONSERVATION

The federal government would further expand its role in public lands management in the first decades of the 1900s. Under Progressive Era leaders such as Theodore Roosevelt, conservation meant providing "the greatest good, for the greatest number, for the longest time," in the words of the first Chief Forester Gifford Pinchot. Conservation-minded Progressives focused first and foremost on managing the nation's natural resources for sustained development.

The preservation of spectacular natural landscapes and priceless cultural heritage was a secondary theme of Progressive Era conservation. The Antiquities Act of 1906, which today is a lightning rod in public debates over land management, was the cornerstone of these efforts. Enacted in response to the looting of important archaeological sites, the act gave the president power to create national monuments by executive order to protect "historic landmarks, historic and prehistoric structures, and other objects of historic or scientific interest" on federal lands. In practice,



Terrace-trench work, Davis County, c 1935. As one of the New Deal agencies, the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) put young men to work building much-needed infrastructure. These terraces and trenches were flood control measures. Image courtesy Utah Historical Society.

presidents beginning with Theodore Roosevelt used the law expansively to protect natural landscapes. Roosevelt made Devil's Tower in Wyoming the first National Monument in 1906, and two years later proclaimed Utah's first, Natural Bridges. National Monument designation often proved to be a stepping stone to National Park status. This is true of four of Utah's "Mighty Five," with only Canyonlands being established directly as a National Park.

For Progressives like Roosevelt and Pinchot, rational land management by trained experts took precedence over local folk practices. Implementing these new management policies meant establishing land management bureaucracies. Their vision was informed by a belief in the ability of standardized practices to maximize efficiency, even if that meant applying policies across different regions. While most Westerners had not soured on federal land management by this point, this kind of standardized, bureaucratic approach would come to irritate rural people later in the century.

NEW DEAL BRINGS INVESTMENT & REGULATION

The 1930s and 1940s saw a significant expansion in the federal government's footprint in rural Utah. President Franklin D. Roosevelt's response to the Great Depression - the New Deal - increased federal budgets and endowed federal agencies with new authority. Many New Deal programs were directed specifically to rural America, and the legacy of this era is one in which federal programs increased both investment and regulation on public lands.

The ways that rural Utahns interacted with public lands at this time remained much the same - mining, timber harvesting, and ranching all continued largely as they had in the past. But an important shift had also begun. While in the nineteenth century, land use had often led to private ownership, by the first decades of the twentieth century, Westerners were thinking about how they could benefit from land that was managed and maintained for common use. As Utah Governor George Dern said in 1932, "It is not necessary to own a piece of land to get the benefit of it."

In fact, Utah leaders including Governor Dern helped to turn back a federal plan to transfer management of the public domain to the states. Utahns agreed with the motivation for the plan - public rangelands needed regulation - but they argued that the state was unable to shoulder that burden. As a result, the federal government began regulating Western rangelands for the first time. The 1934 Taylor Grazing Act established grazing districts and a permitting system intended to prevent further damage to unappropriated and unregulated lands, as well as the Grazing Service, a new office under the Department of the Interior, to administer the program.

The New Deal further expanded the impact of the federal government on rural Utah. Utah's agricultural communities had been devastated by drought beginning in 1930, the same drought that created the "Dust Bowl" on the southern Great Plains. Federal dollars provided much needed relief in the form of direct payments, price supports, and public works programs. One such program was the Civilian Conservation Corps

(CCC). Over one hundred CCC camps were active in Utah between 1933 and 1942 (about thirty at any given time). They employed over twenty-thousand young men in conservation work including reforestation, erosion control, and the construction of campgrounds and other recreation facilities.

Much of the New Deal aimed to stabilize and improve rural life, and Utah voted for its architect, Franklin D. Roosevelt, by substantial margins each time he ran for president.

EXPANDING WATER INFRASTRUCTURE

The New Deal era was also pivotal for one of the West's most impactful federal agencies, the Bureau of Reclamation (BOR), which manages Utah's federal dams. The increased size of federal budgets during the New Deal era provided the bureau with funds for sophisticated engineering projects like Nevada's Hoover Dam. This new generation of dams generated large amounts of hydroelectricity, which helped rural electrification efforts and provided much-needed revenue for the BOR.

Prior to the 1930s the BOR, begun as the Reclamation Service in 1902, faced criticism in Congress over its budget shortfalls. Designed to "reclaim" desert land for cultivation, Reclamation's irrigation projects were expensive. As Western farmers largely failed to establish farms that could pay back the construction costs, Reclamation's debts mounted. The best plots of land - the easiest to irrigate and the ones without alkaline soil - had been claimed by the end of the 1800s. Water was necessary for practically any use of land in the West, but getting the necessary water where it was desired was something accomplished in fits and starts. The fact that the federal government took over the effort when individual settlers and Western states failed speaks to the national importance of continued settlement of the region, as well as the increasing difficulty in doing so. Even a century later, after significant investment in water infrastructure, only two to three percent of Utah's land is irrigated.

In the BOR's heyday in the decades following World War II, the agency would become powerful enough - in terms of expertise and in the halls of Congress - to re-engineer the hydrology of the West. Glen Canyon and Flaming Gorge dams, as well as the collection of dams that make up the Central Utah Project, are among BOR's twenty-five dams in Utah. These dams store and deliver water for agriculture, provide boating and fishing opportunities, and generate hydropower. Today, as megadrought conditions

threaten water supplies, agriculture in rural Utah is facing pressure to adapt to a drier future - both from the water supply itself and from a growing urban population around the state.

THE MILITARIZED WEST

The entry of the United States into World War II marked the end of the New Deal era, but the federal government's footprint in Utah would continue to grow by way of the military. The American military has always shaped the rural West in some regard. In the nineteenth century members of the Army Corps of Topographical Engineers surveyed road and railroad routes, preparing the way for the incorporation of the West into the United States. Meanwhile, regular troops fought a series of wars against Indigenous peoples, forcing them onto reservations and opening the most valuable lands to Euro-American settlement.

But during World War II and the Cold War, the scale and scope of the military's impact on the rural West increased exponentially. In some areas, particularly along the Wasatch Front, the character and use of rural land would be changed forever because of wartime industrialization. This process transformed thousands of acres of prime farmlands and orchards, seemingly overnight, into new factories and military bases. The Remington Small Arms Plant gobbled up 5,000 acres in rural Salt Lake County, while just to the south an equal sized tract of farmland became the Kearns Army Air Base.



Flaming Gorge Dam and Power Plant, Artist's Conception, c 1955. The federal Bureau of Reclamation directed considerable investment into dams and diversions that store water, generate power, and provide for recreation. Image courtesy Utah Historical Society.

Wastelanding



William Wilson (Diné), *Mexican Hat Disposal Cell Redux*, Halchita, Utah, Navajo Nation, 2019, inkjet print. This aerial image shows the 68-acre US Department of Energy tailings storage structure built in the 1990s adjacent to the San Juan River on the Navajo Nation. Notice Monument Valley - an iconic tourist attraction and Tribal Park - on the close horizon. Image courtesy Utah Museum of Fine Arts, UMFA2022.8.3A.

The way we think about the desert helps determine how it gets used. Characterizing the desert as a valueless waste allows for extractive uses which can destroy the land and harm those who live nearby. This process is called “wastelanding.”

When the US Atomic Energy Commission sought to build up a

domestic supply of uranium for nuclear weapons in the 1950s, prospectors poured into the Four Corners region in hopes of striking it rich. The boom lasted only a decade, but evidence is still visible. On the bank of the Colorado River, not far from the entrance to Arches National Park, sits a remediation site where the radioactive waste tailings from the uranium industry are still being mitigated. Uranium mining also took place on and near the Navajo Nation, yet remediation efforts there have been even slower. The area contains more than 500 abandoned mines, with less than half of those currently scheduled for cleanup. Miners of all backgrounds and their families have gotten sick, but the ongoing harms have fallen disproportionately on Diné people.

Like the Diné to the south, the Skull Valley Goshute people in Utah’s West Desert have also experienced adverse health impacts that stem from military wastelanding. When the US War Department needed open tracts of land far removed from population

centers, it looked to Utah’s West Desert. In 1942, it established the US Army’s Dugway Proving Ground and the Deseret Chemical Depot on lands surrounding the Skull Valley Goshute Reservation. These facilities secretly tested the effects of hazardous materials and weapons, which contaminated the land, water, and air with chemicals, radiation, and land mines. For example, a nerve gas leak in 1968 killed 6,400 sheep grazing near the Goshute reservation. Dugway Proving Ground, which is still in operation, has since become an Environmental Protection Agency “Superfund” site requiring environmental remediation.

Characterizing a landscape as barren and remote constructs a version of land that is permissible to destroy, regardless of the harm to nearby inhabitants or lasting toxic legacies. Desert land is not inherently valuable or valueless - value is something that people assign to it. How might Utah’s desert look different if there were no “wastelands?”

In more remote places the military established secretive facilities for weapons testing and training. Like other arid landscapes in the Great Basin and the Southwest, Utah’s West Desert was envisioned as a “wasteland,” good for little else than a bombing range. Wendover Air Base, established in 1940, survived into the 1960s largely as an auxiliary for Hill Air Force Base in Davis County. Portions of its massive bombing range later became part of the Utah Test and Training Range (UTTR), the largest contiguous area of restricted supersonic airspace in the United States. The continued vitality of Hill Air Force Base, long one of Utah’s largest employers, is due in part to the vast area west and southwest of Great Salt Lake used for supersonic training and testing. South of UTTR, the Dugway Proving Ground covers over 1,200 square miles of the West Desert. The Army’s Chemical Warfare Service founded the base in 1942 precisely because of its

isolation. For much of its long history, Dugway was the nation’s principal open air testing ground for chemical, biological, and radiological weapons.

The Cold War gave continued life to sites like Dugway, but the military spending that reshaped rural communities across Utah was often short lived. The Air Force came to Green River in 1964, when it opened the Utah Launch Complex, a remote installation of New Mexico’s White Sands Missile Range. For the next eleven years Athena and Pershing missiles were fired from Green River, arcing their way across Utah’s canyonlands toward their targets in New Mexico. When launch testing was moved to a base closer to White Sands, the facility closed down, taking jobs and income with it.

Many wartime installations were established by executive order of the president as emergency measures which withdrew large chunks of land from the

public domain. Originally intended to be temporary, many installations have become permanent fixtures in rural Utah. Some rural communities have had to bear the costs of chemical contamination and radiation from weapons testing, but for others, the military has provided an economic lifeline. And in some places, both of these things apply.

MULTIPLE USE DOCTRINE

In the 1970s, the federal government significantly overhauled its land management policies to clarify the mission of its agencies and to account for the variety of human uses of public land. In the nineteenth century, Utah, like the rest of the West, was a place where homesteaders could come to own a piece of the public domain as long as they were willing to work for it. While federal regulation of public lands increased through the twentieth century, it was still theoretically possible, if altogether unlikely, to claim a homestead. That would change in 1976 when the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA) repealed the Homestead Act and extended a "multiple use" mandate to the Bureau of Land Management (BLM).



Atlantic Research missile test complex, Green River, Utah, 1964. More than 100 people worked at this test site until it relocated in the 1970s. The federal Environmental Protection Agency is now remediating the site for environmental contamination. Image courtesy Utah Historical Society.

It is hard to overstate how the FLPMA fundamentally changed Utah's relationship with federal land policy. By repealing the Homestead Act, the law declared that "public lands be retained in Federal ownership." The privatization of public lands had been the central aim of federal land policy since the earliest days of the republic. Now, unless it served a demonstrated "national interest,"



A ranger points to bullet holes in a US Forest Service sign near Vernal, Utah. The shooter may have used this sign for target practice or to express a political opinion. Uintah County Library Regional History Center.

individual citizens could no longer claim or buy their own piece of the public domain. Not only did the law mark an ideological shift, it also raised the prospect of economic stagnation in rural communities as millions of acres would remain forever non-taxable federal land.

The concept of "multiple use" for these lands was not new, for public lands had always been used in many ways. For example, the US Forest Service necessarily regulated grazing in order to manage the national forests for watershed preservation and sustained timber harvests. This existing balance was first formalized for the Forest Service, however, with the Multiple Use and Sustained Yield Act of 1960. Later, the FLPMA defined the BLM's mission according to this same multiple use idea. While public lands management had previously favored extractive uses, this formalized concept of "multiple use" put recreational, scenic, scientific, environmental, historical, and archaeological values on equal footing with industry for the first time - at least on paper.

That broadened scope of responsibilities is a big job, and the BLM became a lightning rod in debates over public land management. The agency administers about 42% of land acreage in Utah, making it the state's single largest steward of federal land, but contention also arises from its multiple use mandate. For some, the BLM has become the symbol of federal overreach, strangling rural economies with its environmental regulations. At the other end of the spectrum, some environmentalists and recreationists view the agency as the willing accomplice of those who would despoil and exploit wild places - known

The Sagebrush Rebellion

The simmering resentments of rural Westerners toward the federal government boiled to the surface in the late 1970s. At the center of their anger was the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), the federal agency which had the greatest direct impact on their lives.

The Sagebrush Rebellion, as the regional movement came to be called, began in Nevada but took root in rural Utah. Much of the rebellion took place in the halls of state houses, where six Western states – including Utah – debated bills demanding the “return” of federal lands. But such laws were political theater, doomed to fail court challenges. Since Ohio entered the Union in 1804, every public lands state had forsworn claims to federal and Indigenous lands within its borders as a condition for admission. There were simply no legal grounds for the demand to transfer federal lands, and there could be no “return” of land that never belonged to the states.

On the ground, the rebellion adopted a militant tone. San Juan County commissioner Calvin Black stated at a public BLM meeting in 1979, “We’ve had enough of you guys telling us what to do. I’m not a violent man, but I’m getting to the point where I’ll blow up bridges, ruins, and vehicles. We’re going to start a revolution. We’re going to get back our lands.” But in fact the only violence that came from the rebels was directed at the land itself. On July 4, 1980, a Grand County commissioner drove a bulldozer into a Wilderness Study Area outside Moab.

The militant rhetoric of small government and individual freedom resonated far beyond ranching concerns in Utah and Nevada. In August 1980, while campaigning for presidency, Ronald Reagan said to a Salt Lake City crowd, “I happen to be one who cheers and supports the Sagebrush Rebellion. Count me in as a rebel.”



Secretary of Interior James Watt (left) and President Ronald Reagan (center), c 1982. Reagan was attentive to anti-government activists in the rural West and appointed Watt, who was sympathetic to the “Sagebrush Rebellion.” Image courtesy University of Illinois Archives.

On the national stage, rural Westerners had come to represent authentic anger at federal government overreach. Once in office, Reagan appointed a Secretary of the Interior, James Watt, who was sympathetic to the rebels. Eventually the rebellion dissipated, but its echoes can be heard in more recent “Patriot Rebellions,” where anti-government activists have engaged in deadly standoffs with federal officials.

to them as the “Bureau of Livestock and Mining.” That such different opinions exist speaks to the real difficulties of multiple use management as a doctrine.

For its part, Congress did try to address the concerns about economic stagnation with the Payments in Lieu of Taxes (PILT) Act. Enacted one day before the FLPMA, it provided compensation to local governments for lost tax revenues. All told, since 1977 almost eleven billion dollars have flowed to county governments, most going to Western states. In 2022, Utah’s PILT funds totaled just under \$43.5 million. (Only California, Colorado, and New Mexico got more in dollars, while only Alaska, New Mexico, and Idaho got more per capita.) But since PILT is distributed on a county basis, statewide figures do not tell the whole story. Population and the amount of federal land within a county are key variables in calculating PILT. Counties with small populations and

lots of federal land get more per capita. For example, in 2022 Washington County received nearly double the PILT funds as San Juan County. Yet with about thirteen times the population, this worked out to around \$17.50 per resident. That same year, San Juan County’s per capita PILT was about \$115. But many rural Utahns feel that no amount of compensation could make up for lost economic possibilities or for a sense of powerlessness.

When it comes to land, rural Utah faces challenges that are in some sense natural – the continued viability of extractive industries, for example, or the fact that the remaining public domain largely consisted of difficult, mostly arid lands that had defeated the homesteading efforts of previous generations. Still, the policy shifts of the 1970s felt like an attack on the livelihood and identity of rural people. Should distant bureaucrats who were presumably out of touch with the needs of rural

people set policies that restricted their futures for the benefit of seemingly affluent urbanites who treated the land merely as a playground?

TOURISM & WILDERNESS PRESERVATION

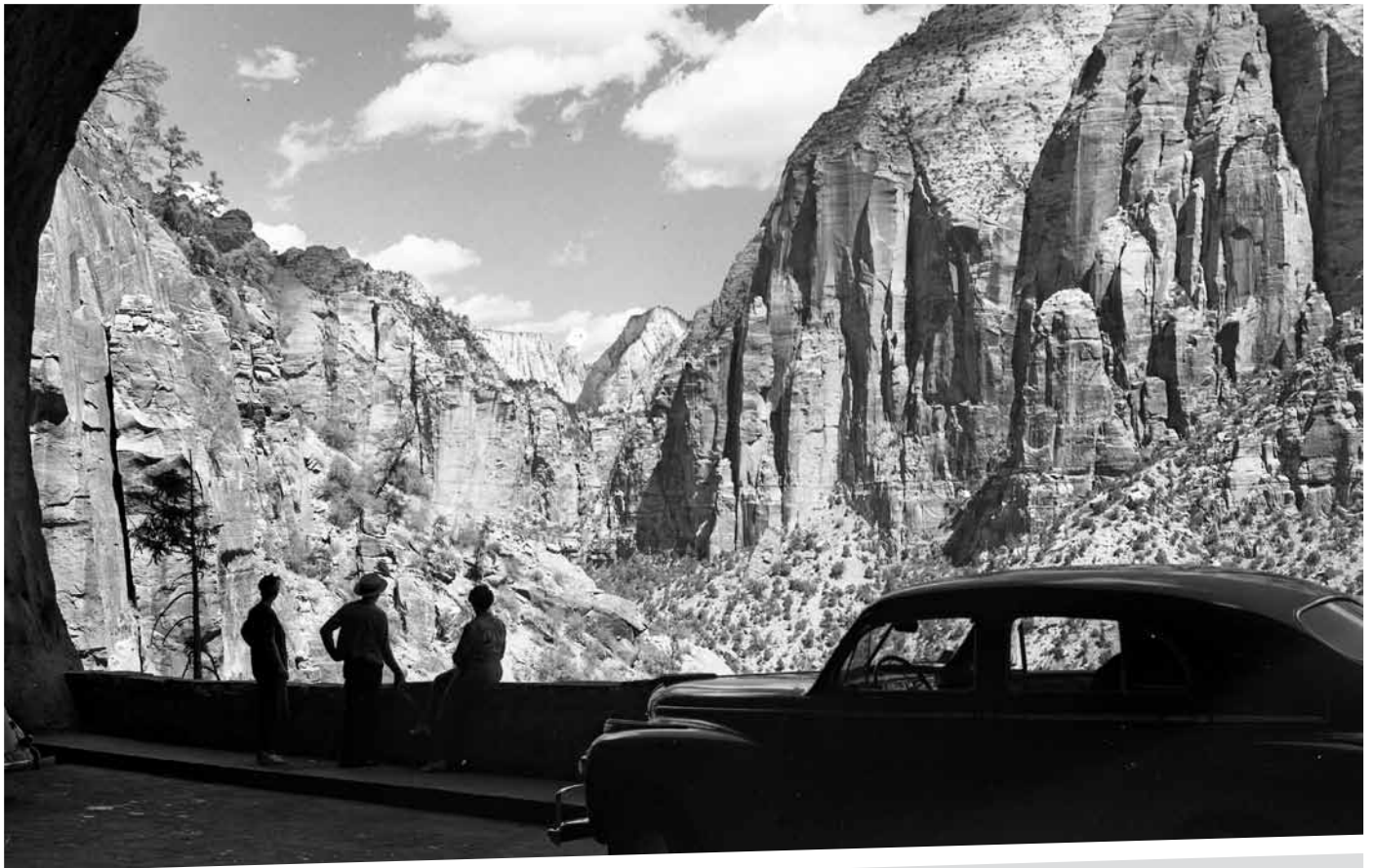
Attitudes about public lands – and rural economies – changed dramatically in the decades following World War II. Included in the federal agencies’ multiple use mandate were new regulations intended to preserve the environment and provide for new recreational uses.

In the post-war period, the growing environmental movement called for the protection of untouched wilderness areas and the creation of national parks as tourist destinations. More Americans than ever had automobiles and were able to take advantage of the interstate system to explore their country. Artists, writers, and scientists had long admired Utah’s unique, even surreal landscapes, but now average citizens increasingly drew inspiration from these places and called for their preservation.

In 1964, the Wilderness Act established the National Wilderness Preservation System across all federal

lands to manage designated areas “in such a manner as will leave them unimpaired for future use and enjoyment as wilderness.” To be considered for inclusion in the system, an area had to be at least 5,000 acres of undeveloped federal lands where the “imprint of man’s work [was] substantially unnoticeable.” Today the system includes over 111 million acres within the national forests, parks, refuges and BLM managed lands.

But what would parks and preservation mean for the future of Utah’s rural communities? As Americans flocked to Utah’s National Parks, tourism became an economic driver, especially for “gateway towns” like Springdale, Moab, Monticello, and Torrey. Visitors spent their money at motels, campgrounds, restaurants, grocery stores, outfitters, and guiding services. But there was a trade-off. While the preservation of wild lands and spectacular landscapes brought in tourist dollars, it also restricted older extractive uses that many locals viewed as better paying and more honorable occupations. Running cattle, prospecting, or working in a mill were not easy jobs, but for many they were preferable to working



Tourists stop inside the Mount Carmel Tunnel, Zion National Park, c. 1940. As roads were constructed and automobiles rose in popularity, visitors flooded to Utah’s beautiful and recently-established national parks. Image courtesy Utah Historical Society.

The Canyonlands Controversy



Chestler Park, Canyonlands National Park, 1964. The fight over the designation of Canyonlands reflected a turning point in federal lands management, when preservation began to weigh more equally with resource development and extraction. Image courtesy Utah Historical Society.

Three new national parks were established in Utah between 1964 and 1971 – Canyonlands, Arches, and Capitol Reef. Arches and Capitol Reef had existed for decades as National Monuments, but Canyonlands was new. Its establishment took place against the backdrop of the modern environmental movement and a national shift toward wilderness protection. The political struggle to establish Canyonlands National Park revealed the tensions between resource development and preservation in rural Utah.

Plans to preserve portions of Utah’s canyonlands stretched back to a failed New Deal era proposal for an Escalante National Monument. Interest in a new park grew again in the post-war years, and by the late 1950s the National Park Service (NPS)

homed in on the lands surrounding the confluence of the Green and Colorado Rivers southwest of Moab. This was due in part to the advocacy of locals, including Bates Wilson, the Superintendent of Arches National Monument, and Ken Frost, a Jeep tour operator out of Monticello. After a tour of the area in 1961, Secretary of the Interior Stewart Udall declared his intention for it to become Utah’s newest National Park.

Utahns gave the idea a mixed reception. Utah Governor George Clyde and Senator Wallace Bennett were uneasy with NPS control, which would impact grazing permits and prevent oil and gas development. They knew protecting these uses would go against public opinion, even in Utah, which leaned toward preservation.

They worked to reshape the proposal into a multiple use plan that protected extractive industries. Faced with this opposition, Udall found an ally in Utah’s junior senator Frank Moss.

Moss introduced a bill to establish the park in 1961, setting off three years of political maneuvering. The senator, sensitive to the concerns of rural Utahns, attempted to strike a middle ground by protecting most of the land while grandfathering existing grazing permits and some mining operations. The plan brought opposition from both the “scenery purists” and the “resource hogs.” The size of the proposed park was also a point of contention. Udall envisioned a massive park covering more than 600,000 acres. Moss’s proposal was for less than half that. Clyde and Bennett countered with plans for several smaller parks that would protect only a fraction of the land in question.

The debate also hinged on the economic impact of the park and who would benefit. Would NPS management “lock away” productive lands forever, as Clyde and Bennett believed, or would it bring a windfall of tourist dollars, as Udall asserted? The Senate ultimately passed a version of the Moss bill that preserved limited multiple use, which the House of Representatives rejected. In reconciling the bills, a ten-year extension on existing grazing rights was the only concession to multiple use. President Lyndon Johnson signed the bill into law in 1964, marking a victory for preservation over resource development that was indicative of the era.

in the service industry catering to tourists – many of whom did not share their relationship with the land. One resident in Kane County reflected that a new wilderness designation meant that a piece of nearby land “will be the playground for the rich, the strong, and the young – which leaves most of the people who live in Kane County out.”

WHOSE LANDS ARE “OUR LANDS?”

Public lands belong to all of us, and it is not easy to balance the needs of every user. Rural land is interconnected with urban population centers, not just in the case of city-dwelling outdoors enthusiasts who visit rural towns on weekends. This interdependence can be fraught. Urban economies depend on the products of the rural West, and by the same token, rural Utah depends on the dollars of urban consumers.

Federal management of public land continues to be a sticking point in local and regional politics. Rural Utahns, as people who work the land, tend to feel that they know best how to take care of it. Yet the declining health of public rangelands due to overgrazing, which prompted an earlier generation to ask for increased management, does not motivate contemporary Utahns in the same way.

Among these differing views, one unifying point is a simple love of the land. Rural Utah is a beautiful place, where the public – including locals and those from farther afield – hold strong opinions about the land’s value and meanings. As rural Utah once again approaches a crossroads, difficult questions about the future of our public commons loom large.



“Westerners usually regarded the federal government much as they would regard a particularly scratchy wool shirt in winter. It was all that was keeping them warm, but it still irritated them.”

– Richard White, historian of the American West, 1991



Tracing Change



Dine-A-Ville Motel, Vernal, 1958. Uintah County Library Regional History Center.



Ski-in luxury hotel, Deer Valley, Park City. Photo by David A. Litman.

A major part of rural economies in the past and today is tourism, although what that tourism looks like has changed dramatically over time. Whereas historic amenities might have been family-owned, like this Dine-A-Ville motel owned by George and Helen Millecam, modern day rural Utah towns with high demands from tourists are dominated by Airbnb and large corporations that increase property prices and funnel money to businesses outside of Utah.

COMMUNITY

Rural Utah has a strong sense of community, but what those communities look like has changed over time.

The unique character of Utah's rural communities reflects both the intentions of their founding generations and the demands of the physical environment. In most places, individual homesteads spread across the landscape characterized the expanding nation. But Utah's early settlements were different. Mormon towns used an orderly, gridded, compact pattern to sustain their communitarian goal. These unique rural Utah communities with their irrigation ditches, poplar trees, equally-sized family plots, and central religious structures formed a distinctive "Mormon cultural landscape."

However, throughout the first half of the twentieth century, events such as the Great Depression, New Deal, and the Second World War brought significant change to rural Utah. Communities started to look different, spatially and demographically. They were truly at a crossroads. Industrial and urban growth transformed rural landscapes and identity through an influx of immigrants and by linking urban and rural communities in new ways.



Chinese parade in Utah, c 1890. About 90% of workers on the western portion of the transcontinental railroad were Chinese. Despite anti-Chinese prejudice in the decades after the railroad's completion, many Chinese workers stayed and created communities in Utah's cities and rural areas. Image courtesy Utah Historical Society.

Traditionally, Utah's rural communities defined themselves through shared values, through their relationships to neighboring communities, and through their relationship to the land. The community's role within its larger region is also important. Accordingly, over time, these values and relationships precipitated substantial change to the make-up of Utah's rural communities.

THE MORMON CULTURAL LANDSCAPE

In nineteenth-century Utah, towns were cooperative ventures intended to sustain a specific type of community. The Mormon colonists who ventured to places as disparate as St. George and Cache Valley believed they were creating paradise in the American wilderness. Their communal values go against our typical vision of the West as the land of rugged individualists. Instead of the competitive capitalism that drove settlement elsewhere, a communitarian spirit infused the small towns of Utah.

The spatial layout of Mormon agricultural towns stands in contrast to the isolated homestead tenuously connected to a distant town center or the ramshackle mining town. The practical challenges of agriculture in an arid land were one determining factor. Working together to build irrigation canals offered a compelling reason to create a compact town center of homes and businesses, with farmlands and pastures located on the outskirts. This settlement pattern also showed the important value of community to early Mormons, who used the close layout of their towns to encourage social interaction and allay the loneliness of the frontier.

Joseph Smith, the founder of the LDS Church, never made it to Utah, but his vision of an orderly, gridded city inspired by village settlement patterns in New England echoes throughout the state to this day. In the summer of 1833 Smith sketched out his "Plat of the City of Zion." The ideal town was to be one square mile, one section of land within a township. It would be divided into ten acres blocks, each with twenty equal-sized lots.



Mormon Cultural Landscape, Logan, Utah, n.d. Notice the individual family plots nestled closely, sharing water canals marked by towering poplar tree windbreaks. The Logan Temple rises in the distance. Image courtesy Utah Historical Society.

Wide streets and public buildings in a central square were also part of the plan. Smith believed that such an orderly community would provide for the spiritual and economic lives of the people.

When laying out the new Mormon capital of Salt Lake City, Brigham Young used a modified version of Smith's plat, which became commonplace throughout Utah. The church house, for example, was at the center of the town, along with a bishop's storehouse, where the local church leader would distribute food and other necessities, a testament to the value of community for both practical and spiritual needs. Mormons brought an architectural style from their previous settlements, houses built from brick or adobe, known as the "Nauvoo style" after the Mormon settlement in Nauvoo, Illinois. Neat rows of Lombardy poplar trees grew as windbreaks parallel to streets and canals. These design elements speak to a unique cultural heritage, a source of pride for settlers in an unfamiliar land. The town arrangements were intentional and orderly, directed by church leaders according to the needs and preferences of the community and accomplished through shared labor.

The Mormon cultural landscape is still visible in many communities across the state, such as Spring City in the Sanpete Valley. Towns along the Wasatch Front and Back still exhibit vestiges of the pattern, although contemporary changes in rural life – such as shifts in

agriculture and the rise of remote work – have begun to erase the Mormon cultural landscape.

CREATING COMMUNAL UTOPIA

As they spread across Utah, some settlers were significantly more zealous in their dedication to combining faith with economics. The founding of Orderville in 1875 is one example of this. Orderville is named for the "United Order," a program implemented by Brigham Young that aimed to eliminate inequality and poverty among the faithful. Located in southern Utah's remote Kane County, Orderville is considered one of the most successful attempts to achieve perfected communalism in Utah. Most of Utah's radical communal experiments failed within six months, but Orderville persisted in its original form for nearly 25 years.

After settlement, many Orderville residents re-baptized themselves to illustrate their dedication to the unique structure of the town. They deeded their land to the United Order and elected a board of management to keep detailed records of the community's shared property, labor, investments, and daily affairs. Town activities were organized into "departments," which managed livestock, cotton farming, knitting, public works, cleaning (called "soap and broom"), midwifery, stock feeding, and schooling. Orderville townsfolk ate in a communal

The Great Orderville Pants Rebellion



Ten children in a wagon, Orderville, c 1880. Although Orderville was an isolated town at first, demands from the younger generation put pressure on its leadership to adapt to the influx of new materials and styles of clothing. Image courtesy University of Utah Marriott Library Special Collections.

For the remote town of Orderville, it was a pair of pants that symbolized the growing influence of the outside world. New railroads introduced outside products - and outside fashions - to formerly isolated communities at an unprecedented rate. Orderville's young people were growing tired of their simple gray woolen trousers.

By one account, a young Orderville man surreptitiously used extra wool to trade for new pants at a store in Nephi. He then wore them to a town dance and immediately received a kiss from a local girl. Such scandalous behavior demanded action and the town's Board of Management ordered the young man to turn over the "store pants"

which could be then used as a pattern for future pants made by the Order's tailoring department.

It was soon discovered that the boys were using the town's grind stone to intentionally wear out the seats of their pants in order to justify requesting a new pair made from trade cloth. These rebellious youth forced the hand of Order elders who sent a load of wool to the mill in Washington, Utah, in exchange for bolts of cotton trade cloth.

While the "pants rebellion" alone did not bring down the United Order, it did illustrate the impact of external goods and the growing interest in the wider market place. United Order commodities were no longer produced by the insular town alone with sacred shared labor. By 1885, the United Order in Orderville dissolved and an auction was held to re-privatize all its land.

dining hall together and successfully managed cattle herds, horses, and 5,000 head of sheep.

But in Orderville, as well as beyond, the spiritual goal of "building Zion" was difficult to achieve. The first generations tended to view the "outside" world as a threat to their political autonomy and ability to practice their faith, but later generations began to view integration into the national economy as a new opportunity. The insularity of close-knit Mormon towns was sometimes a strength, but at other times a liability. Even isolated Orderville could not keep the outside world at bay forever.

FROM ISOLATION TO INCORPORATION

The completion of the transcontinental railroad in 1869 marked a turning point for Utah's integration into the broader economic and cultural context of the United States. While it created some anxiety, Brigham Young supported the building of this national link,

seeing the potential for railroads generally to move needed resources between the city and the country, as well as to transport Mormon converts emigrating from Europe to Utah.

Not only did railroads bring access to new materials and goods, they brought jobs. Young himself facilitated a contract with the Union Pacific Railroad that ensured Mormon laborers would grade ninety miles of track bed from Echo Canyon to Ogden. Because of drought many farms were struggling and labor was readily available, but Young also felt it would be better "for the Saints to do the work for nothing, if necessary, than to let outsiders do it."

With the transcontinental line complete, Young directed the development of spur lines linking the rest of Utah to the main line, a connection that fundamentally transformed many of rural Utah's communities. By January 1870, just nine months after the Golden Spike,

the Utah Central Railroad connected Salt Lake City and Ogden. In 1871, work began on both the Utah & Northern, headed toward Cache Valley, and the Utah Southern Railroad, which by the end of the decade connected communities as far south as Nephi with the capital. Now integrated into a national economy via the rails, church leaders attempted to control the local impact of outside culture, money, and goods. They encouraged residents to shop at the church-founded Zion's Cooperative Mercantile Institution (ZCMI), whose stores transferred goods to Mormon consumers through church-approved retailers, rather than from the merchants pouring in from other parts of the continent.

However, as much as Mormon leaders wanted to isolate their communities in the countryside, the economic, political, and cultural realities were too complex. Much attention was focused on the corrupting influence of "outsiders," but the forces for change often came from within the community.



Sanpete Valley Railway, c 1895. The arrival of the railroad incorporated Utah into a changing, diverse nation while spurs from the main line connected rural Utah more than ever before. Image courtesy Utah Historical Society.



"It is not the men actually working on the line that I should fear so much, though no doubt they would cause some trouble... but it would be the bummers, gamblers, saloon and hurdy-gurdy keepers, border ruffians, and desperados generally who prey upon the laborers whom I should fear most."

– George Reynolds, letter to a fellow missionary, 1868

In particular, new goods and opportunities proved alluring to younger generations. As more and more Utahns embraced the capitalist economy by the 1880s, the self-sufficient agriculture that had characterized the early decades of settlement gave way to fully commercial enterprises. During the 1890s the total acreage of farmland in Utah nearly quadrupled. Many of the new homesteaders moved into marginal lands where they put their faith in vaunted but risky new dry farming methods. There was also a shifting focus to new crops – fruit orchards were the latest bonanza after 1900.

The rise of the sugar beet industry perhaps best illustrates how commercial agriculture impacted rural Utah. Mormon businessmen, with the support of church leadership, founded the Utah Sugar Company in 1889. Operations began first in Utah County but quickly expanded north to Box Elder and Cache Counties. By 1901, the Utah Sugar Company sold half of its stock to the American Sugar Refining Company, putting it on the national map as a major US company that expanded operations into Idaho, Oregon, and Washington. This combined East Coast and LDS Church capital investment entrenched Utah's rural farms even more deeply into the national economy. As a result, the vagaries of global markets started to impact Utah's farmers as the state's industries grew. Whether rural Utahns liked it or not, their isolated religious communities integrated into a global economy.

The growing economic incorporation of Utah into



Multilingual Safety Sign, Combined Metals Reduction Company, Bauer, near Tooele, c 1920. This sign's use of English, Greek, Italian, Hungarian, Croatian, Slovenian, and Japanese shows how diverse Utah's workforce became during this period. Image courtesy Utah Historical Society.

the United States also changed the demographics of Utah communities. Chinese railroad workers, as well as Japanese miners, brought Asian culture to Utah and built valuable infrastructure. An influx of single men from European countries went to work in the mines producing ore and coal. Many later brought their families and put down roots across rural Utah. New Catholic, Orthodox, and Jewish places of worship sprung up in the wake of these immigrants, and many formed unions to improve working conditions and fight the exploitative labor systems that had brought them to rural Utah.

Far from the idealistic, gridded, and organized settlements unique to the Mormon cultural landscape, many parts of rural Utah started to look like the rest of America. Consumer goods and commodities matched those in other rural states rather than being made with communal labor and local resources alone. Farmers and businesses made decisions according to financial systems of the East Coast. Plus, the transcontinental railroad brought in more outsiders than tight-knit Mormon communities had ever seen.

In the face of such great change, nativist intolerance gained traction here as many believed immigrants should become more "American." Some mining companies even established baseball teams to encourage assimilation among their immigrant workers. Still, many of Utah's new communities held on to their

unique cultural backgrounds. Clearly, the face of rural Utah changed permanently. As the 1900s progressed, towns across the state experienced even greater shifts, as economic devastation and two world wars altered who lived and worked in Utah's rural communities.

MIXED LEGACIES: THE NEW DEAL

In Utah and across the nation, economic depression came to farmers years before the stock market crash of 1929. With the outbreak of World War I, the demand for agricultural commodities, along with their prices, soared. But the bottom dropped out when the war ended. Demand plummeted and farmers faced glutted markets, falling prices for their crops, and increased debt. Local factors made things worse in Utah. The state's per capita income before the crash was \$537 per year, 20% lower than the national average. If that were not enough, devastating droughts led to decreased crop yields as the rest of the country began to feel the effects of the Great Depression. In 1934, Utah farmers only planted 30% of their normal acreage, and even then, only harvested about 40% of that crop. Rural Utahns in the 1930s really struggled.

Utah's underpaid Latino and immigrant workers bore the brunt of many of the economic hardships of the period. Miners from Italy, Greece, and other European countries found themselves abandoned by the companies that controlled their access to goods. Many



Italian boarding house, Bingham, c 1920. Immigrants who came to rural Utah in the early twentieth century brought with them their own culture, language, and needs that shaped the face of each town they lived in. Image courtesy Utah Historical Society.

Segregation, Racial Violence, and the Klan

The increased population of African Americans in Utah following the arrival of the railroad changed the racial makeup of our state enough for some communities to take notice during the early 1900s. In some urban parts of Utah, like Ogden, African Americans who found work in the new industries of hospitality, music, mining, and railroad construction coalesced into tight-knit communities. But in more rural parts of Utah, Black workers and families often faced increased discrimination and persecution, threats compounded by relative isolation.

Although Black people have lived and worked here – as trappers, cowboys, and farmers – long before Utah gained statehood, Black individuals traveling through Utah in the early twentieth century faced risks of racial violence. When Jim Crow laws and segregation were the norm across America, some Utah communities used racial clauses in housing covenants and other ordinances to restrict where Black people could go. In some rural towns, vigilante justice in the form of lynching and other extrajudicial

violence loomed as a possibility for Black residents, especially for a Black man accused of a crime.

The presence of the Ku Klux Klan (KKK) in Utah contributed to a widespread acceptance of racially-motivated violence. Officially incorporated in Utah in 1921, the KKK terrorized rural and ethnically diverse places like Carbon County. Klan members sometimes targeted Catholic immigrant workers with crosses set ablaze in their front lawns, and the KKK controlled several businesses and government positions.

The last lynching of the American West is sometimes attributed to Price, Utah, as a Black miner named Robert Marshall was hanged in front of a mob of 1,000 spectators after being accused of shooting a white guard in 1925. After Marshall's murder, authorities charged and jailed eleven men with known connections to the Klan, but the men never went to trial. The local newspaper, *The Sun*, wrote "All is well that ends well... The general sentiment of the folks of Carbon county is that even were the men under accusation the actual perpetrators of the lynching there was little to be gained by carrying



Robert Marshall with his family, Ludlow, Colorado, c 1920. Marshall is considered the last victim of racially-motivated lynching in the West after he was murdered by a mob in Price in 1925. The perpetrators were never tried for the killing. Image courtesy Wikimedia.

the matter to a point where they would be severely dealt with."

Utah's anti-mask laws, which prohibited masks during public demonstrations, helped to halt the growth of the secretive Klan. Nevertheless, the context that allowed it to exist – hate and intolerance – is an uncomfortable legacy that still challenges our hopes for more inclusive communities.

toiled for minimal wages, if their coal town avoided shutting down entirely. Latino farm workers called *betabeleros* ("sugar beet workers") were essential for harvesting crops and keeping the rural economy from complete collapse, but their wages were pitifully low during the depression years. Latinos continue to be one of Utah's lowest paid working populations. In 2010 the estimated pay for Utah's migrant workers was \$7,500 annually, showing little improvement in the decades between.

To alleviate the Great Depression, President Roosevelt's New Deal brought hope – and solutions – to many rural Utah communities, and the legacy

has lasted. The Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) shaped rural Utah in ways still visible through building reservoirs, terracing, rock walls, campgrounds, and hiking trails. The Works Progress Administration (WPA) and Public Works Administration (PWA) also employed Utahns installing New Deal infrastructure – post offices, schools, libraries, parks, sidewalks, and even power grids and municipal water plants. All of these built resources transformed rural Utah life and can still be found in virtually every rural Utah town. New Deal-era paintings and sculptures by Federal Arts Project recipients are often at the heart of a small town's character, found in government buildings or other shared areas.

Putting a Face on Poverty: Dorothea Lange in Utah

During the Great Depression of the early 1930s, Utah experienced severe drought and was the top recipient of federal dollars for Depression relief. One Farm Services Administration project of the era was to send a team of photographers around the country to document the impact of poverty on communities hit hardest by the Depression.

Dorothea Lange, a photojournalist from New Jersey known for capturing some of the most famous photographs in American history, was sent to rural Utah. As a photographer, Lange felt a responsibility to capture matter-of-fact images of her subjects and their poor living conditions. In doing so, she gave a human face to rural poverty in Utah and the economic devastation of the Great Depression.

Lange first went to company towns owned by Blue Blaze Coal in Carbon County. In one image, a mother struggles through the snow with her children. In the Garfield County towns of Widtsoe and Escalante, Lange photographed Mormon farmers, their land, buildings, and families. Her striking images of barns in snow were ominous in a time of economic strife. In all her photographs, Lange captured dignified subjects who were surviving life amid crisis.

Because of photographers like Lange, we have a precious glimpse into what life was like for Utah's rural communities during the Great Depression. Her ability to humanize these rural communities and bring their realities to life has power still today.



Mormon woman and native of Denmark receiving her old age assistance check for the first time, Widtsoe, 1936. Photo by Dorothea Lange. Image courtesy of Library of Congress.

But in Utah, the New Deal also had a mixed legacy. Some New Deal programs, such as the Resettlement Administration, had distressing effects on rural communities. In the case of Widtsoe in Garfield County, the plan to buy out marginal farmland and help residents resettle to more productive land did not go as intended. The process was more expensive than anticipated and many families waited months or years for their payments. Negative impacts also occurred on the Navajo Nation. When silt began to back up behind the newly-completed Hoover Dam, federal officials blamed upstream overgrazing. The Bureau of Indian Affairs accepted that conclusion and instituted a disastrous stock reduction program that slaughtered over 250,000 sheep and goats and more than 10,000 horses belonging to the Navajo. This not only thrust many Diné households into poverty, it delivered a spiritual blow to a people for whom sheep were culturally significant. "Sheep is life" is still a maxim for Diné people.

Still, the New Deal undeniably saved rural Utah. By 1933, Utah was the top per-capita recipient of federal

dollars, with the federal government spending seven dollars on Utah for every one dollar it collected in taxes. Many towns built sewage and electrical systems for the first time, allowing their communities to grow. This period's public investments defined both the built environment and people's livelihoods in rural Utah.

ACCELERATING CHANGE: WORLD WAR II

Despite the massive influx of federal dollars during the New Deal, Utah's economy remained stagnant until the onset of World War II. The war brought new industries and population shifts that reshaped the American West, demonstrating the constant change occurring in twentieth-century communities in rural Utah.

During World War II, employers sought immigrant laborers for two reasons. First, they functioned as strikebreakers and allowed companies to counter powerful labor organizations with cheaper labor. Second, as more men left to fight, US companies scrambled to fill agricultural and industrial roles. As a result, Utah's Latino population grew substantially

during the war. Latino communities already existed in southeastern Utah in the early 1900s, notably in Monticello, but the war brought new residents to towns throughout Utah. The majority were US citizens, including *manitos* from rural New Mexico and Colorado who entered both the agricultural and industrial workforce. The *islanderos* were recruited from Puerto Rico, largely to work in the Bingham Canyon mine. Mexican laborers called *braceros* also came to the US from Mexico through a federal program specifically aimed at increasing the agricultural workforce. Immigrant workers provided crucial labor power for maintaining Utah's agricultural industries during the war, but were often subject to mistreatment and poor living conditions as they tried to join Utah's rural communities.

The incarceration of Japanese American citizens also changed the face of rural Utah. After the attack on Pearl Harbor, Executive Order 9066 directed the relocation and imprisonment of around 100,000 Japanese Americans away from the West Coast. Some, like Frank Wada, voluntarily came to Utah and started cooperative farms for displaced citizens. Others were forcibly moved to concentration camps such as Topaz

in Delta, Utah. When it opened on September 11, 1942, Topaz had approximately 9,000 internees. Its total area was 19,000 acres and included agricultural areas, a post office, fire station, churches, schools, libraries, and a community gym. With 623 buildings, Topaz dwarfed the nearby town of Delta, which had a population of just 1,500 in the 1940s. Its economy also entangled with that of the small rural Utah town, as incarcerated gradually received permission to work off-site on farms and in businesses and homes. But by the end of the war, the majority of people incarcerated at Topaz moved back to California's Bay Area. After the Utah desert was transformed into one of the largest cities in the state - only to return to dust again - the wartime Topaz installation would be considered another of rural Utah's boom-and-bust cycles.

A massive increase in Utah's industrial manufacturing also reshaped the state's rural communities and landscapes. Between 1939 and 1945, Utah's manufacturing output increased by 200%. For many rural Utahns, as for rural Americans in general, this new work was appealing, offering higher wages and steady work. And, as more men left for the war, opportunities opened for women and immigrant workers. Many



School children, Topaz Internment Camp, near Delta, Utah, c 1943. At its peak, 11,000 Japanese American citizens were incarcerated at Topaz. National Archives (210-CT-622), courtesy Utah Historical Society.



Navajo workers, Peter's Sugar Farm, Salt Lake County, c 1945. Whole families were brought by truck to work in the sugar beet fields. By one estimate, Utahns at that time spent around \$1 million per year on imported sugar. Image courtesy University of Utah Marriott Library Special Collections.



Woman making a parachute, C.F. Fauntleroy Parachute Company, Manti, c 1942. World War II gave Utah women new work opportunities, which changed the face of rural Utah communities. Image courtesy Utah Historical Society.

moved to the industrializing Wasatch Front but in other cases the work came to them. For example, the Standard Parachute Company of San Diego relocated its plant to the inland security of Manti in 1942, employing hundreds of Sanpete County women to sew parachutes with industrial machinery.

The war also intensified Utah's extractive industries. The output of coal and copper mines nearly doubled during the war years, while iron ore production saw an astounding 625% increase. Meanwhile, the US Geological Survey searched for new mineral deposits across Utah, fueled by a desire for American self-sufficiency in metal production. As a result, new mines for tin, tungsten, copper, iron, lead, and zinc opened across Utah. The atomic era ushered in yet another new mining boom as the Atomic Energy Commission enticed prospectors into scouring southeastern Utah for uranium, which eventually led to a Cold War boom in towns such as Moab and Blanding.

Utah's wartime transformation brought prosperity, but also irrevocable change that struck at notions of rural identity. Urban and industrial expansion came at a cost for Utah's agricultural sector. Cities like Provo and

Ogden along the Wasatch Front were once surrounded by orchards and small family farms, but after the war, most of those who previously farmed worked in the manufacturing, construction, defense, or service sectors. In 1960, the Geneva Steel plant alone employed 30% of the workers in Utah County - most of whom had previously farmed. The reality of work across Utah had forever changed, as postwar rural America reorganized itself with expanding suburbs and industrialization. In spite of this remarkable shift, agrarianism was still cherished as an ideal way of life while Utah's population became more urbanized and suburbanized.

LESSON IN RESILIENCE

Since the arrival of Euro-Americans, Utah's Indigenous communities have struggled with dispossession, poverty, civil rights, and environmental degradation. Settlers deemed Native ways inferior and pressured Native communities to conform to the agrarian way of life that white settlers idealized. Despite this, Utah's Native peoples adapted to new conditions and found ways to preserve their heritage and history, passing them down to new generations. The process has not been easy, yet Native communities have survived.

The story of the Northwestern Band of the Shoshone Nation is a powerful illustration of the struggle to maintain community in the face of overwhelming changes. After the US military decimated their Tribe in the 1863 Bear River Massacre, Shoshone survivors led by Sagwitch navigated complex changes, assimilating



"Each time I saw the homes burn, I cried... I was there talking to Mr. Cutler. I told him I had seen good times in that home. I saw it as a little girl. In this home many of us were married... we had singing practice and business meetings. We were happy in it. ... Mr. Cutler... only laughed at me. I guess to him it was an old house.

To us it was a home."

– Amy Timbimboo, testimony about 1960 burning of Washakie, 1974



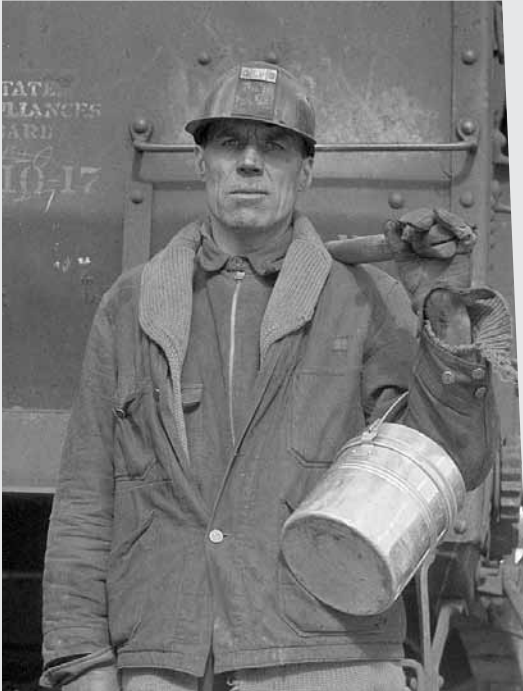
Moroni and Amy Timbimboo, Washakie, 1939. Moroni was the first Native American LDS Bishop. The Northwestern Shoshones who lived at Washakie experienced relative stability until the property was sold by the LDS Church in the 1960s. Image courtesy Utah Historical Society.

economically and socially into LDS communities, but never giving up their cultural heritage.

Unlike the Utes who resisted attempts to turn them to farming, the Northwestern Band of Shoshones saw it as a means of survival. Rather than enroll at a reservation in Idaho or Wyoming, the Northwestern Shoshones chose to remain in their homeland, which had been engulfed by Mormon settlement. Many, including Sagwitch, were baptized into the LDS faith. In 1874 Sagwitch and his cousin John Moemberg approached Brigham Young to help the people learn to farm. By early the next year the Shoshones had established a community on the lower Bear River near Corinne. The community's success, however, was short-lived. Using a manufactured "Indian Scare" the non-Mormon settlers of Corinne convinced the government that the Shoshones were a threat and secured an order that they should all return to their reservations. But Sagwitch's people had never gone to a reservation, so had nowhere to go. Still, the Shoshones were forced to abandon their camp,



Tracing Change



Coal miner, Consumers, Utah, 1936. Photo by Dorothea Lange. Image courtesy of Library of Congress.



Coal miner named Natividad, following his shift at the Scofield mine, Eureka, Utah, 2019. Photo by Christine Armbruster, "Utah 800" series.

The technologies of coal mining have changed significantly since 1930, as has our reliance on it as a society. Nevertheless, some rural communities in Utah still rely on this dangerous and grueling industry. Although these two men were photographed nearly 100 years apart, the context of their work remains similar: most major coal companies are not based in Utah but operate here, and they rely on workers willing to do physically taxing labor.

leaving over one hundred acres of crops in the field just before the harvest.

After other failed attempts to establish an agrarian Shoshone community on the Bear River, in 1880 the LDS Church established the town of Washakie, just south of the Idaho border. Washakie bore some resemblance to Orderville and other communitarian Mormon settlements. Shared spaces and a tight-knit community made for an industrious town that built its own school buildings and canals. The community collectively managed and owned a sheep herd that brought in shared funds for machinery and farm equipment. Even with these successes, however, the Shoshones of Washakie struggled to maintain their small town. World War II drew away young people and their labor, just as it did all across rural Utah.

By 1960, only three residents remained working at the farm on a year-round basis and, despite promising the farm to the Shoshone people in perpetuity, the LDS Church moved to sell off the land. Assuming the homes were abandoned, the LDS Church burned down family homes with all possessions inside. This left many Tribal members destitute, and wondering

about the future of their community. Some tried to join the Bannock Creek Shoshone Reservation in Idaho after losing their homes. But as Mormon converts, they were treated as outsiders and not allowed to hunt or fish on the Reservation.



"What my grandmother would want you to know is that we have survived. We have adapted and are thriving in a world that seems so polarized and black and white. We had to adapt to our surrounding environment or we would have been destroyed. We are just now beginning to blossom as a rose, as some prophecies have said we would."

– Darren Parry, Northwestern Band of the Shoshone Nation, 2019

Despite years of difficulties, the Northwestern Band of Shoshone are an active part of communities along the Wasatch Front and Cache Valley. Their Tribal government engages in a number of business enterprises. Mae Timbimboo Parry, as a cultural conservator, kept her peoples' stories and passed them to succeeding generations. Today her grandson Darren Parry has worked tirelessly to preserve the memory and history of their Tribe. The Tribe purchased the site of the Bear River Massacre to restore the space with native

vegetation and turn the land itself into a symbol of Tribal resilience and identity.

Accelerating change altered all of rural Utah's communities across the twentieth century. For rural Utahns facing similar rapid change today, lessons from the Northwestern Band of Shoshone about adaptation, survival, and stewardship of the land may illustrate possibilities for how to build resilient and strong communities for the twenty-first century.

Basque Community in Utah

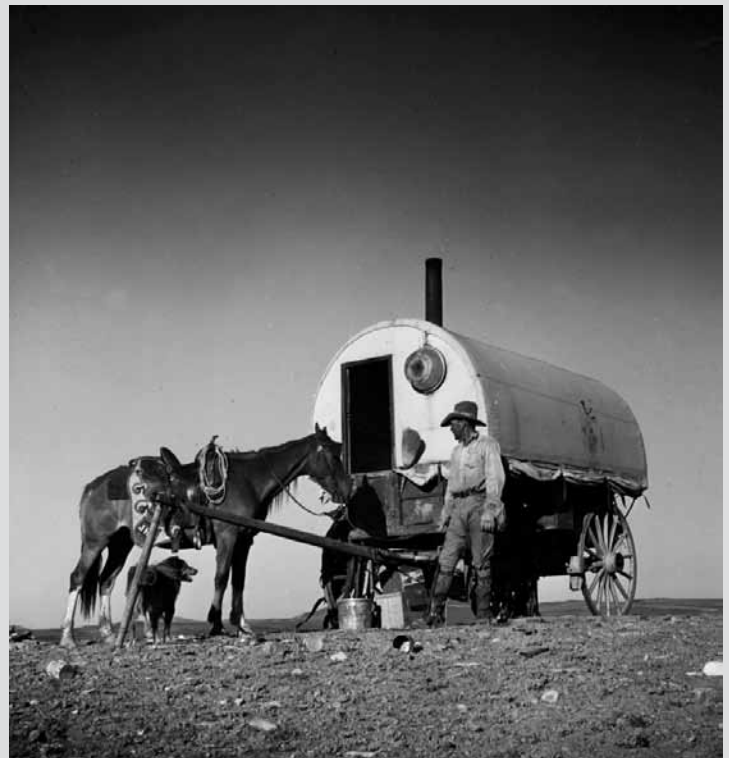
Mikee Ferran

When the Hogar Hotel opened in Salt Lake City in 1927, it became a home for Basque immigrants working throughout the West. A tightly-knit and proud ethnic group, the Basques hail from the mountainous border region between Spain and France. Political upheaval and an uncertain economy brought a significant number of Basques to the Intermountain West. In rural Utah, "Basque" became synonymous with "shepherd" and many developed reputations as reliable and skilled herdsmen. The work was lonely, but the isolated men found community in Basque-only boarding houses located in towns such as Price, Ogden, and Salt Lake. It wasn't long before this small handful of boarding houses became community centers that supported the traditions and culture of Basque country.

Owned by Basque immigrants John and Claudia Landa, the Hogar Hotel was a haven for Basque shepherders in need of housing and

comfort during the winter months. The Landas took real pride in creating a familiar atmosphere for local Basques, who used the business as a restaurant, meeting place, and cultural center. To register with the hotel, you needed to be Basque and speak the language (or, at least, Spanish or French). Seen by many community members as honorary grandparents, the Landas served traditional homemade meals and played Basque records on the jukebox.

Winters in the Hogar Hotel were starkly different from the months spent shepherding. Traveling in a small sheepwagon, young Basque men would range for hundreds of miles throughout Utah during seasonal grazing cycles. The work was mentally grueling and isolating. Without the company of anyone but their dog, horse, and flock of sheep, many men turned to the rural landscape to tell their stories. Their tree carvings, or arborglyphs, served as a way to share news, grazing



Basque shepherd with his animals, c. 1945. This wagon is typical for sheep camps across Utah. Image courtesy University of Utah Marriott Library Special Collections.

information, or simply mark the passage of time. There are over 27,000 documented tree carvings attributed to Basque shepherders throughout the American West.

By the 1960s, the shepherding industry waned, and the Hogar Hotel closed its doors. However, these boarding houses served a lasting role in protecting Basque culture. Food, music, and a familiar language helped foster a close community of individuals that were defined by the isolation of their rural work. These hotels helped connect new immigrants, families, isolated shepherders, and elderly community members, creating small ethnic enclaves that preserved Basque traditions.

PERSISTENCE & MANAGING CHANGE

**How do Utah's rural communities make a living today?
The decline in both agriculture and extractive industries in rural
Utah has forced communities to reinvent themselves.**

Utah is a different place than it was even ten years ago. Between 2010 and 2020, Utah shifted from being a “small” state to a “midsize” state according to the US Census Bureau, and is now the fastest-growing state in the nation. The same data show that over half of Utah's population growth was driven by minority groups. Although many think of our state as a clear descendant of its relatively white, Mormon past, our diversity index is now 40.7% and expected to increase, making our state more comparable to Minnesota or Ohio than to Idaho or Wyoming. In addition to this rapid population growth and changing demographics, new technologies and industries are pushing rural Utah communities to reinvent themselves culturally and economically while still preserving their local identity and character.

Today, Main Street revitalization, tourism, and new technological developments are all important parts of adapting to change. But as communities redefine what rural Utah work looks like, clashes over rural culture again challenge identities around who belongs, especially as rapid gentrification starts to price out local businesses and families. Other twenty-first century challenges, like climate change and access to healthcare, continue to show that rural Utahns are resilient, managing difficult changes in innovative and inspiring ways.

WELCOME TO MAIN STREET

Ever since the New Deal funneled federal money into rural communities, the picturesque small town Main Street has become a symbol of rural American identity and culture. Across Utah, local businesses like farmers markets, art galleries, and coffee shops are reclaiming Main Streets in an effort to sustain a rural identity in a modernizing world while embracing tourism as an economic base.



Idle Isle Cafe, Brigham City, Utah. 2021. Main Street revitalization allows rural towns to preserve historic storefronts and community character for locals and tourists alike. Image courtesy Brigham City Corporation.

Part of this is made possible by Main Street America, a federal program established in 1980 within the National Trust for Historic Preservation. Through Main Street America, rural communities can access funds for stabilizing damaged historic properties as well as services such as design consultation, business strategizing, and market analyses. A big motivator for participants of Main Street America's program is heritage tourism. In Utah, road trippers and outdoor recreation enthusiasts often pass through towns settled in the nineteenth century - from Springdale, just outside of Zion National Park, to Helper, situated on the edge of red rock canyon country. For these towns, maintaining a picturesque, lively, and accessible Main Street is an economically and culturally important part of their community.

During the 1970s, Spring City residents used Main Street preservation to transform the town into a model for heritage tourism. This Sanpete County community, with a population of just under 1,000 residents, is famous for the entirety of its buildings being on the National Register of Historic Places. Its layout, mostly original to the 1849 Mormon settlement of the area, is a classic example of the "Mormon cultural landscape:" individual farms clustered near one another in blocks, with each family home allotted a quarter of the five- to eight-acre block of land to steward. Nearby, Mormon religious structures such as an LDS Relief Society granary and the Bishop's Tithing House all serve as examples of the frontier architecture. Today, many of the dwellings have been converted into homes and studios for artists who find inspiration in the surrounding, aesthetically nineteenth-century atmosphere. One local non-profit, Friends of Historic Spring City, even hosts a yearly festival that promotes historic preservation, allowing visitors to see the impressive restoration of the town's dwellings through open-home tours.

However, for some residents, the transition of this rural community into a heritage tourism site was not easy. Louisa Bennion grew up in Spring City as it was redefining itself as an artist colony and historic preservation mecca during the 1970s. At that time, Spring City's population was so low it was actually declared a ghost town. Its elevation to a National Historic District led to an influx of "incomes" driven to restore and save the town, but it also dramatically changed the culture of the community. Locals who had lived there for generations faced tension with the "incomes" and "weekenders" who saw any alteration to historic homes for new amenities as essentially "cutting off their nose to spite their face." In this tense atmosphere of great community change, Bennion reflected simply, "When I was a little girl growing up in an old house in Spring City, I knew of only two kinds of politics: the politics of water and the politics of historic preservation." For many rural Utahns even today, these tensions around the old versus the new are ever-present.

Fistfight Between Old & New

Mette Flynt

Park City's population rapidly changed during the counterculture movement of the 1960s, causing friction among the city's residents between old-timers and newcomers. One major cause of change was the shift from a mining industry to one based on skiing and tourism. In 1963, Park City mayor William P. Sullivan oversaw the opening of a new ski resort, Treasure Mountain, and the influx of tourists began to cause problems.

To some longtime Parkites, newcomers all fit under the category of "hippie," which carried a negative connotation at the time. One writer lamented in a 1969 edition of the *Park Record* that hippies ran "naked through the streets playing flute while under the influence of drugs." Another high school student countered, writing "tell me, how are hippies stopping you from lending a helping hand?" The conflict over hippies in Park City was about more than resistance to the counterculture.

It reflected a deeper concern that "old Park City" would disappear with cultural and economic change.

Mayor Sullivan captured this anxiety in his Fourth of July Proclamation in 1971. He called on Parkites to address current challenges, including "restless youth" and "the sapping of our country's moral strength." Perhaps unexpectedly, the tension that Sullivan described escalated into a "hippie riot" on Main Street.

As Parkites gathered along Main Street for the traditional Independence Day parade, a group of hippies sitting on a roof threw water balloons into the crowd, hitting a miner's wife. A fight between miners and hippies then started. Park City Police Officer John Bircumshaw intervened after a water balloon hit his car. Three people jumped Bircumshaw, and the brawl grew to more than five hundred people. The bars began to empty, with new residents pouring into the eastern side of Main Street and longtime residents on the western side.



Park City Arts Festival, 1975. This crowded street is a familiar sight to Parkites today. Skiing, Olympic training, the Sundance Film Festival, and more attract visitors from all over the world to the once-isolated mining town. Image courtesy Utah Historical Society.

Some later contested the term "riot," saying they had seen more intense fights at high school football games. Nevertheless, roughly thirty law enforcement officers responded before the holiday brawl ended. The fight between old and new, however, persisted as the Park City community managed the drastic transition from mining to skiing.

OLD TIMERS VS. NEWCOMERS

For Louisa Bennion's parents, the loss they felt witnessing the changes that had taken place in their home in Orem motivated their restoration of a nineteenth-century historic home in Spring City. During the post-war period, strip malls and subdivisions replaced the orchards and farms that once defined Utah County's landscape, creating a suburban space focused on consumers rather than agricultural producers. Indeed, the rapid change that transformed Utah County might provide a roadmap for what to expect in other rural Utah counties undergoing similar shifts today.

In part, federally funded wartime industrialization initiated these changes. Most notable in Utah County was the Geneva Steel Works, an enormous operation established in 1941 on 1,600 acres next to Utah Lake that attracted thousands of workers and their families. Provo, Utah's "Garden City," soon claimed the mantle of "Steel Center of the West" because of its proximity to Geneva. Orem's population doubled every decade between 1940 and 1980. The demand for housing drove suburban expansion, which ate up more and more agricultural land. But industrial employment was just part of the story.

The natural beauty and recreational opportunities offered by the Wasatch Range brought others seeking an enhanced quality of life. Robert Redford, the

acclaimed actor and longtime owner of Sundance Ski Resort, was one of them. Sundance began as "Timp Haven," a family getaway owned by Ray Stewart on land that had been in his family for decades. Redford purchased Timp Haven in 1968, renamed it Sundance, and within ten years began hosting filmmakers as a way of attracting them to Utah. These gatherings eventually integrated Utah into the film industry and exploded into what is today the largest independent film festival in the US, held in neighboring Park City. Because of the festival, Park City - a once-rural mining town - has become an annual destination for some of America's most famous celebrities. Sundance, like the Geneva Steel plant, linked rural Utah spaces to a national economy, transforming them forever.

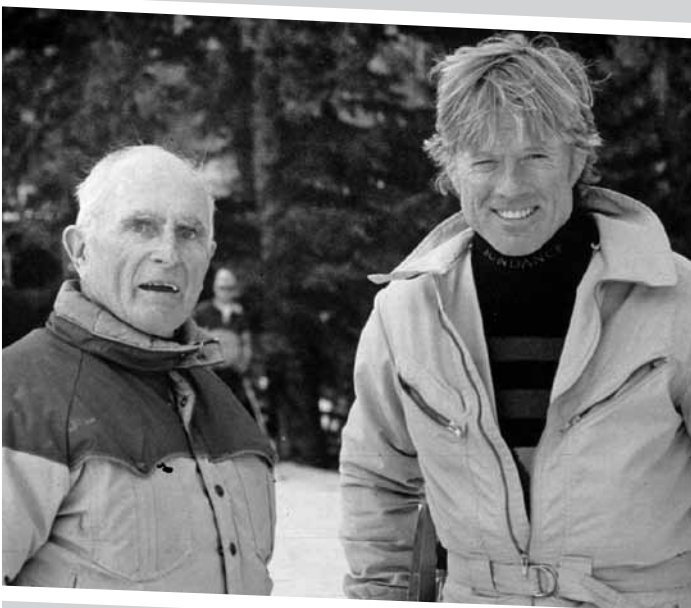
By 1975, as Redford began hosting visiting filmmakers at his resort, rapid change had already transformed the rural spaces of Utah County. With a booming population and available real estate right on the new interstate I-15, developers saw Orem as the obvious choice for Utah Valley's first shopping mall. By 2000, all of the town's orchards were gone.

Outside pressures - ranging from federal projects to Hollywood celebrities to Utah's sky-high growth rate - continue to force rural Utah towns today to envision what they want to look like in the future. As the rest of Utah tries to avoid becoming their I-15 corridor counterparts, historic preservation is one way to cope with the pressures of population growth and increased tourism while still preserving a sense of rural identity.

NEW TECHNOLOGIES

In the same way the railroad and World War II altered rural towns, a new wave of technological investment is shaping communities in rural Utah. While many Utahns harken back to the significance of agricultural work in preserving rural culture, this industry is fading. By 1990 an estimated 2.2% of Utahns were employed in agriculture, and the US Census stopped counting how many farmers Utah had. Today, 1,140 workers are employed in farming, fishing, and forestry according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

The unique landscape enticed many of the technological research facilities found in rural Utah. The Mars Desert Research Station (MDRS), for example, hosts field seasons for scientists and engineers to engage in simulated missions to Mars. Utah's remote desert and unique geological features offer the perfect opportunity for this kind of training. Another research



Ray Stewart with Robert Redford, c 1985. Stewart's family ran the Timp Haven ski resort before selling the land to Redford. Image courtesy University of Utah Marriott Library Special Collections.

station, Utah Frontier Observatory for Research in Geothermal Energy (FORGE), is located near the rural town of Milford because of its geothermal hot springs. FORGE received \$220 million in funding from the US Department of Energy to develop new geothermal energy technologies. Today, geothermal energy accounts for only 0.4% of all energy in the US, but with research into rural geothermal reservoirs conducted by places like FORGE, this source of energy may be on the rise. These two research facilities stand in stark contrast to the alfalfa field or cattle herd ideal we may typically associate with rural Utah.

Autonomous Solutions, Inc., located just north of Petersboro, Utah, develops self-driving vehicles and prides itself for creating jobs that aren't "dull, dirty, and dangerous," displaying an awareness of their work's contrast with that of Utah's past. Their high-tech vehicles, which use satellite positioning to move themselves, are designed with a team of 150 employees for industries all over the world. Ironically, one of their main models is the self-driving tractor, which automates the same agricultural labor that many rural Utahns hold so dear.

HOUSING & SUSTAINABILITY

Perhaps the best example of how new technologies are changing Utah's rural landscape is in the case of remote work. Since the COVID-19 pandemic began in 2020, the rise in tele-work has caused a significant influx of remote workers into Utah's rural towns, made even easier by the increasing availability of broadband internet and temporary rentals via services like Airbnb.

The increase in remote work in the wake of COVID only exacerbated the sense of unchecked growth in rural Utah, as housing prices and local amenities have struggled to keep up.

Main Street America, the federal program that provides funding and resources to rural towns' historic preservation and tourism initiatives, is also trying to shine a light on housing management in rural communities. As of 2022, 87% of Main Street America participants reported that housing is a concern in their districts, and recent sessions from their national conference have titles such as "Whatever You are Doing on Housing, Double It." With the rise of high-priced temporary rentals, many rural Utahns are feeling the housing crunch just as much as their urban counterparts.



Windmills old and new, Milford, Utah, 2017. The Milford area supports a diversity of renewable energy sources, from wind, geothermal, solar, and biogas. Photo by David Crane.

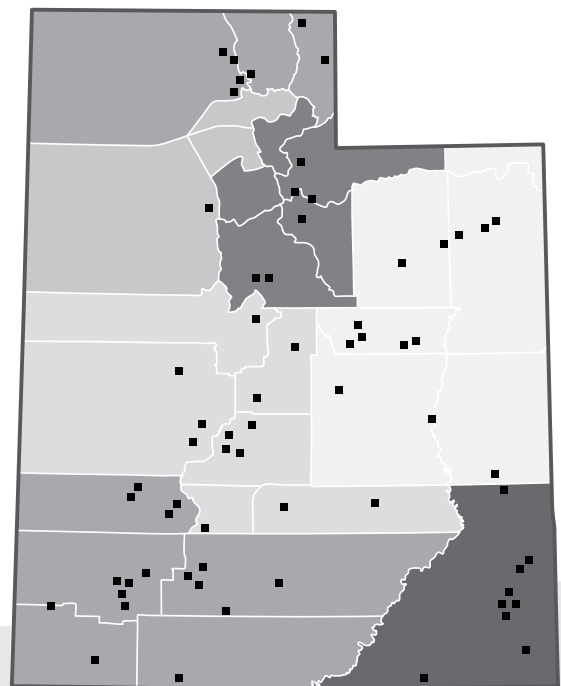


Annual protest walk against the White Mesa uranium mill, 2022. The complex stores about 700 million pounds of radioactive waste and affects the White Mesa community's water. Among the more than 100 activists who participated, Ofelia Rivas said, "Every step that you take on this Mother Earth is a sacred step, every step is a prayer, every step is an offering. Every inch of this Mother Earth, this Turtle Island, has remains of our ancestors... The prayer walk is a solidarity walk." Photo by Tim Peterson, Grand Canyon Trust.

Population pressures, coupled with climate change, are causing some hopeful Utahns to consider creative ways to adapt to this new reality. For example, after decades of diminishing water at his Clearfield family farm, engineer and alfalfa farmer Stan Jensen is experimenting with organic farming and permaculture in preparation for Utah's "dry future." And now that market pressures are forcing many of Utah's coal plants to close, Rocky Mountain Power is looking to retrain coal plant workers to operate nuclear power plants. In addition, Utah's Governor Spencer Cox is prioritizing investment in rural infrastructure to ensure delivery of water, power, and internet services to isolated and marginalized communities. All of these approaches will be important as rural Utah faces an uncertain future, economically and environmentally.

RURAL ACTIVISM

Well before current issues of population growth and climate change came to the fore, Utah's rural communities have been advocating for themselves. For example, when the Navajo Nation bought the 120-acre property of Westwater near Blanding in 1986, basic services of electricity and water were guaranteed. Instead, residents have been hauling 300-gallon tanks of water three times a week to sustain their homes. Now, because of Native lobbying and new sources of federal funding, this Tribal community is getting access to drinking water infrastructure for



COVID-19 CASES BY COUNTY



Covid-19 Case Rates per 100,000 people, September 2020

the first time – nearly one hundred years after the New Deal provided Utah’s other rural communities with the same resource.

Even with access to drinking water infrastructure, many of Utah’s Native communities still face serious health challenges. The post-war uranium boom, for example, devastated the water supplies of many rural communities. The only uranium mill currently operating in the US neighbors the White Mesa Ute Community, and the outdated facility seeps dangerous chemicals into the area’s groundwater. One Ute Tribal member said of the poisoned springs: “Water is sacred to us. Water is life. You protect the water because it’s going to protect you.” As White Mesa Utes advocate for the protection of their surrounding water, the aquifers continue to be monitored for contamination from the mill.

Compounding the dangerous legacy of the atomic age, access to health services is tenuous for all rural Utah communities. Residents of isolated towns must travel hours to see a doctor. Despite boasting some of the best health care services in the country, Utah ranks 49th in the nation for access to primary care. This was especially troubling during the COVID-19 pandemic, when Utah’s rural communities were some of the hardest hit. The Navajo peoples referred to COVID-19 as a *Naayéé*, meaning a monster. *Naayéé* are an important part of the Navajo creation story, wherein Changing Woman bore the Hero Twins – Monster Slayer and Born for Water – who saved the people from *Naayéé*. In May 2020 the Navajo Nation experienced the highest per-capita COVID infection rate in the country. To combat the *Naayéé*, local organizations such as Bluff Area Mutual Aid (BAMA) raised funds and mobilized volunteers to deliver basic necessities

Utah Downwinders: Rural Activists for a Post-Atomic World

Between 1951 and 1992, the US government tested 928 atomic bombs in the remote Nevada desert near Las Vegas, timing them so that prevailing winds carried the fallout eastward. Onlookers from southern Utah camped out on the hoods of their cars to watch desert dust plume into the Nevada sky. But it wasn’t long before these same rural Utahns started to witness sores and hair loss on their livestock. Then, genetic mutations and spiking cancer rates among their families and neighbors forced them to band together and demand action from the federal government.

They called themselves “Downwinders” – and they were unheard at first. In one 1956 trial, plaintiffs argued that nuclear testing was responsible for the deaths of 4,500 sheep in rural Utah, but the government withheld scientific data and pressured witnesses to help them win the case. Other studies from the 1950s found that children died of leukemia in southern Utah at two and a

half times the normal rate. All of this, it was becoming clear, was due to atomic testing.

But it wasn’t until the 1980s that the government began to acknowledge its role in these deaths. This was in part because an exposé noted that ninety-one of the 220 actors and crew on the John Wayne film *The Conqueror* – that had filmed near St. George in 1954 – were diagnosed with cancer, with many – including Wayne – dying from it. Could it be possible, Americans began to wonder, that the US government’s careless nuclear testing had actually killed John Wayne?

“Nobody paid attention to it when it was people in southern Utah who were the first to start speaking up about it,” Downwinder Mary Dickson said, “when their sheep, cattle, and babies were dying.” Downwinder activism from rural Utah’s communities led to the 1990 Radiation Exposure Compensation Act, and a series of class action lawsuits led to an official apology from the US government as



Civilians and military personnel watch the Small Boy nuclear test detonate in the Nevada desert, July 1962. Image courtesy Nevada National Security Site, Nuclear Testing Archive.

well as monetary compensation for individuals exposed to fallout between 1942 and 1971.

Because of the efforts of Utah’s rural Downwinders – as writers, social workers, filmmakers, and more – Americans are now more aware of the effects of nuclear testing. Although we are all in a sense Downwinders, it is this group of rural Utahns who brought important attention to the issue for the betterment of our communities.

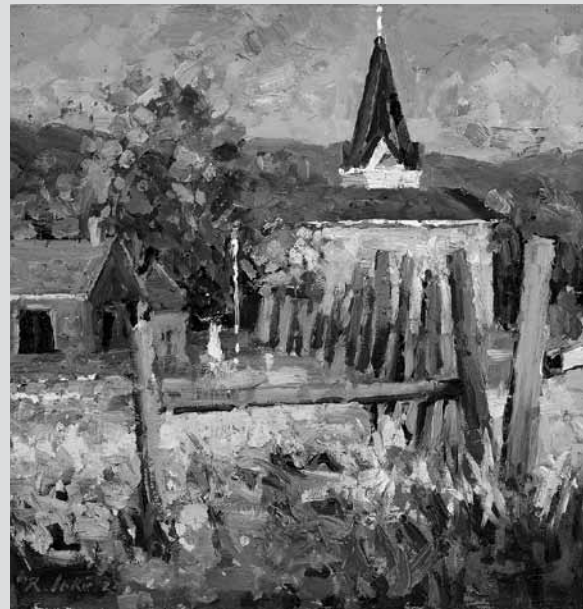
Creative Economy in Rural Utah

Utah's state motto is "industry," a word which may not bring to mind images of Shakespearean actors or landscape painters. However, artists and cultural sector workers fuel Utah's economy and boost tourism, giving many small towns a path forward amidst economic change and uncertainty.

As the first state to create a government art agency, Utah has a long history of loving arts and culture. In rural Utah, local museums, art galleries, theaters, studios, and even coffee shops cultivate a strong sense of creative community. Today, Utah is fourth in the nation for employment in the cultural sector, with over 1,600,000 jobs in or related to the industry. From music to theater to graphic design,

literature, visual arts, and more, it is clear that Utah is a national leader when it comes to the business of creativity.

This remains true in rural Utah, even amidst great change and challenges. Although the COVID-19 pandemic devastated Utah's creative industry, the sector continued to generate \$347.9 million in tax revenue after 2020. In one of the state's fastest growing regions, Washington County, 5.8% of jobs are in the cultural sector. Jobs in the arts and humanities attract tourists but also valuable community workers with unique skills. Perhaps most importantly, arts and humanities can provide a sense of comfort and belonging in times of great change and uncertainty.



Randall Lake, *Back of Spring City Chapel*, 2019, oil on canvas. Historic preservation mecca Spring City is also a haven for artists who find inspiration and creativity there.

to local residents. Setting up shop in the closed Twin Rocks Trading Post and Cafe in Bluff, masked volunteers filled donation boxes with food and other supplies. In an area that relies on tourism, this was especially helpful for unemployed Utahns during the pandemic.

In addition to clean water and health care, rural activists have also been working on enhancing voting rights. In 2018, a non-profit called the Rural Utah Project began registering Navajo voters, many for their first time. Organizers discovered that 21% of voters were registered in the wrong precinct and even more could not register because they did not have an official street address. By partnering with Google maps, the Rural Utah Project was able to assign addresses on the Navajo Nation for the first time, allowing more than 1,600 Navajo voters to register to get their voices heard. These activists, working together to improve their health and the environment or to assert their rights, demonstrate that rural Utahns are not powerless in the face of change.

PUBLIC LANDS & TOURISM

While rural activism can unite residents, it can also divide communities. The fate of Utah's public lands continues to be a source of tension, compounding feelings of uncertainty about rural Utah's future.

In 2021, National Parks and Monuments brought in \$2.5 billion to Utah's economy, placing the state third in the country for most dollars earned from public lands tourism. As existing public lands receive greater protection but draw more visitors, critical economic and social questions confront rural Utah. The influx of visitors naturally changes the character of these towns and can strain local budgets and emergency services responsible for the safety of travelers. While National Monuments like Bears Ears (designated in 2016) are an important part of preserving cultural and natural resources for all Americans, many local community members feel unheard in the face of federal power.

These issues are not new. When Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument was designated in

1996, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) district manager Verlin Smith pessimistically reported that there was very little common ground in rural Utah. Some residents desire unhindered development and want fossil fuel extraction to continue. Others wish to enjoy wilderness isolated from human intervention. Polarized debate about what “wilderness” meant and who it was for escalated following the Grand Staircase-Escalante designation and raged again during the years-long struggle over the designation, reduction, and redesignation of the Bears Ears monument. Environmental groups, Tribal governments, and many local business praised the designations, while other local business and many state and local government officials deemed them federal overreach and lamented a “loss of rights.”

Remaining at an impasse, however, benefits neither side in the debate. Public lands tourism will remain critical for rural Utah economies for the foreseeable future, while new technologies and opportunities will likely draw even more newcomers to put down roots in small communities set in stunning landscapes. The question is not how to stop change. Indeed, the history of rural Utah shows that change has been a constant. The question is how to come together to manage change in order to build and sustain resilient rural communities



Jeep Safari near Moab, c 1965. Automobiles brought more people to the scenic wonders of rural Utah – and introduced new challenges to the preservation of those places. Image courtesy Moab Museum.



Tracing Change



Provo Peach Orchard, c 1905. Image courtesy Utah Historical Society.



Geneva Steel Plant on the shore of Utah Lake, c 1945. Image courtesy Utah Historical Society.

Utah Valley was once a rural space known for its farmscapes and peach orchards before giving way to vast population growth and urban development. Part of this boom was due to the construction of the Geneva Steel Plant at the shore of Utah Lake, which employed many farmers during World War II and shifted the local economy away from agriculture. The area is still among the state’s fastest growing, with new subdivisions changing the landscape once again.

LOOKING AHEAD

Rural Utah is at a crossroads, but it's not for the first time.

Change has been a constant in rural Utah. Native peoples felt the loss of their homelands, Mormon pioneers struggled to build new lives in an arid environment that was radically different than anything they had experienced before, and new migrants and technologies transformed small communities as did global economies and conflicts. Utahns have adapted to economic depressions, displacement, and drought. Most communities survived and thrived, while others have not.

The story of rural Utah is one of cherished ideals coupled with challenging realities. But why does rural matter in an overwhelmingly urban place like Utah? Fully 90% of our population lives in urban areas, yet many if not most Utahns feel a deep connection to rural ideals and values. This stems from idealized visions of a rural, agrarian life at the center of both our state's heritage and identity and broader national beliefs about the nature of American democracy.

But the realities of rural life have always been more complex and contested. The importance of extractive industries complicates simple views of agrarian values. Utah's pioneer identity draws on a tradition of independence but is defined by an ethic of communal work. That same cherished sense of independence has often been shaken by external forces and economies, while so many communities' dependence on the public lands that surround them has resulted in tensions with the federal government.

While change and adaptation have been constant, there have been moments of more profound transformation. Events like the Great Depression, New Deal, and World War II have accelerated the pace of change and offer valuable examples to consider. Are we today at another such juncture in rural Utah?

New sources of income and public investment - like remote work, outdoor tourism, and the arts - can be a lifeline to rural towns, but also require adjustment. Yet again, this dynamic is nothing new. In the nineteenth



Father and daughter at the Small Fry Rodeo, Wayne County Fair, 2018.
Photo by Stephen Trimble.

century railroads brought the outside world to small town Utah, bringing new peoples, ideas, and goods, simultaneously enriching the lives of individuals while potentially threatening community traditions.

Contemporary pressures that drive change may seem daunting, yet adaptation has always been core to rural life. At a time when much of rural Utah is again reinventing itself, *Crossroads: Change in Rural America* offers a chance to look at our path over the past century - to highlight the changes that affected our fortunes, explore how we've adapted, and think about what's next.



RURAL UTAH AT A CROSSROADS

RECOMMENDED READING | SCHOLARLY

Don E. Albrecht, *Rethinking Rural: Global Community and Economic Development in the Small Town West* (Washington State University Press, 2014).

Leisl Carr Childers, *The Size of the Risk: Histories of Multiple Use in the Great Basin* (University of Oklahoma Press, 2015).

Jared Farmer, *On Zion's Mount: Mormons, Indians, and the American Landscape* (Harvard University Press, 2008).

Sarah Alisabeth Fox, *Downwind: A People's History of the Nuclear West* (University of Nebraska Press, 2014).

Doug Goodman and Daniel McCool, eds., *Contested Landscape: The Politics of Wilderness in Utah and the West* (University of Utah Press, 1999).

Frieda Knobloch, *The Culture of Wilderness: Agriculture as Colonization in the American West* (University of North Carolina Press, 1996).

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GLOSSARY

Allotment: the process of dividing up community-owned land on Indian reservations into individually-owned parcels, many of which were auctioned off to white settlers.

Amenity town: a town whose main draw for visitors or residents is quality of life, which is often correlated with natural beauty and recreational opportunities.

Assimilation: the process wherein one group adopts the cultural norms of a dominant or majority group.

Boom and bust: a cycle in which market prices and the availability of a resource creates first a frenzy of activity followed by economic decline.

Communitarian: a mode of organization which seeks the benefit of the community as a whole, in contrast to "individualistic" goals that benefit single persons.

Conservation: a movement originating in the early 1900s federal Progressive Era politics that aims to protect and develop natural public resources for the benefit of society as a whole.

Extractive industry: any industry which depends on extracting some resource from the land, such as timber and mining.

Gateway town: a town bordering on a tourist destination, such as a national park, that provides services and so is heavily dependent on the tourism economy.

Jeffersonian ideal: also known as the "agrarian ideal," this is a vision of society articulated most notably by Thomas Jefferson where a stable, long-lasting republic was made up of economically independent farmers.

Mormon cultural landscape: a village settlement pattern used by Latter-day Saints in the Intermountain West consisting of a grid pattern with streets running north/south and east/west and intersecting at right angles. Town lots consisted of equal-sized family plots, small homes, centralized community structures including church meetinghouses, irrigation canals and ditches, poplar trees, and farm land on the outskirts of the village.

Multiple use doctrine: an administrative approach within the federal government that, beginning in 1960, directed agencies to manage public lands in a way that accounts for a variety of uses.

New Deal: a set of federal programs intended to counter the economic impacts of the 1930s Great Depression, providing much needed-infrastructure in most of rural Utah.

Public domain: resources which belong to the people as a whole, rather than to a private individual. In Utah and the American West this specifically refers to the public lands owned by the federal government on behalf of all Americans.

Reclamation: the process of "reclaiming" wild lands for human use through alteration and development. In the West, reclamation usually refers to irrigating desert land.

Utopia: the goal held by an idealistic community in which society is perfected, an idea common to many immigrant groups to Utah.

Yeoman: an independent, land-owning farmer.

AUTHORS

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Learn more about the Crossroads tour of Utah, location exhibitions, and activities
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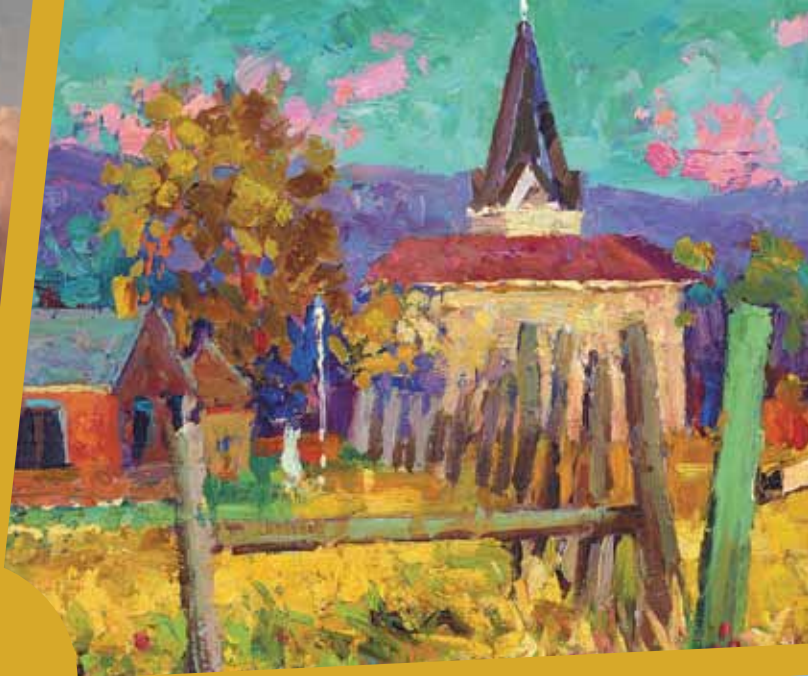
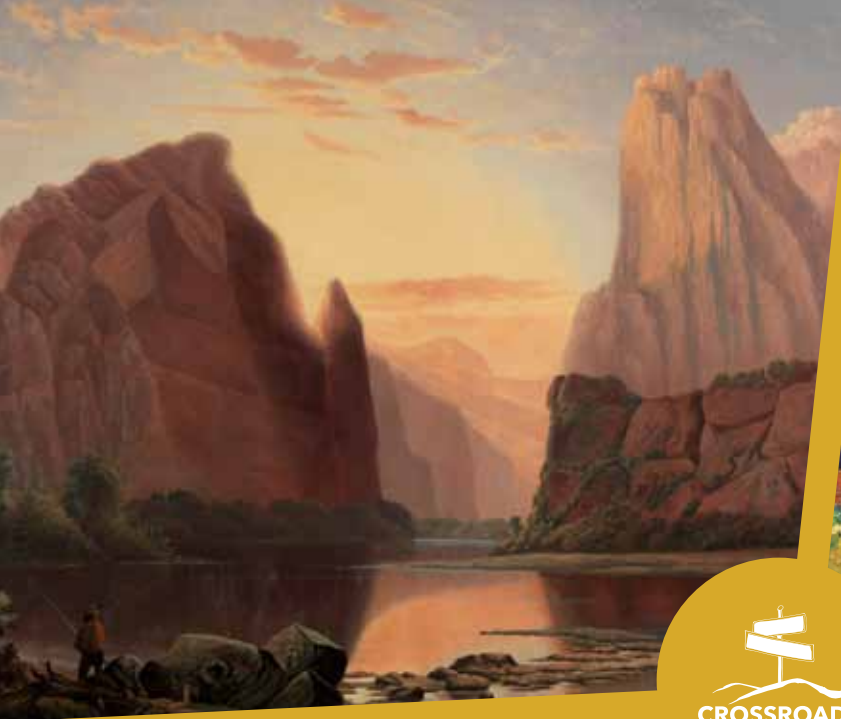


The story of rural Utah is one of cherished ideals coupled with challenging realities.

The iconic sandstone towers of Monument Valley, seen here on the horizon, helped Hollywood define the West in the minds of Americans. The Navajo Nation's Tribal Park at Monument Valley hosts nearly half a million visitors every year, yet few know of the 68-acre Mexican Hat Disposal Cell just a few miles down the road, where radioactive uranium mill tailings are buried.

Not all of rural Utah has served as Hollywood scenery, but romanticized imagery and identity cloak much of rural life in the West. The artist William Wilson, himself Diné, counters traditional landscape images by Euro-American artists with his photographs of tailings on Native land, in this case the Navajo Nation:

- How is Wilson's photograph different from other depictions of Monument Valley that you have seen? Does his unique perspective change your perception of this rural area?
- The Tribal Park and Disposal Cell sit in close proximity and offer contrasting uses of the land. But do they share any similarities?
- What rural places do you know that depend on industries other than agriculture? What are those industries?



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