

What The Mormons Did

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History is no more than the written record of what people said and did. But just suppose that the Mormons had never said or done anything.

Doubtless, even if the Mormons had not gone there, the Salt Lake Valley would have been settled. Sooner or later someone would have seen the rich possibilities of the country and he would have pointed them out to others. But how long would it have taken?

However, rather than wonder about what might have happened had the Mormons not gone west, it is possible to point out part of what happened because they did go. Their accomplishments are many—far too many to list in full.

It seems to this writer that one of the most important contributions the Mormons made to their country was the example they set.

When they left Nauvoo they had only what they could load into their carts and wagons. They were in desperate need of almost everything, and they thought that if they built roads and blockhouses, the United States would pay them money which they needed badly. But the country they intended to enter was prized so little, and the Mormons themselves were held in such small regard, that the Government refused to consider their offer or to pay them anything at all.

The Mormons might have quit then. They might have stopped where they were, assured each other that they could not possibly go on unless they got some help, and done nothing. But they didn't.

Getting money where they could, supplying their own labor, they built the roads and forts anyhow. What must be done, they did. There were no anxious agricultural advisers standing at their shoulders when they sank their plow points into the desert; they could find out how to grow crops in such a land or they could starve. The first transcontinental railway went through Ogden, Utah, and by-passed Salt Lake City. It was the Mormons themselves who built additional railroads in their state. They built highways, bridges, telegraph and telephone lines, factories.

This independence of spirit and thought is still very much a trait of the Mormons. They know what they want, and they neither ask nor expect anyone except themselves to get it for them.

The Mormons were unbelievably industrious colonizers. From 1847, when they founded Salt Lake City, until 1877, when Brigham Young died, they themselves established three hundred and sixty colonies. Some of these were hundreds of miles from Salt Lake City. The farthest was San Bernardino, in southern California, more than 700 miles away.

It is very doubtful if there are more than a handful of cities and towns in our Mountain and Pacific Coast states which the Mormons did not help settle or whose settlement they did not influence directly. The Mormon settlements brought civilization to a vast wilderness. People

from the Northwest, Washington and Oregon, Canada, and even Mexico, came to the Mormons for seeds, draft animals, cattle, and help without which settlement of their own areas would have been much more difficult.

Though the Mormons had their Indian wars, it was always their desire to live at peace with the Indians. They were very successful, and many a wagon train got through without Indian trouble because it had a Mormon guide. The Mormons did much to make the trails safe for those who came after them.

The Mormons did at least as much as anyone else to open the West to those from other countries. In Brigham Young's lifetime alone the Mormon settlements grew from 20,000 to 150,000 people, many of whom were born outside the United States. They brought with them skills and talents which have contributed vastly to the development and progress of the entire country.

Beyond any doubt, the Mormons were the first to develop any worth-while irrigation systems in America. They mastered the science of bringing water to dry land, and of making that land productive. They contributed much to the art of dry farming, or farming without any water except that already in the land. Because of irrigation and dry farming, millions of acres of what would have been worthless land now grows some of our finest crops.

Long before anyone else even considered such a thing seriously, Mormon women had the right to vote. They were at all times the equals of their men and they had a full voice in community affairs.

There is almost no craft or industry which the Mormons did not encourage. And they backed the fine arts just as enthusiastically. One of the first buildings they constructed in Salt Lake City was a theater. Brigham Young himself took under his personal care people of special talents such as artists, sculptors, architects, poets, and musicians. The Mormons did everything possible to encourage the establishment of schools, colleges, and universities.

The list does not end here, nor will it ever end. Today Mormons are highly respected citizens of every state in the Union and their missionaries are in almost every foreign country. They still adhere to the principles that inspired Joseph Smith and Brigham Young and, true to the word of these men, they are a happy and prosperous people. The list of their achievements can have no ending because every year Mormons, who are found in every constructive activity, add to it.

Though they are now world-wide, their capital is still Salt Lake City. Anybody who visits there will not be able to tell a Mormon from a non-Mormon by his dress, his speech, or his manner. But anyone who stops in Salt Lake City, and who will use his eyes to see and his ears to hear, will discover for himself that the Mormons today are not greatly different from those of Brigham Young's day. The traveler will be sure of a warm and courteous welcome. And he will come away, as we did, with the thought that he has been among a fine and wonderful people.