During the decade between 1859 and 1869, Ogden City election procedures functioned adequately under a lenient electoral ordinance which merely specified:
Streetcars gave urban dwellers a mass transit system unequalled in Utah to this day, but change continued apace through the years prior to World War II. The movement of soldiers and supplies put heavy demands on America's railroads, sometimes with tragic results. Some fifty persons, most of them servicemen, were killed when two Southern Pacific trains collided on the Lucin Cutoff west of Ogden December 31, 1944.

On January 30, 1910, French aviator Louis Paulhan made the first flight ever attempted at an altitude above practical sea level when he soared 300 feet above the state fairgrounds in Salt Lake City. Airmail service, commercial passenger flights, and private air travel were inaugurated in the Beehive State in the 1920s as an important factor in a new era of transportation.
Sec 2. A Moderator or chairman of Said meeting shall be chosen by the Mayor whose duty it Shall be to State the object of the meeting, and who Shall announce that he is Ready to receive nominations of officers herein Specified. On putting Such nominations of officers, their Election Shall be determined by the voice of the people & declared by the Moderator.¹

Those nominated for office were predetermined by Mormon leaders — who were the city officials — and elected by acclamation or voice vote as stated.

Then, as railroad crews moved into nearby Weber Canyon, the Mormon officials became anxious about unwanted influences that could come with the approach and completion of the railroad. The city election of 1869 was scheduled for February 8. The number of people voting in previous elections had been approximately seventy-five. The city fathers believed that a sizeable group of the railroad workers would be in town on election day. Anticipating what might happen if the railroad crews were to vote under the existing election laws requiring no residency clause and permitting election by acclamation, the city council on January 23 passed a new and entirely different set of election ordinances intentionally designed to offset any railroad vote at the polls.

The election ordinances enacted on that date were based upon territorial statute and those of Salt Lake City. Elections were to be held on the second Monday in February for a mayor, three aldermen, and five councillors. The elective franchise was changed from the voice vote to a semisecret ballot on which the election judge wrote a number. He then recorded the name and number of the voter on a roster. A way was provided, therefore, to police the voters to see who voted for whom. The important part of these new ordinances concerned candidate and voter qualifications:

Sec 2. No person shall be elected or appointed to any city office unless he shall have been a constant resident of said City during at least one year next preceding such elections or appointment neither shall any person be eligible to vote at any election unless he is a citizen of the United States over twenty one years of age and has been a constant resident in Said City during the six months next preceding Said election.²

Mr. Kotter is instructional media coordinator at North Ogden Junior High. This article is derived from his "An Examination of Mormon and Non-Mormon Influences in Ogden City Politics, 1847-1896" (M.A. thesis, Utah State University, 1967).

¹Ogden City, Ogden City Council Minutes Book, vol. A, p. 181, Ogden City Recorders Office. Volumes A and B are a verbatim transcription of the originals, however, the same pagination has not been followed.
²Ibid., vol. A, p. 203, emphasis mine.
The restrictive residency qualification meant that no railroad person could be elected or appointed to any city office. Citizenship and residency clauses were designed purposely to eliminate mass voting of the Union Pacific's Irish and German laborers.

The election of 1869 arrived and passed uneventfully. Naturally, the expected "turn out" of the railroad employees failed to transpire. Lorin Farr was returned as mayor for the tenth time. It is important to know who was elected, but in another sense the election of 1869 is more important for what occurred as a result of the passage of the new election laws. The city recorder's minutes of February 27 reveal the first incident in a series of interesting events. A letter — signed by the mayor, aldermen, and councillors — was sent to President Brigham Young and his council regarding the passage of the electoral ordinances of January 23. The minutes then show that Ogden city councilman Chauncey W. West moved that Section Two, concerning voter and candidate qualifications, be repealed. This was done. The next action of the city council was to amend the ordinance by substituting and passing a new Section Two which stipulated:

No person shall be elected or appointed to any City Office unless he shall have been a resident and tax payer on real estate in the Territory during at least one year preceding such election or appointment. . . .

The change is apparent. By paying a real estate tax and holding territorial residency only, a person was suddenly eligible for election or appointment to the city council. Gone was the city residency requirement. This change still eliminated the railroad people but opened the door for almost anyone else in the territory to gain public office in Ogden.

The city council's reason for changing the ordinance is revealed in a letter sent to President Brigham Young:

We the undersigned, Mayor, Aldermen, and Councillors, composing the City Council of Ogden City, would respectfully represent to you that the passage of a certain Ordinance regulating Elections by the City Council of Ogden City on January 23rd A.D. 1869, was not done with any intention of preventing your son Brigham, or any others whom you may wish, from holding any position in the City Council of Ogden City, as we did not know that you had contemplated sending him or any others, to help along in our City affairs. Instead of doing, or having a desire to do

---

Ogden City Politics

anything that would thwart any measure you might wish to advise for the benefit of our City, we are desirous to do anything in our power to assist you in whatever you may deem necessary for the welfare of this place, and as a proof of this, we are happy to inform you that the Second Section of said Ordinance has been repealed. A copy of the repealing Ordinance is herewith transmitted.5

The Ogden City Council thus conveniently opened the way for President Young to send his son Brigham, Jr., and any others to Ogden to hold public office.

As if these changes were not enough, Mayor Lorin Farr — also an LDS stake president — sent a personal letter of apology to Brigham Young explaining that the actions of the Ogden City Council were taken to combat problems arising from the railroad. The letter also betrays a concern for approbation from Salt Lake.

Dear Brother I have considered it necessary to write you a few lines to let you know more fully my mind in relation to you wishing to send here such men as you might think best to assist us (the people of Ogden) in managing the affairs that pertain to the welfare of the saints and Citizens in this part of the County. Although my feelings were expressed in short in the communication addressed to you by the city council of Ogden, some weeks ago, your acquaintance with me should have supposed would have prescribed the necessity of my writing. I have learned that there are some feelings existing with you and some of the other Brethers in relation to a certain sections being Passed in our election law requiring Citizens to be residents in Ogden City one year before they could be eligible to hold an Office, we thought at the time the section to be a wise provision and a necessary one, as there was a prospect of some thousand or more railroad men being in our midst in Ogden City on the day of Election.

Farr then reiterated that in the absence of a city residency clause it would have been a “verry easy matter” for the railroad laborers, many of whom had been in the territory for over six months, to have controlled the election. Mentioning that the first revised Ogden ordinance was no more restrictive than the Salt Lake City

5Ogden City Council to President Brigham Young, February 27, 1869, holograph, Archives Division, Historical Department, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, emphasis mine.
ordinance, he continued his explanation as follows:

It has been said as the reason why it looks as though we passed the ordinance was to exclude anyone from coming from Salt Lake City to fill offices; was because we passed it just at the time you should have talked of sending someone here. I would say that the Council knew nothing about your wishes to send anyone here (unless it was Br. Chauncey W. West and he was out on the Promontory and he said nothing about it if he had heard anything said) except you and Bro. Geo. A. Smith told me one evening in your office that you talked of sending Br. Franklin Richards up here to act as Probate Judge but there was nothing said or intimations given about any other one wanted to come here . . . consequently I cannot see how we should be censurable for a thing we knew nothing about. I would say further that we had no law relative to Elections only the old one under an old Charter and that was to Elect by aclimation, and I told the Committee on Elections Just before I went to the Legislature I wished them to get up an Election law and they accordingly done so. Now as it has all passed and we had no difficulty in our Election with transient persons. I will say if it is still your wish to send your son Brigham here to act as the Mayor of Ogden I would with pleasure resign my office as Mayor and as the Charter Provides that where there is a vacancy the remaining Council can fill that vacancy by appointment until the next Election; and should you wish to have any other one in the City Council I am authorized to say that there can be a vacancy made for such person to fill. Hoping this will be satisfactory . . . .

Brigham Young, Jr., did not go to Ogden. However, Apostle Franklin D. Richards did, and by appointment of the Territorial Legislature became probate judge of Weber County. The church leaders, seeing the need to have someone of stature in Ogden to influence the spiritual, political, and economic life of the people, arranged for the move. As a member of the Council of Fifty and School of the Prophets, Richards worked to administer the Kingdom of God on a local level by dealing with each situation to the particular advantage of the church. He could do this in his non-elective capacity as probate judge, exercising general, common law, and chancery jurisdiction in the county until 1883.

To achieve the desired solution concerning the railroad and its accompanying influences — rather than ignore involvement — church officials contracted with the railroad to do grading work in Weber Canyon. This would employ Utah people, bring in cash, and

---

6 Lorin Farr to Brigham Young, March 10, 1869, holograph, LDS Archives, emphasis mine.
8 Franklin L. West, Life of Franklin Dewey Richards (Salt Lake City, 1924), 167.
eliminate outsiders. Also, under Brigham Young's direction, land west of Ogden was offered free to the Union Pacific and Central Pacific officials as an inducement to locate their depot, switch yards, and shops in Ogden rather than in the unfavorable Gentile city of Corinne. The decision had to be made in Congress.

At the very time the Mormons were taking decisive measures to maintain their status in Utah, momentum was developing in many corners of the nation to "Americanize" the peculiar Mormon people and their institutions. In Congress, William A. Wheeler of New York made a prophetic statement about the effect the influence of the railroad could have on Ogden and Mormondom as a whole. Wheeler spoke in favor of Senate Bill 580 — passed that same day — which would settle the question of whether Ogden or Corinne should be the junction city for the transcontinental railroad:

The obtaining of these lands is rendered necessary by reason of the fact that at this junction extensive shops will be erected and hundreds of workmen will be employed, and necessarily must have homes in the immediate vicinity. We have now an opportunity without expense to the Government to introduce a little of the Gentile element into the Mormon Kingdom. The establishment of a Gentile city under the very shadow of the walls of great Salt Lake City will, in my judgment, be more effectual in destroying polygamy than any thunderbolts of war which we may forge here.

Ogden in 1860 had a population of 1,643, an increase of a few hundred over that of 1850. By 1870, barely a year after the railroad arrived, the population had grown to 3,127. The city was rapidly gaining an increasing number of people with religious beliefs, thoughts, and commitments different from the Mormons. Clashes over ideas, habits, and morals resulted. This was also a period when the Mormons were held in generally low esteem throughout the United States for their practice of polygamy. The junction city issue of Ogden vs. Corinne would be but one of many leverage devices used in an attempt to change Mormon ways. Conflict was inevitable.

The beginning of the two-party political strategy in Utah had as its foundation the short-lived Godbeite movement. In the rebelling Godbeites, the non-Mormons or Gentiles saw a promising opportunity to oppose the Mormons. A coalition of the two groups led to the organization of the Liberal party in July 1870 with headquarters at Corinne. This rising Gentile city, with its saloons, speculators,
gamblers, and ruffians, was chosen as a political move not only to capture Box Elder County in the elections but also to influence the elections in Ogden and Weber County. The first Liberal political convention was held there July 16, 1870.13

Meanwhile, the Ogden City Council under Mayor Lorin Farr’s direction passed on April 14, 1870, still another important electoral ordinance. According to its key provision:

No person shall be elected or appointed to any office of said city unless he shall have been a constant resident therein during at least one year next preceding such election or appointment, . . . . 14

The reinstated city residency clause on candidate qualification brought Ogden’s electoral reform full circle. It was the logical culmination of a fast-moving transitional period which had begun fifteen months earlier.

Although the coming of the transcontinental railroad did not directly influence the outcome of Ogden’s 1869 municipal election, its impact was soon reflected in the several procedural changes it prompted in the city’s electoral laws. The changes pertained to both voter and candidate qualifications, with the trend being clearly in the direction of increasingly tight restrictions. This presented certain difficulties for the church leaders in Salt Lake City who sought Ogden municipal offices for themselves or family members, and these difficulties were embarrassing to the incumbent mayor and councilmen of Ogden. Given the rapid influx of non-Mormons into their city, however, they felt there was no other choice. Of course these electoral changes by themselves did not lessen Ogden’s political dependence on Salt Lake City. They were symptomatic only. The driving force of change was the great growth in Ogden’s population and economic strength which followed her establishment as the railroad junction of the Intermountain area. Within a remarkably short time thereafter, she would shed her agrarian complexion, gain commercial dominance over neighboring towns, and take her place as “Utah’s Second City.”

13 Edward W. Tullidge, Tullidge’s Histories, Containing the History of All the Northern, Eastern, and Western Counties of Utah . . . (Salt Lake City, 1889), 307, 309, 310, 314.

14 Ogden City, Ogden City Council Ordinance Book, vol. A, p. 8, Ogden City Recorders Office, emphasis mine.