Utah comes of age politically: a study of the state's politics in the early years of the twentieth century

BY JAN SHIPPS

A cause can be a valuable asset to a man who sets out to save souls, or sell newspapers, or get himself elected to public office, and at the beginning of the twentieth century in the United States neither the preacher, the journalist, nor the politician lacked suitable crusade objectives. In 1896 William Jennings Bryan had applied the techniques of the tent meeting to convention politics, transforming thereby an economic question into a moral matter. Afterwards many Americans began to look on government as a means for the remedying of social ills. It was soon quite the fashion to decry the "Shame of the Cities," censure the dispensers of demon rum or to denounce the Rockefellers and Pierpont Morgan, and condemn the meat packers, the oil magnates, the railroads, and trusts in general.

When it became clear in 1904 that there were still men living in Salt Lake City who could, as Ray Stannard Baker put it, "take a [street]car
going in any direction and get home,” the Mormon practice of polygamy was, once again, elevated to the stature of a social evil which would surely, if it were left unchecked, destroy the American home. For some time thereafter, while the Senate tried to decide whether a legally elected legislator who was also an apostle of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints should be allowed to remain in Washington, the preacher, the politician, and the journalist all joined forces in a crusade which revived anti-Mormonism as an issue in national politics. The old charges about polygamy were renewed, and it was rumored, in addition, that the 1890 Manifesto against the practice had not stopped many Mormons from marrying several wives simultaneously. There were some who seemed just as concerned about the fact that the church was said to have retained its economic strangle hold on the Great Basin, and others who feared that the apparent success of the effort to separate church and state in Utah was illusion. But everybody seemed to agree that Reed Smoot ought to be excluded from the United States Senate.

And so for two years, from March 1904 till April 1906, Upton Sinclair’s Chicago Jungle, Lincoln Steffens’ bosses and their municipal grafting, Jacob Riis’s strange four hundred-four million ratio, and Ida M. Tarbell’s Standard Oil story were overshadowed while Mormon Church authorities, Utah and Idaho political leaders, newspaper editors, school teachers, supposed polygamous wives, professional busybodies, apostates, and even the town drunk traveled to Washington at the request of the Committee on Privileges and Elections to tell the “truth about Utah.” From the witness stand in that crowded committee room in the nation’s capital, the Mormon story was told in a manner quite unlike any in which it had ever been told before — or since for that matter — and when it was done a majority of the committee, and most likely a majority of the American people, were convinced that the Kingdom of the Saints was a den of iniquity in which polygamy was continued and condoned and where the Mormon Church dominated the economic, social, and political life of the people.

Although they were wrong, their deduction did not proceed entirely from faulty logic or even from emotional reaction to the obviously malicious gossip and patent exaggerations about the Saints that had provided grist for journalistic mills throughout the country. Objective considera-

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tion of the testimony given by many of the witnesses during the Proceedings in the Matter of the Protests against the Right of the Hon. Reed Smoot, a Senator from Utah to Hold his Seat leads to the conclusion that the church had retained direction of much of the Utah economy and even more of Utah politics in the years following the coming of statehood—a conclusion that has been clearly borne out by subsequent historical research. While the testimony with regard to polygamy was somewhat less persuasive, it is now generally conceded that the practice had by no means disappeared entirely. Plural marriages were being per-

Reed Smoot (1862–1941)
Successful merchant, manufacturer, financier, and politician, Reed Smoot was an apostle in the Mormon Church from 1900 until his death. He was a United States senator for 30 years (1903–1933).

formed in Mormon colonies in Mexico, and perhaps surreptitiously even in Utah, long after the turn of the century; polygamous co-habitation was unquestionably continued in plural marriages of long standing. This mistaken assumption that was so prevalent did not issue, then, from an incorrect assessment of the evidence presented to the Senate committee.

A large proportion of the American public at the time, and many historians since, simply failed to realize that Utah was passing through a period of such accelerated social, economic, and political change that witnesses who sincerely believed they were making contemporary observations about the Mormons were, in reality, often presenting little more than extremely revealing historical descriptions of a society that no longer existed in its original form. In order to appreciate how very different Utah was in the early twentieth century from what it had been in the late nineteenth century, it is necessary to examine briefly how things were before.

During the territorial period two separate and distinct power structures developed in the Great Basin Kingdom. During Brigham Young’s lifetime Mormon society was self-contained, and the Mormon establishment was monolithic and highly authoritarian; it was supported from within through the power of the priesthood and the faith of the people.
From time to time after 1877, the authority of the priesthood was not clearly defined. But for almost three decades the cohesiveness of the Mormon community remained, allowing some vacillation at the highest levels without a serious loss of power.

The Gentile establishment, on the other hand, was a jerry-built association of federal officials, Mormon apostates, and non-Mormon businessmen and entrepreneurs. It was supported almost entirely from without by the power of the federal government — a power which proved strong enough in the nineties to force the general authorities of the church to abjure polygamy and renounce overt participation in politics. Since more than 80 per cent of Utah's 250,827 people were Mormon, it was natural that the Saints should reassert their power when the federal government withdrew its support from the Gentile group just prior to the coming of statehood in 1896.

In the years immediately following, the church scrupulously adhered to the "unwritten law" of Utah politics that held elective offices should be evenly divided between the Saints and the Gentiles, but the non-Mormons were fully aware that the church authorities could have ignored this understanding with impunity. As it was, the non-Mormons who were favored with public office were in all likelihood not the men whom the Gentile community would have selected. In important contests the leaders of the non-Mormon group were passed over; men like Orlando W. Powers, C. C. Goodwin, Charles S. Varian, Charles Zane, and E. B. Critchlow were not considered. Instead the Saints supported lawyers who had never openly opposed the church, men like Arthur Brown, Joseph L. Rawlins, and George Sutherland who had proved themselves notably friendly to the Mormons during the territorial period. Joseph F. Smith, the president of the church after 1902, preferred men without independent means or political power, a preference he clearly demonstrated with the rejection of Thomas Kearns' request for support in the 1904 Senate race.

Since the protest against the seating of an apostle of the Mormon Church in the United States Senate was instigated by that portion of the non-Mormon community which had much to gain and little to lose by opposing the power of the Mormon hierarchy, it seems reasonable to conclude that the Smoot investigation was, in a very real sense, a direct invitation from this group for renewed federal intervention in Utah. While the Salt Lake Ministerial Association formulated the primary protest against Smoot's serving in the Senate, the petition for hearings was signed by P. L. Williams, E. B. Critchlow, C. C. Goodwin, W. Mont
Ferry, and C. E. Allen — all influential Gentiles who were, or wished to be, active in politics. Very soon thereafter this faction became the nucleus of the American party, a political movement based, at bedrock, on opposition to ecclesiastical influence in state politics.

In spite of all the charges the American party could muster against the leaders of the Mormon Church, however, or perhaps because of them — since the testimony given during the hearings convinced Theodore Roosevelt and a great many other Republicans that the church authorities controlled politics in Utah — the federal government refused to intervene in the domestic concerns of the state, even to the point of sending Reed Smoot packing. The fact that the investigation failed to unseat the apostle proved to be unimportant; it still accomplished its purpose by persuading the most important leaders of the church that the old order had indeed passed away, and so cleared the way for a fusion of the Mormon-Gentile establishments in the Great Basin Kingdom.

As a result of the hearings, a definite change occurred within the Mormon community. Joseph F. Smith, as president of the church, had been called to Washington to describe the situation that existed in the land of the Latter-day Saints. In all honesty the historian must point out that President Smith gave an account of things as they would be, rather than as they had been. But Smith was a pragmatist, and he returned to Utah determined to “make truth happen” to his statements. In the final session of the Seventy-Fourth Semiannual Conference of the church, he issued the “Second Manifesto” declaring officially that plural marriages had not been sanctioned by the priesthood since 1890 and that they would not, under any conditions, be sanctioned henceforth. He added that any person contracting a plural marriage would be excommunicated from the church. Although no wholesale expulsion of the polygamous Saints ensued, Apostles John W. Taylor and Matthias F. Cowley were forced to resign from the Quorum of the Twelve two years later, and a definite policy of excluding those who had taken plural wives after 1890 from responsible positions in the priesthood was followed thereafter.3

At the turn of the century, the Deseret Telegraph had been sold to Western Union, and two years after that Henry O. Havemeyer had acquired control of the Utah Sugar Company from the church. Now, as a direct result of the hearings in Washington, control of the Utah Light and Railway Company was sold to E. H. Harriman, the Union Pacific magnate, and the church likewise disposed of its coal and iron land claims,

3 Kimball Young, Isn’t One Wife Enough? The Story of Mormon Polygamy (New York, 1954), 422.
the Saltair Beach Company, and the Salt Lake and Los Angeles Railroad Company.⁴

During these same years, “the economic leadership [of Utah] passed from the agricultural valleys and scattered mining districts to the industrial and business communities in Salt Lake City and Ogden.”⁵ As a result, Utah’s economy was drastically altered. The self-sufficient subsistence farm economy of the pioneer era was rapidly transformed into a modern commercial economy as sugar beets and wool acquired importance as cash crops, and as individual mining enterprises were consolidated into large corporate organizations. This shift in the structure of the economy was accompanied by the development of a less transient and more responsible non-Mormon business community. And slowly, hesitantly, carefully, but very surely, the church authorities and the leaders of the Gentile community drew closer together.

The integration of the leadership of these two sectors was neither complete, nor entirely effective. It was, and it remained for many years, a somewhat tenuous working arrangement institutionalized to an extent through the Salt Lake City, Ogden, and Provo commercial clubs and local chambers of commerce. To many non-Mormons, and perhaps even more Mormons, however, the status quo seemed vastly preferable to the entente cordiale being effected between the most influential Latter-day Saints and Gentiles in the state. Fearing loss of group identity and dreading the diminution of individual prestige that an expanded power structure threatened, many members of both groups struggled to retain the segregated societies of an earlier day. This overt opposition to Mormon-Gentile cooperation affected not only religion, but the economic and social life of the state as well.

In addition, it complicated an already complex political situation. With the dissolution of the Liberal and the People’s parties in the 1890’s, Saints and Gentiles alike had abandoned the politics of religion. While the confusing circumstances of that decade make generalization difficult, it is possible to conclude that a majority of the non-Mormons moved into the Republican party in the subsequent political realignment. A few influential Gentiles followed Judge Powers, Joseph L. Rawlins, and Parley L. Williams into the Democratic party, but for the most part non-Mormons supported the Republicans. This merely meant a raffilia-

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tion with the Grand Old Party for some, but it often represented a departure from a background of Democratic partisanship. Men who had been Democrats before they came to Utah refused to return to that party because there were so many Mormons in it. Even after a large proportion of leading Latter-day Saints had been "called" to be Republicans, thus creating a fairly equitable division of the Saints along national party lines, the Democrats failed to attract significant numbers of non-Mormons to their cause.

Consequently, notwithstanding the considerable influence of Orlando W. Powers and several other outstanding Gentiles who were active therein, the Democratic party in Utah was essentially an organization made up of members of the Mormon Church. It was not the church party, however. Joseph F. Smith and the First Presidency were usually directly opposed to its principles and to its candidates for public office. The internal chaos and resulting breakdown in the party machinery following the Moses Thatcher incident and the congressional rejection of B. H. Roberts made the remaining Mormon Democratic leaders pause and reflect before beginning new political activities. This temporarily sapped the strength of Utah’s Democratic party, causing observers to conclude that the political dispensation in Zion was Republican.

In reality, the overwhelming triumphs that made the state seem so safe for the GOP were deceptive, and no one knew that better than Senator Reed Smoot. Although he made no attempt to enlighten his colleagues in Washington who thought, as Professor Milton R. Merrill said, that Utah was a pocket borough belonging jointly to Reed Smoot and the president of the Mormon Church, the senator was fully aware that such was not the case.

As most successful political organizations are, Utah’s Republican party was a coalition of diverse factions. Its two main divisions, of course, were the Mormons and the non-Mormons, but these two groups were, in turn, separated into subgroups. Until 1904 the Saints within the party had remained fairly well united, but after Smoot’s election and the opening of the Washington hearings, a fissure developed between those who supported the senator and felt that he should be vindicated no matter what the cost to the church and those who felt that the apostle should resign and allow the furor which had been caused by the investigation to subside. Since President Smith made it crystal clear at the October conference in 1906 that “Reed Smoot had the confidence and support of the General Authorities of the Church in his present position as Senator for
Utah," 6 those who were unsure that one man should be exalted in both the ecclesiastical and the public realms were faced with the same dilemma that confronted Democrats who opposed the "will of the Lord" in politics.

If the Gentiles did not have to worry about justifying their political opinions to uneasy consciences, they did have to decide whether to support Thomas Kearns or George Sutherland in an intrafactional struggle for power. After Kearns lost his bid to return to the Senate, he left the Republican party and joined the Utah Americans. Most of the anti-Mormons (this term should not be confused with non-Mormons) followed the Silver King into the American party to decry with almost equal vigor, the power of the "hierarch" and the "treason" of Gentiles like W. S. McCornick and D. C. Jackling who refused to attack the church. 7

The strength of the party of Frank J. Cannon, Kearns, and the Tribune was not negligible. The Americans controlled the municipal administration of Salt Lake City from 1905 until 1911, and their power was a major factor in the decision that was made by Joseph F. Smith and Reed Smoot to abandon John C. Cutler and make William Spry Utah's governor in 1908. 8 Nevertheless, the main importance of the American party in state politics was its tendency to attract those who opposed Mormon-Gentile cooperation to its cause.

The policy of this third party was almost entirely based on opposition to the influence of Reed Smoot and the First Presidency of the Mormon Church in the state's politics. Ironically, by attracting those

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Thomas Kearns (1862–1918)
Mining magnate, Thomas Kearns made his first million dollars before he was 28 years old. He was at various times a member of the city council of Park City, a member of the Utah Constitutional Convention, and United States senator (1901–1904). Mr. Kearns was affiliated with many business enterprises, among which was the Salt Lake Tribune. A devout Catholic, he contributed generously to their many projects.
who were hostile to the senator to the new party, the Americans made it easier for Smoot to control the Republican party and thereby direct Utah's political destiny.

After the 1904 state Republican convention when the Kearns forces were decisively defeated, Reed Smoot set out to consolidate his hold on the party. Because he had recognized that he needed more than the support of the president of the church in order to keep his job in Washington, the senator collected a coterie of able lieutenants from both factions of the party to manage his interests in Utah. Most of the members of this group held federal offices at one time or another, and consequently the Tribune and the Herald referred to the Smoot "machine" as the "federal bunch." Its principals were C. E. Loose and James Clove from Provo, William Spry from Tooele, and E. H. Callister and James H. Anderson from Salt Lake City. Except for Loose, who was one of Smoot's business associates, all of them were "respectable Mormons, but men who did not have important positions in the church." Loose was a "jack-Mormon"; his parents had been faithful Saints, but he had not held to the church. He did not oppose it however, and that tolerance allowed him to act effectively as the machine's liaison officer between the church and the Gentiles.9

Senator George Sutherland was not exactly a member of the "federal bunch"; he had considerable support from the non-Mormon community on his own account, but his alliance with the senior senator was essential to his reelection. The ruthless rejection of John C. Cutler's claim to a second term as Utah's governor in 1908 apparently convinced Sutherland that any idea he had about demanding Smoot's resignation from either the Senate or the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles had best be forgotten. After visiting Salt Lake City that summer, the junior senator returned to Washington fully in accord with Reed Smoot, and from that time forward the relationship between the two senators was highly satisfactory.10

Prior to the Kearns' bolt, the Salt Lake Tribune had served as the Republican newspaper. When that defection left the party without a voice, the Inter-Mountain Republican was established. Its editor, E. H. Callister, did his best to defend the party against the vitriolic attacks of the Tribune and Kearns' afternoon paper, the Salt Lake Telegram,

11 Joel Francis Paschal, Mr. Justice Sutherland, A Man Against the State (Princeton, 1951), passim.
advocating meanwhile the election of Republicans to every public office. For the Mormon reader, Callister “sugared over” the policy of protection with frequent references to Brigham Young’s home industry doctrine. And for the non-Mormon he argued protection on the basis that the economy of the state would collapse if free-trading Democrats were allowed to direct the affairs of the nation, or even of Utah.

The publishing business was not new to Callister. He had been a printer’s devil at 15, had risen through the ranks of the Star Printing Company to become manager, and then partner in the business. As able as he was, however, he found it impossible to make the new paper pay its own way. His problem was not unique though. In fact, with the possible exception of the Deseret News, every newspaper in Salt Lake City was losing money. The community, which had only 115,000 people by 1914, was already saturated with daily papers before the Inter-Mountain Republican entered the field. Thomas Kearns and David Keith were pouring the proceeds of their successful mining enterprise at Park City into the publication of the morning Tribune and the afternoon Telegram in an effort to lure adherents to the American party. The Democrats published the Salt Lake Herald. And always, except for Sundays, there was the Deseret Evening News which printed, according to the thinking of many, all the news fit for the Latter-day Saints to read. And so the Inter-Mountain Republican was a financial liability from the very first.

In spite of that, Reed Smoot and Joseph F. Smith thought the paper was essential to the success of their program of trying to hold enough Gentiles in the Republican party to win elections.\(^{12}\) It order to do so, some defense against the venom being spewed forth by the Tribune and the Telegram was vital, and while the Deseret News made vigorous efforts to answer Cannon and Kearns in kind, it was rarely read by non-Mormons. The Republican was read by non-Mormons, and its continued publication worked to the advantage therefore of both the party and the Mormon Church.

Although most of the “federal bunch” had participated in the organization of the paper, the significant initial investments had been made by Smoot, Sutherland, Loose, and Callister, and it was primarily this group that underwrote the Republican’s losses. In times of crisis, however, church funds were also used to sustain its operation. Editor Callister thought that he could stop this constant financial drain on the resources

of the Republican leaders and perhaps even make the paper turn a profit if only a connection could be arranged with a national wire service. Governor Spry, Senator Sutherland, and Senator Smoot all made attempts to secure the services of the Associated Press early in 1909, but they were unsuccessful.\textsuperscript{13} And the paper continued to lose money.

After the 1908 election, the backers of the \textit{Salt Lake Herald} apparently gave up hope that the Democratic party would ever amount to much in Utah, and they offered the \textit{Inter-Mountain Republican} corporation an opportunity to buy their paper. Reed Smoot, President Smith, and Bishop C. W. Nibley of the Presiding Bishopric (the ecclesiastical body which administers the business affairs of the church) considered the offer, and on the basis that a merger would remove at least one of the competitive papers from the scene, they decided that the \textit{Herald} would be a good investment. While Senator Sutherland "and his friends" owned a large block of the stock when the merger was completed, the control of the Republican party's newspaper was held jointly by Apostle Smoot and the Mormon Church after 1909.\textsuperscript{14}

The sale of the \textit{Herald} was a symptom of the state of the Democratic party. Judge William H. King made an attempt to oppose Reed Smoot in the 1908 senatorial campaign, but the party leaders seem to have accepted the fact that no Democrat could be elected in the face of President Joseph F. Smith's semiannual conference address in which he said:

\begin{quote}
I thank God that the State of Utah is and has been represented in the halls of Congress by honest men — men after God's own heart, men who love their own people and who are just and impartial and true to all the citizens of our state. . . . In the name of common sense I deplore the thought that any Latter-day Saint should regret that good men and true have been chosen, not by the Church, but by their own followers and by their own political parties.\textsuperscript{15}
\end{quote}

These words implied, of course, that the Mormons should elect Republicans to Utah's Legislature since the man "after God's own heart" would have to be elected by the state legislature.

The outcome of the election cannot be wholly attributed to the influence of President Smith's words. The disorganization of the Democratic

\textsuperscript{13} Spry's correspondence regarding this matter may be found in the Personal Correspondence of Governor William Spry, Box 1, Governors' Papers (William Spry [1909–1916]), Utah State Archives.

\textsuperscript{14} Reed Smoot, "Diary of Reed Smoot" (typescript, University of Utah), April 18, April 20, April 22, August 28, and September 2, 1909.

party was so complete that they managed to nominate a gubernatorial candidate who refused to run, which made it necessary to find a substitute after the state convention had adjourned. The national election, moreover, tended to give the advantage to the GOP. William Jennings Bryan who headed the Democratic ticket had already been an “also-ran” twice, while William Howard Taft was known to have the enthusiastic approval of the highly popular Theodore Roosevelt. These three things, then — the fact that the Republican slate was strong nationally, that the condition of the Utah Democratic party was chaotic, and that the president of the Mormon Church gave a far from cryptic admonition to the Latter-day Saints about electing Republicans to the state legislature — taken all together, explain the one-sided nature of the election returns.

When the Utah Legislature convened in 1909, it was composed of 61 Republicans and two Democrats. And when a joint session was held to elect a new senator from Utah, Reed Smoot received 61 votes, and William H. King got two. The choice of a senator was about the only thing that state legislature was agreed upon, however. The overwhelming nature of the Republican majority presents a false picture of unanimity, for the Republicans themselves were fundamentally divided.

The point of contention, not only in the legislature but in all Utah in 1909, was prohibition. The matter of temperance legislation was being pushed throughout the country during these years. People were getting excited about liquor laws in every section of the United States. Still, prohibition was probably of greater interest to the average citizen of Utah than elsewhere because it touched on a basic tenet of the Mormon faith.

In a revelation announced in 1833, the prophet, Joseph Smith, had offered a "Word of Wisdom" for the benefit of Zion, saying that

strong drinks are not for the belly, but for the washing of your bodies.

And again tobacco is not for the body . . . And again, hot drinks are not for the body or belly . . . And all saints who remember to keep and do these sayings, walking in obedience to the commandments, shall receive health. . .

In early Mormonism this commandment was not binding on the Saints, but during the “grow your own or do without” campaign which Brigham Young instituted in the late 1860’s to counter the effect of the coming of the transcontinental railroad, the Word of Wisdom was greatly emphasized and “in less than two decades, abstinence from tea, coffee, tobacco, and intoxicating beverages was almost as strong a test of faith as carry-

16 The Doctrine and Covenants of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints... (Salt Lake City, 1954), Sec. 89, vss. 7, 8, 9, 18.
ing out a colonization or missionary assignment.” After the practice of polygamy was renounced, the Word of Wisdom became even more significant because it was an overt means of setting the Mormons apart and keeping them a peculiar people.

Among the Twelve Apostles, Heber J. Grant and Francis M. Lyman felt more strongly about the Word of Wisdom than the rest of the apostles. Yet all the members of the Quorum of Twelve felt that the Saints should abide by the prophet’s advice. President Smith had restated the church’s position with regard to liquor at the semiannual conference in April 1908:

We believe in strict temperance; I sincerely hope that every Latter-day Saint will co-operate with the temperance movement spreading over the land; I and my brethren, at least, are in harmony with the movement.

He added, “we want nothing drastic, nothing that would be illiberal or oppressive,” but his words came too late. No doubt inadvertently, President Smith had opened a Pandora’s Box which eventually led to the defeat of the Republican party in Utah.

Almost immediately Mormons of both parties began to agitate for statewide prohibition. Heber J. Grant, Anthony W. Ivins, Francis M. Lyman, and George Albert Smith of the Council of the Twelve took steps to encourage political action through stake conference addresses and in signed articles in the Deseret News.

Reed Smoot, however, correctly identified the prohibition issue as a new threat to Mormon-Gentile cooperation. He kept the Word of Wisdom himself, but he knew that if the church supported an attempt to

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**Joseph F. Smith (1838–1918)**

Son of Hyrum Smith, Joseph F. Smith was ordained an apostle of the Mormon Church when he was 28 years old (1866). He spent most of his life in the service of the church, and upon the death of Lorenzo Snow, Joseph F. Smith became president of the Mormon Church (1901). During his 17 years as president, many important church construction projects were inaugurated — Hotel Utah, L.D.S. Hospital, church offices, and Mormon edifices in Canada, Hawaii, Great Britain, and some Pacific islands.

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31 Arrington, *Great Basin Kingdom*, 250.
make everybody in Utah do likewise, the American party might gain con-
trol of the state and reopen the old struggle between the Saints and the
Gentiles. He saw a strictly regulated local option law as the best solution
to the vexing problem.

By this time Utah had a modest, yet thriving liquor industry. When
the pro-prohibition propaganda in Utah referred to those vague and
somehow unsavory "liquor interests," it generally was a reference to the
three outstanding brewers in the state, Gus Becker of the Becker Brewer-
ies in Ogden, Frank Fisher of the Fisher Brewery in Salt Lake City, and
Jacob Moritz of the Salt Lake Brewery. After Smoot and the "federal
bunch" had managed to defeat a dry plank in the Republican platform
at the 1908 state convention, it was widely charged, even by some of the
apostle's fellows in the Quorum of the Twelve, that the senator and his
machine politicians had sold out to the liquor interests. Despite a wide-
spread contemporary conviction that some sort of understanding had
been concluded, no proof has ever been produced to indicate that any
kind of "deal" was ever formally made. It is probable that the action of
the apostle and his associates in the convention was taken to guarantee
that Becker, Fisher, Moritz, and other Utah brewers would not decide to
join Thomas Kearns, Frank Cannon, and the Utah Americans in their
anti-Mormon campaign.

Still, politics is politics, even in Utah. And when the legislature con-
vened in Salt Lake City in 1909, it was made up of individuals who had
been sent to the capital by an electorate which overwhelmingly favored
prohibition. Almost as soon as the House of Representatives was organ-
ized, a stringent statewide prohibition measure, the Cannon Bill, was
introduced. It was placed before the House by Joseph J. Cannon, and it
was sponsored officially by the Anti-Saloon League. On an early vote
this legislation passed 39 to four, and a week later, on February 18, it
came up for debate in the Senate.

Callister was worried. He wired Senator Smoot in Washington that
he would try to kill the bill in the Senate the next day. It all depended,
he said, on Carl Badger, a state senator who had formerly served as secre-
tary to Smoot. Callister was sure that a word from the apostle would
help Badger stand firm in the face of the extraordinary popular pressure
being placed on legislators to vote for statewide prohibition. He cau-
tioned Senator Smoot, however, to "Be careful who you write letters to.
Heber J. [Grant] is using same against you." 20

20 The prohibition fight as it affected Reed Smoot is fully covered in Merrill, "Apostle in
Politics," 233–49.
The apostle did not need this warning to know that the prohibition question had caused a row within the Council of the Twelve. He had received a letter three days before from Hyrum M. Smith charging him with being out of harmony with the quorum. He feared, moreover, that President Smith was leaving for Honolulu to get away from the fight and that "in his absence [First Counselor John R.] Winder would withhold support from the InterMountain Republican."

Nevertheless, he felt that the time had not come to make Utah a dry state, and so on February 20, he wired Carl Badger to "Give us strict regulation and local option and vote against [the] Cannon bill." The senator’s influence was vitally needed. When the bill came up for a vote on February 23, Callister and C. A. Glazier, a nephew of the apostle who functioned as one of the lesser cogs in the Smoot machine, were hard put to get a bare majority against the measure. Glazier described the fight in a letter to his uncle thus: "The Smoot 'boys' [the federal bunch] would get promises one day and Heber J. Grant would take them away the next." Defeat of the Cannon Bill was uncertain until the very last vote was cast.

Two weeks later Governor Spry indicated to a joint meeting of the legislature that he would welcome a good local option law. In less than three days, the Utah State Senate had unanimously passed a bill introduced by Badger providing for local option and strict enforcement. On March 17 the Badger Bill passed the House in amended form, and on March 20, just before adjourning sine die, the Senate accepted the House amendments and sent the measure to the governor. After the legislators had dispersed to tell their constituents that they had, after all, passed a liquor law, Governor Spry discovered that laws already on the books accomplished the same purpose. And besides, he said, certain parts of the law were unconstitutional. He vetoed the measure on March 23.21

It was a grandstand play, and it brought the expected applause. The Weber County Republican Club, of which Gus Becker was a guiding light, wrote to Spry praising him for having the "sound judgment of the business man" and being "made of the right kind of stuff when the critical time arrives." Fred J. Kiesel, an Ogden wholesale liquor dealer relayed a telegram to the governor from Adolphus Busch of the Anheuser-Busch Brewing Company of Saint Louis which read, "a rousing hurrah for Governor Spry." 22

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22 Personal Correspondence, Box 1, Governors' Papers (William Spry).
In reality Spry’s veto was unimportant. The final vote on the Cannon Bill had killed statewide prohibition. The veto was merely a gesture made to show the non-Mormon business wing of the Republican party that Smoot’s “Mormon boys” had kept faith with the program of cooperation between the two groups. It served its purpose very well, apparently, since Senator Sutherland who had been visiting in Salt Lake City, told Reed Smoot on April 10 that “the political situation [at] home is much better. The feeling worked up over prohibition is subsiding and the businessmen feel grateful for the action of the boys.”

If the veto had no practical effect on the sale of liquor in Utah, it is nevertheless significant. It set a precedent for Spry himself which may help to explain the erratic independent course the governor followed in 1915 when the prohibition question came up again. The governor was a good Mormon, but he seems to have found the praise of the non-Mormons, which gave him a feeling of self-sufficiency, very sweet:

I will be frank enough to admit that my first impression of you was that you would turn out to be a tool in the hands of the Mormon leaders, mere putty to be molded to their will as they may desire. I am delighted to see that I was mistaken and that you are really a great big man.

Non-Mormons, seeing the sound and fury of the crusade that had been waged by Grant, Ivins, Lyman, Hyrum M. Smith, and several other apostles in favor of prohibition, concluded that Spry had defied the authority of the priesthood. Yet President Smith did not seem unduly concerned. At the April semianual conference priesthood meeting, he spoke strongly in favor of prohibition, but he said that the saloons should be closed with the present laws. And that seemed to be that.

But it was not. The 1909 legislature’s failure to enact a statewide prohibition law did not defeat temperance, as it was called, in Utah. It

24 O. F. Peterson to William Spry, March 23, 1909, Personal Correspondence, Box 1, Governors’ Papers (William Spry).
Frank J. Cannon (1859–1933)
Journalist and editor of several newspapers, Frank Cannon was Utah’s first United States senator in 1896. Previously he had been Utah’s territorial delegate to Congress (1894). An active newspaperman, Frank Cannon was connected at various times with many Utah newspapers. He served as editor on the Logan Leader, Ogden Herald, Ogden Standard, Daily Utah State Journal, and Salt Lake Tribune. Frank Cannon remained in newspaper work in Colorado after his defection from the Mormon Church in 1905.

merely destroyed its momentum. Even though Joseph F. Smith’s reaction to the situation proved that he — and therefore the church — would not repudiate the work of faithful Saints who believed it best to leave compliance with the Word of Wisdom up to the individual, prohibition remained an explosive issue in state politics. Heber J. Grant and the Democrats injected it into every election contest, and Smoot, Sutherland, and Howell were repeatedly plagued with the problem whenever they returned home to campaign.

Between 1909 and 1915 the whole tenor of Utah politics changed. The American party lost control of Salt Lake City’s municipal government in 1911, and shortly thereafter the Tribune’s vitriolic and bitter editor, Frank Cannon, betook himself to Denver to rage against the evils of Colorado politics as the editor of the Rocky Mountain News. With his departure the American party movement collapsed. Thomas Kearns drifted back into the Republican fold, and for the most part, the Tribune discontinued its diatribes against Senator Smoot and the Mormon Church. And it soon became clear that the real danger of a Mormon-Gentile political division had disappeared. With this final disappearance of the traditional religious division in Utah politics, the state stood at the threshold of political maturity.

Third parties were not a thing of the past, of course. This was the decade of Bull Mooseism, Prohibitionism, and Progressivism, and all three had a bearing on Utah politics. But Utah had essentially become a two-party state, and third parties found it difficult to gather significant support. It may be suggested that third parties were never so popular or influential here as they were in other sections of the country because the memory of the American party made independent politics objectionable to the populace.
In 1912, for example, Theodore Roosevelt had a wide personal following in the state, yet Utah was one of the two states in the nation to cast its electoral vote for William Howard Taft. Since Joseph F. Smith wrote a signed editorial in the Mormon publication, the Improvement Era,\textsuperscript{25} which was interpreted as an appeal to members of the church to vote for Taft, the outcome of this presidential election has sometimes been characterized as still another incidence of ecclesiastical influence in politics. Perhaps so. But the campaign was very complicated; Theodore Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson were both popular, yet their policies so nearly coincided — at least as they were understood in Utah — that it is just as likely that they killed each other off, as it were, allowing the old guard Republicans to carry the state. Smith’s Improvement Era article caused such a stir in Democratic circles, moreover, that its effect was somewhat mitigated by a subsequent statement that it was intended merely as an announcement of personal preference. This, in turn, impelled Simon Bamberger, a Democratic candidate for the State Senate, to publicly ponder what Taft thought of “his friend in Utah who was working for him without,” as Smith’s second statement had said, “having any intention to influence a single vote.”

The results of the election of 1912 apparently forced the Progressives to recognize their limitations, and by 1914 the Progressive organization had accomplished a formal fusion with the Democrats in Utah. It was a liaison of convenience, however, and it did not hold fast throughout the entire campaign, or throughout the entire state for that matter. Just to take one case, the Progressives in Carbon County divided among themselves, one-half fusing with the Democrats and the other half joining the Republicans.

The effect of fusion, even so, was enough to cause Reed Smoot, running for reelection for the first time under the constitutional amendment providing for the popular election of senators, to worry about his chances. The Democratic-Progressive coalition had nominated James H. Moyle to oppose the apostle, and Moyle, who was personally popular all across the state, acted like a man about to win. He visited every county in Utah making every attempt to exploit the opposition to Smoot’s machine leaders. In this way he was able to conduct a campaign which did not reflect on the apostle’s character while still emphasizing the need for a change.

The results of this election reflected the success of his tactics: Moyle, himself, was defeated by just over 3,000 votes, but the Republicans were defeated in Salt Lake County where the power of the federal bunch had been strongest. The Republican majority was wiped out in the lower house of the state legislature, and the fusion candidate for Congress, James H. Mays, defeated the machine candidate, E. O. Leatherwood. With reference to Reed Smoot, Dr. Merrill was right when he quipped that the Senator “didn’t win, he survived.” 26

And there were those who contended that he did not even do that. Democrats in Washington and Weber counties raised cries of fraud, and party leaders pleaded with the defeated senatorial candidate to take the question to the courts. According to Hinckley’s biography, Moyle “sensed this would mean only muckraking and so declined.” 27

All of which indicates just how tenuous the Republican party’s hold on the state had become. Reed Smoot won, but only because he managed to keep prohibition out of the campaign. Two years later the Republicans were not that successful, and the temperance issue broke out again in full force. Once that happened, the Republican party divided against itself. Just as he had recognized the danger which prohibition threatened to the party in 1908 and 1909, Senator Smoot now realized that the only way the Republicans could win another election would be for the party to “take the lead in providing for future [state]wide prohibition.” He thought, however, that the law should “allow the manufacture of beer for exportation and not destroy that business,” and that it should also “give saloons ample time to dispose of their property.” 28 He presented this plan to the Quorum of the Twelve, and also discussed the matter with Gus Becker who agreed that “perhaps it was the best that could be done.”

Yet when the legislature met in January 1915, it seemed that even this was too much to ask. Neither the party affiliation nor the religious connection of the lawmaker appeared to matter this time. Prohibition — strict, statewide, immediate, and final — was what the legislature wanted, and that is what the Wooten Bill, which both houses passed, provided. But Governor Spry, possibly with the advice of President Smith and certainly with the support of Becker and Fisher and the other Utah “liquor interests,” vetoed this bill as soon as the legislature adjourned.

26 Merrill, “Apostle in Politics,” 159.
27 Gordon B. Hinckley, James Henry Moyle (Salt Lake City, 1956), 271.
The governor had been warned that a veto, this time, would mean political suicide. And it did. In refusing to sign the 1915 prohibition measure, Governor Spry ended his own political career, and at the same time paved the way for the absolute destruction of the Smoot machine and the overwhelming defeat of Utah’s Republican party.

Because he had been reelected in 1914 and had yet another four years to demonstrate to the people of Utah that he was the man who made the laws in Washington, Reed Smoot escaped the 1916 Republican debacle. He was the only outstanding member of the party to do so. Sutherland was defeated by William H. King; Howell fell before James H. Mays; Nephi L. Morris, the former Progressive who had won the Republican nomination for governor on the basis of his strenuous pro-prohibition record, was routed by Simon Bamberger; and similar results were reported in election contests all along the line. In almost every case, from governor on down, public offices were filled with men who promised to bring prohibition to Utah.

Arch erected on Main Street and South Temple carries the Republican party campaign posters of 1916. This was the year of the Republican debacle in Utah. Nephi L. Morris was defeated by Simon Bamberger; George Sutherland fell before William H. King; and Woodrow Wilson was reelected President of the United States.
Practically before the legislators got settled in their new quarters in the new state capitol, a “bone-dry” liquor measure was approved by both houses and sent to the governor for his signature. When Simon Bamberger, Utah’s first non-Mormon governor, signed this legislation making a portion of the Mormon prophet’s sumptuary revelation a state law, a new era had begun.

Less than two years later Joseph F. Smith died, and Heber J. Grant became the new president of the Mormon Church. For well over a decade, Grant had been leading the Mormon Democrats in politics, and many members of his party probably expected that at long last it would be the “will of the Lord” for Democrats to win Utah elections. If so, they were disappointed. A full year before the 1920 senatorial election, President Grant announced that he intended to vote for Reed Smoot, and he made no public reference to what he thought the outcome of the state election should be.

Grant remained a nominal Democrat, but he was not really a party man. His activities in support of the party between 1908 and 1918 had been directed almost entirely to the bringing of prohibition to Utah. Once that was effected, his interest in party politics subsided. Since that had been the only basic issue separating Grant and Smoot, their enmity to each other, too, abated, and in time Grant became as enthusiastically partisan in the senator’s favor as Joseph F. Smith had been.

At the state level, however, politics during Grant’s presidency operated, for the most part, in both parties with neither the advice nor consent of the president of the Mormon Church. It was still Utah, and the Mormon interest was still paramount. But it was not the same. Utah had finally come of age politically.