

UTAH HISTORY ENCYCLOPEDIA

[HOME](#)
[ABOUT](#)
[PREFACE](#)

FREEMASONRY IN UTAH

By Attilio G. Parisi

[Ba](#)

Freemasonry made its first organized appearance in Utah during the winter of 1858 when twenty-three officers and men of Johnston's Army, sent to quell the reported "rebellion of Mormons," sought fraternal fellowship at their inhospitable outpost of Camp Floyd near Fairfield, called "Frogtown." The army felt unwelcome: the Mormons, understandably, resented the "invasion" and withheld friendship, while the climate and conditions were harsh.

To house nearly 4,000 personnel, adobe soil was converted into bricks for eight-foot walls, and trees were milled into planks for roofs, which were covered with clay. The floors of all buildings were packed dirt. Such was the construction of the first Masonic meeting hall in Utah; it was 60 by 30 feet, with high windows, which served more for ventilation than light. Unlike the other camp buildings, this one was built entirely by lodge members.

When it was announced a Masonic Lodge was to be formed, applications were numerous. Consequently, 162 candidates became Masons, a record unequalled in Utah within the same time-frame. Following Masonic custom, the lodge spent considerable money helping destitute migrants who were passing through Utah to western destinations. The effort was significant considering the army pay at that time.

All Masonic activity and enthusiasm ceased with the uncertainty of the times, including the impending Civil War and Indian problems. Camp Floyd (renamed Fort Crittenden when Secretary of War John B. Floyd joined the Confederacy) was disbanded and everything sold to Utahns at a fraction of cost. Realizing the imminent decampment, the lodge surrendered its charter in July 1861, three months after the Civil War started. Thus ended Utah's first Masonic Lodge, Rocky Mountain No. Missouri registry.

The next Masonic activity in Utah created a furor and presented a conflict between two unyielding Masonic groups over a basic principle. When fourteen Masons, led by James M. Ellis, met in Salt Lake City on 11 November 1865 they petitioned the Grand Lodge of Nevada for a dispensation (temporary authorization). Grand Master DeBell responded 25 January 1866, with the stipulation that "No Mormon be accepted for the Degrees," later adding, "or to be admitted as a visitor." These rigid provisions were due in part to the history of animosity against Mormons in other states, but were based largely on the experience of Nevadans with Mormons, especially at Genoa, formerly Mormon Station.

The Utahns objected to the restriction because they firmly believed it violated their rights. Because of their objection, the petitioners were deemed "insubordinate," their charter (permanent authorization) was withheld, and the dispensation extended another year. After bitter discussion, the petitioners "agreed to adhere and work in" but apparently changed their minds, returning the dispensation, "respectfully," in September 1867.

Determined, they looked elsewhere for authorization. They applied, unsuccessfully, to Colorado and Montana. Finally, they turned to Kansas and received a dispensation and later a charter on 9 November 1868. This aroused nationwide criticism for the Kansas Grand Lodge, but the furor subsided.

Meanwhile, another group of Masons in Salt Lake City, led by Obed F. Strickland and Reuben H. Robertson, law partners from Montana, and subsequently first and



Masonic Hall drill team, Salt Lake, 1931

second Grand Masters of Utah, petitioned the Montana Grand Lodge for a dispensation which they received dated 22 October 1866. When it was rumored that Mori contemplated petitioning the United Grand Lodge of England for a dispensation, the two lodges reluctantly combined forces to form Argenta Lodge, under Colorado registry, thus becoming eligible to organize the Grand Lodge of Utah, on 16 January 1872.

The growth of Masonry in Utah was slow but steady. Within nine decades, thirty-two lodges scattered throughout Utah had been formed, Twin Peaks No. 32 in Midway being the last one, chartered in 1961. Although sometimes lacking members in the early years, Masonic organizations increased. All this activity prompted a Grand Master to complain, "There is too much Masonry in Utah, with members spreading themselves too thin and poor attendance."

El Kallah Temple, consisting exclusively of York Rite Knights Templar and Scottish Rite 32nd-degree Masons, was instituted in 1891. Over the years this group worked diligently to help build the Intermountain Unit of Shriners' Hospital for Crippled Children, which serves Arizona, Colorado, Idaho, Nevada, Utah, and Wyoming, at no cost to patients.

The ladies related to Masons formed their own auxiliary organizations: Daughters of the Nile, Ladies of the Oriental Shrine, Order of the Eastern Star, Social Order Beauseant, and White Shrine of Jerusalem. Some lodges support youth groups: the Order of DeMolay for young men and the Order of Job's Daughters for girls.

Although Brigham Young, Joseph Smith, Hyrum Smith, and others in the Mormon Church hierarchy were legitimate Masons, a deep-seated rift developed between the LDS Church and the Masons in Utah. Blame for this animosity has been attributed to both sides. For almost sixty years, no member of the LDS Church could apply for membership or visit a Masonic lodge in Utah. The Grand Lodge of Utah officially rescinded the exclusionary provisions in 1984.

Few residents of Salt Lake City know that their library system owes its origin in part to the Masons. Christopher Diehl, Grand Secretary and dedicated bibliophile, was unceasingly to establish a public library. While he was begging for Masonic and non-Masonic books, the Ladies Literary Society, composed mostly of wives of Masons, struggled unsuccessfully to establish a public library. When their efforts failed, they put their 900-plus volumes in storage, to be given to Diehl when he opened the Masonic Public Library. Here, again, the effort proved more than the Masons could bear; therefore the Society delivered the 9,981 volumes they had accumulated to the mayor of Salt Lake. Meanwhile, the state legislature adopted an empowering act permitting cities to assess a tax levy to support public libraries. From this modest beginning, Salt Lake City has developed its impressive library.

No report of Masonic activity is complete without a review of the dedication of Masons to three principal tenets of Masonry--Brotherly Love, Relief, and Truth--and to charge to practice Faith, Hope, and Charity. Each year, the Utah Grand Lodge, through its Masonic Foundation, disburses an ever-increasing sum for the support of colleges and universities, public broadcasting stations, hospitals, medical research, and student loans and grants, among other contributions. In 1984 these benevolences totaled \$100,564; in 1988 they were \$144,844, exclusive of the philanthropic activities of the thirty-one current lodges and other related bodies, each of which selects and supports its own beneficiaries; and exclusive of contributions of individual Masons. Traditionally, Masonic disbursements are made without fanfare and publicity is usually generated by the recipients. Surveys indicate that, nationally, Masonic benevolence exceeds \$1,000,000 *per day*. Utah Masons proudly share their imposed obligation.

See: Gustin O. Gustin, *First 100 Years of Freemasonry in Utah, vol. I, 1872-1972 (1984)*; Samuel H. Goodwin, *Freemasonry in Utah (1934)*; Samuel H. Goodwin, *Mormonism and Masonry, A Utah Point of View (1938)*; E. Cecil McGavin, *Mormonism and Masonry (1956)*; Chester R. MacPhee, *The Greatest of These Is Charity (1987)*; John H. Van Gorden and Stewart M. L. Pollard, *Masonic Charities (1987)*.

Disclaimer: Information on this site was converted from a hard cover book published by University of Utah Press in 1994. Any errors should be directed towards the University of Utah Press.

THE BOOK - UTAH HISTORY ENCYCLOPEDIA

Original book edited by:
Allen Kent Powell

Originally published by:
University of Utah Press
J. Willard Marriott Library
295 South 1500 East, Suite 5400
Salt Lake City, Utah 84112

 **Contact us**  **800-621-2736**

THE WEBSITE - UTAH HISTORY ENCYCLOPEDIA

Website maintained by:
Utah Education Network - UEN
101 South Wasatch Drive
Salt Lake City, Utah 84112

 **Contact us**  **800-866-5852**

[Terms of Use](#)

 [Web Accessibility](#)