Reflections in the Water:
Placing Salt Lake Valley’s Warm Springs in History

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Orienting Yourself in Warm Springs

ON A CHILLY DECEMBER day in 2022, I walked through Warm Springs Park on the northern edge of my hometown, Salt Lake City, Utah. My intent was to see the place I’d been reading so much about. However, when I sat down on one of the benches, my eyes were drawn to everything but the main building itself. I looked to the quarries pocketing the side of the mountain to the east. I looked to the railroad depot and oil refinery across the road to the west. I looked to the lush grass around a bubbling hot spring at the northern end of the park. While I saw a few small monuments and signs and recognized that some effort must have been made to interpret the site, I couldn’t help but feel like the building—surrounded by fencing and covered in peeling paint—faded into the background (fig. 1).

In the last decade, a local activist group has been working to change that. Named the Warm Springs Alliance, their principal goal is to convince the Salt Lake City government to renovate the Warm Springs building and make the area into a community center. Sylvia Nibley, the leader of this group, wants the renovation to be rooted in history, saying that “it is not only feasible, but important to renovate Warm Springs property in a way that honors its unique history, architecture and natural features.” She wants Warm Springs to be “a place that belongs to all of us.”

But what is Warm Springs’ history? Why does the current landscape strike the Warm Springs Alliance as an inadequate representation of that history and the people within it?

As I dug deeper, I discovered that the landscape which captured my attention is not a distraction from the history of Warm Springs, but is the history of Warm Springs. Everything that initially drew my eye is essential to the layers of history that Warm Springs contains. A renovation alone would not reveal these layers, but a better understanding of the stories that have made Warm Springs will.

3“Landscape is history made visible” as put by John Brinckerhoff Jackson, Landscape in Sight: Looking at America (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 10.
What, exactly, do I mean when I refer to “Warm Springs?” I use the term to refer to the continuous sense of place that today is located in Warm Springs Park. Although tied to a loose geographic location, this sense of place is primarily associated with three different buildings that have gone by many names over the decades, including Warm Springs Municipal Bath, Warm and Sulphur Springs, and Wasatch Springs Plunge. The first building was constructed with city taxes in 1850 in order to pump water from the nearby hot springs to a covered pool. The current building was constructed in 1922, built again with the intent to pump water from the hot springs. Each one of these buildings has gone through the hands of a number of owners and many physical renovations including repainting, refurbishings, and reconfigured plumbing.

Warm Springs is also composed of the people who visited it and the stories they have told about their lives. The efforts of Indigenous peoples, Mormons, Gentiles, tourists and many others are what make Warm Springs a place worth untangling. They saw Warm Springs as a place to imagine what it meant to be healthy, to be Mormon, to be justified, to be American, to be amused, to be Utahn, to be productive, and to belong. History is the summary of individuals’ attempts to

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4Photo by Francisco Kjolseth as published in Semerad, “Neighbors hope to restore the mineral baths.”
5Additional names included Bullock’s bathing place, Wasatch Springs Municipal Bath, and Warm Springs Plunge.
6There have been a handful of local histories focused on Warm Springs written in the past half century. While incomplete, they provide a basis for the general knowledge on the traditional history of the area. Louise B. Pearce, Salt Lake City’s Vanishing Hot Springs, 1953, Utah State Historical Society, MSS A 1690; Darrell E. Jones, and W. Randall Dixon, “It Was Very Warm and Smelt Very Bad: Warm Springs and the First Bath House in Salt Lake City,” Utah Historical Quarterly 76, no. 3 (2008): 212-226; Michael McLane, “Taking the Waters: Lost Leisure on Salt Lake City’s Beck Street,” Utah Historical Quarterly 87, no. 1 (2019): 58-75.
7As a note on terminology, in this paper, I attempt to reduce confusion by using consistent terms for groups of people. I will use the term Indigenous peoples to indicate the collective grouping of tribes who lived and live in this area. I will refer to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints as the LDS Church, and its members as Mormons. I use the term Gentile to refer generally to non-Mormons—particularly White, American-born non-Mormons.
imagine their placement in the world.

It is not that Warm Springs is remarkable for its particularly unique view on these broader historical trends. Indeed, it was only one of many water resorts which populated the southeastern corner of the Great Salt Lake, including Garfield’s Beach, Saltair, Lagoon, and Beck’s Hot Springs.8 Beyond even that specificity, any location with a name touched by human hands has a history to tell. A careful study of any location’s landscape would reveal how people’s negotiation with their culture and the surrounding world leaves a mark. However, as historian Elliot West notes, “constructing a narrative necessarily requires choosing and stringing together only a few pieces of what is known. In other words, to tell a story arguing for inclusiveness, you have to be exclusive.”9 Telling a larger story is better done by focusing on a smaller one. This is the place of my focus, but any location could be the place of a different perspective on this history.

The point of this paper is to tell a story which allows you to recognize how the landscape around Warm Springs reflects a deeper history that cannot be done justice in a small monument or historical marker. The point is to tell a story of continuous, negotiated change between many different people. The point is to tell a story of place-making.

I Reading Place like a Historian

What does it mean to do a place-based history? Every day, amateur historians tell stories of single locations in order to make meaning of the world around them. However, a distinct, academically rigorous, place-based scholarship has emerged among academics following the cultural turn of the 1960s and, influenced by other disciplines like philosophy and geography, has created a new approach to history within the academic field.10

Drawing from the scholarship of people like Henri Lefebvre, Nigel Thrift, Yi-Fu Tuan, and Winifred Gallagher, scholars across diverse disciplines have created distinct definitions for place and space.11 While their exact definitions differ depending on the author, I will rely on a few common features attributed to these two concepts for this paper. Space is, simply put, a physical location. Space only gains meaning when it becomes place, since place is “a spatial reality constructed by people.”12 In other words, place occurs when a physical space is interpreted and transformed through human action and imagination. Additionally, places are “a node of continuous human activity: political, economic, and cultural.”13 Finally, the meaning of a place will almost inevitably be contradictory and tentative as groups of people with competing power negotiate its meaning.14 These concepts, which I will use throughout this paper, can be boiled down to four

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11Phil Hubbard and Rob Kitchin, eds, Key Thinkers on Space and Place (Sage, 2010).


words: construction, continuity, contradiction, and contestation.

My approach is also in conversation with the New Western Historians, who object to the traditional history of the West best exemplified by Frederick Jackson Turner. The New Western Historians criticize Turner’s “frontier thesis,” codified in his 1893 essay “The Significance of the Frontier in American History.” Turner declared the frontier closed as of 1890, creating a narrative where the American West was a savage natural world until it was settled by people from the East Coast, who brought civilization to the rest of the land. From the perspective of place-based scholarship—with a strong emphasis on continuity and contested meaning—this “frontier thesis” is simplistic and damaging. Advocating for New Western History in 1991, historian Richard White succinctly proposes an alternative thesis: “each successive group of immigrants has not confronted pure nature; they have confronted worlds created by people who came before them and in many cases continued to live alongside them.” This nuanced approach is useful when telling the history of Warm Springs.

Implied in this approach is a rejection of teleology; in other words, histories that only tell the story of progress. In rejecting the idea of inevitable progress, New Western Historians reckon with the inevitable harm people do to the spaces they are transforming into places and the people they encounter while doing so. Despite their acknowledgment of harm, New Western Historians are primarily focused on reckoning with the past and acknowledging the irony inherent in it, rather than condemning the individuals or groups who caused this harm.

Jared Farmer has led the way in bringing place-based scholarship to Utah history. In books like On Zion’s Mount and essays like “This Was the Place” he examines how various groups of people have used stories to shape their relationship with the Salt Lake Valley. While this paper parallels Farmer’s work in many stylistic ways, it covers a different location not to compete with but rather add to works like his. Like Farmer, I attempt “to get you thinking, through various examples, about place creation and landscape loss; and, along the way, to unsettle your mental geography, and adjust—ever so slightly—your inner compass.” Treat the following set of stories as a map; by digging into each landmark on that map, the layers of historical meaning reflected in Warm Springs are revealed.

II Mountains and Valleys: This is the Place

Although the environment does not gain meaning until people imagine it as a place, it is still an important actor in place-making. A story of Warm Springs geological history helps to illustrate its deep history as well as illustrating what initially drew people to this particular space.

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17White, “Trashing the Trails,” 36.

18Jared Farmer, “This Was the Place: The Making and Unmaking of Utah,” Utah Historical Quarterly 82, no. 3 (2014): 186.

19On a relevant introduction to irony and the ways in which competing groups took advantage of each others’ conceptions of place to change the political and literal landscape, see David Walker, Railroading Religion: Mormons, Tourists, and the Corporate Spirit of the West (UNC Press Books, 2019), 5-6.

20Jared Farmer, On Zion’s Mount: Mormons, Indians, and the American Landscape (Harvard University Press, 2009); Farmer, “This Was the Place.”

21Farmer, “This Was the Place,” 186.

22West, The Way to the West, 11.
Salt Lake Valley, like the valleys around it, once formed the bottom of the massive Lake Bonneville. The Great Salt Lake, an inland sea with no outlet, is among the last vestiges of that ancient lake, which is theorized to have drained into Idaho around 15,000 years ago. Lake Bonneville was hemmed in by the mountain ranges of the Great Basin, including the Wasatch Range. It is from the base of the Wasatch Range that Warm Springs emerges. More specifically, they emerge from the base of the “Salt Lake salient” or “the City Creek spur,” which is a collection of sediments and sedimentary bedrock formed as a result of Lake Bonneville’s lapping shores and the mountains’ shifting faults. Warm Springs is itself a result of the mountain’s faults. It, along with upwards of 50 other hot springs in this area, transfers the heat of the earth’s mantle to the surface.

The very heat that makes Warm Springs so appealing is a promise of future change. The Wasatch Range is not static; it is an active fault which will change its position and alter the environment around it. People will tell stories about that change. They will give it meaning, just as they gave meaning to Warm Springs when they first encountered and continued to live around it.

III The Hot Springs: A Healthy Country for Displacement

People are not static either. The Great Basin has seen people arrive, leave, be displaced, and redefine themselves in order to belong there for at least 10,000 years. While my focus is on the late 19th and early 20th century, it is important to recognize the depth of people’s history just as we recognize the depth of geologic history.

The story told by archeological records and oral histories is that the ancestors of modern Ute, Shoshone, and Paiute displaced the Fremont who were living on the eastern edge of the Great Basin region around 1200. The fertile promise of the Salt Lake Valley enticed them, since it was one of the wettest parts of the arid desert around it. They named themselves in reference to the space, calling themselves “Lake People” and “Fish Eaters” as they made their homes along the lakes and rivers. They were not, though, a passive part of the environment around them. As preeminent historian Richard White notes, Indigenous peoples, “like all peoples, live in a physical world which is not only natural but also historical—a creation of their ancestors and themselves.” They shaped the environment to suit their needs. The ways of meeting those needs changed. For instance, over the last half millennium, the culture of the Fish Eaters was particularly influenced by Spanish colonialism to the south. Notably, while some fur traders and missionaries trickled through the area, what gradually changed Indigenous peoples’ relationship to place in the arid West before the 19th century was the introduction of livestock and the Spanish slave system. The adoption of new systems informed culture, culture informed the adoption of new systems, and they defined the land as home.

Mormons arrived in the valley in 1847. Theirs was an abrupt and violent arrival that displaced the contemporary inhabitants and their ways of relating to the land. Reckoning with the way that

26 Farmer, On Zion’s Mount, 23.
29 Farmer, On Zion’s Mount, 31. Additionally, for an exploration of how the introduction of livestock into Indigenous economies of North America shifted the dynamics of their cultures and future conflict with White settlers, see White, The Roots of Dependency.
Mormon stories of this land replaced Indigenous stories of the same land is critical to reckoning with the history of Warm Springs. To do this effectively, we have to acknowledge that displacement is not a new part of human history. Indigenous peoples also displaced each other, and to discount that fact is to create a stereotypical and rigid image of them. At the same time, the settlement of the West by Mormons and other white settlers in the 17th through 19th centuries was abruptly and violently damaging to both humans and the environment in a way that previous displacements were not. Manifest Destiny justified death and disappearance and did not want to leave room for previous cultures to continue. They lived on anyway.\(^3^0\)

Local histories of Warm Springs and Salt Lake Valley often erase or soften this story of displacement.\(^3^1\) However, these histories’ erasure does both a disservice to modern Indigenous groups whose story of this place is erased as well as modern Mormons and Salt Lake City occupants whose relationship with the land is incomplete without the Indigenous peoples they interacted with and displaced. A clear narrative will often focus on the story of a particular group at any one moment, but we must keep all the rest in mind as we continue our story.

When the first group of Mormons arrived in the Salt Lake Valley in 1847, they described the landscape as beautiful. Their previous experiences of persecution in the East and the theology they had brought to the valley shaped their first impressions.\(^3^2\) In 1842, Joseph Smith, the first prophet of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS Church), had reportedly “prophesied that the Saints would continue to suffer much affliction and would be driven to the Rocky Mountains” which would be their promised land.\(^3^3\) After Smith was killed by a mob in Illinois, Brigham Young and other LDS authorities consulted trappers and explorers who had traveled throughout the West in order to determine where along the Rocky Mountains this promised land would be. These travelers’ accounts—including those of John C. Fremont and Lansford Hastings—pointed toward Salt Lake Valley, which was still officially claimed by Mexico. The Wasatch Range would protect them from the U.S. government, the land was fertile as evidenced by how many Indigenous people already lived there, and—while the area was more arid than the East coast—they could make this land more like home through extensive irrigation and city planning.\(^3^4\)

After Brigham Young, the new prophet of the LDS Church, had led them across the desert in an effort told in parallel to Moses’ effort to lead the Jews out of Egypt, they were primed to see Salt Lake Valley as perfectly suited to their purposes. They described it as arable and ready to be worked, scattered with rivers that could be channeled to irrigate plenty of farms, surrounded with

\(^{3^0}\) Today, many Indigenous peoples live in Salt Lake City. The majority, though, live on federally recognized reservations. The closest federally recognized reservation, The Skull Valley Reservation, is an hour’s drive to the west of Salt Lake City and is mainly populated by Goshute.

\(^{3^1}\) For example, one local history of South Davis County summarizes this displacement in two sentences: “Shoshone and Paiute Indians, who in previous years had formed winter camps or come to hunt and harvest fish from the streams, soon moved on. For a few years, they traded with the new settlers, but, as the towns grew, the Indians moved farther north and were eventually located to reservations.” While in many ways not technically inaccurate, the shortness and softened nature of this story produces a disingenuous history. Royce Allen and Gary Willden, South Davis County (Images of America, 2014), 7.

\(^{3^2}\) The LDS Church was organized in 1830 in New York when Joseph Smith declared he was restoring the original church of Christ on the earth. He and his followers were persecuted, which compelled them to move west to Ohio, then Illinois, then Missouri. After Joseph Smith was murdered in 1844, multiple splinter groups emerged. Brigham Young would lead the most well-known continuation of the faith to Utah in order to establish the LDS Church. Mormons have an additional book of scripture called The Book of Mormon and hold doctrinal beliefs about the after-life and the nature of God unique from other religions.


\(^{3^4}\) Later, Utah would be reimagined in Mormon’s collective memory as a desert. This transformation is explored in Farmer, “The Desertification of Zion,” in On Zion’s Mount, 105-138; and Jackson, “Mormon Perception and Settlement.”
rocks which could build a city, and cleansed by lovely winds from the Great Salt Lake. Their description aligned with the story that this was their promised land. Acting in accordance with a divine command, they believed they were meant to build a self-sustaining Mormon city outside of the jurisdiction of any government but their own.

Warm Springs experienced a microcosm of this pattern of seeing potential beauty, being claimed by Mormons, and being physically shaped to match that perception. Thomas Bullock, the designated secretary of Brigham Young, felt sick only a few days after arriving in the valley in 1847. One of his companions recommended he visit the hot springs to the north on his own to soak away his sickness while they ascended the adjacent foothill, later named Ensign Peak. As they claimed the space on top of the foothill through speech and prayer, Bullock claimed the springs at its foot. His perception of the Warm Springs was shaped by his first impressions. As historian Elliot West observes, “many of our most vivid physical descriptions of the [West] have been written by gawking aliens. These writers have set the West against mental landscapes of other places, then have written from the shock of difference.” With his alien eyes, Bullock described the Hot Springs Lake in his diary as fed by Beck’s Hot Springs and Warm Springs.

He also shaped Warm Springs to fit his idea of what springs were meant to be as informed by his experiences in the East. In between planting farms in the valley and planning Salt Lake City, he and two other men took off, one day in August, to dig the springs deeper, and better dam the outflowing creek with spades and hoes, until they “were satisfied with the improvement.” This physical alteration of the springs made it into a more welcoming place for the purposes Bullock imagined for it.

The Mormons’ mental conception of Salt Lake Valley was reflected in how Bullock described Warm Springs to others. Writing in a magazine intended for potential Mormon converts in England, Bullock said that “These springs, like the Pool of Siloam, heal all who bathe, no matter what their complaints. The air is very salubrious, and with these warm springs, I can truly say we have found a healthy country.” At first glance, Bullock’s words easily reveals his interest in convincing potential Mormon converts that Salt Lake Valley was a safe and enjoyable place to live and be Mormon. By looking at broader trends around contemporary understandings of health, we can reveal a more nuanced depth to these words.

As historian Conevery Bolton Valencius explains in *The Health of the Country*, 19th century settlers had an extensive and meaningful vocabulary to talk about the land in which they were situating their bodies. At the time, the widely held theory of disease by physicians and the public in the Western world was miasma theory. Like all good scientific theories, the exact details were hotly contested, but, essentially, in miasma theory the air itself carried the essence of decay and putrefaction, which could infect the land, water, or people it inhabited and spread to. Still water was a recipe for disaster; moving water was a sign of strength. Hot springs’ sulfurous smell and hot

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37 West, *The Way of the West*, 133.
41 Valencius points out that “Though many scholars have written about American western expansion... we have not fully understood these matter-of-fact, plainspoken assessments, even though they filled nineteenth-century writings.” Conevery Bolton Valencius, *The Health of the Country: How American Settlers Understood Themselves and Their Land* (Basic Books, 2002), 2.
temperature, by the fact of their very potency, implied healing properties.\textsuperscript{43} Beyond physical health though, Bullock’s invocation of a Biblical reference to the Pool of Siloam reveals the religious implications of a “healthy country” in the promised land. While Bullock’s assurances in 1848 that this was a “healthy country” aligned with Eastern settlers’ ideas of what made a good place to live, his religious focus reminds us that Mormon settlers had a particular way of judging the land. This distinction is important. Mormons were, like many other American settlers in the 19th century, transporting Eastern conceptions of private poverty and land use into the West. However, their own culture and specific encounters with the physical space of the West shaped their conception of the land to be distinct. Land use was not just good when it was used, but when it was used \textit{productively} for collective purposes that worked toward transforming the divinely promised land into the beautiful Zion they imagined.\textsuperscript{44}

This idea of the land was in conflict with that of the Indigenous peoples already on it. While Mormons did not ignore the presence of the various seasonal bands and more permanent villages through the valley, they used many different narrative techniques to underplay and discredit them. The reimagining of the Indigenous peoples’ relationship to Salt Lake Valley’s environment is more obvious in memories. In the moment, people like Bullock carefully recorded trades between his fellow Mormons and Indigenous peoples and worked to, at least loosely, keep track of each groups’ name.\textsuperscript{45} This attention makes sense, since the Mormons understood Indigenous peoples as competitors for control of the landscape when they arrived. However, they imagined a future where Mormons would dominate this land.\textsuperscript{46} Future developments meant that they could look back on these first few years and read the land as more empty than it was.

The Mormons’ initial concern becomes more stark when looking at how they later tell the story of the initial years of settlement in the valley. Mormons, culturally, are particularly invested in telling informal history. Many LDS Church authorities have promoted the use of diaries and since 1831 “Church Historian” has been an official role in the LDS Church.\textsuperscript{47} All cultures share a collective memory, a set of stories which explain “what they hold to be important, to which story they accord eminence, which anxieties and values they share.”\textsuperscript{48} Mormons were and continue to be particularly interested in recording their collective memory. One such collective memory is that of the “Miracle of the Gulls.” The broad strokes of this mythologized story is that, in the first couple years of Mormon settlement in the valley, crickets threatened their crops and Mormons were pushed to the point of starvation. Their prayers for salvation were answered when a massive flock of seagulls ate the crickets. This story, along with a set of others around the initial settlement of

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\item Valenčius, \textit{The Health of the Country}, 153.
\item Jedediah Rogers explains how Mormon settlers understood the land as “ordained by Providence for human labor” whereas other Anglo-American settlers understood the land as “ordained by Providence as a refuge for nature.” Jedediah S. Rogers, \textit{Roads in the Wilderness: Conflict in Canyon Country} (University of Utah Press, 2013), 3. Or, as Jeanne Kay and Craig Brown put it, the Mormons considered themselves “tenants obliged to a divine landlord.” Jeanne Kay and Craig J. Brown, “Mormon Beliefs about Land and Natural Resources, 1847–1877,” \textit{Journal of Historical Geography} 11, no. 3 (1985): 260; Farmer, \textit{On Zion’s Mount}, 50.
\item Bullock, \textit{The Pioneer Camp of the Saints}, 240.
\item This assertion simplifies the complex matter of Mormons beliefs about the Lamanites, the people they believed to be the ancestors of Indigenous peoples on the American continent and an important group in the Book of Mormon. This theological idea, complicated since the origin of the LDS faith, is treated with care by Max Perry Mueller, \textit{Race and the Making of the Mormon People} (University of North Carolina Press, 2017), 35-45.
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the valley, has become so familiar as to be formulaic.

Diaries of the time record the incident as one of many events happening during the difficult process of settlement, when Mormons were unsure if they would be able to stay in the valley. It was when Mormons remembered the event that they used it to make claims on who belonged in the now established Salt Lake City. In 1880, John Nebeker was asked to remember the first couple years of Mormon settlement in the valley. He begins by telling how hard the pioneers worked to irrigate and farm this land and transform it into something livable. He tells of the hardships they experienced, including the story of the “Miracle of the Gulls.” In an abrupt transition, he says “The Indians got fat on them [the crickets]. They would gather them in baskets, then put them in willows and set fire to the willows.” According to many other accounts, the basic facts of his statement are true. The Indigenous peoples of the area did eat crickets; “plagues” of crickets were a normal occurrence in the region and they had incorporated that reality into their everyday lives. They did use fire, both to corral insects and to maintain the plant life that filled the valley. Mormons, though, did not have the mental adaptability to change their everyday actions. Nebeker’s narration indicates a disdain for this way of life, implying that it is disgusting and almost immoral. He implies that, though they risked starvation, the pioneers were in the right as they dug useless channels to stop the crickets’ advance and waited for divine intervention.

Nebeker’s opinion on Indigenous use of the land is further reinforced by the next story Nebeker tells about Warm Springs. As happened across the American continent, the Indigenous peoples in the valley got sick with measles introduced by the White settlers. Nebeker connects the memory of their deaths to Warm Springs. He remembers that “They died off about as fast as they went into the water [of the Warm Springs]… This was the first time measles appeared here. It was a new disease to them, and they didn’t know how to cure it, or where they got it.” While he exhibits concern over these deaths, Nebeker’s story largely undermines the Indigenous peoples’ control of their environment. He claims they have the wrong reaction to the crickets, they do not have a resistance to such a common disease as measles, and they don’t know that Warm Springs won’t save them. Telling the story of this place, Nebeker implicitly dismisses Indigenous peoples’ claim to the place of Warm Springs, making room for Mormon claim instead.

Stories allow people to insert themselves into a place. Culture shapes expectations, expectations shape descriptions, and people act to shape the land to match those descriptions. Through their actions, people construct their own place. When the Mormons looked at a changed landscape—one where they could no longer see Indigenous peoples—they shaped their memories into a story that justified their own presence and claim to this place.

52 White puts the vulnerability of Indigenous peoples to disease during colonization of the West into a larger context of changing culture, politics, and economies. “The fact that Indians… starved because colonizers had come, that they died in such prodigious numbers from disease in part because colonizers had wreaked their subsistence systems, and that these subsistence systems themselves were inextricably intertwined with the political, social, and cultural relations colonizers set out to undermine subverted the more beneficent rationale that colonialism brought a better life to all. Colonialists, therefore, tended to prefer imaginary pasts and more benign presents.” White, Roots of Dependency, 315.
IV The Building: Imagining Borders of Amusement and Belonging

As Mormons wrote Indigenous peoples out of the landscape, they defined themselves against the East they had left. On one hand, they drew on the values and traditions they had come from, transporting narratives of health and relaxation into the landscape occupied by Indigenous peoples and loosely claimed by Mexico. On the other hand, they desired to find ways to sharply distinguish themselves against the America they had left. Warm Springs was a place that saw itself redefined within borders meant to make this distinction. These imagined lines crossed and encompassed it with at times violent consequences.

National borders changed almost immediately upon the arrival of the Mormons in Salt Lake Valley, a land initially imagined to be distant from the United States. In 1848, one year after the first Mormons arrived in Salt Lake Valley, the United States won the Mexican-American War. In the Treaty of Guadalupe, the United States officially controlled the area the Mormons called their promised land. This news took time to travel across the continent, but the Mormons acted quickly in response. In 1850, the LDS Church sent a delegation to propose a state named Deseret. Congress refused their request, citing the lack of population and the large geographic size of the proposed state. Despite the rejection, LDS authorities imagined a Mormon empire that would stretch from modern Utah to Nevada and down into Arizona.

The Eastern public and American government watched with increasing horror as the Mormon population in the Utah territory grew. Although Mormons had largely been born in America or were immigrating from northern European countries that had been the origin of many elite Eastern families, the East regarded Mormons as utterly different. For the Protestant mainstream of Eastern America, Mormons presented the cognitively dissonant problem of White people who would not conform to American values, particularly with their practice of polygamy. Samuel Bowles, a Gentile visitor to Salt Lake City in the 1860s, used notions of nationality to degrade Mormons: “a large proportion, perhaps the majority, of the people of Utah are foreigners... The larger proportion are English... But Germans, Swedes, Finns, Scotch, Icelanders, and even East Indians, are here... The bulk of them all are of the peasantry... and so the congregations of the Mormons do not exhibit the marks of high acuteness and intelligence.”

This complicated and contradictory relationship was two-sided. For Mormons, the American government had genuine potential, but had failed to follow the goals outlined in the Constitution and had then proven itself untrustworthy by not protecting them from persecution. While many Mormons expressed a desire to be American, they also actively sought independence from

54 Previous states had been accepted once they had a population of at least 60,000 eligible voters. In Salt Lake City, the Mormon population was less than 12,000 in the 1850s. The rejection was also likely based on a fear of the fact that Mormons voted consistently as a bloc which meant that, despite their small size, they would have real political power if they were the majority of an entire state. Edward Leo Lyman, Political Deliverance: The Mormon Quest for Utah Statehood (University of Illinois Press, 1986), 5, 7; Thomas K. Hafen, “City of Saints, City of Sinners: The Development of Salt Lake City as a Tourist Attraction 1869–1900,” Western Historical Quarterly 28, no. 3 (1997): 346.

55 This generalization simplifies matters greatly. First, Mormons were not only White even in the first couple of decades of the LDS Church’s existence. 24 of the 2,408 people coming to Salt Lake City in 1848 were Black. See Will Bagley, “Afterword: The Triumph of Brigham Young and the Road to Great Salt Lake City, 1848,” in The Pioneer Camp of the Saints: The 1846 and 1847 Mormon Trail Journals of Thomas Bullock, ed. Will Bagley, vol. 1 (AH Clark Co, 1997), 321. Second, it was not just Protestants that were uncomfortable with Mormon theology; Mormons rubbed a large majority of Americans the wrong way, and this discomfort would lead many Mormon critics to employ racially charged language against the largely Caucasian population of Mormons. See Mueller, Race and the Making of the Mormon People.

56 Samuel Bowles, Across the Continent: A Summer’s Journey to the Rocky Mountains, the Mormons, and the Pacific States (Springfield, Massachusetts, 1865), 117.
The East would become disproportionately obsessed with Mormons. Travel journals consistently devoted at least one chapter to “the Mormon question.” Samuel Bowles, wrapping up his section on Salt Lake City, offered a common solution to the question: “even without the interference of the government, [Mormons] must soon give way here, in their peculiar sway and their revolting institution, before the progress of population and the diversification of civilized industry that comes along with it.” The East needed to see evidence of “civilization” before they would end Utah’s liminal status as a territory and affirm Utah as a place in the United States.

This context shaped Warm Springs. Warm Springs, as a place of health and a place of social life, was informed by the Mormons’ desire to imitate the East as well as their desire to distinguish themselves from it.

When the first bathhouse using water from Warm Springs was built using city taxes in 1850, it largely followed the patterns of Eastern hot spring resorts. In the late 1700s, the Eastern elites of the newly independent United States saw hot spring resorts as a way to escape the unhealthy miasma of the cities and flee to the “healthy country” of nature, however constructed that nature was. In the East, hot spring resorts were a place to negotiate whether to define America as a place of the common-person or of the elite. Some Utah resorts evoked the prestige of Eastern resorts through naming conventions. While names like Warm Springs and Hot Springs were commonplace, other names were more distinct. For example, the Saratoga Springs on the shores of Utah Lake must have purposefully chosen its name to reference the status of the famous Saratoga Springs in upstate New York.

Additionally, Warm Springs and other Utah resorts imported the strategies of advertisement used in the East. In both places, patients and doctors held a similar level of authority when determining the efficacy of a hot spring. Doctors contributed their long list of credentials and produced charts of measurements of the waters. Presented with little to no additional explanation, Thomas Chambers argues that these charts reveal that patients were expected to be literate in what the various levels of things like sodium chloride, sulfate, carbonate and silica meant for their health. Additionally, patient testimonials were considered critical to the success of a hot spring resort.

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57 Samuel Bowles, *Across the Continent: A Summer’s Journey to the Rocky Mountains, the Mormons, and the Pacific States* (Springfield, Massachusetts, 1865), 117.


59 Wagoner, “Saratoga,” 109. This practice was not unlike what happened in Texas, “both Lampasas and Sutherland Springs pictured themselves as the ‘Saratoga of the South,’ while Sour Lake was the ‘winter Saratoga,’ destined to draw visitors from the colder North.” Janet Mace Valenza, *Taking the Waters in Texas: Springs, Spas, and Fountains of Youth* (University of Texas Press, 2010), 108.

60 Chambers, *Drinking the Waters*, 52.

61 Chambers, *Drinking the Waters*, 52.

62 Chambers, *Drinking the Waters*, 53-75.
These imported discourses around hot springs were also used to distinguish Utah from the East. One advertisement for Beck’s Hot Springs in 1886 claimed that a lady, after her rheumatism failed to be cured by any of the many hot springs she visited in the East, finally found relief at Beck’s Hot Springs after “only a few days.” Her testimonial is followed by the affirmation that “local physicians express themselves as astonished at the wonderful powers the waters are found to possess.”64 Both patient and doctor weigh in, affirming the superiority of Beck’s Hot Springs’ healing abilities in contrast to the East.

At times, hot springs were used to do more than just define Utah in contrast to the East; they were places to define Mormons against the Gentiles who made up a small proportion of Salt Lake City in the latter half of the 1800s. Visitors were welcome, even encouraged, to enjoy the resorts, but they understood themselves as visiting a Mormon place.65 This cultural claim may be most evident in retrospect. In 1918, a journal article for the Mormon-owned *The Improvement Era* outlines the history of the amusement hall in downtown Salt Lake City, beginning with the first Warm Springs bathhouse. Writing in a rhetoric that would be familiar to the Mormon audience of *The Improvement Era*, Maud Babcock declares that “the gospel is all truth, and blazes the way toward good. The Latter-day Saints have advocated wholesome amusement in direct contrast, and to the horror of other churches… [The LDS Church] has stimulated and provided entertainment even when crushed with such sorrows and faced by such struggles as history only accords to the followers of new revelation.”66 Packing in distinctly Mormon references to “the gospel” and the “new revelation,” Babcock pulls on Mormon culture and collective memory to invoke Mormons’ superior moral claim to amusement halls in Salt Lake City. As she goes on to write about Warm Springs as the earliest Mormon location for dancing, she effectively wraps Warm Springs into this larger story of religious persecution and determinism. She uses Warm Springs as a waypoint to map a Mormon landscape.

At times, creating imagined maps of Mormon belonging was not enough. In 1866, when Dr. John King Robinson was murdered, Warm Springs became a place where Mormons and Gentiles physically contested over borders.

First, we must look at the broader context. Dr. John King Robinson was a retired United States

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63 John Hanson Beadle, *Life in Utah; or, the Mysteries and Crimes of Mormonism: Being an Exposé of the Secret Rites and Ceremonies of the Latter-Day Saints, with a Full and Authentic History of Polygamy and the Mormon Sect from Its Origin to the Present Time* (National Publishing Company, 1870), 446.
64 “Beck’s Springs,” *Territorial Enquirer*, April 23, 1886.
65 In fact, city officials hosted multiple prominent political visitors at Warm Springs, including the Speaker of the House Schuyler Colfax in 1865. Farmer, *On Zion’s Mount*, 106.
army doctor who had arrived in the valley in 1857 during the Utah War. The war, short as it was, indicated the incompetence of the United States government in dealing effectively with the Mormons as well as the Mormons’ capacity and willingness to take anti-Mormon rumors to the extreme.67 Ultimately, there was no violence within Salt Lake City itself, and territorial governorship was handed from Brigham Young to Alfred Cumming—a Gentile appointed by President Buchanan.68 However, the war made crystal clear to Salt Lake Valley residents—both Mormon and Gentile—which side the United States government was on.69 Within this political context, some Gentiles in Utah began to “jump claims” on land that Salt Lake City had claimed in the territorial charter.70

Robinson was one such Gentile. He began to erect a shanty on land near Warm Springs. When city officials tore it down in 1866, he sued with the explanation that the relevant city charter had not been submitted to Congress as required by the organic act of the territory and therefore all the city’s land claims were void, including on the land near Warm Springs.71 His case was presented to Utah Territory’s Chief Justice—a Gentile appointed by the President—who ultimately ruled in favor of Salt Lake City and against Robinson on October 21, 1866.72 That night, Robinson was told a man with a broken leg needed his help and, as he made his way towards this fictive patient, he was shot in downtown Salt Lake City.73 Unsurprisingly, the details of the murder and the exact intentions of his murderers are unclear. Ultimately, the details are unimportant since the way Mormons and Gentiles narrate Robinson’s murder illustrate the larger stories of place at play in the moment.

The Gentiles, even before Robinson was murdered, played into the idea that Mormons were not citizens and that, as Americans, they themselves should have claim to the land. Along these lines, the Gentile-owned Union Vedette reported in early October that “The laws of the Territory, if fully carried into effect, are amply sufficient to protect the innocent and punish the guilty: but to place it in the hands of those who regardless of the rights of others, obey but the “orders” of some one, or a dozen, perhaps, is not only jeopardizing the liberty but the lives of our fellow citizens.”74 Contemporary readers would have read the reference to the “orders” of a dozen as a crystal clear

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67 Other important contextual matters include the month or more communication gap between Washington and Utah before the 1860s, the contemporary political concern over Kansas and questions of slavery in the territories, and the “Mormon Reformation” during the preceeding years which emphasized the faith’s apocalyptic dimensions. Richard D. Poll, and William P. MacKinnon, “Causes of the Utah War Reconsidered,” Journal of Mormon History 20, no. 2 (1994): 16-44.

68 There was significant violence connected with the war to the south. In September, 1857, 120 members of a settler party headed for California were massacred by a group of Mormons in an event called the Mountain Meadows Massacre. The Mormons blamed the deaths on the local Piaute, a choice which would have devastating ripple-effects for their treatment in the future. Juanita Brooks, The Mountain Meadows Massacre (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1962).

69 Regardless, in the years following this war, LDS Church authorities sent delegations to Washington, DC in the hopes of turning the Utah territory into a state. Lyman, Political Deliverance, 7-9.

70 Walker, Railroading Religion, 64.

71 Farmer, On Zion’s Mount, 107. His claims assume everyone would know that the majority of the local city government was Mormon. The Utah territory was generally understood to be, functionally, a theocracy.

72 Warm Springs Case,” The Union Vedette, October 22, 1866; “Legal Ruling,” The Deseret News, October 24, 1866.

73 Interestingly, Robinson was murdered on the corner of the street where a sanitarium that pumped water from Warm Springs would be built in 1889. The year of construction comes from Jones and Dixon, although they have incorrectly placed the sanitarium in the city: Jones and Dixon, “It was Very Warm and Smelt Very Bad,” 224. A fire insurance map from 1898 shows the sanitarium on 3rd street between Main and West Temple. Sanborn Map Company, “Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps: Salt Lake City, Salt Lake County, Utah,” vol. 1 (Teanack, NJ: Chadwyck-Healey, 1898), 8. Beadle tells us that Robinson was murdered on the corner of 3rd Street and Main. Beadle, Life in Utah, 208.

74 Another Mormon Outrage,” The Union Vedette, October 13, 1866. This article reports on the “smashing up” of Robinson’s bowling alley. The rhetoric on law and order continued after the murder of Robinson in “The Public Lands,” The Union Vedette, October 23, 1866.
condemnation of the Mormon Quorum of the Twelve—a group of Mormon religious authorities second-in-command only to the LDS Prophet and his two Counselors. Who is innocent and who is guilty according to the writer of the article is evident; it even goes so far as to imply that Mormons are not citizens of the United States. This story is a powerful one; if the assertion that Mormons were not United States citizens took hold, Gentiles would be justified in driving them out of the United States.

However, this story had competition. Mormons had already created a strong narrative of why they belonged in Salt Lake Valley. Just three days after Robinson was murdered, the Mormon-owned Deseret News published an article titled “Reasons and Causes.” While never directly mentioning Robinson, the piece directly addresses the question of why Mormons should have claim to this land. Albert Carrington, the editor of Deseret News and future Apostle of the LDS Church, wrote:

“That the original settlers of this Territory accomplished a great work, in conquering the obstacles with which they had to contend, and turning a desert wilderness into a fruitful land, no one can gainsay... Roving bands of Indians disputed with crickets and wolves the occupancy of the country, and looked with jealous eyes on those who came to settle here and cultivate the soil... While thus engaged in peaceful industry, the people were happy, because they were virtuous, and prosperous because they were energetic and persevering... But nearly all the disturbance, produced by intemperance, which has yet been seen in this city, has been caused by transients and person owning no taxable property here.”

This story relies on a sense of displacement of the evil—Indigenous peoples, dangerous animals—and the replacement of the virtuous—productive industries and beautiful landscapes.

It also shifts the blame. For the Union Vedette, the blame was put on the evil organization of the LDS Church, the members of which should not be included in the idea of the United States. For the Deseret News, the blame was put on disruptive individuals, individuals who, notably, are “transients” or own “no taxable property.” In this way, the Mormons staked claim to place by declaring that the people who did not fit into their imagination of the Salt Lake Valley would not stay.

Stories around Robinson’s murder make clear how Americans use borders to drive out those they do not desire—whether that be Mormons, Gentiles, Indigenous peoples, or others. They make clear how a desire to belong can shape perceptions of an event, a border, and a people. This specific story also demonstrates how the larger political trends of a time shape a specific locality. Robinson’s claim to Warm Springs, let alone his murder, would not have occurred outside of a conflict between Mormons and Gentiles fighting to belong in Salt Lake Valley.

V The Railroad: Seeing America and the Other in Salt Lake Valley

When the transcontinental railroad was completed in Utah in 1869, Salt Lake Valley was irrevocably stamped onto the map of America. I do not just mean that literally—although it was significant for the industries of Salt Lake City to be so closely connected to other centers of industry—but also metaphorically. Salt Lake City became mapped into the American imagination as a place to negotiate America’s relationship with religion. David Walker, author of Railroading Religion, contends that railroads—including the government that approved them, the workers that built them,

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75 Albert Carrington, “Reasons and Causes,” The Deseret News, October 24, 1866. See footnote 34 for a discussion of how Mormons reimagined Salt Lake Valley as a desert in the decades following their arrival.
the corporations that ran them, and the tourists that moved in them—expected Utah to be a stage where they could negotiate America’s relationship with religion and business. Residents of the valley were forced to respond, deciding whether to embrace these visitors’ perception of Utah as a place of tourism and commerce or to reject it. They did both.

The railroads were part of a national reimagining of America. Throughout the country, railroad plans justified the removal of Indigenous peoples from their land. The massacre of more than 250 Shoshoni in 1863 cleared the way for railroad towns like Corinne to the north of Salt Lake City. Mormons were meant to be the next group of people driven out, or at least transformed. People in the East predicted that, once Salt Lake City was connected to the civilized East by railroad, “the period of Utah’s isolation and estrangement would come to an end; men would become familiar with new thoughts and new vocations; women would be exposed to eligible bachelors and enticing fashions; outdated sensibilities and superstitions would wither; and freedom would reign.” This idea, often called the “death knell thesis,” relied on an understanding of how railroads manipulate space: the railroad would make Utah morally closer to America because it would make it closer to America in time.

However, as extensively demonstrated by historian Richard White, railroads in Northern America rarely achieved their goals. They were messy, corrupt, and beneficial primarily to individual business owners rather than the people they connected. Brigham Young and other LDS authorities took advantage of the railroad’s bureaucratic and corporate inefficiency, playing the Union Pacific and Central Pacific off each other in order to get the best deal. For instance, he convinced the Union Pacific to help build spur lines throughout Utah immediately after the completion of the transcontinental railroad. Their deal settled the railroad’s debt to the LDS Church, which had provided a massive amount of labor.

Warm Springs sat along the first of these spur lines, Utah Central, which connected Salt Lake City to the transcontinental line. Soon, spur lines spread, connecting many of the resorts around Salt Lake City. While the long-term success of resorts like Warm Springs relied on local residents, tourists were critical to their expansion and were funneled to places like Warm Springs in ever higher numbers. By the end of the 19th century, between 150,000 and 200,000 tourists visited Salt Lake Valley every year, which meant that nearly four tourists visited Salt Lake City for every resident of the city in 1902.

Tourism was a power that—both actively and passively—forced communities to change their presentation. As Hal Rothman writes, “rather than an exchange of cultures that transforms the visitor, more often the result [of tourism] is that the ‘visited’ bear the brunt of change as they seek to fashion themselves in the image of what visitors seek in the competition for the dollars that tourists bring.” In this way, tourism was demanding in its imagination of a place as well as its

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76 Walker, Railroading Religion, 112.
77 Walker, Railroading Religion, 36.
79 White, Railroaded, 140-141.
80 White, Railroaded, xxi-xxiv.
81 Walker, Railroading Religion, 77-78.
82 Notably, LDS authorities were pleased that the Union Pacific allowed them to control the demographic make-up of the teams that Mormons would be sent to work in; this control meant LDS authorities could exclude the Irish and Chinese laborers so common in many railroad work camps. Walker, Railroading Religion, 74.
83 This mirrored the fact that, in the East, the fast expansion of railroads was creating a massive boom in the resort business, with, for example, 16 of 80 establishments in Virginia and West Virginia opening in the years between 1865 and 1895 as railroads linked the states on the East coast together. Chambers, Drinking the Waters, 205. Railroads were also built to serve the growing mines throughout northern Utah.
84 Hafen, “City of Saints, City of Sinners,” 355-356.
financial influence on business. Tourists added their own layer to the meaning of any place they visited, just by virtue of having expectations for it.

The national shift in tourism was the result of a mass marketing campaign of the West that compared locations in the region to well-known European attractions. The campaign—often called “See America First”—advertised that the West was a sort of Americanized Europe that “included standard sublime and picturesque vistas dotted with buffaloes, Indians, Mormons, and frontier gunmen.” As historian Anne Farrar Hyde demonstrates in this quote, Mormons were positioned alongside Indigenous peoples and buffaloes as an exotic attraction of the West. Salt Lake City barely needed to advertise itself. At least, Salt Lake City didn’t need to advertise itself as long as residents were fine with the East’s vision of Salt Lake Valley.

The East’s imagination of Salt Lake Valley was constructed by a variety of mediums, including word of mouth, travel accounts, and newspapers. As the railroads spread across the West, a new medium emerged: the tourist guide. These guides, small enough to fit in a traveler’s pocket, contained maps and short descriptions of key sights along the railroad. The idea was that travelers would buy a guide like Crofutt’s Trans-Continental Tourist’s Guide and read sections of it as they sat in a railcar, staring at the window at the landscape rushing by. These guides constructed a place that would appeal to visitors, a place where they would be entertained and could affirm their own identity. Unlike the Mormons and Gentiles residing in the valley, tourists knew they did not belong in the place they visited. As a result, when constructing Salt Lake City as a place, tourists didn’t assume that Mormons needed to leave. In fact, many railroad guides simultaneously highlighted and softened Mormon presence rather than condemning it.

Thomas Hafen, writing about how tourism changed Mormon presentation, demonstrates how railroad guides even took on Mormon narratives of how they settled the land, adding to the story only the claim that Mormons had been “tamed” of their barbarism. Railroad promotions explained that visitors could see the remnants of a time “now happily passed away, when polygamy was quite the thing in Utah.”

Utah, in the tourist conception of it, was a safe place to observe Mormons, the Other, without any harm or damage to the tourist themselves.

This othering extended to the landscape. As early as 1869, railroad guides began promoting the vision of Salt Lake Valley as an accessible version of the distant Orient. Maps were included in the guides to help tourists imagine the comparison. These maps equate the Dead Sea with the Great Salt Lake, the Sea of Tiberias with Utah Lake, the Jordan River with the Jordan River, and Salt Lake City with Jerusalem (fig. 3). Of course, maps are always some version of a lie. When compared to other maps, the Union Pacific railroad guide’s map clearly manipulated the orientation, size, and highlighted features of each area to make the comparison less ambiguous. By understanding Salt Lake Valley as a parallel to Canaan, the valley is defined by the presence of Mormons rather than by the Mormon residents themselves.
With the advent of the railroad, Warm Springs became a kaleidoscope of perspectives. Different people saw different Warm Springs. Tourists looked for the exotic Mormon and for leisurely entertainment that was delivered conveniently. Mormon residents were proud of a location they had worked to make their own and saw a place that facilitated health and social connection. Gentile residents saw an opportunity for capital in competition with Mormons. Indigenous peoples had been displaced from Warm Springs, although their absence informed the stories told about it. Yet Salt Lake City, for all that it was involved in affirming an imagined America, was not yet officially American.

VI The Capitol: Building a City on Top of a Remembered Place

In the traditional narrative of Utah, Salt Lake City became irrevocably American in the 1890s. Tourists’ imagination, the influence of the railroad, and the crackdown by the American government succeeded in pacifying the worst of Mormon doctrine. The years 1890 and 1896 are the two most important dates in this narrative. In 1890, the President of the LDS Church released a statement

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95 Hafen adds nuance to this traditional narrative saying that, in order to challenge stereotypes of barbarism and ignorance, “Mormons’ dream of utopia changed from a self-contained theocracy to a community exemplifying the educational, social, and economic goals shared by the elite classes of American society.” Hafen, “City of Saints, City of Sinners,” 377; Walker undermines it entirely. Walker, *Railroading Religion.*
that was understood to be an official end of polygamy within the LDS Church. In 1896, Utah became a state. Statehood was meant to be a turning point: since the 1830s, Mormons had been in conflict with the American government, but now they were finally brought to heel.

In a place-based history, this clean division of history cannot be accepted. The idea that Mormons “became” American misrepresents the fact that the LDS Church was founded in America and never truly cut ties with it. At the same time, Mormon resistance to the American government did not end with statehood in the 1890s. Many men, particularly those with authority in the LDS Church, spent the next couple of decades avoiding government officials or proudly being sent to jail for their practice of polygamy. However, the traditional narrative does reflect a relatively quick shift in the story Mormons told about themselves and their place. A look at what stories older residents told the new generation of children growing up now within the borders of the United States reveals how the past was constructed to inform a vision of the future.

As the 19th century turned over into the 20th, Salt Lake City worked to redefine itself as a location to be proud of as an American. This shift is exemplified in a 1907 article in a local newspaper titled “A Transformation is Coming.” In it, the author says that “Last week we ventured to compare the city of Washington as it is with the Salt Lake City that is to be. Some people laughed at the comparison. We do not hate those people; we are just sorry for them.” The article goes on to describe the lovely orchards filling the valley, the success of the mining industry, the progress in constructing a capitol building, and the natural health of the valley’s hot springs. “Take heart,” the article ends, “the loveliest city between the seas is beginning even now to round into form right here.” In this short article, a new group of people is being mentally constructed: Utahns. Unsurprisingly, while new, the narrative reflects its primarily Mormon roots. The particular focus in the article on orchards and the concept of tithing are examples of this inheritance. At the same time, pride in belonging in an American city that rivals Washington outshines the 19th century concerns about having an exclusively Mormon land. Gentiles could imagine themselves as part of this place, too.

Warm Springs found itself wrapped up in this new imagination as people pushed to reinvigorate it. Beginning in 1890, people began to call for a bigger and better sanitarium that would pump water from Warm Springs into downtown. These calls often drew on old notions of health with, for example, a 1905 article saying that a physician from Los Angeles thought that Salt Lake City was a particularly wonderful place to build a sanitarium because the “high, dry air, the presence of it of the salt from the lake, the infrequency of strong winds, the alternating currents of air from valley to mountains and mountains to valley, the sunlight, the springs, all combined, make Salt Lake Valley a perfectly natural sanitarium.” While using familiar notions of a healthy country, this narrative is turning it to a slightly new purpose. Because the valley is so healthy, it is natural that Salt Lake City should be an expansive city with all the best facilities.

The city government got involved in affirming this story. Karl Scheid, running for city commissioner in 1915, based a significant part of his platform on the promise that he would make a new municipal bathhouse at Warm Springs. Although his promise took time to fulfill—one tax meant to fund the construction of the bathhouse was tied to other less popular improvements and failed—Salt Lake City took back total control of Warm Springs in 1916. Finally, in 1922, a new bathhouse was completed. While built in the Spanish Colonial Revival style—a style reminiscent

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97“A Transformation is Coming,” Goodwin’s Weekly, April 6, 1907.
100Karl Scheid,” Goodwin’s Weekly, October 9, 1915.

Warm Springs, the current building that stands today, was part of an effort to reimagine Salt Lake City as a place worthy of consideration within the American landscape because of its demonstrated success as an American city. The tensions between Mormons and Gentiles were certainly not gone. Tourists continued to see Salt Lake City as a place of the exotic Other. But a new story was emerging that could potentially encompass a larger portion of the population. Warm Springs had featured in multiple generations of current Salt Lake City residents’ experiences. This locus of memories and meaning made it a useful place to imagine the future as well as to forget the past.\footnote{As Jared Farmer explains, “all societies have demonstrated a facility to forget the past and also to believe what they want to about the past, even in the face of inconsistent evidence. People can create meaningful connections to olden times without formal history lessons or academic degrees.” Farmer, On Zion’s Mount, 370-372.}

Notably, Indigenous peoples were not a part of this new story of Utah. Instead, Salt Lake City residents used Warm Springs as a place to stage, erase, and reframe Indigenous displacement. Erasing Indigenous peoples or using stereotypical caricatures of them in stories of the past was a pattern already well-established in the East, particularly around hot springs. As Chambers explains, “During the early nineteenth century, as Americans struggled to create a national culture distinct from that of their colonial parent, Great Britain, memories of the Revolutionary era and the idealized image of the noble savage became increasingly important and prevalent cultural symbols. Both were distinctly American.”\footnote{Chambers, Drinking the Waters, 34. For more discussion of the reimagining of Indigenous peoples in the stories of springs, see Chambers, Drinking the Waters, 33-36; Farmer, On Zion’s Mount, 282-378; Valenčius, The Health of the Country, 157.}

Similarly, both of the stories told about Warm Springs around the turn of the 20th century were constructing it as an American place. Stories of Warm Springs either imagined a future where all the city’s residents would be proud to enjoy its waters or imagined a past where Indigenous peoples never existed or simply happened to disappear. Both narratives were distinctly American.

Making the erasure of Indigenous peoples at Warm Springs visible requires comparison, since it is quite literally looking for the absence of a story. For our purposes, we can compare two stories of the “Miracle of the Gulls”—the one told by John Nebeker in the 1880s and one outlined in a lesson plan written for Sunday School in 1916. The lesson plan was titled “The Crickets and the Gulls” and was published in a Mormon magazine intended for Sunday School instructors. Cultivating a tradition of Mormon collective memory, the lesson plan provides teachers with a narrative of what the first Mormon settlers to arrive in Salt Lake Valley experienced. The three outlined sections condense years of time to the degree that it takes on a myth-like quality. The first section tells the teacher to “Speak of their...trips of exploration—for instance, Brigham Young was the first to put his hand in the lake; Warm Springs was visited; the stars and stripes raised on Ensign Peak.” The second section gestures to, essentially, a decade of city development when it says, “irrigation [] made it possible to convert the desert into a rose.” The third section tells the story of the plague of crickets that the Mormons struggled to defend against in the first years of settlement. It describes how, after praying, an army of seagulls came from the Great Salt Lake to deliver the Mormon settlers from the plague.\footnote{“Lesson Plan 19,” Juvenile Instructor 51, no. 10 (October 1916), 701-702.} Notably, no Indigenous peoples appear anywhere in this settlement story: neither their presence, their interactions with Mormons, nor the way they dealt with the crickets. Where Nebeker had denied that Indigenous people had control over their environment—implying that Mormons had a better claim to the land—this narrative simply removes them altogether.

Warm Springs becomes almost casually involved as the lesson plan explains that “children living in or near Salt Lake City should be directed to see some of these places and locations that are still.
standing” including Warm Springs. The lesson plan is not only creating an idea of place, but encouraging the literal travel to places to practice seeing a particular past within them. The lesson plan transforms local residents into spectators of their own history. They become tourists of an imagined past as they look at a landscape and see it as a location representing their cultural ancestors.

The construction of Salt Lake City as an American city required a reimagining of its past. As new generations grew up, they relied on their community, their education, and their family to tell them why they belonged in this place. The story their community told them was one of progress comparable to that of the great cities of America. The story their education told was one of hard work, hardship, and well-earned success. The story their parents told them was one of virtue and of natural belonging. This is a healthy country, these new stories echoed, a healthy country in which to erase an uncomfortable past.

VII The Quarries: Industrializing a Place of Health

If Warm Springs became a location that so many of these memories relied upon, a place that had seen so much work go into it, why does it sit abandoned today? The stories told thus far have shown no signs of stopping, only of shifting course. The answer, in my opinion, comes down to a matter of a change in people. However, other writers have attributed the fall of Warm Springs’ popularity to differing reasons, including the increase in industry around it and a change in notions of health. These other stories certainly reflect changes in the social environment around Warm Springs, and they therefore deserve consideration.

Since Mormons first arrived in the valley in large numbers, industry was visible from Warm Springs. The widespread industry fit into the Mormons’ conception of the valley as suitable because it could be used to build their promised land. When, for example, Thomas Bullock first arrived in the valley, he remarked on the stone surrounding the valley—which could be used to build a city—as an indication of its suitability. This belief led to Mormons happily accepting the growth of quarrying industries. According to the historian Rebecca Andersen, “Mormons removed resources from their mountain ramparts with an almost worshipful regard... By wisely utilizing these resources, Mormons hoped to redeem their arresting alpine backdrop.” Quarrying, when used for the right purposes, was an acceptable, even beautiful, part of the Mormon landscape.

While recorded on maps and in discussion of city planning, industrial locations around Warm Springs show up less often in the accounts of travelers to the valley. Visitors saw what they wanted to see, and that often didn’t include the limestone workers slowly working their way into the mountain behind their healthy resort. However, quarrying did fit into some outsider’s vision of the landscape,
particularly those interested in the story of geology. One of the earliest visual depictions of the mark that industry was leaving on the land around Warm Springs comes from Grove Karl Gilbert. A visiting geologist to the valley in 1877, Gilbert was attempting to trace the geologic evidence of the ancient Bonneville Lake. While gathering evidence for his theory, he used the lime-kilns behind Warm Springs to explain the mineral makeup of the mountain; Warm Springs and Beck’s Hot Springs are referenced only to help pinpoint the physical location.\textsuperscript{112}

Over time, the individually run lime-kilns described by Gilbert evolved into larger companies. One man, in 1902, is announced in the local mining review as contracting with the American Smelting & Refining company—now part of the Rocky Mountain Power Company—to provide 500 tons of rock daily from “a quarry north of the warm springs.”\textsuperscript{113} The increase in quarrying aligned with the emergence of the oil industry, with the first oil refinery near Warm Springs built in 1909.\textsuperscript{114} In the 1920s, both the oil industry and quarrying industry around Warm Springs began to pick up steam in response to a growing consumer base and improving technologies.\textsuperscript{115}

Local residents complained about this physical shift that destabilized their notion of place. In 1908, the Deseret News approved of a proposal to beautify Ensign Peak—the small mountain directly adjacent to Warm Springs—as long as the surrounding area would also “be protected from the encroachments of the sand and gravel diggers who are now defacing the landscape back of Salt Lake.”\textsuperscript{116} The proposal was not followed through on. Although physical change was disruptive, the story of Warm Springs as a small piece of a beautiful city that was becoming part of a larger America could withstand the defacement of the mountain behind it. The other commonly blamed culprit for the closure of Warm Springs was a change in notions of health.\textsuperscript{117} As established by many historians, the nation shifted from a belief in miasma theory to that of germ theory by the early half of the 20th century.\textsuperscript{118} This shift was particularly evident at the end of World War I when the 1918-1919 Influenza broke out across the United States. By then, public health authorities had been given legal power to close down businesses, and they actively used public health campaigns to promote mask-wearing.\textsuperscript{119} Hot spring resorts across Salt Lake Valley experienced the effects of this changing perception of health. Saratoga Springs, near Utah Lake, faced increasing rumors of poor sanitation: a local newspaper reported in 1920 that “‘some malicious persons for personal reasons’ were gossiping that health conditions were not good at the resort and that a ‘person with an incurable contagious disease was at the place.’” A county health inspector—notably not a doctor or a local patient as was the norm in the late 1800s—reaffirmed the health of the resort. However, the authority of the city official was not strong enough to stop another rash of rumors in 1924 that claimed local pools had caused serious sickness.\textsuperscript{120} In response to these complaints, in 1930, Saratoga Springs began filling its pools with chlorinated water rather than water from the hot springs they once drew from.\textsuperscript{121}

\textsuperscript{112}Grove Karl Gilbert, \textit{Lake Bonneville}, vol. 1. (United States Geological Survey, 1890), 348-349.
\textsuperscript{113}With Engineers and Millmen,” \textit{Salt Lake Mining Review}, July 15, 1902.
\textsuperscript{116}Good Forest Suggestions,” \textit{The Deseret News}, September 16, 1908. I pull my understanding of this narrative from Rebecca Andersen.
\textsuperscript{117}Good Forest Suggestions,” \textit{The Deseret News}, September 16, 1908. I pull my understanding of this narrative from Rebecca Andersen.
\textsuperscript{119}Notably, even in 1918, the authority of public health officials was contended with. Nancy Tomes, "’Destroyer and Teacher:’ Managing the Masses During the 1918–1919 Influenza Pandemic,” \textit{Public Health Reports} 125 no. 3 (2010): 49-50.
\textsuperscript{120}As quoted in Wagoner, “Saratoga,” 118.
\textsuperscript{121}Wagoner, “Saratoga,” 118; Beck’s Hot Springs, operating along similar logic, advertised itself in 1932 with three
However, narratives about the world do not just disappear at the command of authorities. Miasma theory still informed people’s perception of health well into the 20th century. Acknowledging the momentum of this perception helps explain why, in 1935 and 1936, Warm Springs was seriously discussed as a location to build a therapeutic center for patients with infantile paralysis, a condition that is the result of a polio infection. An article Salt Lake Telegram professed its qualities in a way reminiscent of earlier advertisements which focused on the environment and on comparing Warm Springs with the East: “Salt Lake City, endowed with a valuable supply of naturally warm water, would be made an infantile paralysis treatment center surpassing even the famed Warm Springs of Georgia, under plans announced Saturday… [One of the people making the plan] pointed out that the sulfur water used in the Wasatch plunge is as beneficial as the Georgia water and has in addition chemicals that aid in treatment of the disease.” The momentum of the narrative around this place kept people coming back to Warm Springs as a place of pride and a place to heal.

The reason writers point to changing notions of health as the cause of Warm Springs’ abandonment is because they were cited in the moment as the reason for its closure. In an ironic turn, less than a decade after it was recommended as a location to treat polio, Warm Springs and other public swimming pools were closed because of an endemic of polio in 1943. While Warm Springs quickly reopened, in 1946 the University of Utah began investigating the cleanliness of Warm Springs, echoing concerns like those that had pushed Saratoga Springs to change its water source the previous decade.

Still, stories of Warm Springs as a place of health lived on in people’s memories. That May, Fred Tedesco—the city commissioner in charge of Salt Lake City parks, including Warm Springs—pushed back against the allegations of poor sanitation, explaining that it met all health standards set by the city. He also disclosed that since the pool discussion arose several weeks ago he had received hundreds of telephone calls from the hundreds of paralysis victims who have been helped by the water at the plunge. ‘These people don’t want the pools closed,’ Mr. Tedesco said. ‘Would it not be calamitous to eliminate this health spot since it has proved so helpful to so many unfortunate paralysis victims?’ Despite this call on previous notions of place, by September, public opinion was against Warm Springs.

The tests “condemned the plunge as unsanitary and a menace to health.” The building closed in May 1947. For over a year, newspapers followed the gradual process of assessing the building, hiring contractors, and the many delays involved in renovating Warm Springs according to the reports’ recommendations. When the building reopened in December of 1948, the main pools were no longer fed by the hot spring water that had enchanted people for so long. For some years more, the smallest pool, used only privately, would continue to be fed by the sulfurous springs. Warm Springs would stay open, although in a reduced capacity. It slowly lost funding from the city and gradually limited its hours. It finally closed its doors in 1976. Officially, it closed because

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123-S. L. Infantile Paralysis Center with Sulphur Baths Planned.”


it could not draw a big enough crowd to justify its expenses or to fix the failing roof. However, money follows people: why did people stop visiting Warm Springs?

Most local histories or newspapers about Warm Springs attribute its closure to one of three larger historical trends: changing notions of health, a shift in recreation, or industry. Certainly, a shift in American understanding of health and who had the authority to determine it helped to justify the renovation of Warm Springs. While not covered here, a shift in recreational patterns also played a role, with people increasingly turning to the mountains as a place to hike and ski rather than the lakes and springs as a place to swim and play. Additionally, the quarries around Warm Springs continuously chipped away at the visuals that local residents had seen as beautiful. But, I argue that these shifts were all too gradual to explain the sudden shift in public opinion.

The key shift was that World War II incited a massive and rapid change in population in the counties around Warm Springs. A new population, as we have explored, brings new notions of place.

Utah was chosen as the location of many of the United States wartime industrial plants and military bases. Wartime industry makes jobs, and people will move from all over to fill those jobs. Accordingly, the county around Warm Springs saw a 95.6% increase in population between 1940 and 1950. As historian Thomas G. Alexander argues, this massive increase in population caused a shift in the social fabric of Utah. Contemporary accounts show how locals complained about ugly housing and blamed newcomers for increased crime. These complaints, while racist in their undertones, reflect a genuine reality of climbing divorce rates and crime statistics across the state that were high even when compared to the rest of the United States during World War II. Warm Springs—sitting in Salt Lake City’s industrial corridor—was surrounded by this new population. New people meant a new group to imagine place and a new group for existing residents to include or exclude from their imagined space. Warm Springs had to be reimagined to fit that new population.

In the process, the history of Warm Springs as a Mormon place of health and culture moved onto monuments, interpretive signs, and into written history.

Connection to a certain story of a place requires time and effort. Mormons had displaced Indigenous peoples in order to claim this land as their own. Warm Springs supported stories of Salt Lake City and of Utah, and was in turn shaped by the stories of those larger places. While challenged by Gentiles, the United States government, and tourists, this story survived the gradually

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130 Grandy and Vlasic, “Salt Lake City Historical Report,” 5.
132 Farmer, On Zion’s Mount.
133 Andersen, “‘For the Strength of the Hills.’”
134 Utah was chosen because it was “then a secure distance from the West Coast and the nation’s northern and southern borders but nevertheless convenient to rail and auto transportation and population centers.” Industrial plants built or expanded during the war—including Utah Oil Refining Company—were converted to private use in the years following. Thomas G. Alexander, “Utah War Industry during World War II: A Human Impact Analysis,” Utah Historical Quarterly 51, no. 1 (1983): 74-75, 85.
137 A study completed in England, for instance, demonstrated that length of residence in the community explains better than any other variable the existence of social and kinship bonds and sentiment supportive of the community. Alexander, “Utah War Industry during World War II,” 91; Compare this observation to the results from a survey completed in the 2010s which “found that more than half [of the 530] said they lacked places to experience community. Nearly 83 percent of respondents said they don’t visit the city-owned Warm Springs Park on a regular basis, but 96 percent said they would if the hot springs returned as a community gathering place.” Semerad, “Neighbors hope to restore the mineral baths.”
changing city around it. But it did not survive an abrupt upheaval in demographics. Today, the Warm Springs Alliance is trying to bring a version of this story back.

Reading Warm Springs like a Place Today

Our map is fully rendered—each area marked by layers of sketches, erasures, and repaintings. Walking through Warm Springs Park now, we can see more than just the surface-level landmarks but the depth of history behind them. With this reorientation, we can address the claims to place put forward by the Warm Springs Alliance.

Dan Flores, in his essay collection titled *The Natural West*, opens and closes the book by pointing us to the question of how to restore the West. It’s an unsurprising question, considering the evident harm done to the environment and the people in the West over the past two centuries. However, Flores questions this impulse, asking “When we talk about “restoring” the West, what in fact are we trying to recreate?” Which place are we restoring at Warm Springs? Who’s place are we restoring?

Time does not run backwards and space cannot contain two things at once. What story is the Warm Springs Alliance trying to recreate?

For Warm Springs to be a place for everyone, it would simultaneously need to be a place where Indigenous peoples make their home in the winter, a place that Mormons control in all aspects, a place where tourists come to see an exotic Other, a place where the city makes its vision of the future known, and a place where companies dig away at the mountain. Warm Springs would need to do justice to the people in Warm Springs’ history who fought, welcomed, took advantage of, and messily helped each other. Warm Springs is *all* of these places. An honest excavation of its history must reconcile the many layers of meaning layered over this one imagined location. However, physical reality is not as forgiving as imagination. Time alters space, and people change.

When the Warm Springs Alliance calls on collective notions of belonging, they *necessarily* call on specific conception of place. Often, Warm Springs Alliance calls on a Warm Springs from roughly the beginning of the 20th century. Those references, however, are mixed with something new. In a newspaper article from 2018, they see Salt Lake City as a city for *global* pride because “Warm Springs offers Salt Lake an unprecedented opportunity to increase its already growing reputation for being one of the greenest, most inclusive and thriving cities in the country.” They speak to recent concerns of health, directly rejecting the rumor that the industries around Warm Springs have contaminated the water. They speak to the erasure of Indigenous people, saying that they plan to “infuse elements of Native American history into the restored spa.”138 Notably, their promotions don’t include a chart filled with measurements of sodium chloride, sulfate, carbonate and silica. Their restoration plans don’t include restored lime-kilns or a new oil refinery. Those, they implicitly say, are not a part of this place.

The Warm Springs Alliance is telling a new story about Warm Springs, something that pulls from a remembered past in order to create an imagined future. They are committed to constructing a place that reflects their own sense of belonging. And, if enough people tell their story, it is certain to leave a mark.

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138 Semerad, “Neighbors hope to restore the mineral baths.”
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