

The Path to Utah Statehood



Mormon Temple, commemorating statehood, 1896. Courtesy: Special Collections Dept., J. Willard Marriott Library, University of Utah

Mormon settlers began a westward exodus, escaping persecution, in the 1830s. When they arrived in the valley of the Great Salt Lake, outside the boundaries of the United States, in 1847, they finally found a home.

The church's strengths -- a cohesive social and economic community and its members' absolute loyalty to their leaders -- threatened some. Critics believed Mormonism combined the roles of church and state in an un-American way. The U.S. government targeted plural marriage, which was, in the words of journalist Ken Verdoia, "the easiest whipping boy for Federal officials who really feared... theocracy in Utah."

Congress would refuse the Utah Territory's applications for statehood for four decades, until the church renounced polygamy in 1890. Then the objections were lifted, and Utah entered the Union on January 4, 1896.