The Way Utah Worked

AN ESSAY BY MATTHEW BASSO AND JOHN PERRY CHRISTENSEN
WITH BUSY HANDS AND MINDS, AMERICAN WORKERS
PERFORM A DIVERSE ARRAY OF JOBS TO POWER
OUR SOCIETY.

Whether we work for professional satisfaction, personal growth, or to ensure the
wellbeing of ourselves and our families, work is part of nearly every American's life.
Office workers, factory workers, homemakers, truckers, and millions more who keep
the nation going through their work make great contributions to American culture
and industry. Work is part of everyday life for all Utahns, so tell us…

HOW DO YOU MAKE A LIVING?

A Division of the Department of Heritage and Arts

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THE WAY UTAH WORKED

Matthew Basso and John Perry Christensen

In August 2016, musician Marian Call asked her thousands of Twitter followers a simple question: What were your first seven jobs? Her question went viral. People from around the country reflected on their work histories and enjoyed sharing them with others. But why? What is it about the work we did – and do – that people find so interesting? Why do we often begin conversations with, “What do you do?” And why does everyone know that the expected answer is meant to convey what one does for paid labor?

Rightly or wrongly, others often see our work as defining who we are. Some people tend to judge our place in society based on our employment, prizing some occupations over others. Think about how differently people view doctors and sanitation workers, or jobs that earn wages versus those – like childcare or housework – that often don’t. Yet, even if we are not troubled by these common assumptions, the work we do – no matter what it is – has a profound impact on our lives. For most Utahns, work is at least a forty-hour per week undertaking. For many, it is far more. And beyond the time we spend working, we know that the actual physical and mental tasks required of us when we are at work, as well as the environment in which we labor, shape us as human beings.

So, what about work in the state of Utah? Is there a “way we work” here? Our state motto, “Industry,” suggests the importance of work in our past, recalling the reputation of early Mormon settlers for having a strong work ethic, for being busy as bees. But work – and a strong work ethic – has been a central part of the lives of Native Americans who lived here long before the arrival of white migrants. Likewise, the racially, ethnically, and religiously diverse peoples that have helped make Utah a cultural crossroads have shared this same approach to work. A strong work ethic, then, is one of the commonalities that bond the millions of workers who have labored in our state. A second commonality is the way the environment has shaped our working lives. It is no exaggeration to say that work was the primary way Utahns engaged nature for much of our state’s history. A third common theme is the communal and community-oriented nature of the way we have worked in Utah.

Let’s keep these three common themes in mind as we look closely at the strong tradition of community-focused work in our state. While there have been thousands of different jobs in Utah, we can only highlight a few here. We will look at how community-focused labor – such as family and small group networks, labor unions, and even government – has played an outsized role in shaping the experience and meaning of work in Utah. Along the way we will look at the forces that sustained – and opposed – these ways of working, as well as changes to our work culture over the last 40 years.

As you read this history, we hope that you think about what it tells you about Utah and how it compares to the work you do now or have done in the past, as well as that done by your family, friends, and others you know. Thinking about changes and consistencies over time in how we work, where we work, who works in what jobs, and why we work, offers us important insights into who we are.
In Utah the family served as the first and most basic form of communal labor. This was true not only of pioneer Mormon families, but also of Native peoples dating back thousands of years. Native groups organized who worked, when, and how according to their conceptions of family and the roles each family member fulfilled as part of a system of shared responsibility. For example, among the many types of work they collectively undertook, Paiute bands (groups of extended families) in southern Utah traveled to pinyon groves to collect one of their most important food sources, pine nuts (tuba). Bands with the longest historical ties to particular pinyon-rich areas welcomed other bands to share these resources, reinforcing an ethic of reciprocity that strengthened extended family ties. Each member of the family had a specific job to do during the tuba harvest. Men shook the nuts loose with sticks and collected them in cone-shaped baskets carried on their backs. Women made the nuts edible by heating them over hot coals, crushing them with stone tools, and stirring them into a thin gruel. Women also wove squawbrush baskets so tight that they held the fine pine nut powder with no waste and were so durable that some of them are still in use today.

Utah’s environment deeply influenced the work of other Native people too. The Northwest Band of the Shoshone and the Northern Ute traversed the often challenging terrain of the Wasatch Front to take advantage of the sustenance provided by its rivers and streams. The Ute bands who gathered around Utah Lake harvested lake trout, hunted deer and elk from the mountains to the valley floor and back again, while gathering seeds, berries, and roots as they went. Although not tied to earning the wages we now consider the primary product of labor, everything it
took to feed, clothe, shelter, defend, and otherwise sustain their families required work. And every member of the Ute family – from elders down to children – participated in that work. Utah’s other tribes also followed time-honored and family-centered ways of collaborating that helped them manage and thrive in their environments.

Arriving in 1847, Mormon settlers dramatically altered the work patterns of Utah’s native peoples as they dispossessed them of their lands. But the two groups shared an understanding of the crucial role environmental factors played in sustaining their communities. The seven streams that crossed the Salt Lake Valley were essential to the success of the first Mormon communities along the Wasatch Front. There and across the state, Mormons settled the land according to the New England Village ideal – which kept their homes close to one another and their fields outside the settlement – and manipulated nature to meet their demand for water. Together they undertook the technical and manual labor involved in surveying and digging dozens of canals and building hundreds of brush dams. They worked so hard at irrigating the land in those initial years that historian Donald Worster jokingly suggested the beaver and dam as their territorial symbols instead of the bee and the hive.

While Mormon communalism dates back to the Latter-day-Saint (LDS) Church’s religious origins – when its adherents deeded their property to church leaders for redistribution among the poor – it also represented a practical response to the situation they faced as they fled west from persecution. By the time they arrived in Utah, Mormons had honed a family-centered communal work ethic that helped them thrive in the Great Basin. Just listen to part of a song Mormons sang, in which they compared themselves to bees in a hive: “Workers are we | No idlers here shall live among our busy, happy band | We gather honey all the year | And plenty can be found on every hand.” Through such hymns, Mormons instilled themselves and their children with an ethic that told them to work hard for the group or risk becoming morally unfit. Experimental communities like Orderville, in Kane County, which LDS Church President Brigham Young chartered in 1875 in an attempt to return to the church’s utopian origins, were the most powerful expression of this communal ethic.

Mormons were not the only religious group to dream of building a communal utopia based on collective labor in the state of Utah. In 1911, eastern Jews following the Zionist call to shun middle class jobs in favor of “back to the soil” farm labor established a colony in Sanpete County. For the next five years, the people of Clarion worked to put their utopian dreams into practice. Initial harvests were good, but the arid environment proved too much to overcome. Clarion’s population dwindled until almost everyone, including most of the colony’s founders, gave up. One of the founders, Benjamin Brown, stayed behind to start a turkey co-operative. Around that same time, exiled Russian religious dissidents known as Molokans left Los Angeles for Box Elder County’s Dove Creek. The Molokans were experienced farmers, but found the land just north and west of the Great Salt Lake impossible to cultivate, and most of them returned to California within a few years. Nonetheless, at Clarion and Dove Creek, and at Orderville where formal communal practices also came to an end, people worked hard for quite some time to keep Utah’s utopian roots alive by laboring cooperatively and close to the land.
This was also the case for Native Americans who, in order to survive and to continue to sustain their extended families, entered the wage work economy. Workers doing a wide variety of jobs – from preparing and serving food, to cutting hair, to repairing machines, to teaching, to banking – provided essential services to those main industries. This bound communities together in yet another type of interdependence.

Much of the work done to sustain Utah communities – including providing the labor necessary so that men could produce salable goods – was done by women. And most of this labor, such as raising children, managing homes, and tending to gardens and orchards, went unpaid. Even as Utah’s economy modernized and work became increasingly shaped by industrialization, women continued to do the unpaid work that bound communities together, kept Utahns healthy, and allowed men to earn wages. But not all women’s work was unpaid. Midwives like Hannah Sorenson, for example, performed the majority of medical care in some Utah communities with remarkable skill and caring until nearly the mid-twentieth century. And they did so for wages (see box).

Although larger-scale communal labor is no longer found in Utah, the family mode of communal work continues today, albeit altered by a changing economy that often requires two breadwinners for families to make ends meet. Likewise, many Utah communities are still connected and sustained by the paid and unpaid work their residents do.

Even those Mormon families who did not participate in communal experiments joined into small communities that extended the idea of collective family labor into a system designed to support many families. Women typically remained inside the village, where they tended their homes, orchards, and children. The majority of men worked outside the village on farms. Mormons donated (tithed) one of every ten days of work to their church in order to labor on shared projects. So when the men were not busy with their own enterprises, church leaders coordinated them in the construction of fencing, irrigation systems, adobe yards, sawmills, and flourmills, all directed toward the public good. Mormon businesspeople even pooled their resources in 1868 to start a department store that operated according to their communal ideals. At first, the Zion’s Cooperative Mercantile Institution (ZCMI) saw merchants working together to purchase goods in bulk and bring prices down. Eventually, as Utah’s economy became more integrated with the rest of the country, ZCMI operated more like a standard department store. This move paralleled the next phase of Utah’s changing economic and labor system.

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By the early twentieth century all but a few small Utah communities had entered a cash-based economy (versus one based on the bartering of goods and services) that was primarily built around agricultural or extractive industries.
In the late nineteenth century some women did receive compensation for their labor. In 1896 at the age of 60, Hannah Sorensen – a Danish Mormon immigrant driven by faith and a personal belief that women should be taught a holistic approach to medicine – moved to Bluff to serve as a paid midwife for southeastern Utah. Her work there mirrored that of other midwives in Utah who became, as one observer put it, the “doctor, the obstetrician, the allround [sic] physician for disorders physical and mental.”

Sorensen’s workday could have included setting a broken bone, a procedure described by another Utah midwife as “pulling on it and pressing with the thumbs and fingers until you feel it slip into place,” and then wrapping and splinting the break. Or she might have procured and administered the folk remedies so popular in Mormon Utah of that era. Delivering newborns was work that often lasted for several days. But no matter how long the delivery took, after the birth, midwives would either visit daily or stay with the new mother during the typical ten-day confinement. During this period, midwives not only cared for the mother and child, but often cooked and cleaned, and took charge of other children in the household. While some have argued that midwives chose their occupation based on “natural instinct” or a particular sense of devotion or mission, midwifery was one of the few jobs in nineteenth century Utah where women earned wages and served the community, which might also explain growing interest in the trade.

Hundreds of women who received training in Salt Lake City took up midwife positions across the state. They charged between $2.50 to $10.00 for delivery and post-delivery care. The wages they earned for this and other health-related work, alongside the demand for their specialized skills, afforded midwives more autonomy than many women had. They were not free, however, from the gender-based expectations that women consistently faced in the workplace. Sorensen’s advice to southeastern Utah women who wanted to be midwives that they be “refined, quiet, and sensitive… a true lady” mirrored that of Dr. Ellis Shipp, the leading trainer of Utah midwives, who contended that women healthcare workers “should be pleasant; look clean, particularly the finger nails; should be good cooks and serve food artfully… not be too talkative in the sick room [nor] communicate a sick person’s thoughts and actions to others.”
In the latter part of the nineteenth century, industrialization began to affect all sectors of Utah’s economy and catalyzed a new type of work community: labor unions. Labor unions often included as members new immigrants who had come to seek work in Utah, furthering its reputation as a crossroads of the West. At the same time, unions, employers, as well as Utah society more generally, often proved inhospitable to racial and ethnic minorities. These kinds of divisions made it difficult to foster a truly inclusive community-oriented work culture.

Mining, one of Utah’s major industries, illustrates the possibilities and challenges of building community in the industrial era. Initially, Utah miners worked alone or in small groups. They used placer mining techniques in stream beds or open pits in an effort to gather high-value minerals like gold and silver with minimal equipment or up-front cash. But accessing Utah’s richest mineral deposits required sophisticated mechanized equipment and larger workforces, and the companies to back them. The promise by mining companies and labor agents (called padrones) of well-paying mining jobs brought migrants from elsewhere in the United States and from Greece, Italy, Great Britain, and other parts of Europe. Miners found that conditions underground – darkness, heat, dampness, and bad air – made work difficult and dangerous. They saw much of this difficulty and danger as a by-product of employers’ desire to maximize profits by, among other things, using new industrial mining technologies. For instance, compressed air drills introduced in the 1870s and 1880s produced significantly more of the rock dust that made many miners ill and eventually led to early death. In addition, by enabling one man to remove considerably more ore from a rock face, compressed air drills allowed employers to shift many men to lower-paying mucking and shoveling jobs.
Utah’s miners found that as individuals they had little traction in their negotiations with bosses to improve working conditions, safety, pay, and benefits. In response they created unions, organizations that represented them as a community of workers and allowed them to bargain collectively. At first these were local associations that represented only small groups. But, finding strength in numbers, the associations sought to grow larger. In 1893, many of the West’s local miners unions – including the Eureka Miners Union, which represented most of the miners in Juab County’s Tintic Mining District, one of Utah’s most active mining areas from 1870 to 1930 – met in Butte, Montana, to form the Western Federation of Miners (WFM). The WFM offered the possibility of industry-wide bargaining and support to smaller unions that often felt isolated in their struggle to improve the working conditions of their members. The rise of the WFM coincided with the growing power of corporations and some workers’ desire to use unions to change the political and economic system in the United States. Just a few months before the WFM was founded, Eureka’s unionized miners went on strike when employers closed a mine and lowered pay from $3.00 to $2.50 a day. After seven months marked by violence and growing despair, miners returned to work at the lower pay rate. But neither they nor miners in other parts of Utah lost their belief in the importance of workers’ unions. In the first sixteen years of the twentieth century 35 new WFM local unions were organized in Utah.

The community of unionized workers in the West succeeded (to a greater degree than their eastern counterparts) in using their collective power at the ballot box to win legislation that improved their working conditions, assisted them if they were injured or fell ill on the job, and provided better living conditions for their families and greater educational opportunities for their children. Many of these successes came in the midst of the financial crisis that led to high rates of unemployment in the United States between 1893 and 1897. In 1894, for instance, nearly 50 percent of Salt Lake City’s workers were out of a job, a situation that could have easily led to greater disunity. Instead, Utah’s unionized workers stuck together and successfully employed their strategy of backing candidates – no matter the party – willing to support key pro-worker provisions in the state’s founding 1895 constitution. Led by bricklayers, stonemasons, and stonecutters, the Utah Federated Trades and Labor Council called for reforming women and child labor practices and ending convict labor. Their most far-reaching victory was securing the eight-hour workday, an act with profound consequences for generations of Utahns.

Utah miners were the first private employees in the nation to achieve what is now considered the standard workday across the United States. Late-nineteenth century courts typically held that eight-hour day legislation was illegal because it restricted an individual’s right to negotiate his or her own hours of work, an employer-friendly analysis that underscored the idea of individualism while ignoring the inability of most workers to improve their working conditions without calling on their co-workers to speak collectively. The decision to place eight-hour day language in the Utah constitution, and the willingness of other Utahns to support that idea, showed how powerful the idea of community was in the state. It also was crucial to the U.S. Supreme Court’s upholding Utah’s eight-hour day law.
in Holden v. Hardy, an 1898 legal challenge. That victory led workers in other states to submit legislation based on the Utah law – not just for miners, but for those who toiled in other occupations.

A little more than a decade after the WFM was founded, radical labor activists organized the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), a union for laborers in every field of work. By appealing to all workers regardless of race, religion, or skill level, the “Wobblies” – as members of the IWW union came to be known – coordinated successful strikes all over the world but were most active in the American West. In 1913, the Denver & Rio Grande Railroad contracted the Utah Construction Company to build a six-mile stretch of rail. The Wobblies infiltrated the company’s squalid tent camps and organized 1,300 workers on whom the company depended to dig ditches. The workers vowed to interfere with construction until the company provided them with conditions that were, as they put it, “something approaching human.” Soon thereafter, the company shipped in new mattresses, installed sanitary toilets and baths, and slightly raised wages. They also swore to run every Wobbly out of the state.

It was into this turmoil that Swedish immigrant Joe Hill checked into the offices of the IWW’s Local 69 headquartered in Salt Lake City. Most Wobblies knew of Hill by the songs he wrote for the union’s Little Red Songbook. Wobblies used to sing songs from the book as a way of forming community and to sow the seeds of solidarity among their members. Hill not only contributed regularly to the Songbook but also penned some of its most popular songs. He was a celebrity in a union that eschewed celebrity in favor of collectivism. Hill found work in Park City mines, lodgings in Murray, and places to perform everywhere in between. But in January 1914, Salt Lake police arrested Hill under suspicious circumstances and charged him for the murder of a local grocer. The state of Utah made him a martyred labor hero almost two years later when it executed him amid a cascade of international protest. In one of his final letters to his comrades in the IWW, Hill wrote, “Don’t waste any time mourning. Organize!” Notably, the IWW continues to fight for workers’ collective rights and maintains an active branch in Utah to this day.

The activism of groups like the WFM and the IWW, and legislative victories like the eight hour day notwithstanding, mining in Utah remained highly dangerous for workers, and mining companies remained strongly opposed to the form of workers’ community represented by unions. Carbon County’s Winter Quarters mine disaster in 1900 – which saw at least 200 men lose their lives – was followed by the nearby Castle Gate mining disaster in 1924, which caused 172 deaths. Both served as powerful spurs to union organizing efforts. But Utah’s mine owners used many methods – including labor spies and black lists – to successfully fracture the unanimity of the workforce and block the formation of local unions. It was not until President Franklin Roosevelt ushered in a new labor-friendly era in the 1930s that Carbon County miners even succeeded in gaining official recognition as a United Mine Workers of America local. The World War II and postwar years were the high point for unions in Utah, but since the 1970s, sustaining this form of worker community has proven challenging.
INEQUALITIES AND DISCRIMINATION IN THE WORKPLACE

Religious, racial, ethnic, and gender differences have often outweighed the bonds that might otherwise develop among Utah workers through their common economic status or shared work experience. The way workers and employers treated other workers or would-be workers based on these differences played a major role in how each person experienced the workplace, and even determined whether some were allowed to work in certain jobs.

Railroads – both a product and a catalyst of late-nineteenth century industrialization in the United States – offer a powerful example of the forces that often split apart worker communities. The workforce that built the railroads in Utah was remarkably multi-ethnic and included, most prominently, Irish and Chinese workers. But Chinese workers faced enormous violence throughout the American West during this period. The year 1885 was particularly horrific, with racial tensions leading to riots and murders of Chinese in Rock Springs, Wyoming. Whites also robbed, beat, and expelled Chinese in California, the Dakotas, Alaska, Montana, Oregon, New Mexico, and Idaho. In Utah, white workers lashed out at the Chinese in Park City and Ogden. In Ogden, white Union Pacific Railroad employees organized under the union banner of the Knights of Labor led the effort. The Knights’ popularity in Ogden was based in part on their effort to foster community among their supporters, but this often took the form of vilifying the Chinese, the antithesis of the union’s promotion of universal brotherhood. Unlike many other sites of anti-Chinese agitation, Ogden saw not expulsions or other forms of violence, but a lengthy boycott of Chinese businesses.

African Americans were also a sizable presence in the railroad workforce, but their work history in the American West began earlier in the nineteenth century. Fur traders and guides – like James P. Beckwourth and Jacob Dobson
the mountains to the valley floor. And black troops of the 9th Cavalry – the Buffalo Soldiers – were also deployed in 1886 to establish Fort Duchesne in the Uinta Valley to monitor the Ute reservations. But it wasn’t until they went to work for the railroad after the Civil War that African Americans had a significant presence in Utah. Toward the end of the nineteenth century the Pullman Company, which manufactured and operated railroad sleeping cars, began to hire black men to work in segregated positions as porters (shuttling luggage around train stations) and waiters (serving whites on train cars that passed through Utah). The work was reasonably decent and provided African Americans with a rare chance at social mobility. By staying overnight in Ogden, the porters and waiters created a demand for restaurants, clubs, and other forms of entertainment. Ogden was so segregated at the time that, to meet the demand, it needed a black merchant class to provide for black workers. African American business people in Ogden met that demand and succeeded in establishing and running hotels and clubs that came to be known throughout the West. Perhaps the most famous was AnnaBelle Weakley’s Porters and Waiters Club, located on Ogden’s historic 25th Street (see box).

– escaped the strict racial order of the United States by becoming mountain men in and around the Great Basin. Their knowledge of the territory helped put it on the map and spur further settlement. There were also a few African Americans who came with the Mormons to Salt Lake Valley in 1847. Folk tradition even says that a black man – Green Flake – drove Brigham Young’s wagon out of

**ANNABELLE WEAKLEY**

*Business Owner and Community Builder*

AnnaBelle Weakley was born a sharecropper’s daughter in the segregated South. In the 1930s, she made her way to the crossroads of the West to settle in Ogden, Utah. It did not help her escape segregation.

Black porters, waiters, and cooks who worked for the railroads frequently came to Ogden, the state’s busiest railroad hub. Weakley and her husband owned and operated the Porters and Waiters Club, located along Ogden’s historic 25th Street, one of the few places black workers could find a meal and lodging in the city. In its own right, the Porters and Waiters Club also employed a substantial number of African American workers, including a robust entertainment line-up that featured traveling blues and jazz musicians like Fats Domino, Duke Ellington, and B.B. King.

After the Porters and Waiters Club shut down in the 1960s, Weakley continued her community-building efforts. She worked with the Boys and Girls Club, the YMCA, and the Legal Aid Society. She also took on advisory roles in Utah government serving on the Governor’s Black Advisory Council – where she focused on drug and alcohol abuse – as well as well as assisting the prison system as Ethnic Minority Specialist. Throughout her life, she embodied the close ties between work and community.
Racism also framed the experience of many other workers of color in Utah, including Pacific Islanders and Mexicans. For example, Mormon converts from Hawai‘i who came to Utah in the 1870-1880s to build the LDS Temple in Salt Lake were treated as inferiors in the city. The LDS Church sent them in 1889 out to Tooele County – located more than fifty miles from the Temple – to settle their own township. They named their Polynesian community Iosepa, and started a sawmill, created an irrigation system, planted crops, and managed a cattle and sheep operation. After a decade of difficult labor they succeeded in creating a flourishing agricultural community.

Mexican labor in the place that became Utah dates back even further – to the 1776 Dominguez and Escalante expedition that depended on the knowledge and muscle of Mexican Indians – but became more prevalent in the early twentieth century. Mexicans fleeing the violence of their country’s revolution made their way to Monticello to work on San Juan County’s cattle ranches and to work as miners (mineros) at Bingham Canyon above the Salt Lake Valley (see box next page). Mexican workers combated notions that they were a bunch of revolutionaries and strike-breakers, but still found themselves at the bottom of the social ladder, often performing the most dangerous and ill-paid labor in the mines and in other industrial workplaces. In the 1920s, Mexican workers also found jobs as track laborers (traqueros) for the Union Pacific, the Central Pacific, and the Denver & Rio Grande Railways. Traqueros worked in six-man teams responsible for keeping three miles of track clean, weeded, in good repair, and clear of horses or cows. One worker described the work this way: “Everything was done by hand. To carry and load the old rail – we did it by hand. In those days everything was done by hand, by hand alone – load and unload the rail – everything was done by hand.” Before the Great Depression, nearly 70 percent of the track laborers between Milford and Salt Lake City were traqueros of Mexican origin.

When the United States stock market crashed in 1929, the resulting Depression made paid work very scarce. Unemployment devastated Utah and minority workers often found themselves the first to be fired. Forced to jump from job to job, Mexican and Mexican American workers traveled the migrant loop between Wyoming, Montana, Idaho, and Utah, looking for work on the ranches or farms that continued to be the bedrock of Utah’s agricultural economy. Diné (Navajo) farms and ranching operations, which had thrived from the late nineteenth through the early twentieth century – even as Navajo lands were opened to Anglo cattle operations – were told by the Bureau of Indian Affairs in the 1930s that they had to cull their herds. For Diné this opened a period of profound loss similar to the horrific 1860s Long Walk. As a result, many had to leave their ancestral communities to go looking for work in cities, while others joined the migrant work force. The sugar beet farms in Garland, Utah, provided one source of seasonal jobs, although the work was hot and strenuous. “We started work on the farms from the time I was about seven years old,” Francis Yanez (a Mexican American young man at the time) remembers. “We started topping beets in the early season. You were down on your knees, like when you go to church and pray, but this was hour after hour... and the sun would be beating on you, and it would rain on you, and this is the kind of work we did.”

Although manufacturing employed more individuals after World War II than agriculture, Utah’s farming and ranching industry also picked up in the postwar years. During the
When Greek miners went out on strike in 1912, the Utah Copper Company—now known as the Kennecott Corporation—turned to Mexican labor to keep production moving. Despite racial tension, some of the strike-breakers stayed on after the dispute was settled. One of these men—a miner named Rafael Lopez—became a folk hero among Mexican workers for his successful, if violent, defiance of authority.

During the first decades of the twentieth century, the mining camps of Bingham Canyon were sizeable melting pots of Finns, Serbs, Greeks, and French. The Mexicans who looked for work there often had to take the least desirable jobs. One way to avoid this situation and maintain control over their own labor was to lease abandoned mines. Lopez made his reputation as an industrious worker by extracting ore from these dangerous old slopes. He and a partner reportedly made forty dollars a day doing this kind of work. But in November 1913, Lopez killed a fellow miner as they were making their way home after a hard day’s work. Some claim that Lopez lost his temper, pulled a gun, and murdered the man in cold blood. Others say he took revenge on the man who killed his brother. We may never know the truth. But in the days that followed, Lopez became a household name throughout Utah.

When the local police chief led a four-man posse to arrest him, Lopez resisted, killing three more men. In response, Salt Lake City police jailed fifty-four Mexicans on charges of “vagrancy.” A few days later, police chased Lopez into a mine and, in an attempt to force him out, lit hay to fill the cavern with smoke. When Lopez escaped deeper into the mine, police decided to dynamite the area in which they thought Lopez was hiding. But after the smoke cleared, they couldn’t find a body, and no one saw or heard from Lopez again.

Long after the story left the headlines, Mexican miners coping with dangerous work conditions and low pay still talked of Lopez. Even if they deplored the crimes he had committed, they turned him into a folk hero for demonstrating that the same police who could jail Mexicans at will could also be beaten. That his whereabouts remained a mystery gave them hope that he somehow escaped and returned to Mexico.
It seems obvious that working for local, state, or federal governments in Utah is a form of community-oriented labor – it’s why we call it public service, after all. What may not be as obvious is how government-sponsored programs helped to foster communal work in Utah, nor how government has shaped the landscape of work for virtually every Utahn.

Among the first federal workers in Utah were the members of early exploratory expeditions charged with cataloguing the topography, flora, fauna, climate, and natural resources of the West. One of those who came to Utah in this role was Leonard Swett, a young man from Chicago who found a position on an 1879 U.S. Geological Survey team (see box next page). Swett and others who worked for the USGS, along with the sizable number of soldiers stationed in Utah during the nineteenth century, were joined by federal employees working for a wide variety of agencies in the twentieth – the Forest Service, the Bureau of Land Management, the Department of Justice, the Department of Agriculture, the National Park Service, just to name a few. But it was in the 1930s that government employment dramatically expanded in Utah.

The Depression years were hard on the vast majority of Utah residents and, in a move that speaks to how
LEONARD SWETT
Government Work on the Frontier

Starting in the 1840s, government explorers and surveyors began to investigate the Intermountain West more thoroughly, sending out parties to survey and map the area. Leonard Swett came to Utah in 1879 as part of a U.S. Geological Survey team and his letters home illustrate how field work in the West wasn’t just about the job.

Writing from Kanab, Swett described for his parents a small portion of the labor required to simply get the expedition team members to their research sites. “Everybody is very busy just now shoeing mules, jerking beef, overhauling tents, saddles, blankets, etc.” In the field, Swett’s primary task was climate observation, including overseeing the barometers. “The work is to read and record the tenths, hundredths, and thousandths by means of an upper and lower Vernier scale. We also read the thermometer and have charge of an instrument for noting the force and direction of the winds. We also observe and record the percentage of clouds in the sky and their species.”

Utah’s mountains, lakes, deserts, soil, and aridity were constantly featured in Swett’s letters, showing the profound role they played in his day-to-day experience of his work for the government. Like many workers, the landscape and environment in which he worked, as well as the work he did, changed his very appearance. “I fear you would not know [your] boy, so rapidly he is changing to a frontier dandy,” he told his parents. “He has a nose peeled with the heat, lips cracked, hands brown, and lumps of hair standing at irregular intervals all over his face.” Swett also changed his attire to match the work clothes of others in this part of the country. He told his parents that “He wears high boots with high Mexican spurs, pants with a buckskin seat, buckskin trimming at the bottoms, over the knee and around the pockets, with a stray star of buckskin here and there for ornament; a blue shirt, gray duck jacket with plaits in front and trimmed with black braid; and to complete the suit a broad brimmed, white felt hat with buckskin strings to tie under the chin or behind, when the wind blows.”

government work can be a community-focused enterprise, Utahns turned to the federal government to help put them back to work. The Roosevelt Administration responded. In 1933, Utah drew more federal relief per capita than any other state in the union. Government programs and policies have a long history of being controversial in Utah, but Depression-era Utahns gladly accepted federal help. One Federal Emergency Relief Agency field agent complained that Utah was the United States’ “prize ‘gimme’ state.” The major expansion of federally supported jobs that occurred with the Works Progress Administration, the Civilian Conservation Corps, and other work-relief programs during the 1930s, preceded the explosion of government work that took place during World War II.
But the government did more than just create jobs by staffing its military bases during the war. In Ogden, for example, the construction and transportation industries boomed during and after World War II as they built homes around, and provided buses to, Hill Air Force Base. On the base, the military employed people in clerical and other support work, and in engine, radio, and aircraft part repair, as well as in the winterization of combat and bomber planes. By July 1944, Hill Field had mobilized 10,000 civilians and 3,000 military personnel in the war effort, and it was, by far, the largest employer in the state. Off the base, the government relied upon Utah’s educational institutions to implement a Mechanical Learner Program that supplied skilled workers for the base. This community interdependence became an example of what President Dwight D. Eisenhower later called “the military industrial complex.”

The most famous World War II workers, though, were the women widely known as “Rosie the Riveters.” With men deployed, Utah women found work at Fort Douglas, Hill Air Force Base, and other military facilities, such as Geneva Steel and C.F. Fauntleroy’s Parachute Company in Manti (see box next page). Women interviewed about their motivations for working at the parachute plant described how helpful the consistent paycheck was for their families. Asked later about the conflict between contemporary church attitudes toward women working outside the home and what took place at the parachute plant, one local man responded with that most typical of answers: that the war “was a different time.” It may be that, aside from the unusual circumstance of the war, women working at the plant were accepted because the culture of rural Utah recognized that women worked to help their families – whether for wages or not.

It may also have helped that the women were primarily sewing – an occupation that did not threaten gender norms as much as riveting or other industrial work women did across the United States. Either way, as the war came to an end, most of the women who worked for the parachute plant, just like most Rosies across the United States, lost their well-paid wartime production jobs.

Civilian employment at Hill Field also dropped drastically – from about 9,000 to 3,000 people – between the end of World War II and 1950. Military planners around that time started talking about phasing out installations throughout the state, but the Korean War altered that trajectory. Government jobs related to defense once again increased. By the mid-1950s, defense installations accounted for a greater percentage of the income received by Utahns than was the case in any other state. In 1963, a full ten years after the end of the Korean War, Utah’s defense industry employed 26,000 people and accounted for 8 percent of the state’s income. Equally telling – and not considered in the estimated amount of defense-generated income – were the contracts the government signed with local private companies during this period. Between 1957 and 1960 Thiokol Chemical Corporation’s employee roster jumped from less than 100 to over 4,000, and its payroll increased from less than half a million dollars to $22 million. Even when direct military-related job growth slowed, jobs related to the military industrial complex increased. Thiokol built an $11 million facility adjacent to Hill Field and employed workers in the first phase production of the iconic Minuteman missile. Another Utah company, the Hercules Powder Company, built a $15 million facility for the missile’s third-phase production.

Government-supported jobs in the private sector have continued to expand in Utah. These include newer
positions in science and technology, occupational sectors that, along with healthcare, have grown exponentially over the last four decades. Men and women who work directly for the local, state, or federal government – whether in teaching, law enforcement, emergency services, transportation, maintenance, or the countless other fields within government that serve the populace, have a profound effect on Utah. Many who work in this sector see serving their community as one of their primary motivations and goals.

UTAH ROSIES
Stepping Up for the Nation while Keeping the Homefires Burning

Based in Manti, the county seat of rural Sanpete County, C.F. Fauntleroy’s was a repair and manufacturing facility built by the federal government during World War II to aid the war effort and to help the area’s struggling economy. Hundreds of women, married and single, with and without children, worked at the plant as sewers, inspectors, and supervisors.

Like workers of color, women faced limits on the types of jobs they were allowed to do. Some in Utah believed that women should not do wartime production work at all. Their sense of what women ought to do centered on the unpaid domestic work that had long defined female social status. In May 1942, for example, an LDS Relief Society official told her fellow Mormon women, “This Mother’s Day should find the mothers of the Church with young children, at home, devoting their energies to the proper upbringing of those children as their most patriotic gesture in the war.” Only a few months later a Utah State Training School psychologist warned that war jobs for women would produce “a new independence of women.” He worried that women would earn higher pay than their husbands “and as a consequence there may be a shifting to or sharing by fathers of motherly functions.” Those messages were reinforced by the LDS Church’s First Presidency, who told mothers that leaving their children so they could answer the call of wartime “civic service” would lead to motherly “shame.”

Others in Utah, however, talked openly about their admiration for Utah’s wartime women workers, noting that these women continued to do a full-time unpaid job at home and, in some cases, even helped look after the children of some of their female co-workers on different shifts. One male pundit opined, “no mere man can understand fully what a mother goes through who takes care of a family and who works at a factory as well.” And, indeed, in oral histories taken after the war, parachute factory women recalled long and difficult days. “We started work at eight o’clock in the morning, and I was glad to get home after work,” one noted. But then wartime women workers’ “second shift” started. When they got home, another recalled, women had to “fix dinner, scrub on the board, [and] iron.” Women “had to stay up till midnight to get things done at home.”

Women in Manti found more support than condemnation, however, with childcare assistance provided by other women being perhaps the most obvious way community networks came to the aid of the “Mormon Rosies.”
There has never been a greater diversity of work in Utah than there is today. Yet, many of the occupations discussed so far, including government work, have also remained important in Utah’s contemporary era. Utah’s ties to the work involved in farming, ranching, and mining, for example, have not dramatically diminished. Nor has the danger of those jobs, as the 2007 Crandall Canyon mine tragedy in Emery County so painfully reminded us. Newer resource extractive industries like oil and gas have also shaped the state over the last half-century. Like workers in these older natural resource industries, oil and gas workers are expected to have new technical skills while also being able to handle the physically demanding aspects of the job.

The rapid expansion of the energy workforce in the late 1970s and early 1980s brought a large number of new residents to Delta and Vernal, straining community relations and making life more difficult for both the workers and the long-time residents of the communities they were now calling home. While oil and gas have brought job growth, something Utahns of the past almost uniformly hailed, contemporary Utahns are split.
on whether developing this industry is best for the state. Environmental concerns and the quality of the jobs in question are a major part of this debate. The Skull Valley Goshute, for example, have debated whether to house on their reservation lands a nuclear waste facility, which would bring much needed employment but also environmental risks. The Northern Ute, who run a successful oil and gas exploration operation, have also continued to weigh its effect on their land and tribal economy.

Postwar Utah has seen an especially significant expansion of consumer and leisure spending and of jobs related to that spending. Tourism and outdoor recreation, in particular, have become a part of Utah’s identity and a major force in the state’s economy. But Utah’s magnificent scenery was not always understood as a source of pleasure and profit. Early in the twentieth century some Utahns questioned looking to the state’s more extreme terrain for fun. One Provo resident observed that, in the past, you climbed mountains to prospect for minerals, fish for trout to feed your family, or find a lost cow, but you did not spend leisure time up there. “What could you do once you got to the top? Come down. Big deal.” Residents in Utah’s mining towns skied – but only as a form of transportation or, in the case of mailmen who delivered the post by ski, as part of their work. So how did Utahns come to see the mountains as sites of leisure – and jobs?

They began by re-appropriating mining workscapes for recreation. For example, Alta, Utah, was once a busy mining town with over 5,000 residents. But it followed the boom and bust cycle of many mining communities, and by the 1930s had basically become a ghost town. Following the lead of Norwegian ski jumpers, a few of Utah’s skiing enthusiasts noticed how the mining companies had cleared the surrounding hills of timber, and they began dreaming of ski slopes. Where Utahns once looked to the mountains for the resources trapped deep within the earth, some now re-imagined them as places for recreation and profit.

In the late 1930s, Utah’s burgeoning ski industry both suffered and benefitted from the Great Depression. With few jobs available, not many people could afford to ski, dampening the hopes of Utah’s early ski entrepreneurs. While they waited for the economy to pick up, however, they encouraged the federally-supported Civilian Conservation Corps to build the roads leading to the slopes, preparing for the possibilities to come. Clubs like the Wasatch Mountain Club and the Alpine Ski Club mobilized the resources of their benefactors to build “rope tows” for helping skiers up the hills. They even repurposed some of the old mining equipment for the construction of these rudimentary lifts (see box).

Based on the infrastructure built in previous decades and on changes in American leisure habits, the Utah ski industry was booming by the 1980s. And, like other parts of the growing outdoor recreation sector, it required ever greater numbers of workers. That trend has only increased in the twenty-first century.

Champion ski racer Suzy Harris Rytting supported her sports career by working as a waitress, circa 1950. University of Utah.
Many jobs associated with outdoor recreation, however, are service and seasonal and do not include the traditional benefit packages that came with manufacturing positions. In this way, recreational jobs mirror larger trends in American work ways. Like elsewhere in the United States, work in Utah has largely shifted away from “making things” in a manufacturing-based economy, to providing services aimed at making life easier for consumers. This shift saw the loss of a large number of manufacturing jobs across the country beginning in the 1960s. Utah was not immune to that shift, as illustrated by the 1987 closing of Utah County’s Geneva Steel Plant (which at its height produced more than half the steel made in the western United States).
In the place of manufacturing jobs, however, new forms of work arose, perhaps most obviously represented by information technology (IT) jobs. In Utah, software and information technology companies such as Netscape, Novell, Corel, and Adobe – many tied to local university engineering and computer science programs – emerged along the Wasatch Front as significant IT employers in the last years of the twentieth century. But not everything about IT work is new. It has strong links to other forms of intellectual labor of the past – manufacturing, office work, and the labor that takes place in scientific labs.

White-collar jobs in the finance industry increased in Utah beginning in the 1970s with the expansion of Zions Bank and the relocation of American Express, and are part of a transition in the postwar United States to an economy pitched to services. But the growth of Utah’s population in recent decades, though often ascribed to the expansion of white collar finance and IT jobs, has also seen the growth of physically taxing work in construction and of older trades – plumbing, electrical work, and others – in response. This work, too, has strong links to the production and manufacturing labor done by previous generations of Utahns.

As we think about the way Utah works today, alongside the growth of jobs in the construction, finance, and IT industries, we need to grapple with the shift to greater numbers of workers doing part-time or contract jobs, a trend that is often described as the “casualization of labor” and is associated with what has been called a new “Uber” economy. Here too, there are connections to older forms of labor in Utah – like piecework manufacturing – and to postwar developments like the growth of seasonal work related to the tourism industry.
Thinking about the history of labor in Utah, there are many questions we might ask ourselves:

What do we value about our own work? What conditions would we like to work in? Is our economy designed in ways that best support Utah’s workers?

Does our work today serve our communities? Are there ways to draw on our past to strengthen our connections to each other through our work? Do we honor the labor of Utahns and see how our shared experience of work can offer the bedrock for greater understanding and respect?

We should ask ourselves about the situation for Utah’s historically most-marginalized workers. How does the contemporary working scene for women and people of color...
compare to the past? Do Latino/a, Asian American, Pacific Islander, African American, and Native American workers have greater opportunities? Are they being treated equally in today’s Utah workplaces?

The same questions must be raised in regard to women’s status. In today’s world, how do we view the unpaid labor that often falls on women’s shoulders? Do we give that work the respect it is due? How do we share fair and equal responsibility for work within our families?

Moving from such questions to conversations with other Utahns about the work each of us does may well encourage insightful and interesting exchanges, but may also help us determine what we need to do to create the kind of society we want to work in and for.

Such conversations will help remind us of the strong bonds we have to our past. Our ancestors would tell us – wherever and whatever they did – the reason they worked so hard was to support their families and their communities. And we would tell them in turn that this is exactly why we, too, are busy as bees.

RECOMMENDED READING


Forrest Cuch, ed. *A History of Utah’s American Indians*. Salt Lake City: Utah Division of Indian Affairs, 2000. (Read online at www.history.utah.gov/publications)


Deseret Sunday School Songs, for the Use of Sunday Schools and Suitable for Primary Associations, Religion Classes, Quorum Meetings, Social Gatherings and the Home. Salt Lake City: Deseret Sunday School Union, 1909.


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Solorzano, Armando. We Remember, We Celebrate, We Believe = Recuerdo, Celebración, Y Esperanza: Latinos in Utah. Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2014.


Utah Humanities is proud to partner with the Utah Division of State History on our tour of *The Way We Worked* and we appreciate its generous support of this publication.

To explore some of Utah’s amazing work stories, visit the superb online resources of the Utah Division of State History:

- Visit [www.history.utah.gov/publications](http://www.history.utah.gov/publications) where you can search and browse through 90 years of the Utah Historical Quarterly, as well as dozens of other publications.
- Utah History to Go ([www.historytogo.utah.gov](http://www.historytogo.utah.gov)) features a rich collection of articles and vignettes on Utah events, people, and places.
- I Love History ([www.ilovehistory.utah.gov](http://www.ilovehistory.utah.gov)) is a site for young people and has information on many kinds of Utah work.

The mission of the Utah Division of State History is to preserve and share the past for a better present and future. As a state agency, it provides services, technical assistance, and information to many different businesses, industries, agencies, and individuals. State History collects and preserves historical documents and makes them available in its Utah History Research Center and online. State History is interested in the work stories of all Utahns, and accepts donations of manuscripts, books, journals, maps, or photos that will enhance the State’s collections.

Learn more at [www.history.utah.gov](http://www.history.utah.gov).
WE AREN’T THE BEEHIVE STATE FOR NOTHING!

“Workers are we / No idlers here shall live among our busy, happy band / We gather honey all the year / And plenty can be found on every hand”*

Work is a key component of Utah’s own identity. Some Utahns used to sing this song to praise hard work and those willing to do it. Everyone – from the farmer to the miner, from the housekeeper to the factory worker – labored to make Utah the Beehive State. With “industry” as their motto, they grew food, extracted minerals, raised families, and produced goods according to a work ethic that remains essential to understanding Utah identity.

WHO WORKS

Everyone worked. It didn’t matter if you were young or old, man or woman, rich or poor. Out here on the eastern edge of the Great Basin, everyone pitched in to overcome the challenges of a harsh environment. But who you were mattered to what kind of work you did. Gender, race, and class differences decided who worked, where, and for whom.

HOW WE WORK

Utahns often worked communally. Utah’s indigenous people relied on kinship networks to determine what kind of work people did. Mormons looked to church and family to decide the same thing. As Utah became more industrial, workers formed unions to protect themselves and their economic gains. Even government-sponsored programs helped to foster communal work.

WHERE WE WORK

In Utah, perhaps more than in other places, nature influenced work. When the state was mostly farms, people had to manipulate and manage water to keep crops. When the mines dominated the economy, workers delved deep into the earth for mineral resources to supply a global market. Work in Utah demanded a close and often dangerous relationship with nature.

WHY WE WORK

Diverse peoples from all around the world made Utah a crossroads of the West. Generations of immigrants came in search of a better life. Often what they found was toil and hardship. Nonetheless, through work, many Utahns forged identities that make their descendants proud. The Indian weaver, the Mormon teacher, the Mexican miner, the Swedish troubadour – and so many more – have all made Utah what it is today.

Listen to #UtahWorks stories on The Beehive Archive www.utahhumanities.org/stories
Join the conversation www.facebook.com/group/UtahMuseumOnMainStreet
Learn about the Utah tour of The Way We Worked at www.utahhumanities.org

* Deseret Sunday School Songs (1909)
Child miner at Castle Gate, c1900. Utah State Historical Society
WORK IS PART OF EVERYDAY LIFE FOR ALL UTAHNS, SO TELL US… HOW DO YOU MAKE A LIVING?

#UtahWorks

(left to right) The whole family worked on Utah's farms (n.d.), Chinese laborers on the Central Pacific Railroad (1876), Sewing parachutes in Manti (c1942). Utah State Historical Society.