



*The Liberal Institute, circa 1875, at Second South and Second East, Salt Lake City. (Courtesy, Church Historical Department.)*

# THE LIBERAL INSTITUTE: A CASE STUDY IN NATIONAL ASSIMILATION

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In a time of the Chautauqua and the public meeting hall, when cultural values were established and reinforced by pulpit and lectern, there stood in the very heart of Brigham Young's Zion the Liberal Institute, a free thought forum dedicated to radical reform and the overturning of the Mormon commonwealth. The Institute would survive less than fifteen years, but during its brief and now largely unknown career, it would serve Mormon opponents as a court room, political hall, school, entertainment center and radical lyceum. The Institute also became a religious counterweight. Utah's earliest congregations of Protestants, Jews, Spiritualists, and "Reorganized" Mormons used its facilities, sometimes to challenge dramatically Utah's prevailing faith. If the everyday rhythms and concerns of societies are revealed in their institutions, the Liberal Institute represented Utah's growing cultural pluralism as the territory matured from its pioneer isolation and Mormon exclusiveness.

This is precisely what the founders of the Liberal Institute intended. By the late 1860s, a group of intellectually disposed and liberal minded Mormons had grown increasingly dissatisfied with their faith. To men like William S. Godbe, E. L. T. Harrison, Henry W. Lawrence, Eli Kelsey, Edward W. Tullidge, Amasa Lyman, and William H. Shearman, Mormonism no longer seemed the advanced and liberal institution of their conversion. Their frustration led them to repudiate their church membership and to embrace the Godbeite Protest or "New Movement" in late 1869 and early 1870.<sup>1</sup>

The Liberal Institute was the child of their apostasy. At first the Godbeites channeled their disillusionment into a schismatic Church of Zion, fashioned in the Mormon image. Consequently, the cornerstones of the Institute were inscribed with the name of the Godbeite rival church.<sup>2</sup> But long before the building was completed, the Church of Zion had proven only a brief way-station in the dissenters' journey to free thought spiritualism. The Godbeites believed that the scientific and intellectual currents of the century ran contrary to Christianity in general and to Mormonism in particular. They found in spiritualism's loosely defined but radical formulations a better expression of their religious and political thinking. Their personal transfor-

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mation altered the proposed purposes of the nearly completed Institute. The reformers now spoke broadly of its "religious, literary, and political" reform destiny and consecrated the building to "freedom, equality, and fraternity."<sup>3</sup>

That the dissenters chose to establish a public forum was hardly surprising. Utah society had long reflected the contemporary British-American interest in public discussion, debate, and lecture. First generation Utahns had organized themselves into "Polysophical," "Philomathian," and "Universal Scientific" societies; they listened to the literary and scientific "Seventies' Lectures"; and they deliberated in their "Ward Institutes" and "Schools of the Prophets." But more than continuing a local forensic tradition, the Godbeites saw the Liberal Institute as a means of exerting persuasion and influence. Only diminutive and makeshift assembly rooms remained exempt from Brigham Young's control, but they, no less than the Mormon meeting houses, seemed an unwelcome harbor for the free-wheeling spiritualists. The latter wished to follow the pattern set by free thinkers elsewhere.<sup>4</sup> They might share their hall with others, but above all they required a home where spiritualist public meetings, lectures, libraries, and séances might flourish and where the word of their new revelation might go forth.

The design and appointment of the Liberal Institute reflected its purposes. Harrison himself had conceived the architectural plans which, by conveying early Victorian mass and weight, gave the building the aspect of a Gentile rampart within Zion. The structure was sixty feet square at the base; its ceiling rose to an impressive thirty feet, while the seating was arranged in a half octagon to facilitate hearing and seeing. The use of the gallery allowed an approximate audience of 1,000, although on at least one occasion temporary seating crowded twice that number into the facility.<sup>5</sup> The pioneer artisans Tullidge and McAvoy grained the woodwork of the interior, which tastefully set off the building's plastered walls. There were prominently displayed portraits of George and Martha Washington—the latter suggesting the Godbeites' feminism. Later, heating stoves were provided to warm the interior (in contrast, the Mormon Tabernacle was forced to suspend its meetings during the winter season), and a removable level floor was laid to permit dancing. A cabinet organ which promised to "supersede everything in the market" was imported from the East.<sup>6</sup> "For convenience of arrangement, beauty of interior finish, and acoustic properties," the Godbeite *Salt Lake Tribune* justifiably boasted, "the Hall surpasses any hitherto erected in the city."<sup>7</sup>

Such a structure obviously was a major undertaking in territorial Utah. Virtually every Salt Lake Gentile of influence, led by Governor J. W. Shaffer, endorsed a circular requesting construction subscriptions from the East, and Shearman was accordingly dispatched to solicit donations. Lyman in turn requested his southern Utah friends to "send us a helping hand at this time of our trial."<sup>8</sup> The wealthy Godbe was a more substantial financial source. The pioneer druggist and his wife, Annie, donated property directly north of their Octagon mansion on the east side of Second East street between First and Second South streets for a construction site. In addition Godbe was apparently the principal benefactor in raising the Institute's \$50,000 construction costs.<sup>9</sup> "Seldom have we met a nobler self-sacrificing band of independent thinkers," wrote the itinerate spiritualist, J. M. Peebles, after visiting Salt

Lake. "Showing their faith by their works, these enterprising souls have erected, and neatly furnished, a magnificent hall."<sup>10</sup>

At the inauguration emotions surged. The reformers "sang their songs of freedom, poured out their rejoicings over the emancipation from the thrall of the Theocracy of Brigham, and told of the beatitudes of soul-to-soul communion with the All-Father," related Susan B. Anthony who happened to attend the dedicatory services on 2 July 1871. At an opportune pause in the proceedings Anthony herself strode to the platform to deliver an impromptu and impassioned plea for women's equality. That evening Elizabeth Cady Stanton delivered her famous lecture, "The True Republic," before an overflowing and highly appreciative audience ("perhaps the very ablest [lecture] ever listened to by a Salt Lake audience").<sup>12</sup> Two days later, additional seating on specially raised platforms allowed 2,000 "Reformed Mormons" and Gentiles to celebrate national Independence apart from the Mormon community—and perhaps more significantly to demonstrate their own growing strength and numbers. Such a response led the dissenters to envision a stream of the most prominent national speakers. The hoped-for Phillips, Emerson, Beecher, Taylor, and Douglass in fact never appeared, but business at the forum initially boomed.<sup>13</sup> "People are fairly flocking to the Institute," the *Tribune* proudly reported after a year's operations. Prosperity's message seemed clear. "Utah Mormonism has either got to harmonize itself with Christian ideals and practices or go by the board."<sup>14</sup>

Initially religious services were a Liberal Institute staple. The 1870s were a seedtime for Utah denominationalism. But without the resources to establish immediately their own houses of worship, Methodists, Presbyterians, Jews, Swedish Lutherans and "Josephite" Mormons turned at various times to the Institute for shelter.<sup>15</sup> The *Tribune* explained the spirit of the free thinkers' hospitality. "The Hall will . . . have Mr. Peirce and his [Methodist] flock in the morning and afternoon and the Reformers, with Mr. Harrison as speaker, in the evening. Neither party seems the least afraid of contact."<sup>16</sup> The "Reorganites" lingered longer than most denominations. Their missionaries, including the sons of the Prophet Joseph Smith—David, Frederick, and Joseph—used the Institute throughout the decade as a staging center for their assaults on Utah Mormonism.

But if the religious language of the Institute was diverse, the dominant tongue was Spiritualism. The free thinkers' worship meetings were typically opened and closed by prayer, with Orson Pratt, Jr., and W. D. Williams respectively playing the organ and conducting the choir. The Mormon hymnal was replaced with the "Psalms of Life"—the "best hymn poetry of the day," with selections by Longfellow, Tennyson, and Whittier.<sup>17</sup> The actual format of the proceedings expressed the mood of the moment—variously devoted to exposition, music and culture, or simply discussion. Religion was broadly described as anything which refined, with "poetry and all that is beautiful or useful in Art and Science" being components of the spiritual experience.<sup>18</sup> "If the Orthodox reader wants a genuine sensation," promised a reporter of the *Tribune*,

let him attend a session of the Progressive Spiritualists, . . . A subject for discussion is usually announced, but if nobody cares to discuss it, any one is at liberty to advocate any views he pleases on any subject. . . . On Sunday last, we heard there pure

Mormonism, scientific materialism, Unitarian ideas and flat atheism. One speaker demonstrated from the Bible that Abraham was a liar and coward, and Jacob a thief; whereupon . . . , "a lineal descendant of the House of Israel," rose to defend his ancestors and Mormonism together. . . .

Shortly after a wandering bohemian gave us his views on the "Origin and Evolution of the God-idea," and an eloquent physician demonstrated that the Bible was the worst book ever published, in that it taught the worship of a monster! The style of speaking was as far ahead of the Tabernacle as the sparkling mountain torrent excels the stagnant pool. In short, no matter what your belief is, if you want to be shaken clear out of the old ruts and set to thinking as to where you stand, go and hear the . . . [Liberals].<sup>19</sup>

The ministry of the itinerant spiritualists lent additional attraction. During the 1870s and early 1880s over forty-five harmonial lecturers and mediums, including some of the most celebrated of the movement, inducted Institute audiences into the spiritualistic mysteries. Trance speaking, or public speaking while in the bodily possession of another spirit, was among the most popular. The public demeanor of the nineteen year old Thomas Walker, the only male of eight recorded trance speakers to visit Utah, illustrated the technique.

He is of slight build, verdant appearance and awkward in his movements. He looks and acts much like a plain, bashful country boy, for the first time dressed in "Sunday clothes." He goes upon the rostrum, seating himself in a condition of easy composure. Very soon a dull, glassy appearance is seen in his eyes, followed by a shivering of his body and the instant closing of his eyes. In a few moments he rises and offers a prayer that compares favorably with the best the preachers can do in that line. He then at once begins his discourse, which usually lasts from an hour to an hour and a half. Any subject presented by the audience, at the moment, is seemingly treated with as much ease and freedom as one of his own choosing.<sup>20</sup>

Frequently the trance speakers composed on-the-spot poetry. If the verses of the eminent and renowned Cora L. V. Tappen-Richmond seemed unfelicitous (the *Tribune* counseled that "the spirit who prompted her numbers should never try his hand at poetry again"),<sup>21</sup> C. Fannie Allyn's rhyming answers to the congregation's questions seemed overpowering. "If Mrs. Allyn could have been heard at the [LDS] Conference," the excited spiritualists held, "the lady would have scattered to the winds all the notions of the Apostles and High Priests about their material-personal-Adam-God."<sup>22</sup> Indeed the trance speakers were the conduit for posthumous messages from the Mormon leaders. Mrs. W. H. King assured her audience that the spirit of Joseph Smith himself, temporarily visiting in Utah, would answer their questions, while Mrs. H. T. Stearns became the mouth for Brigham Young's spirit to detail his current work in the Summerland of the departed.<sup>23</sup>

Almost as dramatic were the test or "cabinet" mediums—and their detractors. The former publicly performed sleight-of-hand tricks or "tests" which supposedly were achieved by spiritualistic intervention. The Keeler family of Moravia demonstrated before an incredulous Institute audience the reason for their international reputation:

On the platform there was a "cabinet" six feet long, six feet high and about three feet deep, constructed of blankets, and containing a wooden seat in each end. This cabinet was thoroughly examined by a number of citizens, and then the committee securely tied one of the mediums to each of these seats.

The cabinet was closed, and immediately three or four bells, which had been placed

on a chair between the mediums, were thrown out of two small apertures at the top of the cabinet. The cabinet was then quickly opened and the mediums remained bound motionless to their seats, just as the committee had left them. The mediums would go into the cabinet with pieces of ropes, and in a few seconds they would be bound hand and foot to the seats. While thus bound their coats would be mysteriously taken off and passed out of the cabinet. Many other manifestations were made. . . . Certain it is that no public séance has ever been given in this city, which has [so] excited the curiosity of the public.<sup>24</sup>

The success of the test mediums, however, brought detractors—especially when exposé promised profitable theater. Charles B. Cutler was not the first debunker to demonstrate before a Salt Lake audience that the cabinet mediums' "supernaturalism" lay only in illusion, but he was the first to do so before the Liberal Institute reformers—who scarcely concealed their hostility. "Certain believers were considerably annoyed at having their idols thrown down and broken," reported the pro-Mormon *Salt Lake Herald* cheerfully. "At times there was much confusion in the hall with indications of a row, but taken as a whole, the entertainment passed off in good style."<sup>25</sup> The Utah free thinkers, who had long believed that popular spiritualism mixed valid phenomena with humbuggery, may have been temporarily shaken, but Cutler's exposure did little to undermine their broader faith.

At least a half dozen spiritualists who preached or practiced "magnetic" or hypnotic healing also appeared in Salt Lake during the 1870s. None, however, approached the drama which the internationally renowned Dr. J. R. Newton afforded Institute audiences. After taking hold of the ailing John Manning, Newton "made a magnetic wave felt by the audience," and then threw "out an electric shock which was felt by many persons." The doctor, who earlier had introduced a device promising relief from pain and chronic disease, healed instantly by wholesale. Over sixty cases of blindness, deafness, sore eyes, cataracts, heart disease, consumption, and lameness were reportedly cured during his one week ministry at the Institute. Truly, the *Tribune* reported, "Dr. Newton is a very wonderful man."<sup>26</sup>

In addition the Institute attracted "scientists" of the arcane. Physiognomists, psychometrists, and phrenologists each combined elements of spiritualism with the ideals of science, personal growth, and social reform. Dr. Joseph Simms gave six illustrated lectures on physiognomy, a study which sought to demonstrate the interrelationships of bodily features, health, culture, and future modes of personal activity.<sup>27</sup> Psychometry, in turn, claimed the power to read personal character, although the books of William Denton, whose lectures at the Institute went unreported, pushed psychometric discovery to include detailed maps of the planets and vivid descriptions of their inhabitants.<sup>28</sup> But phrenology, or the idea that mental and character traits were revealed by the conformation of the skull, was clearly the Utah spiritualists' prime "scientific" fascination. Several of their leaders had previously received highly flattering readings (Mormon authorities in fact believed that resulting pride may have encouraged their apostasy), and during the 1870s they warmly urged attendance when four phrenological lecturers visited Utah. But their affection was tested when the eminent Orson S. Fowler compared two members of the Institute audience, one a Mormon bishop and the other a Utah dissenter, in "No. 7 Veneration." When the

comparison proved unfortunate to the latter, the city's radicals for a moment seriously questioned the professor's expertise. But the *Tribune* quickly regained its equilibrium. "The lack of veneration," judged the newspaper after more mature reflection, "is eminently a Gentile organ. . . . The Anglo-Saxon has a constitutional repugnance to priestcraft or kingscraft."<sup>29</sup> This perspective, plus Fowler's well received lectures on self-culture, the laws of health, the secrets of female beauty and manhood strength, and a phrenological proof of immortality, restored the professor to the Utah spiritualists' graces.

Spiritualism with its pseudo-scientific derivations was not the only ingredient in the caldron of nineteenth century radicalism. Probably no question agitated Liberal Institute audiences more than feminism. In addition to the touring spiritualists who made no effort to conceal their allegiance to the women's cause, others spoke directly in its support. Besides Anthony and Stanton, there were Emily Pitts Stevens, editor of the *San Francisco Pioneer*, A. S. Duniway, proprietor and editor of the *New North West*, Laura Cubby Smith, celebrated suffragette, Mrs. C. H. Spear, California feminist organizer, Victoria Claflin Woodhull, publisher of *Woodhull and Claflin's Weekly*, and a half dozen others.<sup>30</sup> The local sisters were at least as active. In the summer of 1871, over one hundred dissenting and Gentile women organized themselves at the Institute into a Ladies' Mutual Improvement Society, with the anti-Mormon crusader, Fanny Stenhouse, as president. The Society dedicated itself to securing "equal footing with man in every issue," promised an evening school for ladies whose early education had been neglected, and endeavored to found a library.<sup>31</sup> Although the society continued for over a half year, it seems to have realized few of its original objectives. Local women also occasionally occupied the Institute's podium. Fanny Stenhouse embraced the opportunity to brand "Brigham Young as a despot and Polygamy as a fraud."<sup>32</sup> Nellie Paddock delivered her nationally famous anti-Mormon lecture at the Institute, while Phoebe Couzin, one of the first women admitted to the Utah Bar, also spoke before the free thinkers.<sup>33</sup>

Temperance likewise became an Institute cause. Mormon authorities had only recently begun to enjoin the church's longstanding health codes upon its frontier membership, and clearly considerable work lay at hand. Several itinerants introduced the cause, including Carrie F. Young, former editor of the *Journal of Health*, who imaginatively premised her temperance address upon "the second, third, and fourth clauses of the Declaration of Independence."<sup>34</sup> More systematic were the efforts of Dr. McKenzie and his Reform Club. McKenzie leased the Institute for a well attended temperance campaign. At one session Judge Boreman "gave a rousing speech, calling upon all young men to come forward and sign, give up their drinking habits and acquaintances and make men of themselves." At least 208 men and 150 ladies requested membership cards during the crusade.<sup>35</sup>

Indeed "Reform" became a synonym for Institute activity. Lecturers continued periodically to lay bare flaws in Utah's prevailing faith; the Saints' tragedy at Mountain Meadows was a repeated subject for discourse.<sup>36</sup> But the Utah dissenters obviously had travelled far beyond their original objective of "reforming" Mormonism. Tom Paine now became a lodestar and traditional Christianity seemed as "irreconcilable with the facts of nature and science as

the story of Sinbad the sailor was with modern geography."<sup>37</sup> Long-time national radicals such as Warren Chase and Victoria Claflin Woodhull inveighed at the Institute against the established order. As early as 1872 a local chapter of the radical "Peoples' National Convention" was organized at the Hall, pledged to sexual and racial equality and to a vigorous program of government activism a half century before such ideals became recognized as legitimate national concerns. Utah's budding radicalism was making the territory, as one dissenter phrased it, "the Massachusetts of the West."<sup>38</sup>

The Liberal Institute became a prominent political center as the Utah dissenters sought to implement their reform ideals. At the outset they recognized the need for a political vehicle and joined with the territory's Gentiles to forge the "Liberal" or "National" party. The marriage proved tempestuous. In July 1871, the union's two factions broke into angry name calling as party members at the Institute debated tactics and philosophy.<sup>39</sup> But the common enemy of the Mormon establishment was sufficient to unite them periodically and to draw protest crowds. In 1872, the party held what it described as the "greatest political meeting ever held in the Territory" to lay plans for Salt Lake municipal reform. Four years later at another gathering at the Institute, Henry Lawrence declared that Mormon leaders, by preaching political obedience, had "bamboozled" the people in an effort to get "away with the spoils."<sup>40</sup> But formal political gatherings were not the only measure of the Hall's political prominence. Gentile officials led by Governor Wilber A. Woods and members of the territorial judiciary frequently spoke before Institute audiences. When the Gentile courts sought maximum political exposure for the belated trial of the murderers of J. King Robinson, they requisitioned the reformers' hall.<sup>41</sup>

The cultural ministry of the Hall was a more constant endeavor. Popular scientific offerings predominated, no doubt reflective of the interests of the *au courant* Utah dissenters. Local speakers such as O. H. Congar, E. M. Barnum, and W. H. Holmes lectured on the origins of life, the progress of science, and the solar system. Mr. Frink dazzled audiences with chemical experiments and by microscopically transforming "a flea to the size of a horse."<sup>42</sup> Bentham Fabian's unsuccessful lecture, "The Past History of the World," combined geology, Biblical fundamentalism, and bloody sacrifices. "Had it been delivered before the [touring] Japanese Embassy, as originally intended," the *Tribune* severely commented, it "would doubtless have had a terrible effect upon their barbaric brains, causing spasmodic if not chronic congestion."<sup>43</sup> Lectures on law, domestic relations, and especially popular culture were also frequent staples. Miss De Wolf spoke on "Thoughts and Their Chariots," Judge Emerson on "Culture," Frank Tilford on "The Creations of Shakespeare," while former Vice-President Schuyler Colfax reminisced on "Lincoln." Professor Griffiths, in turn, drew some of the largest crowds in the history of the Institute as he displayed his considerable abilities at ventriloquism and declamation.<sup>44</sup>

Lyceums might broaden the perspectives of the mature, but the Institute also owed a responsibility to the young. Only months following the Hall's inauguration, the Liberal or Institute Academy was established under the preceptorial direction of Professor W. H. Holmes. The school "is in no way allied to Spiritualism or any other 'ism,'" explained the *Tribune*. "It is



representative alone of liberal sentiment and free thought."<sup>45</sup> The principal opened the Academy to all elementary and secondary grades for a \$2 tuition charge per quarter, and for a time it claimed to be "steadily on the increase."<sup>46</sup> But after only a year's operation, Holmes left Salt Lake to pursue a lecturing tour, and the project collapsed.

The Children's Progressive Lyceum was a less conventional educational venture. Like its predecessor it claimed no sectarian orientation, but actually it borrowed both its name and philosophy from prototypes sponsored by the American Association of Spiritualists.<sup>47</sup> In Salt Lake, Mrs. L. T. H. Congar conceived the undertaking and remained as the school's "Guardian"; W. H. Shearman was named Conductor, with Godbe and Lawrence respectively serving as Librarian and Treasurer. "A Children's Lyceum," the *Tribune* explained:

is one of those Sunday Schools where children are taught to do their own thinking. They are required to use their judgments respecting every subject presented to them by the teacher. The chief method relied upon is to draw out of the child what it knows and understands and develop its powers rather than to make it a little machine into which somebody else's wisdom is pumped. No creeds are taught on the strength of Authority, ancient or modern; and all this is combined with so much of variety and even amusement in the exercises that children seldom fail to take as much interest in the Lyceum as the teachers themselves.<sup>48</sup>

Like other Sunday Schools of the era, the Progressive Lyceum undertook more than a religious curriculum. "Truth, justice, fraternity, purity, art, science, health, and spirituality" were its self-confessed objectives. But it substituted reasoning for convention and personal judgment in the place of absolutes. In March 1874, after a year's service, the school boasted an enrollment of 150 children and a library of 300 books, which Institute leaders eventually sought to expand for adult purposes. Throughout the middle 1870s, the Lyceum's Sunday afternoon sessions and periodic concert recitations were very much a part of the Salt Lake scene.<sup>49</sup>

Captain J. W. Witherell's "Free School" was another educational enterprise undertaken at the Institute. The aging but ebullient "professor" had recently found himself unemployed when President John Taylor urged that non-Mormons be excluded from teaching Mormon youth. His personal exigency, coupled with the city's need for inexpensive, mass education led Witherell to open Utah's first nontuitional school. Expenses would be met through voluntary contributions by parents, recently imposed tax levies, community endowments, and the use of the Institute facilities without charge. But the professor found the hall poorly constituted for a school. Its high ceiling made heating difficult, while only improvised desks could be fastened to the backs of a few seats. After only three months Witherell moved with his 135 students to the Seventies Hall.<sup>50</sup>

Although the Institute's tone, particularly during the early years, was generally sedate and grave, its managers understood the need to leaven the intellectual loaf. During the early 1870s, New Year, May Day, and Christmas parties were scheduled, while social entrepreneurs Professor Sheldon and John Manning periodically staged parties for profit.<sup>51</sup> The Institute was accordingly transformed:

The interior of the building [was] beautifully festooned with national ensigns, [the] paper[being] of various colors, . . . Down stairs the southwest corner is divided off with flags as an ice cream room, while in the gallery there are two dressing rooms of a similar kind, and a table about twenty feet long on which a sumptuous repast will be spread for those who may desire refreshments during the night. Everything that might tend to make the occasion one of pleasure has been done by the conductors of the affair.<sup>52</sup>

Activities varied. Institute dances featured not only pioneer Utah's customary quadrilles and lancers, but the polka, the schottische, and even the waltz. A "grand old-fashioned tea-party," which promised to "beat everything out," greeted one New Year.<sup>53</sup> Children in turn were treated to such Gentile delights as an appearance of the Queen of May and, at the appropriate season, to a Christmas tree with gifts. Institute recreation, like its intellectual endeavor, charted the infiltration of Gentile influence.<sup>54</sup>

Spectator entertainment at the Institute at times was innovative. At one end of the spectrum were the cultured Holbrook sisters, who rendered their theatrical production without the aid of scenery, stage effects, or orchestra. "To make a performance of this kind successful, in this degenerate day of spectacle dramas, immoral language, limbs and general nudity," the *Tribune* commented approvingly, "requires the highest type of genius."<sup>55</sup> But as spiritualism and the use of the forum declined during the late 1870s, Institute managers no longer demanded the highbrow. In 1879, the hall staged probably Salt Lake's first sparring exhibition, as twenty-four light, medium, and heavy weights contested both for prizes and the honor of being the "most scientific head puncher in the ring."<sup>56</sup> Two years later the building was temporarily transformed to permit a disreputable contest of billiards. "There was just enough betting to keep the interest of the spectators," the *Tribune* reporter wrote, "and the few losers seemed to pocket their losses as good humoredly as the winners did their spare twenties and fifties."<sup>57</sup>

The decline of the Liberal Institute seemed to confirm official Mormon policy. "Strangers would not know of its existence," the *Tribune* bitterly complained, "if they depended upon the organs of the Church for the information."<sup>58</sup> The churchmen hoped that the spiritualist insurgency would expire by its own hand and accordingly ignored the hall and its activities. Nevertheless the Institute possessed an undeniable allure. During its early years, the Spiritualists' Sunday evening services probably outdrew any Mormon ward meeting in the city. One local Relief Society leader expressed dismay "to see so many of the saints drawn there."<sup>59</sup> But there was more curiosity than conversion in this, and as soon as the edge of the novelty wore thin, the failure of Utah spiritualism and its hall became obvious.

The *coup de grâce* was administered by the construction of the sumptuous Walker Opera House which competed for the Gentile literary and theatrical trade. In the fall of 1884, after serving Utah spiritualism for only thirteen years, the Liberal Institute was sold by Godbe and Lawrence to the First Presbyterian Church for \$6,500. The Presbyterians would use the building as a male dormitory for their Collegiate Institute, the progenitor of Westminster College. Several years later they razed it to make way for a school building of their own. "Nothing that ever went into its walls ever prospered," the *Salt Lake Daily Herald* jibed, "not even excepting the Liberals and the Rentz-Santley Minstrels."<sup>60</sup> The *Herald's* mirth was truthful only in a narrow sense.

The short-lived career of the Liberal Institute symbolized a force larger than itself. During the 1870s the winds of national assimilation were blowing on Deseret. The sometimes bizarre but always very much American activity of the Institute bespoke something more than a spring zephyr.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>I trace the origin and development of Godbeitism in "The Commencement of the Godbeite Protest: Another View," *Utah Historical Quarterly* 42 (Summer 1974): 216-44.

<sup>2</sup>"No Bribery" to the Editor, 26 July 1871, *Deseret News*, 2 August 1871.

<sup>3</sup>*Salt Lake Daily Tribune*, 22 April 1871. Also see William S. Godbe, "The Situation in Utah," *The Medium and Daybreak* (London), 15 December 1871, p. 407.

<sup>4</sup>Andrew Jackson Davis, *Beyond the Valley* (Boston: Colby and Rich, 1885), p. 144.

<sup>5</sup>*Salt Lake Tribune*, 17 September 1870; *Salt Lake Daily Tribune*, 22 June and 1 July 1871; and *Daily Corinne Reporter*, 5 July 1871. Harrison's architectural contributions to Pioneer Utah are traced in Allen Roberts, "Utah's Unknown Pioneer Architects: Their Lives and Works," *Sunstone* 1 (Spring 1976): 79-84.

<sup>6</sup>On graining: *Salt Lake Weekly Tribune*, 20 May 1871. On the portraits of George and Martha Washington: *Salt Lake Daily Tribune*, 6 July 1871. On heating: *ibid.*, 3 November 1871. On flooring: *ibid.*, 8 and 17 February 1872. On organ: *ibid.*, 22 April 1871.

<sup>7</sup>*Salt Lake Daily Tribune*, 28 June 1871.

<sup>8</sup>Amasa Lyman to Robert Richey, 13 May 1870, Amasa Lyman Papers, Church Library-Archives, Historical Department, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah (hereafter cited as Church Archives). See also *Salt Lake Herald*, 21 August 1870.

<sup>9</sup>*Salt Lake City Survey*, Block 72. Plat A, Lot 4, 7 November 1871, Salt Lake County Recorder's Office, Salt Lake City, Utah; *New York Tribune*, 16 September 1871.

<sup>10</sup>J. M. Peebles, *Around the World: Or Travels in Polynesia, China, India, Arabia, Egypt, Syria and Other "Heathen" Countries* (Boston: Colby and Rich, 1875), p. 15.

<sup>11</sup>*Revolution*, 5 July 1871, as reprinted in the *Salt Lake Daily Tribune*, 19 July 1871.

<sup>12</sup>*Salt Lake Daily Tribune*, 3 July 1871.

<sup>13</sup>*Ibid.*, 1 and 6 July 1871 and 19 September 1871; *Daily Corinne Reporter*, 5 July 1871.

<sup>14</sup>*Salt Lake Daily Tribune*, 11 July 1872.

<sup>15</sup>On Methodists: *ibid.*, 12 August 1871. On Presbyterians: *ibid.*, 3 January 1873 and 1 January 1875. On Jews: *ibid.*, 17 February 1872, 11 October 1872, 13 September 1874; Juanita Brooks, *The History of the Jews in Utah and Idaho* (Salt Lake: Western Epics, 1973), p. 74. On Swedish Lutherans: *Salt Lake Daily Tribune*, 24 January 1875. On "Reorganized" Mormons: *ibid.*, 16 September 1872, 16 January 1873, 30 August 1874, 1 September 1874, 2 December 1876, 10 December 1876, 20 October 1878, and 26 November 1879.

<sup>16</sup>*Salt Lake Daily Tribune*, 12 August 1871.

<sup>17</sup>*Salt Lake Tribune*, 22 October 1870.

<sup>18</sup>*Salt Lake Daily Tribune*, 18 November 1871. Also see *ibid.*, 21 November 1871.

<sup>19</sup>*Ibid.*, 23 June 1875. For other discussion topics, *ibid.*, 27 April 1872, 6 June 1875, and 4 July 1875.

<sup>20</sup>*Ibid.*, 5 December 1876, quoting from the *Osceola* (Iowa?) *Beacon*.

<sup>21</sup>*Ibid.*, 26 March 1876.

<sup>22</sup>*Ibid.*, 7 October 1873.

<sup>23</sup>On King: 16 April 1876. On Stearns: 9 October 1881. At times the Utah spiritualists had demanding standards. They refused to print a synopsis of Fanny Young's discourse because "it was so rambling and abstract in its character that we could not follow any particular train of thought," *ibid.*, 29 July 1872.

<sup>24</sup>*Ibid.*, 30 June 1876. Also see 27 June 1876.

<sup>25</sup>*Salt Lake Herald*, 17 September 1876. The paper did not regard the exposé as a conclusive refutation. "Whatever great and glaring errors there may be in . . . [spiritualism]," it had earlier declared, "professors of legerdemain are not the agencies to meet and overcome it," *ibid.*, 17 September 1871.

<sup>26</sup>*Salt Lake Daily Tribune*, 14 October 1872. Also see *ibid.*, 12 and 15 October 1872; J. R. Newton, *Directions for the Use of the "Vital Recuperator"* (Cincinnati: Wrightson and Co., 1859); and Frank Podmore, *Mediums of the Nineteenth Century*, 2 vols. (New Hyde Park, New York: University Press, 1963), especially 1:51-66.

<sup>27</sup>*Salt Lake Daily Tribune*, 22 and 28 September 1880. Simms had published widely, including his physiognomic text, *Nature's Revelations of Character; or Physiognomy Illustrated; A Description of the Mental, Moral, and Volitive Dispositions of Mankind, as Manifested in the Human Form and Countenance* (New York: D. M. Bennett, 1879).

<sup>28</sup>"The People [of Mars]," Denton reported another medium as saying, "are darker colored

than ours, and have four fingers instead of five, . . . All that I see are barefooted. No: some have a little thing under the foot, that seems made of metal, . . . Their faces are not as pleasant as ours. . . They have large, wide mouths, cut farther back than ours. The hair is yellow. I tried a number, and they had blue eyes. I see no beards, but just a few bristles on the chin." William and Elizabeth M. R. Denton, *The Soul of Things; or, Psychometric Researches and Discoveries* (Wellesley, Massachusetts: Denton Publishing Co., 1863). For other psychometrical lectures at the Institute, see the *Leader* (Salt Lake), 18 October 1873 and *Salt Lake Daily Tribune*, 24 February 1874.

<sup>28</sup>*Salt Lake Daily Tribune*, 31 January 1872, emphasis in the original. See also *ibid.*, 30 January 1872.

<sup>29</sup>On Stevens: *ibid.*, 19 July 1871. On Duniway: *ibid.*, 6 July 1872. On Smith: *ibid.*, 16 December 1877. On Spear: 22 June 1871. On Claflin Woodhull: *ibid.*, 13 May 1874.

<sup>31</sup>*Salt Lake Daily Herald*, 8 July 1871. See in addition, *ibid.*, 6 August 1871; *Salt Lake Daily Tribune*, 12 and 19 July 1871; 10 and 15 August 1871; and 23 January 1872.

<sup>32</sup>*Salt Lake Daily Tribune*, 25 June 1874.

<sup>33</sup>On Paddock: *ibid.*, 17 February 1872. On Couzin, *ibid.*, 21 and 23 September 1872. I treat Fanny's career in "The Stenhouses and the Making of a Mormon Image," *Journal of Mormon History* 1 (1974): 51-72.

<sup>34</sup>*Salt Lake Daily Tribune*, 19 July 1873. See also *ibid.*, 20 February 1876.

<sup>35</sup>*ibid.*, 12 February 1880.

<sup>36</sup>For example, see *ibid.*, 16 October 1872 and 30 January 1873.

<sup>37</sup>*ibid.*, 25 March 1872. Tom Paine was considered not sufficiently "scientific" for several Utah dissenters, but he nevertheless was a continuing Institute theme, see for instance *ibid.*, 9 January 1877.

<sup>38</sup>James T. Cobb, "Mrs. H. T. Stearns," *Tullidge's Quarterly Magazine* 1 (April 1881): 424. On Chase: *Salt Lake Daily Tribune*, 17 and 20 May 1881. On Claflin Woodhull: *ibid.*, 13 May 1874. On Peoples' National Convention: *ibid.*, 20, 22, and 24 April 1872.

<sup>39</sup>*Salt Lake Daily Herald*, 25 July 1871; *Salt Lake Daily Tribune*, 24 July 1871; Eli Kelsey to the Editor, *ibid.*, 27 July 1871; "No Bribery" to the Editor, 26 July 1871, *Deseret News*, 2 August 1871; and Edward W. Tullidge, *The History of Salt Lake City* (Salt Lake City: Star Printing Company, 1886), pp. 428-29, 506-11.

<sup>40</sup>*Salt Lake Daily Tribune*, 20 February 1872 and 6 February 1876.

<sup>41</sup>*ibid.*, 15 December 1871 and 7 January 1874.

<sup>42</sup>*ibid.*, 2 and 4 December 1871, 13 January 1872, 8 March 1872, 9 September 1872, and 14 February 1875.

<sup>43</sup>*ibid.*, 4 March 1872.

<sup>44</sup>On law: *ibid.*, 8 January 1875, 28 February 1875, and 14 March 1875. On domestic relations: 18 August 1871 and 19 August 1872. On De Wolf: 12 October 1872. On Emerson: 24 March 1874. On Tilford: 12 July 1873. On Colfax: 20 June 1878. On Griffiths: 15 November 1873.

<sup>45</sup>*ibid.*, 6 November 1871.

<sup>46</sup>*ibid.*, 8 February 1872. See in addition *ibid.*, 4 November 1871, 4 March 1872, and 19 September 1872.

<sup>47</sup>J. M. Peebles, *Seers of the Ages: Embracing Spiritualism, Past and Present* (Boston: Willaim White, 1869), p. 354. Andrew Jackson Davis, perhaps America's leading spiritualist, claimed to have originated the concept of the Children's Progressive Lyceum. See his book, *Beyond the Valley*, pp. 98, 136, 149, 153, 332.

<sup>48</sup>*Salt Lake Daily Tribune*, 10 March 1873.

<sup>49</sup>*ibid.*, 28 September 1873, 4 March 1874, 17 October 1875.

<sup>50</sup>Letter of J. W. Witherell to the Editor, *ibid.*, 14 and 27 August 1878; *ibid.*, 6 and 17 September 1878, and 19 and 27 December 1878.

<sup>51</sup>*ibid.*, 18 November 1871, 12 and 28 December 1871, 24 and 27 April 1872, 3 and 9 May 1872, and 1 and 20 May 1873.

<sup>52</sup>*ibid.*, 1 May 1873.

<sup>53</sup>*ibid.*, 12 December 1871.

<sup>54</sup>On dances: *ibid.*, 18 and 22 November 1871. On tea-party: *ibid.*, 12 and 28 December 1871. On Queen of May: *ibid.*, 3 May 1872. On Christmas tree: *ibid.*, 12 and 28 December 1871.

<sup>55</sup>*ibid.*, 11 May 1875.

<sup>56</sup>*ibid.*, 24 January 1879.

<sup>57</sup>*ibid.*, 27 February 1881.

<sup>58</sup>*ibid.*, 19 July 1871.

<sup>59</sup>Sarah Decker, Minutes, Senior and Junior Cooperative Retrenchment Association, 31 October 1874, Church Archives; "Honest Poverty" to the Editor, *Salt Lake Daily Tribune*, 21 January 1873.

<sup>60</sup>*Salt Lake Daily Herald*, 16 October 1884. See also *Salt Lake Daily Tribune*, 16 October 1884.