

# Seagull Monument

Salt Lake City, Utah, USA

The Seagull Monument located on Temple Square, is a tribute to the history behind the state bird of Utah. After the pioneers arrived in the Salt Lake Valley in the summer of 1847, the next winter was a mild one. The early settlers planted crops early and were looking forward to the harvest. However, after planting approximately 900 acres of wheat, a “great numbers of large, black crickets...came swarming from the foothills literally by millions.”<sup>1</sup>

Attempts to drown, burn, bury and club the infestation were unsuccessful. The Saints pled to the Lord to deliver them from the plague of crickets, which some likened unto Egypt’s curse of locusts. On June 9th, great flocks of seagulls from the Great Salt Lake descended upon the crickets and fed upon them for over three weeks, saving the crops. George W. Bean wrote: “They would come by thousands and gobble up those great fat crickets that were as large as man’s thumb, until they would get about a pint, seemingly, then they would adjourn to the water ditch, take a drink and throw up all their crickets – rest themselves a little, then back to slaying the black ‘monsters’ again.”<sup>2</sup> To those observing the experience, it appeared that the seagulls were throwing back up the entire crickets. In actuality, they would regurgitate only the crickets’ exo-skeleton which they could not digest.

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints commissioned Mahonri M. Young, a well-known LDS sculptor, to create a monument depicting the miracle of the seagulls. The monument contains four relief panels depicting the miracle as well as two bronze seagulls atop a granite column. It was completed, placed on Temple Square and dedicated on September 13, 1913 by Joseph F. Smith, then President of the Church. Seagulls remain protected in Utah to this day.



The Seagull Monument  
Photo courtesy of Derek J. Tangren

## SOURCES

<sup>1</sup> B. H. Roberts, *A Comprehensive History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, 6 vols. (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1930), 331.

<sup>2</sup> “The Miracle of the Gulls,” <http://www.lds.org/newsroom/showpackage/0,15367,3899-1--34-2-185,00.html>.

## B. H. ROBERTS ACCOUNT OF THE SEAGULL MIRACLE<sup>1</sup>

“The pioneers when entering the valley, it will be remembered, noted that in the foothills there were great numbers of large, black crickets,

which then excited but a passing remark. Now, however, in this month of May, [1848], they came swarming from the foothills literally by millions, and descended upon the new-made fields of grain. They devoured all before them as they came to it. Their appetite never abated. They were cutting and grinding day and night, leaving the fields bare and brown behind them. There seemed to be no end to their numbers. They could not fly; their only means of locomotion was by clumsily hopping a scant foot at a time—hence, once in the fields, the difficulty of getting them out; and they came in myriads, increasing daily. Holes were dug; and for the radius of a rod the pests were surrounded by women and children, and driven into them and buried—bushels of them at a time; and this was repeated again and again; but what was the use?

This method seemed not to affect the numbers of the pests. Then the men plowed ditches around the wheat fields, turned in the water, and drove the black vermin into the running streams and thus carried them from the fields and destroyed them by hundreds of thousands—all to no purpose; as many as ever seemed to remain, and more were daily swarming from the hills. Fire was tried, but to no better purpose. Man's ingenuity was baffled. He might as well try to sweep back the rising tide of the ocean with a broom as prevail against these swarming pests by the methods tried. Insignificant, these inch or inch and a half long insects separately, but in millions, terrible. The incident illustrates the formidableness of mere numbers.

Since the days of Egypt's curse of locusts there was probably nothing like it. The failure to destroy these pests spelled famine to these first settlers of Salt Lake Valley. It meant starvation to the companies of thousands of women and children then en route across the plains. Small wonder if the hearts of the colonists failed them. They looked at one another in helpless astonishment. They were beaten. That is something awful for strong men to admit, especially when beaten by units so insignificant. Meantime the ceaseless gnawing of the ruthless and insatiable invader went on. The brown

patches of the wheat fields grew larger. Soon all would be bare and brown, and hope of food and life would disappear with the recently green wheat fields.

Then the miraculous happened. I say it deliberately, the miraculous happened, as men commonly view the miraculous. There was heard the shrill, half-scream, half-plaintive cry of some seagulls hovering over the wheat fields. Presently they alight and begin devouring the crickets. Others come—thousands of them—from over the lake. The upper feathers of the gull's wings are tinted with a delicate grey, and some of the flight feathers, primaries, to be exact, are marked with black, but the prevailing color is white; and as they came upon the new wheat fields, stretched upward and then gracefully folded their wings and began devouring the devourers, to the cricket-vexed colonists they seemed like white-winged angels of deliverance—these gulls.

They were tireless in their destructive—nay, their saving work. It was noted that when they were glutted with crickets they would go to the streams, drink, vomit, and return again to the slaughter. And so it continued, day after day, until the plague was stayed, and the crops of the pioneers saved.”

## SOURCES

<sup>1</sup> B. H. Roberts, *A Comprehensive History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, 6 vols. (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1930), 331-33.

## ORSON PRATT'S ACCOUNT OF THE SEAGULL MIRACLE<sup>1</sup>

We planted our crops in the spring and they came up, and were looking nicely, and we were cheered with the hopes of having a very abundant harvest. But alas! it very soon appeared as if our crops were going to be swallowed up by a vast horde of crickets, that came down from these mountains—crickets very different to what I used

to be acquainted with in the State of New York.

They were crickets nearly as large as a man's thumb. They came in immense droves, so that men and women with brush could make no headway against them; but we cried unto the Lord in our afflictions, and the Lord heard us, and sent thousands and tens of thousands of a small white bird.

I have not see any of them lately. Many called them gulls, although they were different from the seagulls that live on the Atlantic coast. And what did they do for us? They went to work, and by thousands and tens of thousands, began to devour them up, and still we thought that even they could not prevail against so large and mighty an army. But we noticed, that when they had apparently filled themselves with these crickets, they would go and vomit them up, and again go to work and fill themselves, and so they continued to do, until the land was cleared of crickets, and our crops were saved.

There are those who will say that this was one of the natural courses of events, that there was no miracle in it. Let that be as it may, we esteemed it as a blessing from the hand of God; miracle or no miracle, we believe that God had a hand in it, and it does not matter particularly whether strangers believe or not.

## SOURCES

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<sup>1</sup> Orson Pratt, *Journal of Discourses*, 26 vols. (London: Latter-day Saints' Book Depot, 1854-1886), 21: 277 - 278.

## VISITOR INFORMATION

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### *Address:*

50 W. North Temple  
Salt Lake City, Utah 84150

### *GPS Coordinates:*

N40° 46.187' W111° 53.568'

### *Hours of Operation:*

9:00AM to 9:00PM

### *Admission:*

Free

## ADDITIONAL READING RESOURCES

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- William G. Hartley, "Mormons, Crickets, and Gulls: A New Look at an Old Story," *Utah Historical Quarterly*, Summer 1970, Vol. 38, 224-39.
- Richard W. Sadler, "Miracle of Seagulls," *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, Vol. 3, (New York: Macmillan, 1992), 1287-88.
- George L. Scott, "The Miracle of the Gulls," *Millennial Star*, July 1963, Vol. 125, 164-65.

