Patricide
in the Halls of Utah Statehood

A PERSONAL ESSAY

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UNLIKE Huey Long, who died by gunfire in the lobby of the Louisiana statehouse in 1935, no murder actually took place in the history of Utah statehood. But a political legacy suffered assassination, and the victim happened to be my great-grandfather, Joseph L. Rawlins. The perpetrator, I discovered, turned out to be the foremost historian of Utah statehood, Edward Leo Lyman.

HISTORY OF A STRAW MAN

Edward Lyman's issue with Rawlins can be attributed to a master's thesis submitted in December 1973 to the history department of the University of Utah. Its author was Joan Ray Harrow, another descendant of Joseph Rawlins, which was approved by a committee of distinguished Utah scholars—historians Brigham D. Madsen and David A. Miller, along with political scientist Samuel Grover Rich, Jr., and veteran Utah archivist Ruth Yeaman. The thesis committee seemed to find nothing objectionable with the title, "Joseph L. Rawlins: Father of Utah Statehood," but Lyman did when he came across it sometime later.

The purpose of Harrow's thesis was to recover the forgotten life and accomplishments of a man who had been instrumental in the achievement of Utah statehood. On Rawlins's death in May 1926, the *Salt Lake Tribune* called him the "Father of Utah," but Harrow modulated that song of praise to a single chord—father of Utah statehood. She did this because Rawlins, as one of ten territorial delegates to Congress from 1851 to 1896, "did as much as any man to bring Utah into the Union."

"…as much as any man…" because Harrow saw her master's thesis title as reflecting the role Rawlins had played in the context of a movement that included other actors and forces. By 1893, when he began his two-year term as territorial delegate to the 53rd Congress, there had been six previous attempts at statehood. The Mormon adherence to the practice of plural marriage, commonly known as polygamy, had defeated them all. A major breakthrough came in 1890, when Wilford Woodruff, the president of the church, and thus the Lord's prophet, *advised* against further plural marriages—and even his mild presidential wording, for Mormons, translated into a commandment. The Woodruff Manifesto took a year or so to convince a reluctant Congress that a half-century-old religious practice had officially come to an end. However, politicians in both national parties,

Republican and Democratic, were vying for the electoral votes that a brand-new state would provide, and the climate was right to act.

Rawlins was aware of the moment's importance—and that he was the first native son of Utah to hold national office. Having left the Mormon church as a young man, he nevertheless held deep ties to Utah and its people. Within a few months of his election to Congress, during a period when Democrats controlled both houses of Congress and the presidency, he managed to bring a statehood bill to President Grover Cleveland's desk.[1] This, the Enabling Act for Utah statehood, signed by Grover Cleveland in July 1894, led to a constitutional convention the next year and Utah's entrance into the Union in January 1896. Thus, Harrow's "Father of Statehood" subtitle.

In January 1973, a few months before Harrow submitted her thesis, Lyman published "Isaac Trumbo and the Politics of Utah Statehood" in the *Utah Historical Quarterly,* a biographical study of a similarly forgotten figure who occupied a much greater role in the statehood movement than Rawlins, Lyman believed. The article begins:

> When Utah's admission into the Union was assured by Congress [after the bill's passage in 1894 but before Cleveland signed the act in 1896], immediate past delegate Joseph L. Rawlins and Delegate Frank J. Cannon received due credit for their efforts. But the most laudatory congratulatory messages poured in to a now-forgotten, former California businessman, Colonel Isaac Trumbo. By those in a position to really know how statehood had been attained, Trumbo was given credit for having done most to reach that long-sought goal.

"those in a position to really know" were Trumbo's clients, members of the First Presidency—the highest authority—of the Mormon church. Over the past few years, Trumbo had been working as a lobbyist with the church leaders to realize two political objectives: first, statehood; and second, to make sure the new state of Utah went Republican. Neither was an easy task,

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[1] Prior to 1894, Utah's congressional delegates, whose territorial status did not allow them to vote, allied themselves with the Democratic party nationally. From 1870, when the Mormon People's party (Democratic) came into being, in contrast to the non-Mormon Liberal party, George Q. Cannon, who served from 1872 to 1882, and John T. Caine, 1882 to 1892—both of the People's party—dominated. Joseph L. Rawlins, 1892 to 1894, was the first independent, non-Mormon Democrat. George Q. Cannon's son, Frank, the first Republican, was the last territorial delegate (1895 to 1896) prior to statehood. His father, George Q., has long been listed as a Republican delegate on the official House history website (history.house.gov), on Wikipedia, and in other sources Yet the House historian's office has recently corrected the Cannon biography to show he served as a Democrat in Congress. Cannon only announced himself to be a Republican in the early 1890s, long after he'd been out of Congress, and surprised many of his colleagues.

and both were closely related. Statehood had to overcome objections on a national level to polygamy, and those objections had largely originated with the Radical Republicans who had long equated polygamy and slavery as "twin pillars of barbarism." Furthermore, ever since the arrival of the railroad in 1870, with a steady stream of incoming non-Mormons, or Gentiles, Utah's territorial politics had been narrowly focused on battles between the Mormon People's party and the Gentiles' Liberal party, which condemned both polygamy and the church's interference in politics and government. Incidentally, most members of the dominant Peoples' party considered themselves Democrats, and most in the substantially smaller Liberal party aligned themselves with Republicans nationally.

Lyman's early venture into the history of the statehood movement led to his first full-length scholarly work, *Political Deliverance: The Mormon Quest for Utah Statehood,* in 1986. One pivotal moment along that path, according to Lyman, was the opportunity taken by Republican lobbyists to take control of events at a critical time. As Lyman tells the story, Rawlins was successful in getting the Utah bill passed by the House in December 1893, then waited for months while Democratic senator Charles J. Faulkner, probably at the behest of the party's leadership, delayed the bill in the Committee on Territories. Disconsolate that the bill would be postponed beyond the current legislative session, and his tenure, Rawlins abandoned his efforts and caught a train for Salt Lake City. At just that moment, Lyman says, Trumbo and his allies, working behind the scenes with Republican senators, forced Faulkner to release the bill. This happened in mid-May 1894.

Lyman writes in *Political Deliverance:*

> Although he [Rawlins] had been persistent in his efforts throughout the winter and spring, his absence from his post on the day that the Utah statehood bill was successfully dislodged from the committee seriously detracts from the claims made then and more recently that he was the "father of Utah statehood." (226–27)

Presumably, Lyman draws his conclusion on Rawlins's departure from a *Salt Lake Tribune* article published on May 17, 1894, the day after Charles Faulkner's announcement and while Rawlins was en route to Salt Lake City. Significantly, however, the *Tribune* article bears a Washington, D.C., *dateline* of May 16—a day earlier. Headlined "Faulkner Brought Around," it begins:

> Senator Faulkner this morning [May 16], at the meeting of the Senate Committee on Territories, agreed to report to-morrow an amended bill for the admission of Utah as a State. He took this action in response to the repeated and

> urgent requests of the Republican members of the committee, [*and*] Delegate Rawlins [,] and Colonel Ike Trumbo,…who was the first to rush down town and announce that Faulkner had come around.
>
> —W.E.A. [W. E. Annin, *Tribune* correspondent in Washington]

The newspaper article closes: "Delegate Rawlins has started with his family for Utah"—the *evening* of May 16, *after* Faulkner's announcement. Similarly, the *Deseret News* of May 17 states that Rawlins "left for Utah last night." Thus, whatever despair Rawlins may have suffered beforehand, his return home would have been celebratory—for it's likely that Faulkner, who was the delegate's friend, telephoned Rawlins with the good news on the morning of May 16, perhaps before making his announcement.

Lyman tells the story of Rawlins's despair again in his next scholarly study, *Finally Statehood! Utah's Struggles, 1849–1896,* published in 2019. This time the historian suggests that Rawlins's "inexperience" might have led to his hasty retreat when things looked hopeless.[2] Regardless of the reasons why Rawlins and his family left Washington for Salt Lake on May 16—though it was *not* before Faulkner announced that he was releasing the statehood bill—the old "father of statehood" ghost reemerges nearly fifty years after Joan Harrow submitted her thesis. "While Rawlins did well in his early congressional efforts for Utah," Lyman writes, "his absence from the nation's capital during the time the statehood bill was dislodged and passed prevents considering him the father of statehood" (288n9).

One wonders why Lyman would find it necessary to debunk a claim that had essentially remained forgotten in the stacks of the university's library for decades. The answer may lie in a more revealing—and far more public—dismissal of Rawlins that made its appearance in a coffee-table book published in 1996, on the centennial of Utah's statehood. Written by Ken Verdoia and published as a companion volume to a popular documentary series that aired on KUED–Channel 7 in Salt Lake City and throughout the state, *Utah: The Struggle for Statehood* looks at the people and events describing Utah's long and unique path to entrance into the Union.

Among the historical figures highlighted—or, in this case, lowlighted—in *Utah: The Struggle for Statehood* is Joseph L. Rawlins. The book's derogatory

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[2] True, Rawlins had been a territorial delegate barely a year, but he was a canny politician. It's entirely possible that his public expression of "despair," along with a suggestion that his own party leaders were holding the statehood bill up for political gain, was a tactical move to force its release it from the Committee on Territories.

treatment of the man who secured passage of the Enabling Act for statehood immediately raises serious questions about the writer's motive:

> Joseph Rawlins was an important delegate in the Utah Constitutional Convention of 1895. After the Manifesto by Wilford Woodruff had overcome the hurdle of federal opposition to plural marriage, Rawlins had the relatively easy task of shepherding Utah's admission to the Union through Congress. Facing only token opposition in both the House and Senate, and bolstered by an extraordinarily effective lobbying campaign in government and the media, Rawlins was given credit by some as the "Father of Statehood" when the Utah Enabling Act was signed into law in 1894. That is a gross overstatement; the bulk of the difficult and important political work had been undertaken by George Q. Cannon and by Rawlins's predecessor as delegate, John T. Caine. (172)

When questioned about this passage, Verdoia took note of the tone.[3] Yet he defended the gist of the paragraph and stated that he had relied on the expertise of historians Leonard J. Arrington and Edward Leo Lyman in preparing it, though he was the "sole, responsible author" for everything in the book. That's right and honorable. But nearly every line of the short Rawlins biography in *Utah: The Struggle for Statehood* conveys Edward Lyman's point of view, including the red-flag reference to Rawlins as Utah's statehood "father." Both explicitly and implicitly, this dismissive paragraph—inappropriate in an otherwise factual, and excellent, public history document like *Utah: The Struggle for Statehood*—begs close analysis.

Error. The first sentence states that Rawlins "was an important delegate in the Utah Constitutional Convention of 1895."[4] Perhaps this was meant to soften the unremitting critique that follows; but, except for paying a visit at the beginning of the convention, Rawlins had no connection with it.[5]

Innuendo. Next, we learn that Rawlins "was given credit by some" as the "Father of Statehood" when the president signed the Enabling Act in 1894. However, we never learn just *who* originated that phrase, and newspapers of the time offer no help. In *Political Deliverance,* Lyman implies that the "father of statehood" title for Rawlins was first coined at the time the Enabling bill was reported out of the Senate committee—and "more recently." The reference to *more recently* obviously points to Joan Ray Harrow's master's thesis

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[3] Email correspondence between the author and Ken Verdoia, August 5, 2021.

[4] The Enabling Act, signed by President Cleveland on July 16, 1894, called for a state convention to draft a proposed constitution to be submitted to the U.S. Congress before statehood could be approved. It was held in the new Salt Lake City and County Building from March 4 to May 6, 1895.

[5] *Salt Lake Herald,* May 5, 1895. Delegate Frank J. Cannon made an appearance at the end of the convention. Both visits were nothing more than gestures of support.

of 1973; but, in *Utah: The Struggle for Statehood*, it is transformed into a kind of myth arising out of the nineteenth century. Lyman never offers evidence that it applied to Joseph Rawlins in 1894—or ever appeared in print at that time.

Realpolitik. Aside from factual problems, the passage on Joseph L. Rawlins in *Utah: The Struggle for Statehood* may be guilty of its own "gross overstatement" in touting "an extraordinarily effective lobbying campaign in government and the media." This campaign, conducted in high secrecy by a small clique in the LDS church's Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, consisted of subsidies to newspapers for favorable stories, and payments to politicians. A key agent in the scheme was Isaac Trumbo, who assembled leading Republican operatives to help bring about statehood. (Ironically, the only known 1894 reference to "father of statehood," on August 8, is the *Salt Lake Herald Republican*'s paean to Isaac Trumbo, a reprint of a July 20 *New York Tribune* article that Trumbo might well have written himself.)[6]

Lyman's approach to Utah's statehood history could be considered *realpolitik* for its unflinching look at the deal-making and payoffs the LDS church engaged in to reverse decades of social opprobrium, draconian laws, and federal control of territorial civic duties. In addition, the support of savvy businessmen and experienced political lobbyists, along with the equivalent of millions in today's dollars, had to make a difference. But the causes and effects of social change, as any sociologist or political scientist knows, can be difficult to assess; and merely comparing the content of news stories from negative to positive over a period of time, as Lyman did, falls short of the kind of statistical rigor necessary for valid conclusions on that kind of scale.

Furthermore, Lyman rationalizes pay-to-print propaganda and bribing congressional legislators as a by-product of the era, the unseen "sausage-making" process leading to desired political ends in the Gilded Age.[7] These

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[6] No reference to "father of statehood" relating to Utah showed up for me in two digital newspaper search sites—one national, one Utah based—between 1894 and September 6, 1993, when Dan Harrie wrote an article entitled "100 Years Later, Father of Statehood All But Forgotten" in the *Salt Lake Tribune* on Joseph L. Rawlins. It commemorated the centennial of the Enabling bill's introduction to the House of Representatives. In one sentence, Harrie captures a truth I haven't found anywhere else—that Rawlins was "the right champion [of statehood] at the right time."

[7] Brad Westwood, "Leo Lyman's Deep Dive into the 'Sausage Making' of Utah Statehood," *Speak Your Piece,* podcast interview with Edward Leo Lyman. Season 1, Episode 3, Part 1 of 2, beginning with track position 41:00 covering the LDS church's Committee on Statehood and its secret funding of national lobbyists. https://community.utah.gov/historian-leo-lymans-deep-dive-into-the-sausage-making-of-utahs-statehood.

tactics are probably true of any age, but such rationalization doesn't excuse the behavior of religious leaders, or anyone else, from the judgments of history. George Q. Cannon, one of the most powerful figures in the LDS church during the last three decades of the nineteenth century, carefully distanced himself from the "extraordinarily effective lobbying campaign" he had approved; and his son Frank, who twice ran for office as a Republican against Joseph Rawlins, condemned these schemes and later abandoned both the church and Republican party.

Problematic argument. The Rawlins passage in *Utah: The Struggle for Statehood* concludes with the statement that Rawlins's predecessors, George Q. Cannon and John T. Caine, bore far greater weight in achieving statehood than Rawlins. Each of these territorial delegates served about a decade in the House compared to Rawlins's two-year term, so in that sense they exceeded him in legislative business. But did they actually help to accomplish statehood? Aside from impressing legislators with his urbanity and intelligence, most of Cannon's efforts focused on defending the church and his own status as a polygamist. Caine, who succeeded him, continued the same diplomacy at the behest of church leaders, under Cannon's direction. Most of the legislative strategy took place through the undercover lobbying campaign. In other words, the contributions of Cannon and Caine amounted to little more than a holding effort. The legislative logjam broke only through intolerable pressure that forced capitulation in September 1890 with President Wilford Woodruff's manifesto against further plural marriages.

All three instances in which Lyman strips Rawlins of his "father of statehood" title—*Political Deliverance* (1986), *Utah: The Struggle for Statehood* (1996), and *Finally Statehood!* (2019)—raise a question. Is there any reason why a graduate student's thesis title would loom so large that it had to be mentioned in two scholarly works and one public history survey?[8] Perhaps there is—and the answer may lie, not in Joseph L. Rawlins per se, but in the thesis Lyman developed back in the early 1970s, before he even came across Harrow's thesis. In *Political Deliverance,* he points to the question that led to his dissertation and first book on Utah statehood:

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[8] Actually, Joan Ray Harrow published a brief version of her thesis, under the same title, in the January 1976 issue of the *Utah Historical Quarterly,* so the "father of statehood" phrase had circulated through the historical community for a decade before Lyman published *Political Deliverance*. Nevertheless, Harrow's *Utah Historical Quarterly* article does not appear as a source in Lyman's books on statehood.

> My interest in the subject of Mormon politics began with the question of why the Latter-day Saints, who had been allied with the Democrats for over forty years, so abruptly became associated with their former enemies, the Republican party, in the 1890s and have retained that relationship to the present time. (301)

The long marriage between the Mormon church and the Republican party, Lyman discovered, began during the height of the church's troubles in 1887 with the government's new stranglehold on the church as an institution—depriving it of income and property holdings. Finding the national Democratic party no more sympathetic than the Republicans, George Q. Cannon discovered GOP operatives, Isaac Trumbo significant among them, who offered assistance in exchange for business opportunities and possible political appointments. A willing entrepreneur, Cannon saw the business-industrial-commercial direction of the Republican party as linked inherently with statehood and the future prosperity of the church.

In fact, when Utah's senior public historian, Brad Westwood, asked Lyman whom he considered the "father of Utah statehood," the historian answered "George Q. Cannon"—not Isaac Trumbo, who ended up spurned by the church and denied the senatorship he believed he earned. Indeed, the mantel "father of statehood," once it was removed from Rawlins's shoulders, quickly came to rest on George Q. Cannon's.[9] Davis Bitton, in his 1999 *George Q. Cannon: A Biography,* makes the phrase a chapter title, and he even has Joseph L. Rawlins, inexplicably, working as a "foot soldier in the field" under commander-in-chief George Q. Cannon.[10]

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[9] George Q. Cannon's invisible guiding hand directed nearly every important church decision or action—even Wilford Woodruff's Manifesto. *"Our* advice to the Latter-day Saints," Woodruff initially wrote, "is to *obey the law of the land*, leaving the nation responsible.…" (GQCJ, September 24, 1890). Cannon rephrased this to say, "*My* advice…is to *refrain from contracting any marriage forbidden by* the law of the land," eliminating Woodruff's suggestion that God would hold the nation responsible for forcing Mormons to give up a divine commandment. The law of the land, at that time, prohibited unlawful cohabitation, or continuing relationships with more than one wife, which was Woodruff's clear message, but Cannon's revision focused exclusively on *new* polygamous marriages. Notably, he also changed Woodruff's plural pronouns *we* and *our*—used throughout the original—to the singular, *I* and *my,* as if to reinforce not only its revelatory significance but also to distance himself and other apostles from it. He clearly wanted to protect his prerogatives over plural marriage, as well as those of his colleagues. (Italics in the quoted material are mine.)

[10] Bitton, *George Q. Cannon: A Biography* (Deseret Book, 1999), last para. Chap. 10 (Kindle edition). The phrase has also been incorporated into an LDS website on church history: "George Q. Cannon: A Mighty Instrument," www.history.churchofjesuschrist.org.

One wonders why Rawlins even *appears* in *Utah: The Struggle for Statehood*. The simple answer is he *had* to. Rawlins couldn't have been ignored. His absence would have left a gap that scholars, if no one else, would have questioned. A simple, straightforward account of his political accomplishments might have sufficed—his Democratic victory over Republican Frank J. Cannon for the congressional seat, his bold amendments to the enabling bill, and his confident handling of a rancorous House member to the laughter and applause of the House. But that kind of simple account wouldn't have carried the message—if only for scholars—that far more complex forces, discovered by Edward Lyman decades earlier, were at work.

Verdoia's commemorative volume brings the statehood story to its end with the proclamation ceremony in January 1896. But even here, unintentionally but tellingly, Rawlins is relegated to that of an invisible actor (accomplished through a "sleight of passive voice"): "Cleveland's pen," the text reads, "was then displayed to the cheers of the crowd" (178). The person making the presentation—who gave Utah's new governor, Heber M. Wells, the pen Cleveland used to approve the state's Enabling Act—was Joseph L. Rawlins, and the cheers actually came earlier, when Rawlins rose to read the president's latest proclamation to "uncontrolled applause and cheers" in the Salt Lake Tabernacle.[11]

LOYAL APOSTATE

The second authority whom Ken Verdoia consulted for the piece on Joseph L. Rawlins in *Utah: The Struggle for Statehood* was the distinguished Utah historian Leonard J. Arrington, who appeared to be familiar with Rawlins's background and professional career.[12] Yet Arrington was mistaken about one critical fact, and, as a result, failed to understand the unique position Rawlins took in the political battles and philosophical disagreements that raged between Mormons and Gentiles in territorial Utah.

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[11] Actually, there were two pens involved, not one as implied in the book (177–78). In July 1894, when Cleveland signed the Enabling Act, Rawlins kept the pen for donation to Utah's future state archives. Then, in early January 1896, Frank J. Cannon, the new senator-elect from Utah, traveled with other dignitaries to Washington, D.C., for the president's signing of the Proclamation of Statehood, and Cannon kept *that* pen for the same purpose. As it turned out, the Enabling Act pen became part of the statehood celebration on January 6, offered to the new governor. Cannon returned from Washington on January 8. *Salt Lake Tribune,* January 5, 1896; *Deseret News,* January 6, 1896; George Q. Cannon journal (GQCJ online), January 8, 1896.

[12] This and earlier information about the treatment of Joseph L. Rawlins in Verdoia's *Utah: The Struggle for Statehood,* comes from a series of email exchanges I had with him on August 5 and 9, 2021, and June 26 and 27, 2022.

Arrington told Verdoia that Rawlins, unhappy when his father became a polygamist, abandoned the Mormon church and joined the Liberal party, which was largely non-Mormon and hostile to the church. Yet Rawlins was already eighteen years old when his father, Joseph Sharp Rawlins, took a second wife, Hannah Stringfellow. By that time, the young man had already developed a resentment against the autocratic dictates of Brigham Young and the church which virtually deprived him of a father living at home—and an education—throughout his youth.

Because Joseph Sharp Rawlins spent most of the 1860s as an emigrant train wagon master (in addition to earlier assignments that took him far from home, such as the aborted 1855 Elk Mountain Mission near present-day Moab), Joseph L. Rawlins received the equivalent of only sixteen months of schooling throughout his formative years. By considerable good luck, his last public schoolteacher was John R. Park, who became president of the University of Deseret (later University of Utah) in the late 1860s and inspired young Rawlins to attend college there. Rawlins did so well in Apostle Orson Pratt's math courses that in the following year he taught college-level math, along with history, to cover his own tuition.

Whether or not Rawlins had begun to harbor doubts about his faith before this time, the intellectual freedom he discovered as a young man convinced him he needed to escape the confines of an authoritarian culture. A chance visit from Midwestern relatives led him to apply to Indiana University, and his departure from Utah in 1871 without approval by Mormon elders marked a significant break with the church. He only enjoyed two years at Indiana, plagued always by lack of funds; but, when he returned to Utah, disheartened, he no longer considered himself a Latter-day Saint. Nevertheless, he committed himself to a future in Utah.

Part of that commitment was his resolve to end polygamy. But plural marriage was only part and parcel of his effort to reform a society he saw enchained by a theocratic political system restricting intellectual freedom and liberty. In his typescript autobiography, he gives an illustration of the kind of dictatorial thinking that ruled the church:

> The learned Orson Pratt published a scientific treatise on the origin and development of the planetary system. Brigham Young and his counsellors [*sic*], [having] determined this publication to be heterodoxical, ordered its destruction and at the same time promulgated [Young's] own views of the matter, which thereafter were to remain unquestioned. Such a condition, to my mind, was intolerable

> and I entertained the view that open and free discussion among the Mormon people…would lead to their emancipation from this intellectual thralldom.[13]

Rawlins might easily have found a future as a university professor. But he went into law, joined a firm, and over the next two decades took on a wide variety of civil and criminal cases. Perhaps his most valuable experience came when Brigham Young appointed him Salt Lake City attorney, in spite of the young lawyer's apostacy. They had visited together on at least one occasion after Rawlins's return from Indiana. At that time Rawlins also met several members of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles—John Taylor, Orson Pratt, Wilford Woodruff, George A. Smith, and George Q. Cannon—and he took careful note of the qualities and character of each man.

Failing to understand Rawlins's background or motivations clearly, historian Arrington placed him in the Liberal party, which originated in 1870 as a counterforce to the dominant People's party of the church. But Rawlins distanced himself from the Liberal party. As a practicing lawyer he represented clients from both political and religious persuasions, including the apostle George Q. Cannon, whom federal marshals pursued in the mid-1880s during the height of anti-polygamy purges.[14] In return, as historian Jan Shipps points out, "the Saints supported lawyers who had never openly opposed the church, men like Arthur Brown, Joseph L. Rawlins, and George Sutherland who had proved themselves notably friendly to the Mormons during the territorial period."[15]

Rawlins even helped represent the church in the most significant polygamy case of all, *Reynolds v. United States,* in 1879. George Reynolds, George Q. Cannon's assistant, had volunteered to test the church's belief that plural marriage was protected by the First Amendment. After the court decided

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[13] Joseph L. Rawlins, typescript autobiography, 72–73, Rawlins Papers, Special Collections, Marriott Library, University of Utah. The pagination refers to a recently discovered typescript, the original of another in the collection that daughter Alta Rawlins Jensen edited and revised for her self-published "autobiography" titled *The Unfavored Few* in 1956. The recently found—but chronologically older—typescript was donated in 2021. Internal evidence dates the typescript as no later than 1916, for it refers to Joseph T. Kingsbury as president of the University of Utah.

[14] George Q. Cannon and Rawlins's father, Joseph Sharp Rawlins, had a close relationship—so close that Cannon trusted the elder Rawlins with the location of a nearby safe house the apostle used during the fugitive years (GQCJ online, August 22, 1887, and March 23, 1888). Cannon also befriended, and perhaps converted, a woman in England named Hannah Stringfellow, and saw to her emigration to the United States. Joseph Sharp Rawlins met her in the 1860s, perhaps while he was guiding a wagon train across the plains, and she became his plural wife.

[15] Jan Shipps, "Utah Comes of Age Politically: A Study of the State's Politics in the Early Years of the Twentieth Century, *Utah Historical Quarterly,* Spring 1967, 94.

against the church, Rawlins met with Cannon, then a territorial delegate in Congress, whom Rawlins considered a friend. As Rawlins recounted,

> One day, as Mr. Canon [*sic*] and I were walking up the Capitol steps, he asked my opinion as to what the church should do and I vouchsafed that conformity to the law was the only road, not to follow which would lead to trouble, if not ruin. He answered, "I thought so too, but they have decided differently at home." He seemed worried and was painfully conscious of his dilemma.[16]

In addition to serving on the Reynolds legal team, Rawlins later acted as Cannon's counselor and took on other cases for Mormon polygamists—in spite of his philosophical opposition to plural marriage.

Rawlins differed with the Liberal party in another major way, too. Its members opposed statehood for Utah, and Rawlins didn't. He was in favor of home rule. But he foresaw that Utah would never prosper as long as its major political parties centered on religion. As a result, he virtually pioneered the effort to develop a party along national Democratic lines—helping to found in the mid-1880s, and becoming the president of, the short-lived Young Men's Democratic Club, whose members purposely included Mormons and non-Mormons.[17] The club foundered, according to Rawlins, because its Mormon members, while favoring a separation of church and state, could not publicly endorse that position or support the law against polygamy. They surely couldn't vote their conscience because ballots were not secret.

The Young Men's Democratic Club evolved into what was called "Sagebrush Democracy," a local alliance with the national Democratic party—and a deliberate alternative to the Liberal party, whose principles aligned with ecumenical Democrats but whose animus toward the church was its own. In May 1888, local Democrats held a convention in Ogden to elect delegates to the national party convention. In *Political Deliverance,* Lyman describes an effort by "members of these dormant [Sagebrush Democracy] clubs" to put up four LDS delegates, and he tells how the credentials

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[16] Rawlins autobiography, 90. Cannon was dissembling, for nothing in his journal suggests that his fellow apostles were demanding plural marriage against his will.

[17] Lyman (*Political Deliverance,* 100–2) describes these young men as "generally of Mormon parentage" and "nominally involved in the spiritual affairs of the church." Many, he says, were educated outside the territory and returned to practice law. Rawlins, who is so well characterized here, yet nameless, was the club's president and wrote its statement of purpose. The other three officers were Mormons Alfales Young and J. T. Kingsbury and a Gentile, J. G. Sutherland. *Salt Lake Herald,* January 9 and 18, 1885; *Salt Lake Democrat,* March 2, 1885; Lyman, *Finally Statehood!* 173.

committee, largely controlled by Liberals, rejected them. But Lyman fails to point out that their leader and advocate was Joseph L. Rawlins, who fought for them so adamantly that he was physically forced to sit down. His name was prominent in newspaper articles describing the brouhaha.[18] Rawlins's fight for Mormon representation—and its significance for his unique role as Utah's territorial delegate to Congress—escapes historical notice in *Political Deliverance*.

Prior to Wilford Woodruff's manifesto ending polygamy in 1890, Rawlins made himself a familiar figure at national Democratic conventions and in efforts to lobby Congress for statehood. He joined Utah's territorial delegate, John T. Caine, in testifying before House and Senate committees in late 1891, and the two of them remained allies in the statehood effort even after Caine retired from Congress and Rawlins won election in 1892. In Washington, Rawlins became acquainted with William Jennings Bryan, a political friendship that lasted through Rawlins's two-year House term (1893–1895) and beyond.

In short, when Joseph L. Rawlins prepared the statehood bill for Utah early in his Congressional tenure—a document that had been submitted several times, in various forms, over nearly half a century—it included provisions both old and new. The previous version, which Caine submitted in 1889, included something totally new—a clear proscription against polygamy, supported by the church, which reflected the majority will of monogamous Mormons. Nevertheless, Congress rejected it, ever skeptical that the LDS church leadership would relinquish both its longtime doctrinal practice and its political influence. They thought it a ploy, which was most likely true. However, both of the national political parties were interested in the electoral advantage a new western state might offer, and so were anxious to bring Utah into the Union under the proper conditions.

Thus, the times and circumstances were right for statehood. So, too, was Utah's new territorial delegate in 1893. Rather than adding a change here and there to John Caine's latest bill, as suggested by the Rawlins passage in *Utah: The Struggle for Statehood,* Rawlins made substantial changes in terms of land for special schools and institutions, as well as adding two sections more than normally allowed in townships for public schools.[19] And that was just

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[18] Rawlins autobiography, 120; *Deseret News,* May 9, 1888.

[19] What Rawlins added to the statehood bill that he inherited from Caine wasn't minimal. He virtually doubled acreage allocated to special schools and care institutions over most of Caine's enabling bill, and added acreage for a miner's hospital. His request for so much land devoted to

the Utah Enabling bill. Another transferred sixty acres from Fort Douglas to the University of Utah; still another returned government-escheated funds back to the church; and various other monetary and land bills—all passed by the House and Senate—made for a full and successful congressional term.

More important, those congressmen who still opposed statehood might well have been impressed with one of only two non-Mormon delegates from Utah Territory to hold a legitimate seat in Congress—and by his confidence. Here was a native-born son who defended the Mormon church in legal battles going back to *United States v. Reynolds* but was outspoken in his opposition to polygamy and a champion of the separation of church and state. As much as John Caine was liked and admired, his colleagues in Congress knew him to be little more than an arm of the Mormon church, subject in his most important decisions to the will of the First Presidency.[20] This new delegate was certainly not.

UTAH'S HISTORY PROBLEM

Edward Lyman's inaccuracies about Joseph L. Rawlins in both scholarly and popular writings reflects a larger historical dismissal of Gentiles who fought for their own principles as much as Mormon leaders did theirs. [21] In fact, the narrative of Utah statehood seems to explain away Gentile concerns as little more than hostility and prejudice, which the Mormon establishment had to overcome, not to principles fundamental to American democracy. The struggle implicit in *Finally Statehood!* (with its exclamatory "whew!") channels Lyman's subtitle in *Political Deliverance—its* story, after all, is a *Mormon quest* for statehood. These books, and to a certain extent Ken Verdoia's

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education, government, and social purposes might have been one reason for the bill's holdup in the Senate Committee on Territories, but he had already convinced the House of its appropriateness given Utah's large amount of arid land.

[20] Judith Ann Roderick, "A Historical Study of the Congressional Career of John T. Caine," 117–23. Unpublished MA thesis, 1959, Brigham Young University.

[21] See, in particular, Lyman's entry, "Statehood for Utah," in the *Utah History Encyclopedia* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1994), which is available online through the Utah Educational Association. A fraction of the entry covers non-Mormon issues, and these Lyman treats dismissively, including a closing paragraph on a Democratic Congress delaying Utah statehood for partisan gain. One could compare this slanted approach with historian S. George Ellsworth's online "Road to Statehood," sponsored by the Utah Division of Archives and Records Service, which is much more balanced in its treatment of Mormon and non-Mormon concerns in the territorial period.

Utah: The Struggle for Statehood, assume that the defining paradigm of the statehood movement was that of an indomitable people striving to be free.

To be sure, Lyman takes a *realpolitik* view of the Mormon push for statehood, and he seems almost gleeful in presenting the warts as well as the achievements of the church's leaders. Yet he pays little attention to the arguments of people whom George Q. Cannon saw as "enemies"—those of the Liberal party and singular critics of church practices like *Salt Lake Tribune* editor C. C. Goodwin and Robert L. Baskin, a legal scholar whose efforts lay behind the Edmunds-Tucker Act and other federal laws against polygamy. True, the opposition to statehood largely came from the Liberal party and its allies, who posed serious obstacles to the statehood movement. But their principles, not just their hostility, must be a part of the historical narrative—as well as the theocratic conditions that led Liberals to resist the Mormon church and its social and political influence. In other words, what's been missing in studies of Utah statehood is a new paradigm—that of a *conflict of ideas* instead of a one-sided *struggle* against opposing forces.

As historian Patty Limerick once said, "Not all victims are innocent." Brigham Young's pursuit of a theocracy in the West set up a natural antagonism between the new Zion and an expanding American republic. Coincidentally, and ironically, the South pursued a similar course—and the 1856 Republican convention held up a banner pledging to end the "twin pillars of barbarism," slavery and polygamy. Easterners couldn't fail to equate the two empires in terms of their governance as well—both of them autocratic and patriarchal.

Joseph L. Rawlins, who grew up during the 1850s and 1860s, when nothing constrained the absolute authority of the church, told of his resentment over its control of almost every aspect of Mormon life. Even after the "world rushed in" with the completion of the transcontinental railroad in 1869, the church continued to carry out its social, civic, and political control by virtue of its greater numbers in the territory. As a result, public education languished for forty years and the secret ballot even longer.[22]

Undergirding this resistance to secular democratic practices was a demand for obedience, which grew out of the Mormon exodus of 1846–47 nearly as much as from the tenets of religion. But, in the last decades of the nineteenth century, well beyond the early years of pioneer struggle, the absolutism of George Q. Cannon set the tone for Mormon obedience to the

[22] John Gary Maxwell, *Robert Newton Baskin and the Making of Modern Utah* (Arthur C. Clark, 2013), 209 (for public education) and Lyman, *Finally Statehood!* 236 (for secret ballot).

dictates of church authorities. Not only did he tamper with the personal politics of church members by directing them to choose between Republican and Democratic parties (instead of a truly "hands-off" approach),[23] but he abandoned any respect for the separation of church and state by insisting that church officials must obtain permission from the First Presidency before engaging in politics. The hammer came down hardest on Moses Thatcher, an outspoken member of the Quorum of the Twelve who often disagreed with Cannon. Thatcher's defiance of the permission edict, as well as that of Brigham H. Roberts—both of whom sought to run as Democrats—led to Thatcher's expulsion from the quorum in 1896.[24]

The fight over Utah statehood represents the most significant conflict between church and state in American history, and it encompassed two sides of the church-state coin—the state imposing itself on religious practice (in the Edmunds-Tucker Law) and religion imposing itself on the "state," or territory, in the efforts of the First Presidency to control politics, education, legislation, and social behavior in the latter years of the nineteenth century.[25]

The only way out of the impasse in which the Mormon church and the federal government found themselves came during the 1880s. This was, as Edward Lyman has argued convincingly, a quiet revolution among the

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[23] J. D. Williams, a legal scholar and church member, reveals how the call to "choose" played out in practice. "Some imaginative bishops at the ward level…," he writes, "stood at the head of the chapel aisle and indicated that the Saints on one side (dare we say 'right'?) should become Republicans and those on the other (left?) should become Democrats" (J. D. Williams, "The Separation of Church and State in Mormon Theory and Practice," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought,* Spring 1966, 37.) Words in parenthesis here are Williams's.

[24] In both cases, the offenders were urged to obtain forgiveness for their offense, and Thatcher refused, which led to his expulsion. In his article "The Alienation of an Apostle from His Quorum: The Moses Thatcher Case," Edward Lyman concludes with his opinion of the rebellious Thatcher: "It is not…the tragedy of an independent mind crushed by arbitrary rule or free agency violated by unrighteous dominion.…It is indeed a tragedy for a man with the seeds of real greatness…not to develop the humility and cooperation with colleagues and higher authority that are necessary for a position appropriate to his talents" (*Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought,* 18/2 Summer 1985, 89–90). The sentiment could easily have come right out of George Q. Cannon's journal.

[25] One illustration of this is George Q. Cannon's effort to install a new president, James E. Talmage, at the University of Utah. In his journal for January 27, 1894, Cannon writes: "The University of Utah is the leading educational establishment in our country; it is extensively patronized by the young people; it has the advantage of being sustained out of Territorial funds; and therefore its control by one of our own people is very desirable. We must pay greater attention to what are called the Religion Classes and keep them up, and make them interesting and attractive, if we suspend any of our Church schools." Talmage was a geologist, and Cannon favored him because "all the popular text books on this science are unfavorable to the Biblical account of creation, and Brother Talmage, I think, would be a man well suited to teach this science" (GQCJ, March 29, 1894).

second-generation sons of polygamous Mormon apostles and bishops. Perhaps they could see that celestial marriage imposed a religious obligation that could only be fulfilled by the wealthy few. It resembled an inequality reminiscent of Calvinism, although celestial marriage in the earthly realm was based on economic status, not predetermined salvation.

A significant actor in making Congress aware of the impact of draconian legislation on second-generation, non-polygamous Mormons was Frank J. Cannon, George Q's son. In 1890, he testified before the House Committee on the Territories against a new bill, another of Baskin's, that extended far beyond religious *practice* to include disenfranchisement of any believing Mormon. Frank Cannon, a Republican, helped to postpone passage of the bill by promising that a major change in the church's position was pending, and he received confirmation from President Woodruff that a statement was coming.[26] Yet Cannon's testimony in 1890 made Congress acutely aware that younger Mormons would not perpetuate celestial marriage.[27] "You punished our fathers for an act and now you would punish us for a thought," he said. "You would take from us the franchise simply because a certain revelation exists in books of the Church—a revelation for which we are not responsible and over which we have not [*sic*] control."[28]

Aside from their opposing parties, the position of Joseph Rawlins and Frank Cannon on polygamy and its effect on a new generation of Utahns is virtually the same. In fact, Rawlins's faith in the honesty and sincerity of the Mormon people distanced him as much from the cynicism of Robert Baskin as Frank Cannon's abandonment of plural marriage distanced him from his own father's unshakable commitment to it. Both Rawlins and Cannon understood the religious commitment of their fathers but realized it was a dying practice—and *had* to be for Utah to become fully integrated into the American body politic.

This unlikely marriage of ideas—perhaps more important to the change of heart in Congress than formerly thought—is only one way of broadening the scholarly perspective on the statehood movement. In doing so, more attention should be given to the views of Gentiles like Baskin, whose cogent

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[26] Nevertheless, it appears that a more immediate danger, the appropriation of the church's temples by the government, was the deciding factor in Woodruff's issuance of the Manifesto.

[27] Lyman, *Finally Statehood!* 200.

[28] *Deseret News,* May 19, 1890.

arguments must not be dismissed along with his passion,[29] and moderates like Rawlins and Frank Cannon. But, in a deeper sense, the conditions of life in Utah prior to statehood—the reasons *why* Liberals and Gentiles opposed the church, as well as the ways in which Mormons and church leaders responded to the federal juggernaut—may offer more valuable insights into the evolution of statehood than heretofore. In short, we need to see the LDS church and the actions of its early leaders as equally responsible for the long and painful road to statehood as their opponents.

If there is to be a full analysis of the intellectual conflict that defined Utah in the late nineteenth century—the light rather than the heat—it remains there for younger scholars to pursue, including the voices of loyal apostates in Utah. One possible avenue of research that comes to mind is a comparison of the political and social ideas of George Q. Cannon, Joseph L. Rawlins, and Robert N. Baskin along a political spectrum.

Lyman's Mormon-Republican alliance thesis, expressed in his books, articles, and interviews, has achieved the status of a historical meme. Its most recent incarnation made its appearance in Utah's 125th anniversary in 2021. In commemoration of the event, and with substantial private funding, the Utah Department of Cultural and Community Engagement developed a multimedia initiative—Thrive 125—that includes websites, videos, podcasts, and educational tools. One of its most important public history products is *Becoming Utah: A People's Journey,* a twelve-minute educational story for seventh graders.

The theme of *Becoming Utah* is that racial, ethnic, and religious diversity has characterized Utah almost from its beginnings, and the effort to achieve statehood involved overcoming significant political and religious differences. The narration tiptoes carefully through the thicket of polygamy and theocratic control in Utah Territory, and argues that Mormons, like other minorities, were victims of American racial stereotypes. The apex of the story is Wilford Woodruff's manifesto and the reward of statehood in 1896; then the video takes up problems of discrimination, born in the past, that continue to the present day.

Becoming Utah: A People's Journey is not meant to be a presentation of complex historical issues, so one narrative passage drops like a moss-encrusted rock into a public swimming pool. The script reads:

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[29] See, in particular, the opening chapter of Baskin's *Reminiscences of Early Utah* (1914), which is less a set of reminiscences than a series of arguments and legal opinions about church and state issues.

> LDS church leaders recognized the importance of collaborating with railroads and other national businesses to help Utah's economy thrive and achieve statehood status. But, religion still divided the state.…[and] both Mormon and non-Mormon leaders worked to overcome…cultural and political differences. One of them was Isaac Trumbo, a Californian who worked with Republican members of Congress to gain their support for Utah statehood.

One suspects that the creators of *Becoming Utah* looked for a historian to vet the draft copy, found Edward Lyman, and ended up with venerable Isaac Trumbo and his unsavory mission in their educational video for junior high students. Trumbo isn't mentioned in the lesson plan, however, which is a good thing considering that his public relations work and lobbying, along with his dreams of wealth that would come from the Salt Lake–Los Angeles Railroad and a Utah senatorship, caused the LDS church great embarrassment.

Becoming Utah ends with the admonition to listen to voices that may not be heard. Utah's history problem, at least in the province of territorial politics, is that voices from the Gentile minority seldom enter the larger discussion—and much of what has been published resembles a Mormon (or Republican) perspective. Aside from the superficialities surrounding the "father of statehood" title, the conflict between church and state goes deeper than politics alone. Its *least* explored aspect—adjudicating between absolutes—is where Joseph L. Rawlins made his career.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Born in 1942 in Salt Lake City, David N. Wetzel attended East High School and graduated with BA and MA degrees in English literature from the University of Utah. In 1967 he enrolled in the doctoral program in American studies at the University of Minnesota. He achieved PhD candidacy (ABD) before moving with his wife and son to Denver, where he joined the Colorado Historical Society as managing editor in 1980. In 1983 he became the society's editor-in-chief and directed the publications program for the next twenty-three years. During that period he authored, coauthored, and contributed to works on Denver's first significant architect, childhood in Colorado, and Plains Indian ledger art. His most recent major publication is a creative nonfiction study, *The Vanishing Messiah: The Life and Resurrections of Francis Schlatter* (University of Iowa Press, 2016). He lives with his son, Richard, and grandchildren in Kansas City, Missouri. He can be reached at: dnwetzel@icloud.com.