

For Immediate Release (January 5, 2015)

Beehive Archive

Welcome to the Beehive Archive—your weekly bite-sized look at some of the most pivotal—and peculiar—events in Utah history. With all of the history and none of the dust, the Beehive Archive is a fun way to catch up on Utah’s past. Beehive Archive is a production of the Utah Humanities Council, provided to local papers as a weekly feature article focusing on Utah history topics drawn from our award-winning radio series, which can be heard each week on KCPW and Utah Public Radio.

Illustrating the West

They say a picture is worth a thousand words... Artists got people moving West by idealizing both the journey and the destination.

The mapmaker for the Dominguez-Escalante Expedition, Bernardo de Miera y Pacheco, created the first known map of Utah in 1776. Miera combined Utah Lake and the Great Salt Lake into one large body of water with a river outlet that led straight to the nearby Pacific Ocean. For the next hundred years, artists on survey expeditions to Utah would continue to combine observation and imagination in their depictions of the Western landscape.

The earliest surveyors were looking for natural resources to tap and easier routes for settlers. The 1849 Stansbury Expedition was the first scientific team to use artists to document the flora, fauna, and geography of the Great Salt Lake. Soon after, the 1853 Fremont Expedition brought along photographer Solomon Carvalho to document a route through the Wasatch Mountains. Brigham Young also commissioned depictions of Utah to encourage immigration. At Young’s behest, English artist Frederick Piercy spent six months in Utah in 1853 creating drawings that appear in a guide for Mormon converts traveling to Salt Lake. Despite the guide’s purpose, Piercy himself returned to England and was excommunicated for refusing to immigrate. Many artists and photographers of the West exaggerated the wild landscape, emphasizing the vastness of the sky and the wonders of creation, in order to fuel the imagination and, more importantly, the immigration of people from the East. Some artists romanticized the journey, making trails look lush, exciting, even easy. Albert Bierstadt, for example, came to Utah with the 1859 Lander Expedition. Bierstadt was known for his sweeping mountain vistas, which convey the emotions provoked by nature more than they depict geographic reality. Other artists, like Thomas Moran, who accompanied the 1873 Powell Survey of the Colorado River, created paintings of Zion, Yellowstone, and the Grand Canyon that influenced Congress to protect these areas as wilderness.

Artistic license? Perhaps... But these expeditions produced an unparalleled body of artwork – drawings, paintings, and photographs – that contributed to the settlement of the West, and to its enduring mystique.

Beehive Archive is a production of the Utah Humanities Council. Sources consulted in the creation of the Beehive Archive and past episodes may be found at www.utahhumanities.org/BeehiveArchive.htm. © Utah Humanities Council 2015.

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