SEAGULLS, MIRACLE OF

The first LDS pioneers entered the Salt Lake Valley in July 1847 (see Pioneer Day). Nearly 2,000 made the journey that year, with another 2,400 emigrants arriving in 1848. From the beginning, having so many dependent on first harvests from an untired land with an unknown growing season produced concern. That first summer, pioneers observed Indians harvesting “millions” of crickets for winter food. The crickets were driven into fires and roasted, and then stored in baskets and bags. Survival—individual and group survival—was clearly on the minds of these first Mormon settlers as they watched the Indians prepare to endure the winter.

During the first year in the Great Basin, most Latter-day Saint settlers resided in the Salt Lake Valley, although small settlements were also begun to the north at Kaysville, along the Weber River, and at Bountiful. Through the summer and fall of 1847, they planted 2,000 acres of winter wheat near the main settlement. A mild winter and thaw permitted plowing in early 1848, making it possible to plant more wheat and another 3,000 to 4,000 acres in corn and garden vegetables by spring.

As spring arrived, pioneer farmers reported with pride that their crops appeared to be doing very well. But April and May frosts leveled some of the crops, and late May brought another devastation—hordes of insects began to destroy the crops. These insects, later dubbed “Mormon crickets,” were as large as a man’s thumb. Not a true cricket but a member of the katydid family, the Mormon cricket has only small wings and cannot fly. Pioneers diarists reported the invaders in the fields as early as May 22. Some described them as numbering in the millions; John Steele wrote that they appeared by the “thousands of tons.” For more than a month, the crickets devastated the fields, devouring the new corn, beans, wheat, pumpkins, squash, cucumbers, melons, and other crops. Farmers battled the crickets with a variety of defensive measures but had little success.

By early June, relief arrived in the form of the seagull. The appearance of gulls was described in a letter of June 9 to Brigham Young in the following manner: “The sea gulls have come in large flocks from the lake and sweep the crickets as they go; it seems the hand of the Lord is in our favor” (Harley, p. 230). For the next three weeks, gulls appeared daily. They fed on the crickets, drank water, and then regurgitated before eating more crickets. There would be a harvest that year, after all.

Some 1848 pioneer journals mention the problems of frost, crickets, and drought without mentioning the gulls. However, several autumn accounts credited the counterinvasion by the gulls for the scanty crops that survived and acknowledged the hand of God in the event.

Ornithologists have noted that gulls, whose spring and summer habitat centers on the shores of the Great Salt Lake, regularly return to the valleys of the Great Basin to devour crickets, grasshoppers, and other insects, and that the 1848 appear-
ance of the gulls was therefore not unusual. Some skeptics thus saw the 1848 activities of both crick-
etts and gulls as simply natural phenomena. On the
other hand, many Latter-day Saints, with faith in a
God whose hand is in history and who often acts
through “natural” events, believed that their crops
had been saved in part by God’s intervention.
Over time, the 1848 “cricket war,” now called “the
miracle of the gulls,” became a prominent part of
the Saints’ collective memory. In honor of this oc-
casion, the indigeninos California gull became the
Utah state bird, and in 1913 the Seagull Monu-
ment on TEMPLE SQUARE was dedicated to com-
memorate the birds’ role in the 1848 crisis.
In the Salt Lake Valley, crickets, frost, and
lack of water played havoc on the harvest of 1848,
and crop losses were severe. But the losses would
have been much worse without the appearance of
the gulls, which was thus a significant factor in the
survival of Utah’s pioneer settlers.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

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SEALING

[This entry consists of three articles:

Sealing Power
Temple Sealings
Cancellation of Sealings

The first article, Sealing Power, explains the meaning of
sealing in the Church and the authority required to per-
form an ordinance so it will be considered sealed; what is
a temple sealing and how it is obtained is presented in
the second article, Temple Sealings; and the third arti-
cle, Cancellation of Sealings, is a brief statement on who
may cancel a sealing.]

SEALING POWER

Signets and seals have been used from early antiq-
uity to certify AUTHORITY. The word “seal” ap-
ppears many times in the scriptures. Jesus Christ
was “sealed” by God the Father (John 6:27), and
Paul reminded ancient Saints that God had anointed and sealed them (2 Cor. 1:21–22) and told
others they “were sealed with that holy Spirit of
promise, which is the earnest [assurance] of our
inheritance until the redemption” (Eph. 1:13–14).
John spoke of the servants of God being sealed in
their foreheads (Rev. 7:3). In the apocryphal Acts
of Thomas (verse 131), Thomas prayed that he and
his wife and daughter “may receive the seal” and
“become servants of the true God.” Even today
licenses, diplomas, legal documents, and the like
bear seals that officially attest to their authenticity.

For Latter-day Saints, the ultimate sealing power
is the priesthood power given to authorized
servants of the Lord to perform certain acts on
earth and have them recognized (sealed) or val-
dicated in heaven. They believe it is this authority
the Lord Jesus Christ described when he said to
Peter, “I will give unto thee the keys of the king-
dom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind
on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever
thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven”
(Matt. 16:19).

The President of the Church holds and exer-
cises the keys of sealing on earth. When a man is
ordained an APOSTLE and set apart as a member of
the QUORUM OF THE TWELVE APOSTLES, sealing is
one of the powers bestowed upon him. Other
GENERAL AUTHORITIES of the Church, the presi-
dencies of temples, and a limited number of of-
cicinators in each temple receive this sealing power
during their tenure. After one is approved by the
FIRST PRESIDENCY to receive the sealing power,
the President of the Church, one of his counselors,
or a member of the Twelve Apostles specifically
designated by the President confers the sealing
power upon him by the LAYING ON OF HANDS.
This is the specific authority to perform the temple
sealing ORDINANCES.

This is the authority by which “all covenants,
contracts, bonds, obligations, oaths, vows, perform-
ances, connections, associations, or expecta-
tions” can be made and entered into and sealed
by the Holy Spirit of promise and receive “effi-
cacy, virtue, or force in and after the resurrection
of the dead” (D&C 132:7).

In this dispensation of the fullness of
times, the sealing power was restored by ELIJAH,
the last prophet of the Old Testament period to
hold it (TPJS, pp. 339–40). He bestowed that au-
thority on Joseph Smith and Oliver COWDERY in
the Kirtland Temple on April 3, 1836 (D&C 110).
As each man who has been President of the
Church was ordained an apostle and became a
member of the Quorum of the Twelve, he had the