

History Repeats Itself

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As published in the April 2008 Sugar House Valley Journal

It is interesting how history does repeat itself. Salt Lake City is facing today many of the same issues it had to deal with in years past: pollution, transportation, and growth. Back in 1863, the discovery of lead and silver in Bingham canyon led to the development of mining in the "Great Salt Lake City" valley. Hundreds of copper, silver, gold and lead mines were opened in nearby canyons. Gigantic smelters were built to refine the ore, and new factories and foundries went up that showed the importance of manufacturing in the valley and the region. This growth was good for the prosperity of the city, but was taking a great toll on the environment as air pollution became the leading problem for the city. Although the City Council passed an ordinance to regulate the burning of soft coal in 1890, it was seldom enforced. The smelter smoke was damaging foliage in Liberty Park and the surrounding residential areas. Farmers complained of failing crops, and animals were becoming ill because of the pollution. In 1908, Mayor John Bransford proclaimed smoke reduction presented one of the most pressing needs of the City. Farmers and citizens complained of the effects of poor air quality, but received little satisfaction. It wasn't until the Salt Lake Council of Women got involved that change was made. They pushed and received support for a smoke abatement. Their actions helped reduce smoke by 50 percent from commercial and home sources.

Rapid growth in the early 1900's caused the price of building lots to double. The cities amenities and services were strained. Even the building of the City & County building was a challenge. Frustrated with delays and bureaucratic bungling, the building project came at a cost of more than two times the original estimate. It was necessary to acquire additional construction bonds. Public transportation became an important issue. Money and resources had to be found to establish the Salt Lake Rapid Transit Company. Salt Lake built one of the countries most comprehensive public transportation rail systems at the time.

Today we face a serious and growing problem with pollution and air quality. As in the early history of the city, when it was the women who took charge to solve the problem, today it is Utah Moms For Clean Air leading the way. We face rapid growth and with it the increase of property values. While this

brings additional prosperity, it places a great hardship on our citizens on fixed incomes. As in the 1800's, our city faces many challenges. As our predecessors took on the challenge to build a city, and all its needs to include a world class public transportation and rail system, so we do today. Even though we have many challenges, I don't think there is a city in this country that has better resources, a committed citizenry, public servants and elected officials to meet them. I believe we have a new mayor and council that are equal to our city's challenges.

I'd like to hear your thoughts, please feel free to email me (jt.martin@slcgov.com), call the city council office (801-535-7600) or visit the council website www.slcgov.com/council/D6