

HOW THE GULLS SAVED UTAH.

Why the State is a Sanctuary To-day.

An incident without precedent in history made the seagull sacred to 500,000 people, and outlined the confines of the State of Utah as a sanctuary to the bird. The monument recalls memories of bitter hardship and suffering, happiness and satisfaction in days when the Commonwealth of Utah was in its infancy.

The weather in Utah, U.S.A., during the winter of 1847-1848 was unusually mild. Some ploughing was done all winter, and in February farm work began in earnest. Plans were complete for the cultivation of 5,000 acres, 900 of which were already planted in winter wheat and rye.

Food at this time consisted mainly of sego and thistle roots, and thistle tops. Losses of cattle had been heavy and milk was scarce. Men, women and children were clad in garments of burlap, bed-ticking, or the skins of animals, and occasionally some relic of former finery was seen.

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Early in May, 1848, the crops came up in abundance, inspiring hopes for a rich harvest. In the middle of that month hosts of Rocky Mountain crickets came from the direction of Arsenal Hill, devouring all the tender vegetation before them. The Saints despaired. The entire populace of 1,700 persons attacked the pests with flails, shovels and sticks. Trenches were dug, and fires were made in an effort to stop the onslaught of the insects. Their efforts were futile. No advantage was gained. All their hopes for a harvest, great or small, vanished. Other emigrants were coming into the valley and all depended on the growing crops. Now all appeared lost, and famine seemed imminent.

When the settlers were in the depths of despair, the sky became over-clouded with seagulls which alighted in the fields, apparently to assist the insects in the destruction. The solid phalanx of crickets became broken, devastation was interrupted, and to the surprise of all, the gulls were devouring all the crickets, disgorging them at nearby streams, and coming back for more. The work of the birds continued from Monday morning until late Saturday evening. The crickets disappeared, and the birds returned to the lake. The incident was repeated in 1849 and 1850.

Preservation of the gulls became an unwritten law in Utah. In the Legislative Assembly of the old provisional State of Deseret it was made a felony to kill the bird. The law was later re-enacted by the Territorial Government of Utah, and was incorporated into the state laws when Utah was admitted into the Union.