

“WHO CARES ABOUT YOUR SPEECH?”

Dr. Steven Neal

Transcript of Address

Mormon Battalion Monument Plaza Dedication

This Is the Place Heritage Park

21 August 2010

Good afternoon Fellow Citizens and Patriots. Today is a *hot* and glorious day, a day when the only thing warmer should be the feeling of gratitude in our hearts.

There are hundreds of people to thank in a collaboration such as this, and I have particularly – I am grateful for, first of all to my mentor in sculpture, Gary Sussman of New York. As chance would have it, he teaches sculpture in the very same room that Mahonri Young taught at the New York Art Students’ League. And that’s what Mahonri Young created up there [pointing to the nearby “This is the Place” Monument], so everything is kind of connected all together. I would also especially like to mention I am grateful to President Boyd K. Packer and Elder M. Russell Ballard for their inspiration and their encouragement. Also, I am very grateful to Larry and Gail Miller for their absolute and philanthropic support (also providing me shelter to sculpt in the service bay of their Lexus dealership). I’d like to thank Ellis Ivory – he’s the director of the Park here. He saved the project multiple times. Also, I am grateful to Michael Hall, my gifted young associate, and to Mike Baer [of Baer Bronze Foundry] who did the bronze work; to Doctors Brady Allred [of the Utah Choral Artists] and Todd Fiegle [of the Utah Premiere Brass]. I am grateful that they came up to do the music today. I am also grateful to the Mormon Battalion Association. They built this plaza. And the designer of that was Kevin Watts, and I need to mention him. Kevin gave – he donated his services, as many of these people that I have talked about. There were literally hundreds, even thousands, who donated their time and their money and their sweat, and blood, and tears.

But most importantly, we are gratefully for the men and women of the Mormon Battalion. These people were willing to sacrifice personal and family fortunes to make sure that they preserved liberty. That sacrifice was not unique to their time or place, but it is a compelling and a noble example for us, their heirs, to honor and emulate anew. Millions of Americans have answered the call to serve their country as this small family depicted in the first sculpture ["Duty Calls"]. But their circumstances were particularly difficult.

In 1846, the Mormons were driven from their homes in Nauvoo, Illinois, into the wilds and the Indian lands of Iowa and Nebraska. Many fled on foot. They only had their clothing that was on their backs, some of them. Provisions were scarce. There was no money for them to buy supplies to go west. Twelve thousand people were spread over 100 square miles, living in wagons, tents, or in the open. Many died of exposure, malnutrition, malaria, [and] cholera.

It was also a time of war with Mexico. U.S. President James Polk gave an order to raise an army to march to California, and the Mormons were in a strategic location. General Stephen Kearny sent Captain James Allen to recruit 500 volunteers from the Mormons to fight in the war with Mexico. Brigham Young, their leader, saw the hand of

the Lord in this thing. “You shall have your 500,” he said, and personally helped in the enlistment efforts. Despite being driven from the United States, the colonizers of this Great Salt Lake Valley reaffirmed their allegiance and patriotism to this great nation.

As they were mustered into service on July 16, 1846, to march to Ft. Leavenworth, [in modern] Kansas, the following words were recorded in the diaries of one soldier, and one family left behind. The first one, Sergeant William Hyde says:

The thoughts of leaving my family at this critical time are indescribable. They were far from the land of their nativity, situated upon a lonely prairie with no dwelling but a wagon, the scorching sun bearing upon them, with the prospect of the cold winds of December finding them in the same bleak dreary place. My family consisted of a wife and two small children, who were left in company with an aged father and mother and a brother. Most of the Battalion left families, some in care of the Church and some in the care of relatives, with some in their own care. When we were to meet with them again, God only knew. Nevertheless, we did not feel to murmur.

Those words inspired me to create the particular statue ["Duty Calls"] we will unveil here in a moment.

Margaret Phelps, who was left behind, said:

We were traveling when the call came for him (husband, Alva Phelps) to leave us. It was midnight when we were awakened from our slumbers with the painful news that we were to be left homeless, without a protector. I was very ill at the time, my children all small, my babe also extremely sick; but the call was pressing; there was no time for any provision to be made for wife or children; no time for tears; regret was unavailing. He started in the morning. I watched him from my wagon-bed till his loved form was lost in the distance; it was my last sight of him.

Alva died on that particular trip.

Was their sacrifice worth it? What is the Price of Liberty?

The second statue, entitled “Duty Triumphs” features the worn Battalion arriving at the Pacific Ocean near Oceanside, California, having blazed a wagon trail 1,800 miles long. They were issued ammunition, Harpers-Ferry flintlock muskets, a pack, canteen, blanket, and \$40 as a clothing allowance at Ft. Leavenworth, Kansas. However, nearly all of that \$20,000 [\$5,192 of \$21,000] for clothing went back to their families to buy wagons and provisions for their trek here to Utah. Therefore, the clothing the Battalion wore on their backs had to last the whole trek to California. By the time they arrived at the coast, the rags were falling off of their sunburned bodies, their hair and beards were untrimmed, over half of them had no shoes. Instead, they wrapped their feet in cast-off clothing and raw animal hides. Many died of illness.

The lack of water was also a constant threat. The Battalion soldiers wrote of finding a pond out of which they drove a thousand head of buffalo, to gladly drink the brown and insect-filled liquid to slake their thirst. Later, in the Imperial Valley, they would have a forced march 80 miles long in three days without any water at all. It was common for the stronger soldiers to fill the canteens of water when camp was struck, and retrace their steps to find the soldiers that had dropped out exhausted along the way. Then after giving them precious water, they would help them to camp during the night, arriving before

dawn in time to see the main Battalion leave and the cycle repeat. Meltiar Hatch saved the youngest member of the Battalion by retracing his steps on the trail night after night, to feed and give water to the sick boy, until he could march on his own. The boy was his 16-year old brother, Orin Hatch. You will see these elements blended into this sculpture.

The lack of adequate nutrition made blazing a wagon trail through deep sand almost impossible. When game became scarce, the soldiers would eat worn-out mules and oxen, hides and all. Some men boiled leather items to make a thin porridge. Their own body mass became the calories that powered the Battalion's wagons. The average weight loss was 40 lbs. per man when they arrived in California.

But Duty did Triumph. The Mormon Battalion arrived at San Luis Rey Mission on the 27th of January 1847, where they climbed a bluff near-by and viewed for the first time, the Pacific Ocean. It is that scene that I have depicted in sculpture. The Battalion escaped any major battles, but they were a presence that stabilized the region from further bloodshed. And as Gail mentioned, they dug wells, they made brick factories, and they helped build up San Diego, and Fort Moore over Los Angeles. They also were the ones who discovered gold, because they were the ones who were digging John Sutter's millrace near Sacramento, California. Then they blazed the trails over the Sierra Nevada that carried the California 49ers. They came into the Salt Lake Valley to reunite with their families, and they were Brigham Young's first choice to colonize the surrounding area.

This monument also honors the women who marched with the Battalion. Melissa Burton married William Coray two weeks before he left with the Battalion. She was one of five women who marched all the way to San Diego with the Battalion. This is what she said: "Why must women always stay behind and worry about their husbands, when they could just as well march beside them." Her third great granddaughter, also named Melissa Garf Ballard, stood in as proxy to be the model of her third grandmother. The other model, also, over in this one [pointing at "Duty Calls"], Heidi Morton, also, she stood in proxy for her relative, which is Melissa's sister, Rebecca Burton. The historical figure of David Pettegrew over here [pointing at "Duty Triumphs"] was modeled by his grandson Robert Pettegrew Paul, who I like to call "Mr. Mormon Battalion."

Was their Sacrifice worth it? What is the Price of Liberty? The hundreds of thousands of Mormon Battalion descendants enjoying peace and freedom in the most prosperous nation on earth are a living affirmation of their sacrifice. They thirsted and starved, and died so that we may live in peace and comfort. May we always remember their sacrifice. And now, more than ever, may we realize that this nation is still worth fighting and dying for; or worth living for and promoting its founding principles. May we teach them to our children. The Price of Liberty always has been and always will be the price of blood. If we are not careful, we can lose our freedom just by being casual. As we gaze upon these monuments, let us remember that they have passed on the duty to us: To be ever vigilant; to preserve the freedom our ancestors won for us and this great nation.

Now if Elder Ballard and Gail Miller will come forward, we will unveil the first of the monuments....