The First Pledge in Utah

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Columbus Day of 1892 saw the first public recitation of the Pledge of Allegiance. Public school students across the United States learned the Pledge for the four hundredth anniversary program commemorating the landing of Columbus in the New World. In Utah, Salt Lake’s children celebrated the holiday in spectacular style.

Prologue

Since the history of the Pledge of Allegiance has been related in great detail in many published sources, it is not necessary to cover the history of the Pledge here. Nevertheless, inclusion of a few pertinent concepts will give a clearer view of the story. Also, examining the political climate in Utah around the year 1892 helps us appreciate the story of Salt Lake City’s Columbus Day Celebration and reflect upon the larger issue of America’s allegiance to its flag.

Flags in the modern world have proliferated to the far corners of the earth. Nations and would-be nations adopt flags to announce their legitimacy. Whitney
Smith noted “Americans, more than most other peoples, are a flag-conscious nation.” The National Anthem, “The Star-Spangled Banner”, the National March, “The Stars and Stripes Forever”, and even popular songs like “You’re a Grand Old Flag” all reflect the prominence of the United States flag in American culture where the flag is celebrated in “art, folklore, literature, and even as an art motif in clothing.” The United States Flag Code, first compiled in 1923, has served as a pattern for flag codes adopted by other nations around the world.

While other nations have followed the American lead in producing formalized lists containing rules prescribing flag display, the pledge to the flag did not inspire similar imitation. This is not a concept unique with the United States; nevertheless, only a couple of nations have official pledges to their flags while in a few other nations such pledges remain unofficial.

In Britain, an attempt in 2012 to establish a pledge drew strong opposition in Parliament. *The New York Times* reported on the Labour Party proposal to create a pledge of allegiance for the United Kingdom. The article quoted Paul Flynn, a Labour Party member from Wales, stating “The idea of pledging allegiance to Britain is a weak attempt to copy the American practice, and does not reflect the reality of the United Kingdom.”
Michael Faul, a prominent British vexillologist, noted “While U.S. patriotism is rooted in the U.S. flag, in Britain national devotion centers on the Monarch.” Indeed, while there was considerable flag waving in the United Kingdom during the recent Diamond Jubilee, the Union Flag is fundamentally a royal emblem. Whitney Smith put it succinctly, “Lacking a royal family, Americans have turned the flag into the highest symbol of their nation and have willingly sacrificed their fortunes and their lives to preserve and protect it.”

The citizens and school children of Salt Lake City wholeheartedly joined with the nation in making the United States flag the focus of patriotic instruction. With the observance in 1892 of Columbus Day, the Pledge of Allegiance would go on to become “…the crux of the official ceremony…in countless schoolyards across the entire country….” Indeed, we may observe that the Pledge has become a mainstay for public gatherings in the United States. The inauguration of the Pledge in Salt Lake City, although not unique, was spectacular.

To understand the impact of the year 1892 we need only consider the figures placed upon the Utah State flag. The two years, 1847 and 1896, included in the design of the Utah State flag are at odds with the rules contained in Ted Kaye’s Good Flag, Bad Flag and many in the vexillological community wondered at the energy spent correcting the placement of “1847” on the Utah flag. Nevertheless, the placement of those two year dates on the flag is significant as flag historians consider what their inclusion tells us about those who designed the Great Seal of the State of Utah which provided the emblem for the state flag. The years from 1847 to 1896 define a period in Utah history known as the “Struggle for Statehood”. As noted in an article in Raven, volume 19, “Utahns struggled for almost half a century to achieve
statehood. At the same time as the United States Congress systematically reduced the area of Utah Territory through the admission of surrounding states, lawmakers repeatedly ignored Utah’s petitions. While there were several reasons behind Congress’s rejections, a central allegation repeated over the decades charged the Mormons with disloyalty to the United States.10

The Columbus Day celebration of 1892 took place near the end of this period, yet that political struggle is clearly evident in the Salt Lake City event. Even years after the exercises related in this paper and after the display of the
“Mammoth Statehood flag” described in Raven, volume 19, charges of Mormon disloyalty to the flag and nation were not uncommon. While it is beyond the scope of this paper to examine this issue in depth, a brief review of a few instances regarding charges of disloyalty relating to flag display is warranted.

Charges of Mormon Disloyalty relating to the United States Flag

An episode known euphemistically as the Utah Expedition is perhaps the best example of a charge of Mormon Disloyalty. In 1857, several Federal appointees left the Utah Territory and returned to Washington bearing alarming tales of Mormon defiance to Federal authority. Certainly, these appointees did not fit into the local culture. However, their reports upon returning to the nation’s capital were highly exaggerated and manufactured to vent their personal anger. Utah residents, to be sure, viewed them as outsiders and basically ignored them. A U.S. Army manual explains the events in brief:

Almost immediately after his inauguration as President in March 1857, President Buchanan received reports that the Mormons were defying Federal authority. Although this was not strictly true Buchanan believed it and acted accordingly. When he sent civil officials to the territory, he decided to send with them a strong body of troops. About 2,500 men—eight companies of the 2nd Dragoons, the 5th and 10th Infantry Regiments, and two artillery batteries—went under command of Col. Albert Sidney Johnston. But before the column could enter the Great Salt Lake Valley, the alarmed Mormons skillfully separated the wagon trains from the troops, burned the wagons, and captured many horses. Johnston’s isolated force was compelled to spend the winter in the Rockies on short rations. In the spring of 1858 more troops started out from Fort Leavenworth—the 1st Cavalry, the remaining companies of the 2d Dragoons, two companies of light artillery, the 6th and 7th Infantry Regiments, detachments of the Mounted Rifles and a band of volunteers—to bring Johnston’s strength to 5,500. But agreement with the Mormons was reached, and most of the troops were sent elsewhere before reaching Utah. But as late as 1860 the Army still had 828 men in the Department of Utah.11

When word arrived that the Army was on its way to Utah to put down the Mormon Rebellion, the citizens of the territory were celebrating the tenth
anniversary of their arrival in the Salt Lake Valley. Brigham Young, the Territorial Governor, had led the group to a campground in one of the canyons southeast of Salt Lake City. There amid square dancing and picnicking, riders arrived with the news. Over the gathering on tall pine flagpoles flew the Stars and Stripes.12 “We have no territorial flag. Our flag is that of the nation—the Stars and Stripes”, Brigham Young would reply to George Henry Preble, a few years later in 1866.13

After the negotiations achieved a settlement, Johnston marched his troops through Salt Lake City to a location southwest of the city where he established Camp Floyd. As the troops marched through the city, there were no cheering crowds. The houses and buildings stood vacant and were filled with straw. Had the troops deviated from the agreement, the settlers were prepared to put the city to the torch and leave the area for Mexico. However, no soldier broke ranks and the settlers returned to their homes without incident.

Colonel Johnston, unhappy that his superior force had been bested by a band of Utah Territorial Militia, and angered by the political solution which deprived him of a military victory, maintained his force at Camp Floyd. During his three years there as commander, Johnston never visited

Figure 7. The layout of Camp Floyd with the flagpole in the bottom center of the camp.
Salt Lake and never met Brigham Young. Although he decried Mormon “rebellion”, Johnston resigned his commission when Texas seceded from the Union and went east to accept a general’s appointment in the Confederacy. His second-in-command, Colonel Philip St. George Cooke, had commanded the Mormon Battalion twenty years earlier during the Mexican War. He had a much more favorable opinion of the Mormons based on his experiences commanding the battalion. It fell to Cooke to close Camp Floyd and dispose of its stores and property.

An unusual charge resulted from the circumstances surrounding the United States Army’s abandonment of Camp Floyd in 1861. Invited to meet with Brigham Young prior to their departure, Cooke and his staff presented the flagpole from the vacated encampment to the Mormon leader. It was offloaded from a wagon on Young’s property in such a way that a teamster drove his wagon over the wooden pole. Undamaged, the flagpole was erected at a school house on Young’s property where it stood for many years. However, the story was circulated that Brigham Young “…had out of contempt for [the soldiers at Camp Floyd] and the nation, cut down the United States flag-staff at Camp Floyd and left it lying on the public road, over which [the soldiers] had to travel.” This is the first and only charge of “flagpole desecration” found by the author.
The struggle between the Mormons and the federal government over the practice of plural marriage, or polygamy, rose to a fever pitch by 1885. Protesting what they believed to be their lost civil and religious freedoms, some Mormon members and businesses in Salt Lake City displayed flags at half staff on Independence Day. An act described by one source as a “minor but provocative incident”, this incited howls of disapproval and threats from those who felt it revealed Mormon “hatred of this nation and…contempt for its power.”

With dueling editorials in Salt Lake’s two competing newspapers, one Mormon and one non-Mormon, writers built up the controversy to a fever pitch during the following two weeks. The 24th of July, a holiday in Utah celebrating the anniversary of the Mormon Pioneer arrival in 1847, elicited an ironic challenge. If on that holiday—only celebrated in Utah—any flag were lowered to half staff, it would be considered an open rebellion against the United States government which would be put down with armed force if necessary. There was a real threat of violence as the days passed. However, on
the evening of 23 July former President Ulysses S. Grant died in upstate New York. Therefore, on the morning of 24 July, United States flags from coast to coast were lowered to half staff.

These are only a few of many instances, but they are typical in demonstrating that while there were very real differences and friction between the Mormon citizens of Utah Territory and the mainstream population in the nation, they possessed a central core of allegiance to the United States. Utahns kept insisting they were loyal, if misunderstood, Americans. Yet many simply refused to believe them.

By 1890, having lost their test case before the U.S. Supreme Court, Mormon leaders entered into an agreement with federal authorities. The Church agreed in 1890 to end the practice of plural marriages or polygamy. This set the stage for Utah’s entry into the Union in 1896. In 1892 all of this remained a sore issue for Utahns; nonetheless, they were anxious to give full support to honoring the nation and its emblem, the Stars and Stripes.
Celebrating Columbus Day and the Newly Written Pledge of Allegiance in a Big Way

The Youth’s Companion, a national magazine, planned a “uniform” program to commemorate the landing of Columbus. Certainly, the anniversary of four centuries called for a truly special celebration. The Youth’s Companion envisioned nearly identical programs held simultaneously by every public school in the country. These programs would coincide with the dedication of the World Columbian Exposition. The program outline included specially prepared songs, poems, and speeches. All would take part in the same program which the issue of The Youth’s Companion issue of 8 September 1892 described in detail:

National Celebration of Columbus Day

THE OFFICIAL PROGRAMME

for the National Columbian Public School Celebration of October 21, 1892.

1. Reading of the President’s Proclamation.

2. Raising of the Flag by the Veterans.

3. Salute to the Flag by the Pupils.

4. Acknowledgement of God (Prayer or Scripture).

5. Song of Columbus Day by Pupils and Audience.

6. The Address, “The Meaning of Four Centuries.”

7. The Ode, “Columbia’s Banner.”

The First Pledge in Utah

The Pledge was written for the third part listed in the program. First, the students would be assembled in a “hollow square” around the schoolhouse’s flagpole. Then Civil War Veterans, members of the Grand Army of the Republic, would raise the flag in the center of the gathered pupils:

*At a signal from the Principal the pupils, in ordered ranks, hands to the side, face to the Flag. Another signal is given; every pupil gives the Flag the military salute—right hand lifted, palm downward, to a line with the forehead and close to it. Standing thus, all repeat together slowly: “I pledge allegiance to my Flag and the Republic for which it stands: one Nation indivisible, with Liberty and Justice for all.” At the words, “to my Flag,” the right hand is extended gracefully, palm upward, towards the Flag, and remains in this gesture till the end of the affirmation; whereupon all hands immediately drop to the side. Then, still standing, as the instruments strike a chord, all will sing America—“My Country, ‘tis of Thee.”*

Thus, the outlined program would then include songs, readings, and speeches.22

In Utah the Salt Lake City Schools planned a celebration even more dramatic than *The Youth’s Companion* outline. To be sure, school officials followed the same basic format. However, they planned a single gathering in the Salt Lake Tabernacle for all the city’s students. The *Salt Lake Tribune* article’s headlines read  “A DAY OF JOY.—The School-Children Celebrate.—THOUSANDS IN LINE.—The Great Parade Through the Streets.—THE BLESSED LITTLE FOLK.—A Living Stream of Them Pour into the Tabernacle.—HEARTY EXERCISES THEREIN.”

At eight-thirty in the morning on Columbus Day, Salt Lake City’s school children gathered at the individual school buildings.23 Students and teachers had practiced over a month for the program. They had learned songs, poems, recitations, and the “Youth Companion’s Flag Pledge”. As the school children of Salt Lake gathered at their schools that morning, they were already excited. Led by fellow students carrying their school banners, the children walked to Main Street immediately east of the Salt Lake Temple block.24 Eight thousand public school students gathered there between North Temple and South Temple Streets. Carrying small hand held stick flags and their school banners, they lined up by grade. Excited children waited there for the Columbus Day Parade to begin. Meanwhile, the bands played as the anticipation grew. The parade was planned to start at ten o’clock sharp. However, the enthusiastic students
had to endure an extra wait. The parade started more than thirty minutes late. By the time the parade finally began, the eager students had grown even more restless. The marchers varied in age from five to eighteen, the youngest two grades leading the way:

**Order of March**

- Mounted Police
- Grand Marshal and Aids
- Liberal Drum Corps
- Grand Army of the Republic
- Denhalter Band
- Public School Students
- Juvenile Tabernacle Choir Band
- Public School Students
- Naval Drum Corps
- Public School Students
- Fourteenth Ward Drum Corps
- Pupils of High School

The parade wended its way through the downtown and back to the Temple Block. Thousands of spectators lined the six blocks of the parade’s route. Parents, relatives, and neighbors cheered as the young marchers waved their little flags. Pupils marched along Main Street to Second South Street, then down to West Temple, moving north to First South, and half a block east to Richards Street. Marching north along Richards Street, the parading public school pupils passed a flag draped reviewing stand at the entrance to the Temple Block. As the school children passed the reviewing stand, they saluted the officials gathered there.

Forty-two minutes were required for the eight thousand children to pass the reviewing stand. Moving onto the temple grounds, Salt Lake City’s
public school students entered the Salt Lake Tabernacle, a building famed for its exceptional acoustics. (Tabernacle Tour guides regularly demonstrate the amazing acoustics by dropping a pin near the pulpit, which visitors can easily hear throughout the auditorium.) They then took their places on the benches filling the main floor. “Of course no one could be quiet”, the Salt Lake Tribune reported, “that was out of the question; so there was a bobbing up and a bobbing down and a general bobbing all around made even more enlivening by the incessant hum of youthful voices.” Spectators jammed into balconies. The available seats were filled and thousands more waiting outside were unable to get in. The choir seats were reserved for civic leaders and church officials.
Wilford Woodruff, President of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, watched the program from the choir seats. Red and yellow cloth, the colors of Spain, adorned the organ and U.S. flags draped the organ’s immense pipes at the front of the hall.

The Juvenile Tabernacle Choir Band and the Liberal Drum Corps played until the last of the pupils entered the Tabernacle. School banners, mounted on long poles, waved as the crowd cheered. Several times, a long staff accidentally crashed though a pane of window glass, and amid the cheering no one seemed to notice. At a quarter before twelve, a bugle sounded to call the assembly to order. The noise, not surprisingly, continued until ten minutes to twelve, when

![Figure 13. Parade route of Salt Lake City’s 1892 Columbus Day Parade (image constructed by the author).](image)

![Figure 14. View of the Temple Block (on 6 April 1892) with the Salt Lake Temple and Tabernacle where the Columbus Day ceremony took place.](image)
Superintendent of Schools Millspaugh asked that the “whispering and confusion cease.” The school children quieted down for the moment, but they were too eager to remain quiet for long.

When the program started, not surprisingly, the children began again to wiggle and whisper. The age span of the students ranged from five years old in first grade to high school students in their late teens. The wide variance in attention span and interest levels would be hard to bridge by experienced entertainers. Actually, an adult audience would have had difficulty sitting through the long and boring program that was about to begin. For these school children, it was certainly more than difficult considering the activities of the morning, the blaring bands, and the crowds of spectators lining the streets during the parade—all combined to encourage commotion and not meditation. The many ingredients for noise and confusion mixed together and boiled over with the exuberance of youth.

Professor Malone of the High School, the first participant on the program, read the President’s Proclamation for Columbus Day “…appoint[ing] Friday, October 21, 1892, the four hundredth anniversary of the discovery of America by Columbus, as a general holiday for the people of the United States. On that day let the people, so far as possible, cease from toil and devote themselves to such exercises as may best express honor to the discoverer and their appreciation to the great achievements of the four completed centuries of American life.” Following President Harrison’s proclamation, Miss Rowe, a teacher, read Utah Governor Thomas’s statement that “earnestly recommend[ed] the people of Utah to appropriately observe the day…."

Next on the program, the Grand Army of the Republic veterans moved to a specially prepared hal­yard positioned directly in front of the large pipes of the grand Tabernacle.

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Figure 15. Headlines from The Salt Lake Tribune of 22 October 1892 regarding the Pledge ceremonies.
Figure 16. Author’s graphic interpretation of members of the Grand Army of the Republic raising the United States flag on a halyard attached to the ceiling in front of the Tabernacle’s massive pipe organ.

Organ. There was no pole, only a rope attached directly to the ceiling. There the veterans raised the United States flag “to the dome of the tabernacle.” As the flag reached the top of the halyard, a hush fell over the audience. The silence was so complete that “the rustling of the autumn leaves might have been heard.” After a short pause, the veterans led the audience in three cheers for Old Glory. The volume grew louder with each cheer. Spectators in the balcony joined their voices with the cheers of the children until the noise was deafening. Gas light globes and window panes again shattered as cheering students wildly waved their flags and banners. Finally, the superintendent of schools held up his arms to restore order.

Then came the Pledge of Allegiance. At a drum roll the students stood and faced the flag. The students saluted in military fashion as they recited, “I
pledge allegiance to my flag, and the Republic for which it stands: one nation indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.” Hearing the pledge, the veterans bowed their heads and said, “Amen!” Waving flags, hats, and handkerchiefs, the audience cheered again. Then the sound of the great tabernacle organ swelled with an introduction and the children sang, “My Country, ’tis of thee, Sweet land of liberty, Of thee I sing…”

Just as today, reciting the Pledge was only the beginning of the program. The students still had the majority of the program to endure, and the participants also endured much. President Woodruff noted in his journal that “there was so much noise and confusion in the Assembly of Little Children that the speakers could not be heard.” This observation is especially significant since, as already pointed out, Woodruff was seated on the stand close to the pulpit where the speakers stood as they spoke.

The Reverend Dr. Utter, a Unitarian Minister as well as a teacher in the public schools, offered a prayer after which the pupils sang a song written for the occasion, “Columbia my Land! All hail the glad day…” The song was set to the musical piece “Lyon” by Johann Michael Haydn which often accompanies the Christian hymn, “How Wondrous and Great”. (Johann Michael Haydn was the younger brother of Joseph Haydn.)
Next, a high school student, Herbert Hill, delivered the special address written by *The Youth’s Companion*, entitled “The Meaning of Four Centuries”. The keynote address, this five minute narrative traced the history and promise of the American nation. It lauded the free public school system as “the most characteristic product of four centuries of American life” and concluded with a patriotic promise: “We pledge ourselves that the flag will not be stained; and that America shall mean equal opportunity and justice for every citizen, and brotherhood for the world.”

After the address, four students, Misses Hetta Watson, Josie Morris, Florence Simpson, and Lizzie Smith, “recited the ode, ‘Colombia’s Banner’”, also written for the occasion. Each girl then recited her portion of the ode’s sixty lines, starting with:

*Columbia’s Banner*

Edna Dean Proctor

> God help me,” cried Columbus, through fair and foul the breeze  
>> I will sail and sail till I find the land beyond the western breeze.

Master George Bywater, a gentleman of thirteen, recited “The Bark of Faith”, which related the story of Columbus:

*The Bark of Faith*

Albertine Woodward Moore

> On Friday morning, August third,  
>> In fourteen hundred and ninety-two  
>> Three ships set sail, as I have heard  
>> All bound to cross the ocean blue.

> While stars kept watch in the far-off skies,  
>> And earth lay wrapped in slumber blest,  
>> A gentle breeze began to rise  
>> That bore the frail barks tow’rd the West!

The poem continued for another eight stanzas, concluding with the last lines:

> ‘Twas the bark of faith braved the billows wild,  
>> Faith lifted the veil to the new, fair world,
And proud America’s eve’ry child
Should be grateful to him who faith’s banner unfurled.

After that poem, an eight-year-old girl, Ethel Deane, gave the recitation “Columbus”:

Who was I that first waved a flag on this soil?
Who was it that cared not how painful the toil?
Columbus, Columbus, with soul great and true!
The heart of our nation beats strongly for you.

Next a local lawyer, Civil War veteran, and officer of the Grand Army of the Republic, E. W. Tatlock, spoke to the audience comparing the lessons of the Civil War with the children’s lessons in the classroom. While not seeming to notice the noise and inattention, he maintained that he and his old comrades had never “witnessed a more impressive sight.”

Salt Lake City’s mayor, R. N. Baskin, was the final speaker, and he spoke of the importance of education while commenting on the day’s events that “such a sight was calculated to fill every heart with emotions.” Enduring the program to its conclusion, the gathered students certainly yearned to escape the confines of the domed Tabernacle. Finally, Wilford Woodruff, the aged L.D.S Church president took the podium and pronounced the benediction. After the final amen, the students escaped to the beauty of an autumn afternoon. The sight of parents and children looking for each other undoubtedly ended the occasion with the same excited confusion that had reigned since the day’s beginning. They must have emerged from the Tabernacle grateful that it was Friday afternoon, and they had the weekend before them.

There were, of course, those who appreciated the children’s exuberance. A city councilman observed that, “I don’t believe that they have more children in New York City than we have in Salt Lake City.” It may have seemed that way from the volume of noise in the Tabernacle. Councilman Bliss continued that “a finer, more intelligent lot of children…would be hard to find anywhere.” Those present at the first public recitation of the Pledge of Allegiance in Utah would certainly have agreed that it would be hard to find a more excited, active group of children.31
Finding Meaning in the Columbus Day Celebration in the Salt Lake Tabernacle

Other American cities held impressive Columbus Day celebrations where they also recited the Pledge of Allegiance for the first time in a public ceremony. Citizens of Salt Lake City could have held individual school programs as outlined in The Youth’s Companion just as numerous communities around the country no doubt did. They could have staged separate school exercises followed by a combined civic parade as they did in Houghton, Michigan, and Schaumburg, Illinois. Rather, they chose to hold a citywide children’s parade leading to a combined program that brought all the city’s children together under one roof. The parade, program, and ceremony had a special meaning and impact in Utah. Certainly the celebration in Salt Lake was aimed at inspiring the area’s youth. However, it demonstrates how the citizens of Salt Lake City and Utah viewed themselves, and how they wanted the rest of the nation to view them.

This same desire would, four years later, create the world’s largest flag to celebrate statehood with a pronounced statement. It would influence the design of the Great Seal of the State of Utah when it was also created in 1896. A beehive, the accepted symbol of Utah, found its place on a shield surmounted by an American Eagle with crossed United States flags displayed behind the shield. This flawed attempt at heraldry became the basis for the design of the Utah State flag in 1903 and later in 1912. It is easy to find fault with the design, but vexillology must look beyond a critique of design. What do the flags, the seal, the Mammoth Statehood flag, and the inaugural recitation of the Pledge of Allegiance in the Salt Lake Tabernacle tell us about these early Utahns, their attitudes, and ideals? None of these things happened in a vacuum. Utahns saw themselves as patriotic American citizens and wanted the rest of the nation to see them in the same light.

This is the case study before us. The study of vexillology focuses on the meaning of flags and their display. All we have to do is observe, research, evaluate, and record, and this is the real challenge and task of vexillology. The flags, the events, and the stories give meaning to the study of vexillology.

This paper was first presented at the 46th Annual Meeting of NAVA in Columbus, Ohio, in October 2012.
End Notes


5. The Philippines, long a United States protectorate, has an official pledge to that national flag. Mexico, the United States’ neighbor to the South, has a pledge and flag salute that may have been influenced by the United States.


7. Michael Faul, e-mail to the author, 16 August 2012.


15. Tullidge, 248.

16. Tullidge, 276-277.


