

*"Be Kind to the poor"*

The Life Story of

ROBERT  
TAYLOR  
BURTON

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for the  
Robert Taylor Burton Family Organization

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Despite the great emphasis on developing united orders, by 1878 most of them were failing, and President Taylor recognized a need for some new type of economic planning. The goal remained the same—establishment of an independent kingdom of God—but Church leaders thought the Lord “would not be displeased” if they tried cooperation on a less intensive scale (Arrington 1958, 341–42). So, using as a pattern a board of trade which had been functioning in Cache Valley since 1872, they established Zion’s Board of Trade in 1878 with John Taylor

as president, William Jennings and Edward Hunter as vice presidents, and a board of directors of fifty men, including the "leading men" of each valley or stake. Robert T. Burton was an active member of this board.

The plan called for each valley, county, or stake to have a board of trade to encourage and strengthen cooperative marketing and buying, to develop new industries, and to regulate trade in the interests of the group as a whole. The representatives of these individual boards would meet as the Central Board of Trade in Salt Lake City at conference time each April and October. Leonard Arrington has described the movement as an attempt by Church leaders to get together the best business and professional people to work out solutions to economic problems (Arrington 1958, 344).

President Taylor introduced the concept to the Church in General Conference, October 8, 1878, the day before the official organization of the Central Board of Trade:

Our true policy is to make, as far as possible, at least what we need for home consumption, with an eye to future exports of those articles which we can sell abroad at a profit. To determine what can be produced and manufactured to the best advantage, on sound business principles, in this Territory, and to devise measures by which those articles can be produced for the benefit of the community and the advantage of all engaged in these enterprises, . . . are the purposes which will be served by the organization of Zion's Board of Trade.

And when we get things into a proper fix we will pull with a long pull and a strong pull and a pull all together. We will strive to be one; . . . we will begin with this, and then cooperate in all the different Stakes, . . . And we will keep working and operating until we succeed in introducing and establishing these things that God has desired, and until Zion shall be a united people and the glory of all the earth (JH, October 8, 1878).

At the Council House the next day, Robert witnessed the formal organization of Zion's Central Board of Trade by "the 12 and some of the prominent Brethren." He was selected as a member of the Board and the Executive Committee (Taylor 1878; R. T. Burton 1856-1907, October 9, 1878).

One project already functioning which fit nicely into the Board of Trade policy was the cooperative tannery, called Deseret Tanning and Manufacturing Company. From the tannery committee's first meeting in June 1877, Robert invested his time and business expertise in this project. He sat on the board of directors and went to Chicago in November 1877 with John R. Winder, to tour the most modern tanneries in America and order equipment to be installed in the building under construction in the Nineteenth Ward. President Taylor dedicated the tannery on March 23, 1878.

One of the least known activities of the Board of Trade began with discussions about the high price of coal in Salt Lake Valley and led to construction of the Utah Eastern Railroad. Fuel to heat homes in the valley had been a constant problem over the years. Settlers exhausted nearby timber supplies within the first decade. By 1860, vast deposits of low-grade bituminous coal had been discovered in Summit, Sanpete, and Iron counties, but transporting it to Salt Lake was difficult and expensive. The mines near Coalville, Summit County, produced coal that burned clean, but it "slacked" or disintegrated quickly and could not be stored from summer to winter. It needed to be shipped during the winter for immediate use, but wagon transportation was undependable and risky. The completion in 1870 of the Union Pacific railroad through Echo Canyon to Ogden and the Utah Central Railroad from Ogden to Salt Lake should have solved the transportation problem. Unfortunately, the Union Pacific was lead by unscrupulous men who controlled the price and availability of coal by setting the rates and allocating the cars between Echo and Salt Lake. Called a "soulless monopoly" by Salt Lake newspapers, the Union Pacific charged \$10 per ton during the winter of 1877-78, and many poor Salt Lakers went without heat that winter because they were unable to pay the exorbitant price.

The injustice and suffering caused by these prices became a regular topic at the meetings of the Presiding Bishopric with the Salt Lake bishops, where the bishops complained that the Union Pacific had "negotiated" with the Summit County mine owners

to take all their output "with the proviso that none be sold to any other purchasers." Mine owners could no longer sell to men with teams who had been carrying Salt Lake merchandise to Coalville to barter for coal. Tithing produce had been bartered this way with the coal going for welfare purposes and to heat Church office buildings, chapels, and businesses. When Union Pacific allocated fewer and fewer cars to carry Summit coal and filled the needs of the Salt Lake market with coal from their own mines near Rock Springs, Wyoming, in 1877, it was the last straw. Unable to ship on Union Pacific and unable to sell to anybody else, the Coalville mines were "starved out" of the coal business and had to lay off their miners (Arrington 1955, 44-45).

The Church purchased a mine in Summit County in August 1877 and worked it with unemployed Mormon miners. They transported the coal into the valley by wagon teams whenever weather permitted.

By the fall of 1879, Board of Trade officials and the Presiding Bishopric had decided to resurrect a plan to build a railroad south from Coalville to Kimball's Junction and down Parley's Canyon to the valley. To finance construction of the railroad, an alliance was made between several Mormon capitalists and a group of non-Mormon silver mine owners from Park City who wanted both a railroad connection and a supply of cheap coal.

The Utah Eastern Railroad Company was incorporated December 27, 1879, with Robert Taylor Burton on the board of directors to represent the Board of Trade and the interests of the Church. Directors and principal stockholders besides Robert included Robert C. Chambers, George M. Scott, Henry Dinwoodey, Francis Armstrong, Edmund Wilkes, John A. Groesbeck, Joseph M. Cohen, and Robert Harkness. Each subscribed for fifty shares of stock, except Robert who subscribed for only five shares (Arrington 1955, 46).

Robert took this assignment seriously because of his strong conviction that it would relieve the suffering of the poor and benefit every resident of the valley. From the day of incorpora-

tion, Robert's journal records his dedication to getting the railroad built as soon as possible. Four days after incorporation, he sent his team and sons Alfred and Robert to begin surveying near Park City, which Robert called "Parley's Park," or simply, "the Park." He began soliciting subscriptions among the bishops and Church members, and spent days in the UERR office working out the legal and land arrangements. In Salt Lake Bishops' meeting, he urgently sought the aid and influence of ward leaders, claiming that "This was no private speculation; it had been commenced for the express purpose of benefiting and blessing the poor" (*Deseret News*, June 11, 1880).

During the fund-raising campaign, articles in both the *Deseret News* and *Salt Lake Herald* emphasized the public nature of the road. A May 19, 1880, *Deseret News* editorial said: "If the people build and own the road, no matter whether a ton of coal is freighted upon it or not, so long as coal is sold in Salt Lake City for \$4 a ton or less, the people will gain largely by the investment." The *Herald* editor explained on June 20, 1880: "The Utah Eastern was not devised as a moneymaking scheme for a few individuals. . . . The Company was organized and the road is to be built for the purpose of breaking a monopoly that is sorely suppressing the people."

During 1880, the organizers of the Utah Eastern also formed a corporation known as the Home Coal Company, which acquired a number of important coal mines in Summit County, and contracted with the Park City mine owners to deliver this coal to their mines, assuring the railroad of business even if crowded out of the Salt Lake City market (Arrington 1955, 51).

Capital stock in the railroad enterprise paid for early stages of construction. Robert convinced the property owners to grant right of way permission in exchange for company stock. Contracts for grading and for 60,000 railroad ties to timber the first twenty-one miles of track were awarded in May 1880 and by the middle of June 400 men and 150 teams were at work on the grading. The overwhelming majority of the men were paid in stock (Arrington 1955, 50).

Utah Eastern officials were concerned from the beginning that the Union Pacific would try to take over the railroad by buying the controlling interest, so stockholders devised a plan to keep power in their hands, regardless if the stock was sold. Under the plan, three trustees were elected in whose hands was placed a majority, or \$400,000, of the stock. This stock was to be inalienable for fifteen years, which meant the stock could be sold but would still be subject to the control of the trustees for voting purposes. John R. Winder and Leonard W. Hardy from the Presiding Bishop's office and Fred H. Auerbach, a non-Mormon Salt Lake businessman, were chosen trustees (Arrington 1958, 347, 501).

Although large numbers of Latter-day Saints subscribed labor and cash to buy stock, the company collected only half the amount needed to buy the iron rails and rolling stock (engines, cars, etc.). The Ontario Mining Company of Park City agreed to advance cash (\$186,000) in exchange for mortgage bonds and a bonus of treasury stock. This sum purchased twenty-five miles of track, enough to link Coalville with Kimball's Junction and Park City.

Grading was finished in August, and the iron and rolling stock were delivered in Coalville late in October. Robert had been busy with railroad business almost daily in Salt Lake with an occasional trip to Coalville; but on November 3, he traveled to Coalville where he and Francis Armstrong took charge of the construction crew. It was very late in the year to begin such a project in the Wasatch Mountains, but the Union Pacific's efforts to build a parallel broad-gauged line from Coalville to Park City and drive the UERR out of the Park City market pushed the UERR forward.

They laid the first track November 4. The next day, they fired up the engine and moved it onto the track. Using it, the crews expected to lay a mile of track a day, but on November 9, the first snowstorm of the year hit the mountains, and crews lost time as they cleared the grading with shovels before laying track. Through long cold days, Robert's determination kept the crew working even though he often wrote in his journal that it



was "very cold," and he was having a hard time getting the men out to work in the snow each morning. He led the crew every day—seven days a week for eight weeks—except when he made one trip back to Salt Lake, November 14–18 (see R. T. Burton 1856–1907, November 4–December 23, 1880).

In seven days, they laid the track to Wanship. Nine days later, the crew was laying track along Silver Creek, and two days later they were going over the divide. Five days later, the railroad reached the ranch of William and Melissa Kimball. The ranch marked the junction of the road into Park City and now became the railroad junction as well. Near Kimball's Hotel, a station house was eventually built. The title, "Kimball's Junction," still marks this site.

Construction was slower after they passed the junction because winter storms intensified, grading wasn't finished, and ties were not laid. But the work did not stop, and Robert continued to lead the men out each morning and work with them until dark. Each night, Robert wrote a sentence in his small, black journal, describing the conditions that day: "Snowing and blowing hard but still continue work," "Hard work to get material forward on account drifting snow," "No train through, blocked in snow," and "Drifting too bad" (November 28–December 5, 1880).

The crew inched forward, laying a half mile or less each day until the rails reached Park City, on Saturday, December 11. Coal had already been delivered at Kimball's Junction from which point it was being freighted down to the city, and on December 13, the first coal reached the mining community at Park City. All the available iron for rails was used up at this point, but the UERR won the construction race by almost a month. The Union Pacific track reached Park City in January 1881. In recognition of Robert's leadership, the UERR named one of its engines the "General Burton" (*Park Mining Record*, May 27, 1882).

Robert stayed ten days attending to railroad business, paying the hands, and overseeing delivery of coal at both the Park and the Junction, until the day before Christmas when he left

Kimball's ranch by sleigh for home. Unfortunately, the snow in the valley gave out, and it was a tired father who walked the last two miles to the farm, arriving just in time for Christmas Eve with his children.

Confident in the success of this venture, two days later Robert was back at his desk in the Tithing Office. He also enjoyed family Christmas and New Year's activities, including the blessing of his son Robert's fourth son, Don Carlos, and the wedding of Willard and Mary Jane Gardner which took place on January 6. Willard left January 24 for a mission to the Southern States, where he labored principally in North Carolina.

Railroad business continued to take up Robert's time for the rest of the winter and also periodically over the next four years. After a year of operation, the UERR was reported to be working at near capacity and paying its own way, although there were never enough profits to pay dividends. Twice, the board of directors began plans to extend the track from Park City to Salt Lake City, but interference from the Union Pacific stopped the project.

As previously noted, when the Utah Eastern was incorporated, the stockholders placed the majority of the stock in the hands of three trustees and made it "inalienable" for a period of fifteen years. However, only 1,638 shares of the original 7,000 were sold in the public subscription, netting only \$82,400. To secure the cash needed for tracks and engines, Robert C. Chambers, president of Utah Eastern and superintendent of Ontario Mining, bonded the railroad to J. B. Haggin, vice-president of Wells-Fargo and the Nevada Central Railroad Company, and president of Ontario Mining. Later, Haggin put up \$186,000 to buy second mortgage bonds on the condition that he receive a stock "bonus" which gave him control of the Utah Eastern. Then in the fall of 1881, without the knowledge or consent of the trustees, Chambers transferred 2,232 shares of treasury stock (twelve shares for each of 186 bonds) to Haggin, giving him more stock than all the other stockholders put together. In the fall of 1883, the Union Pacific purchased the Utah Eastern bonds from the San Francisco partnership of Haggin and Lloyd Telvis.

They also secured from the firm a proxy to vote the bonus stock and later the stock itself (Arrington 1955, 56).

This complicated and somewhat devious arrangement between Chambers, Haggin, and the Union Pacific came as a surprise to the trustees, board of directors, and stockholders of the Utah Eastern at the annual stockholders meeting, November 19, 1883. The representatives of the Union Pacific came to the meeting, voted the bonus stock, and elected their own slate as board of directors, replaced the management, and removed the books of the UERR to Union Pacific headquarters in Omaha. Almost immediately, they transferred the rolling stock to a Union Pacific subsidiary, the Utah and Northern Railroad, in effect closing down the Utah Eastern and allowing the Echo and Park City road to absorb the coal contract between Utah Eastern and the Ontario Mining Company (Arrington 1955, 57).

Robert's journal entries only hint at the anger and frustration of the now-minority stockholders and the residents of Salt Lake City. They instituted a number of investigations and legal steps over the next two years, but the results were inevitable; the mighty Union Pacific had won again. If managed properly, the railroad could pay its debts, but the superintendent, a Mr. E. Dickinson, chose not to run it at all. A year after the takeover, Charles W. Penrose described "The Injustice of a Great Corporation" in a November 18, 1884, *Deseret News* editorial:

The U. P. [Echo & Park City Railroad] is in fine condition, conveying both passengers and freight, . . . chiefly coal for the Ontario. The U. E. is dilapidated and empty; its rails are twisted, its road-bed sunken, its bridges falling into decay, and the whole concern going rapidly to destruction. It is a standing but crumbling shame to the Company which has wrought this ruin.

By February 1885, when Judge Charles S. Zane appointed a receiver and it appeared that sufficient prodding by the minority stockholders could force him to get the railroad back on its feet, the antipolygamy campaign was in full swing and the important minority stockholders, including Robert Burton, were forced to go "underground" to avoid jail. They could no longer fight

for the railroad. On February 21, 1887, the Union Pacific bought the Utah Eastern at a bankruptcy auction, bidding \$25,000 for the roadbed, locomotives, cars, and other properties (Arrington 1955, 56-63).

However, all along Robert had been most interested in helping the community and the poor, and this had been somewhat accomplished. Through the Board of Trade, he and other leaders worked to increase employment and production in all the communities. In the early 1880s, the Board of Trade actively supported the construction of a Denver and Rio Grande railroad from its rich new coal mines in Carbon and Emery counties, signaling the end of the Union Pacific monopoly. Countering the monopoly and discriminatory tactics of the Union Pacific Railroad during its heyday in Utah became the board's most outstanding accomplishment (Arrington 1958, 348-49).

Robert's involvement in the Utah Eastern was a direct result of his positions in the Central Board of Trade and the Presiding Bishopric,