

Way We Were
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Total eclipse of the sun
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Are you doing anything for the eclipse on Monday, August 21, 2017? Many people, Americans and international visitors alike, have been planning for months (or, for the most dedicated, years) for this celestial event. It will be the first of its kind visible in the United States in thirty-eight years. NASA-sponsored events are being held across the country. Campsites and hotels in the “path of totality” have long been booked up. Only those in the path (a narrow arc stretching from Oregon to South Carolina) will see a perfect total eclipse, but viewers elsewhere will still be treated to a partial eclipse, which is still a sight to behold.

Parkites turned their gazes skyward for a similarly dramatic display in April 1930. That path of totality for that particular eclipse passed first over the San Francisco Bay Area and then upward and over Nevada, Idaho, and Montana. A small corner in northwestern Utah was within the path, but Park City and the rest of the state missed out on totality. Instead, Parkites would have seen about ninety percent solar coverage.

In the weeks leading up to the event, scientists all over the country prepared. At the University of Utah, students and professors planned to watch from the astronomical observatory. In California, astronomers from an observatory in San Jose stirred up excitement with their plans to photograph the eclipse from a plane. As it was “a feat never before attempted by man” and promised “some of the best records ever made of an eclipse of the sun” if successful, the mission was highly anticipated all over the country. Preparations and results were reported by the Salt Lake City newspapers.

For the casual observer here in Park City and the rest of Utah, University of Utah professor Junius J. Hayes made sure to emphasize that safety should be the priority. He suggested “the use of smoked or colored glasses” to view the solar event, as looking directly at the sun puts people at risk for retina damage. Other experts suggested peering through exposed film.

As the moon passed between the sun and the earth, Utah was bathed in “a peculiar shadow of purple darkness.” The eclipse started around 10:50am on a Monday morning. It reached its maximum at 12:20pm, “when only a slightly crescent appeared on one side of the moon where the sun was still peeking through.” The shadow was gone by 1:50pm.

On that Monday in 1930 (as, perhaps, on this upcoming Monday in 2017), Parkites stopped what they were doing for a few brief moments. They might have used exposed films while we have our snazzy “eclipse glasses,” but eighty-seven years doesn’t make us that different from our counterparts of the past. We humans seem naturally inclined to gaze at the

stars. "Many were the looks heavenward," the Park Record reported a few days after event, to gaze at "old Sol's" glory.

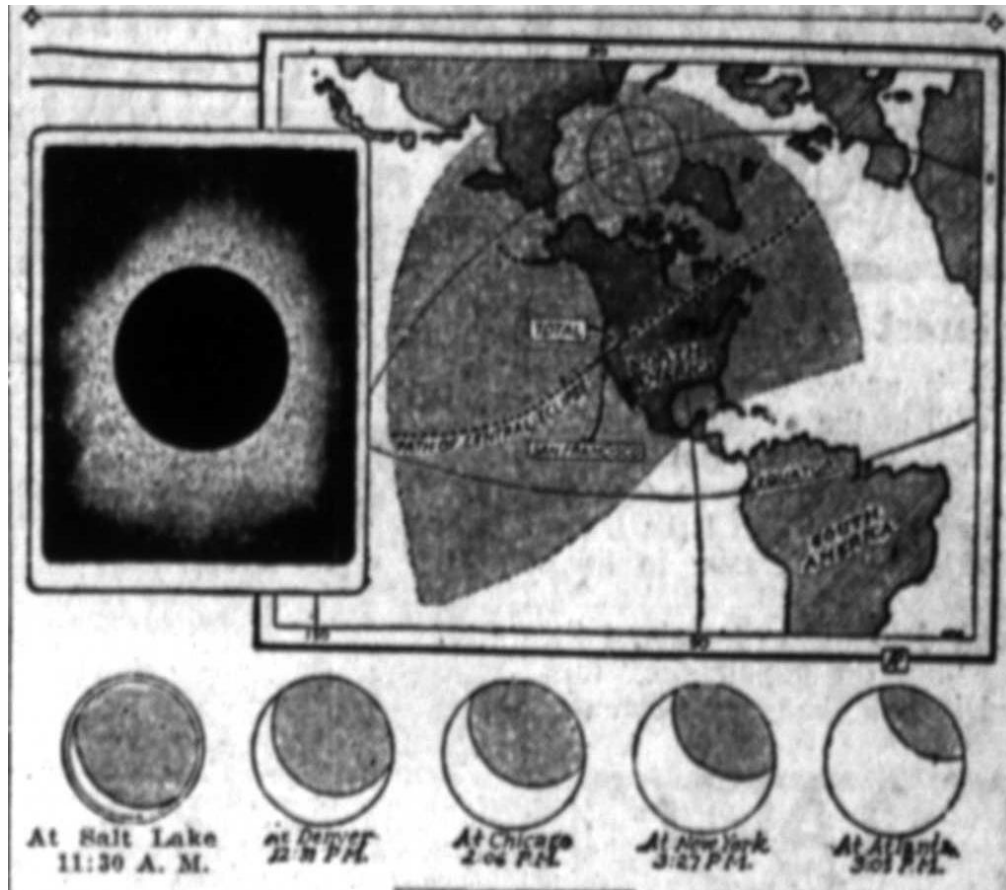


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Credit: Salt Lake Telegram, Utah Digital Newspapers Collection

Caption: "Foolish Chickens will seek their roosts," the *Salt Lake Telegram* headline accompanying this diagram proclaimed in advance of the April 28, 1930 solar eclipse. The five drawings on the bottom show the percentage of coverage in Salt Lake (far left), Denver, Chicago, New York, and Atlanta (far right).