The Early History of Cache Valley

Joel E. Ricks

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.usu.edu/joel_ricks

Part of the History Commons

Recommended Citation
https://digitalcommons.usu.edu/joel_ricks/3

This Unpublished Paper is brought to you for free and open access by the Utah State University Special Collections and Archives at DigitalCommons@USU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Joel Ricks Collection by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@USU. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@usu.edu.
THE EARLY HISTORY OF CACHE VALLEY

Dr. Joel E. Ricks, State Historian, Sons of the Utah Pioneers

The Rocky Mountain men—American fur traders—were probably the first white explorers of Cache Valley. They spent the winter of 1824 and 1825 on the Bear River and its tributaries. Since there were at least fifty men they probably trapped all the streams of Cache Valley. In this group was James Bridger who was said to have traveled down the Bear River to Great Salt Lake. While the Americans were still in the valley, Peter Skeene Ogden led a party of Hudson Bay fur traders to the Bear River and followed that stream to the Great Salt Lake. This was in May 1825. Ogden met some of the Americans, much to his regret. In the years immediately following Cache Valley, or Willow Valley as it was first named by the fur men, was a favorite rendezvous.

In August, 1843, Fremont with his expedition entered Cache Valley and described it very much in detail. Evidently Captain Fremont was not impressed since he did not give a favorable impression of the valley or of the Indian inhabitants.

Shortly after the arrival of the first Mormon pioneers to Salt Lake Valley a small party was sent by Brigham Young to explore the country north. When they returned to Salt Lake in August, 1847, they reported that Cache Valley was the most beautiful valley they had seen.

Attracted by the fine grasses of the valley, Brigham Young sent the Church cattle to Cache Valley in 1855. John Clark Dowdle, one of the party, records in his journal as follows:

"I started for Cache Valley where the church had started opening up a farm, herd ranch, or ground for keeping their stock, reaching that beautiful valley August 25, 1855." He then tells of the hard winter and the loss of many cattle in the severe winter.
Peter Maughan was the first to form a permanent settlement in Cache Valley. He lived in Tooele but the dry seasons caused his cattle to suffer for lack of grass and in July, 1856, with the assent of Brigham Young, Peter Maughan explored the agricultural and grazing possibilities of Cache Valley. He returned to Tooele, disposed of his possessions, and left in August, 1856, to found a new settlement. There were eight men and several women and children in the party and they arrived in Cache Valley September 15, 1856. At first they placed their wagons in the form of a fort for protection against the Indians. They began building their fort in 1856 and completed it the following year. To them Brigham Young wrote in 1859:

"We advise you to have the brethren settle so that all may avail themselves of the fine range and hay land of that region but in sufficient numbers together to be safe. Each settlement should by all means make a good strong fort to include all the inhabitants thereof, and large enough to store all their grain therein, with strong corrals adjoining, to secure all the stock in case of trouble with the Indians. Your stock yards should be located at sufficient distances from your forts so as not to endanger them in case of fire. If you build mills, let it be so arranged as to bring them inside of some fort so that they may be protected in case of trouble and in all things endeavor to take a course that will enable you to maintain and preserve yourselves in that isolated region, realizing that you will be obliged in a great measure, under the prudence of God, to depend upon your own exertions in time of trouble."

After the Utah war Peter Maughan sought settlers for Cache Valley and wrote a glowing description in June 1859 to the Deseret News as follows:

"The length of this valley from north to south is about forty miles, the breadth from east to west about twelve miles. There are four new settlements already located towards the south end of the valley; the farming land is extensive; the water for irrigation and all kinds of
machinery is abundant, in short, it is the best watered valley I have ever seen in these mountains. The range for the cattle in the summer season is excellent, and there is a reasonable amount of grass land in the vicinity of each settlement already located, and plenty of good grass and farming land further north for other settlements. There are over one hundred families engaged in agricultural pursuits at the present time."

The four settlements in 1859 were Mendon, Logan, Providence, and Smithfield, in addition to Wellsville which was reoccupied after the Utah war. They were located in the south end of the valley for better protection against the Indians.

The year 1860 was a boom year for Cache Valley. As the editor of the Deseret News in 1860 wrote: "Emigrants have been constantly passing through this city, (Salt Lake), for two or three months, on their way to Cache Valley, and more especially since the winter season ended. How many have gone there this spring is not known but judging from the hundreds of settlements, towns and villages in Utah County and perhaps some settlements in the southern part of Salt Lake County must have materially decreased in population, in consequence of the great rush northward by those in search of new homes and better location.

"Only a few days since, a company numbering some twenty wagons, with flocks and herds sufficient to make an imposing show passed our office going into the north country. On stepping out into the street an old acquaintance was recognized in the company as it was passing, from whom, on inquiry, we ascertained that they were from Payson, one of the most thriving towns in Utah County, and that their destination was Cache, which place though within the Territory is a long way from that portion of it where most of the wheat and grain was raised last summer."

There was a rush of settlers to add to the small settlements already founded and to establish additional towns. Hyrum, Mellville, and Paradise
were settled in the south part of the valley while Hyde Park and Franklin
were colonized in the north. In 1860 Apostle Ezra T. Benson was dispatched
to preside over the settlements in the valley. The various towns were
organized into wards and Logan was divided into four wards. Peter Maughan
became the presiding bishop of Cache Valley. The wards were formed into
a stake. Forts were constructed and each town in the valley possessed
its militia to protect it against the attacks of hostile Shoshones. Saw-
mills, flour mills, and stores were erected in the "60s" to provide improved
houses. In 1860 the success of Cache Valley settlement was assured.