



The Face of Fillmore

By Sherry Shepard
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In the past two years, since I began writing the Face of Fillmore, I have been impressed on many occasions with the end results when group of volunteers sets out to accomplish a goal. This spirit of volunteerism is what ties a community together and makes it improve and prosper.

I had occasion this past week to visit another small community where this very spirit is in full swing. Not only does it have this in common with Fillmore, but some of the early people who settled there have family ties in our county.

The community I am writing about is Bluff, Utah. Nestled in a narrow valley on the banks of the San Juan River in southeast Utah, Bluff became home to the pioneers of the San Juan Mission in 1880. Theirs is a story of amazing struggles as they left Parowan headed for Montezuma. We have all heard of their trials as they descended through Hole in the Rock to the Colorado River below and from there over the roughest landscape Utah has to offer. Deep gorges that looked impassable were a common obstacle in their journey. After climbing San Juan Hill, they carved their sentiments in the cliff's face: "We thank thee oh God". Then they traveled on the last leg of their journey, trail-weary and unable to finish the last 18 miles to Montezuma, they opted to stay in Bluff. (Read more about San Juan Hill in the Sand Rock RidgeRiders article in this issue.)



Now a group of descendants of the first settlers called The Hole in the Rock Foundation is working to rebuild the fort.

As we entered the fort, several groups of volunteers were busy at their assigned tasks. Some were laying sod. Others were laying the flat rock walkways around the statue of John Taylor, which will be unveiled in a special ceremony on October 24. It was he who called these hearty Saints to settle in southeast Utah. We stopped at the visitor center and watched a ten minute movie showing the ruggedness of the area and telling of the pioneers trials.

As I looked around the visitor center, one of the volunteers pointed out to me a barrel of old branding irons. She said that as their group was digging up an old cellar to retrieve the building stones, she found the branding irons buried under the floor. Knowing that Bluff was once the county seat and that, at that point, there was no agency in charge of recording brands; they felt they would never know who were their owners. Not long afterward, a worker in the San Juan Courthouse in Monticello found two old thin books in the bottom of a seldom-used drawer and there was the missing link in the mystery. It was a list of ownership of the brands. This volunteer told me their work has been full of tiny miracles such as this one.

We visited the cabin of the Joseph and Harriet Barton family, the only original one left. It is seen in the pictures here, then and now. We saw cabin replicas built by the families of the pioneers and saw the cottonwood log meetinghouse, which was rebuilt as much like the first one as possible. Covered wagons and other old items of interest were seen around the old fort.

For additional information on Bluff Fort and the pioneers who built it, go to <http://www.hirf.org>.

Once again we felt the pioneer spirit and the enthusiasm for continuing to keep our great heritage alive just as it is in historic Fillmore.