



Face of Fillmore

By Sherry Shepard
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An account of the first Christmas in Fillmore among its new settlers of 1851 would probably be very similar to the celebration they enjoyed at Thanksgiving with some homemade gift items and remembrances of the first Christmas read from the scriptures.

Interestingly, the two previous years, there were also pioneer explorers in the area during the Christmas/New Year season.

From reading I have done in early journals, I find that this was the “exploration season”. During the spring, summer and fall months, crops were grown, food harvested and put away for winter use. While it was certainly tempting to spend the cold winters at home keeping warm, I have found that this was the time of year to explore locations for new settlements and routes to them.

In the fall of 1850 members of the Iron Mission passed through the eastern edge of Millard County on their way to settle in Parowan. This group began their journey in Provo.

In an interesting book entitled “Trial Furnace: The History of the Iron Mission, 1850-1858” by Morris A. Shirts, it gives a day by day account in great detail.

Where were they on Christmas in 1850? The ninth day of their trek, Christmas Eve 1850, the group was on the banks of the Sevier River, north of Scipio.

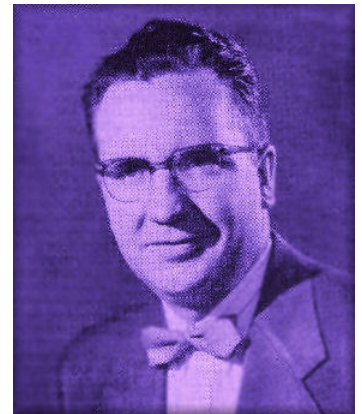


George A Smith

The morning dawned clear and a cold 10 degrees after three inches of snow had fallen in the night. The planned crossing was too swampy to consider so George A. Smith sent out four experienced men, Anson Call, Elijah Thomas, Tarleton Lewis and William Layne to explore the route ahead with the hopes of bridging the river. Simon Baker and Joseph Horne were to take a closer look at a possible passage through the swampy area. A decision was made to head east around the springs and then turn south, although the route would be 16 miles instead of nine.

Traveling this distance took an entire day through the low hills with the snow and mud making it a dangerous route. By evening they were to the river.

Day 10, Christmas Day, brought even more severe temperatures, with the morning temperature dropping to -16 degrees. The cattle had been turned out to graze for the night but morning found two of the oxen gone. While the wagons began the slow process of fording the frigid river, some men were sent to look for the lost oxen. The tracks of the animals were found along with two sets of Indian tracks. About one p.m. the men returned with the two oxen. Bright had been shot twice in the shoulder with arrows and Old Balley had 11 wounds. Smith had the wounds dressed with salt and turpentine and



Morris A Shirts

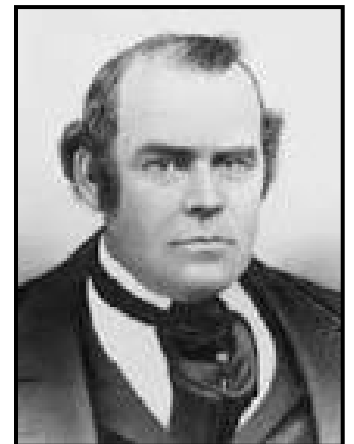
the oxen were covered with buffalo robes to keep them warm. When it became apparent that Old Balley would not survive he was put out of his misery. Bright survived the attack.

George A. Smith wrote of the incident. “The oxen they had wounded were favorites with our family and had been in our service ever since we left Nauvoo and had traveled the road from there to the Great Salt Lake Valley three times over. They were at present owned by my brother who loaned them to me for the trip. They moved his family across the plains and mine; ever faithful in all bad places and perfectly handy and gentle and willing to draw. I had formed an attachment for them that is hardly conceivable to exist between man and beast. And when Old Balley goaded with eleven wounds came up to my wagon tongue and lay down, groaning with pain and looking so wishfully to me for help, I myself and my wife could not refrain from shedding tears. After dressing his wounds, offering him food and giving him water which we had warmed, covered him with a buffalo robe. I felt that I could inflict almost any punishment on the head of his savage enemies, but when I came to see them, a father and twelve- year-old son, two thirds naked (thermometer below zero), half-starved and more than a third scared to death, first thing I did was to give them some bread to eat and place them under guard until morning.”

Day 11 started well below zero. After passing judgment on the two Indians, the group traveled on up the draw to the south of the crossing. The road was “slippery and sidling”, Lunt recorded in his journal. Near the summit the men had to grip the wagons physically to keep them from tipping over. That old route is still visible from the highway. It is obvious the difficulty it caused this early party.

Interestingly, this same route is the site of Parley P. Pratt’s men the year before. (1849) During the night that year it snowed two feet. In the morning, Pratt was the first to awaken. He described the camp as looking like a cemetery because the bodies of the travelers were mounds in the snow. As he called to arouse them from their sleep, they sat up out of the mounds of snow. He described it as looking like the resurrection so the spot became known as “Resurrection Camp”.

Monday, December 30, 1850 the Iron Mission Group were on the banks of Chalk Creek at the spot that would become Fillmore just a year later. The party had left Pioneer Creek that morning and one of the wagons, belonging to Andrew Love, broke an axle. The group made it to Chalk Creek about four in the afternoon and the blacksmith began fixing the wagon so they could move on the next day, traveling on to Meadow Creek.



Parley P Pratt

In January 1850, Parley P. Pratt’s group stopped at the site of Fillmore. He divided his exploring party, leaving the wagons and most of the provisions with the younger men, while he pressed on toward Provo with a smaller party. John D. Lee tells that the rear party called the site Camp Creek because “the Exploring co. were forced to pitch their Encampment on it” for two months after becoming snowbound there. Smith and Lunt describe the place as Chalk Creek because of the natural chalk deposit close by. On October 21, 18151, Brigham Young and a group renamed it Fillmore in honor of President Millard Fillmore, then President of the United States.

From this point on December 31, 1850 the Iron Mission party, having been able to fix the broken wagon axle, traveled on the Meadow Creek where they arrived in mid-afternoon. According the Shirts’ account, at midnight the guards cry echoed in the crisp air at the camp: “Happy New Year”.