



The Face of Fillmore

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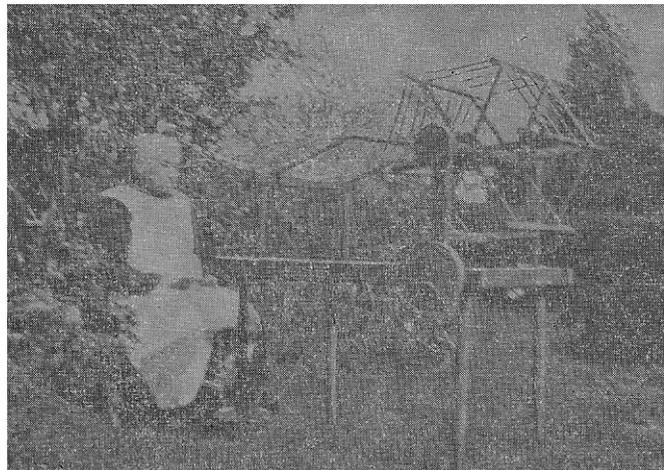
Early Fillmore residents, as well as those in other newly settled Mormon communities, were advised to produce all of the items they used in their homes.

In his message to the January 1852 legislature held in Fillmore, Brigham Young said: “Deplorable indeed must be the situation of that people whose sons are not trained in the practice of every useful avocation and whose daughters mingle not in the hive of industry...Let home industry produce every article of home consumption.”

With home industry in mind, Brigham Young was convinced that the climate and soil of Utah was well adapted to the silk industry, so when he was still Governor in 1855, he ordered a supply of mulberry seed from France. In just a few years fifty acres of mulberry trees were planted in orchards and groves in many communities including Fillmore. After the trees had grown sufficiently, the cocoons were also sent for from France.

Word was sent to the settlements encouraging people to get involved in this new silk industry. The ladies were loyal to their leaders’ wishes and accepted the challenge. They also had a desire for the fine thing of life like silk clothing. Many of the men soon followed.

Thomas Whittaker and his wife Elizabeth of Centerville were among the first interested in sericulture in Utah. He sent to England for the silk worm cocoons sometime in the 1850’s. They fed the young worms on mulberry leaves from the trees they grew. After they spun, they were place in hot water to kill the larvae inside; then they were unwound and the thin thread of silk was reeled (as seen in picture), ready for spinning and weaving. Mrs. Whittaker made silk neckties, scarves and vests.



The first silk dress produced entirely here in Utah was produced by Nancy Clark of Farmington and woven by Mr. Hadley also of Farmington. It was presented to Eliza R. Snow, sister of church president Lorenzo Snow.

In many towns the women of the Relief Society were asked to take the lead in sericulture. This included planting mulberry trees, growing cocoons and the manufacturing of raw silk into cloth. The Utah Silk Association was soon organized. This industry was successful for a number of years and won prizes throughout the country, including at the World's Fair in Chicago in 1893. Susan B. Anthony wore a dress made of Utah silk and Mrs. Rutherford B. Hayes, wife of the President of the United States, owned a collar of silk made in Utah.



Fillmore had a connection to the silk industry. Isabel Carling Brunson tells in her own words of her involvement in raising worms for silk. She was less than sixteen year old at the time. Her mother Ann Ashman Carling came home after a Relief Society Meeting and asked if Isabel would be willing to raise silk worms.

“I immediately consented and on investigating found that I would have to take the assignment of worms while the worms were very young and as I recall I assumed the responsibility of caring for one thousand silk-worms for the summer season. When I first received them they were about one-half inch long and of a rather dark gray color and very slender. I was very diligent and exact in my caring for them. I fed them three times daily at six each morning, twelve o'clock at noon, and six o'clock each night. I had to scout around town in search of mulberry leaves. It happened that my Uncle Hans Peterson grew mulberry trees in his city lot and gave me permission to gather them.”

Isabel kept the worms in the large upstairs room of her grandparent's home. Her grandparents were John T. and Ann Wild Ashman.

“I carried the process to a conclusion . . . and I was very disappointed receiving nothing for my labor. However, I always figured that it was a good experience and that my having had this task to perform had perhaps kept me out of mischief.”

A special thank you to Audene Gregorson for sharing this information about early Fillmore with me.