



Face of Fillmore

By Sherry Shepard
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The Face of Fillmore this week takes a close look at what a typical Mormon pioneer town looked like not long after its beginnings. An interesting book by Richard Francaviglia called *The Mormon Landscape*, points out a few things to look for as does an article for *History Blazer* by Becky Bartholomew published in December, 1995. I especially enjoyed some of Mr. Francaviglia's descriptions, which I will share as this column continues

One of the main features we look for in a typical Mormon settlement is the strict north and south layout of the town, often with the Latter-Day Saint chapel as the focal point in the center. This was somewhat different in Fillmore, as the Territorial Statehouse was used as the center of town and the main attraction. This would have been even more so if more than the south wing had been completed. Nevertheless, it is still an impressive building and still the center of focus as one visits Fillmore.



Another frequently seen feature is the wide streets, as much as 88 feet in width, to accommodate the turning around of a team and wagon.

The blocks were usually divided into four lots of about an acre each with a house on the corner of each lot. Many of those lots have been divided more than once since, but the center of most blocks is still a wide open area, giving the towns a particularly rural feeling.

Mr. Francaviglia's description of the fences in town is interesting. He calls them, "One more unpainted, crooked element in an already cluttered landscape." Each individual lot in town was a small farm in itself. Every family had their own farm animals nearby their home so they could care for them daily, as well as a garden, an orchard and outbuildings. Fences to divide the properties and enclose the animals and gardens were constructed of whatever was available



including cedar, juniper, and even wagon wheels. Because the center of the block was the “farm”, remnants of old barns, sheds and other items still remain in many spots around town.

Ditches lined the streets and continued on into the blocks so that irrigation water could flow along to the proper water owners and furnish their lots with water. Diversion dams with head gates similar to a guillotine, as Ms. Bartholomew described them, controlled the larger ditches. The communities were dependent on the snowfall in the mountains for their source of water and these water systems provided a means to distribute it. In recent years, this same water source has been piped into irrigation systems that are much easier to use.

Along these ditches, early residents planted trees not only for shade and a wind break, but also for a source of wood in the future. Fillmore’s streets were lined with black locusts as pictured in this view of early Main Street. Poplars were also used in many areas.

The types of buildings constructed by early settlers were also a common thing among the Mormon communities. While smaller, frame houses dominated the rest of the West, large and sturdy brick houses were the norm in communities such as Fillmore. These bricks varied in color, but the floor plans were nearly always much the same, with a central hall type called the Nauvoo style and a fireplace at each end. Some even had two front doors. Some people saw this as a sign that a polygamist lived there when it was actually the style in much of the country in the mid-1800’s. In about 1900, some Victorian style homes began being built by wealthier families. These had more decorations and more complicated floor plans.



The appearance of our community has changed much in the past century, but our hats go off to those who help preserve the rich pioneer architectural history we enjoy.