



The Face of Fillmore

By Sherry Shepard
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Throughout the century and a half that Fillmore has been in existence, travelers from all corners of the globe have passed along its streets and enjoyed the hospitality of the residents of the Face of Fillmore.

Motel, hotel and café owners will tell stories of famous actors, statesmen, and church leaders who have enjoyed a brief stay in their establishments. From the days when Brigham Young spent time with the legislature in Fillmore and appears to have stayed in each major hotel in town to a few years back when the Boy Scout Jamborall was here and President Thomas S. Mosen, not yet president at the time, stayed in the Inn at Apple Creek, church dignitaries have enjoyed Fillmore's welcoming arms. Hal Linden of television fame stayed at the Paradise Inn as did our Utah favorite Doug Miller. And the list goes on.

Other groups passing through Fillmore were not as welcome. The Fancher Party from Arkansas is an example of that. Their criminal mischief caused hardships and sadness for the local residents.

One traveling group of interest this week was led by Nathan Davis, Elijah Sheets, who was an experienced blacksmith, and three other men. The story of the cargo they were shipping through Fillmore actually began much earlier.

Nathan Davis was born in 1814 to a Quaker family and was baptized into the Mormon Church in Ohio in 1850. He and his wife Sarah Woolley immigrated to Salt Lake where they built a home on North Temple Street and Nathan was put in charge of the machine shops for the city's public works department, a position he held for several years. He established the Davis Foundry in 1872 and one of their first orders was to construct the baptismal font and twelve oxen for the St. George Temple.

Nathan was a mechanic and businessman, not a foundry man. He contacted Amos Howe from St. Louis who was skilled in that area and the two formed a partnership in early 1873. Soon work on the



font began. The first drawings for the oxen were unacceptable to Brigham Young, so a search was made to find the perfect oxen, which were corralled and used as models for the metal oxen.

In the next two and a half years, the work continued. Brigham Young was so pleased with the final product that he donated the cost of \$5000 for the font and added an extra thousand as a bonus.

In the summer of 1875 the task of moving the font and oxen to St. George began on July 12. The cargo was taken on the Utah Southern Railroad as far as Spanish Fork and from there began the trip on three specially built oxen-drawn wagons to St. George.

C.L. Christensen drove one of those wagons – his cargo, the bottom of the font which was in two pieces with two oxen bolted in between. It was placed in the wagon standing on end and its height reached the top of the wagon bows.

Christensen wrote of their trip, “Everywhere along the way we were royally received and entertained.” The residents of Fillmore and other small towns along the way were quite isolated and the people were excited for their visitors and their precious cargo. One wonders if this picture might have been of the wagon train passing through Fillmore on its way south. No one but the bishops in a town, Bishop Edward Partridge here in Fillmore and a few people who had been given permission by them was allowed to see what the wagons contained.

At the same time there were soldiers traveling on foot to Beaver for the trial of John B. Lee in the incident at Mountain Meadows. They suspected that the cargo no one was allowed to see were cannons or other weapons being shipped south. They, of course, wanted to see what the wagons contained but were not allowed to see into them.

The weather was also a problem for the group, as temperatures were often above 100° and some of the oxen suffered from lack of water. Whenever they sensed water close by, they would attempt to stampede to it.

The wagon train pulled into St. George on August 20 to deliver their cargo to the temple site after its long, hot trip through Fillmore and other settlements along the way.