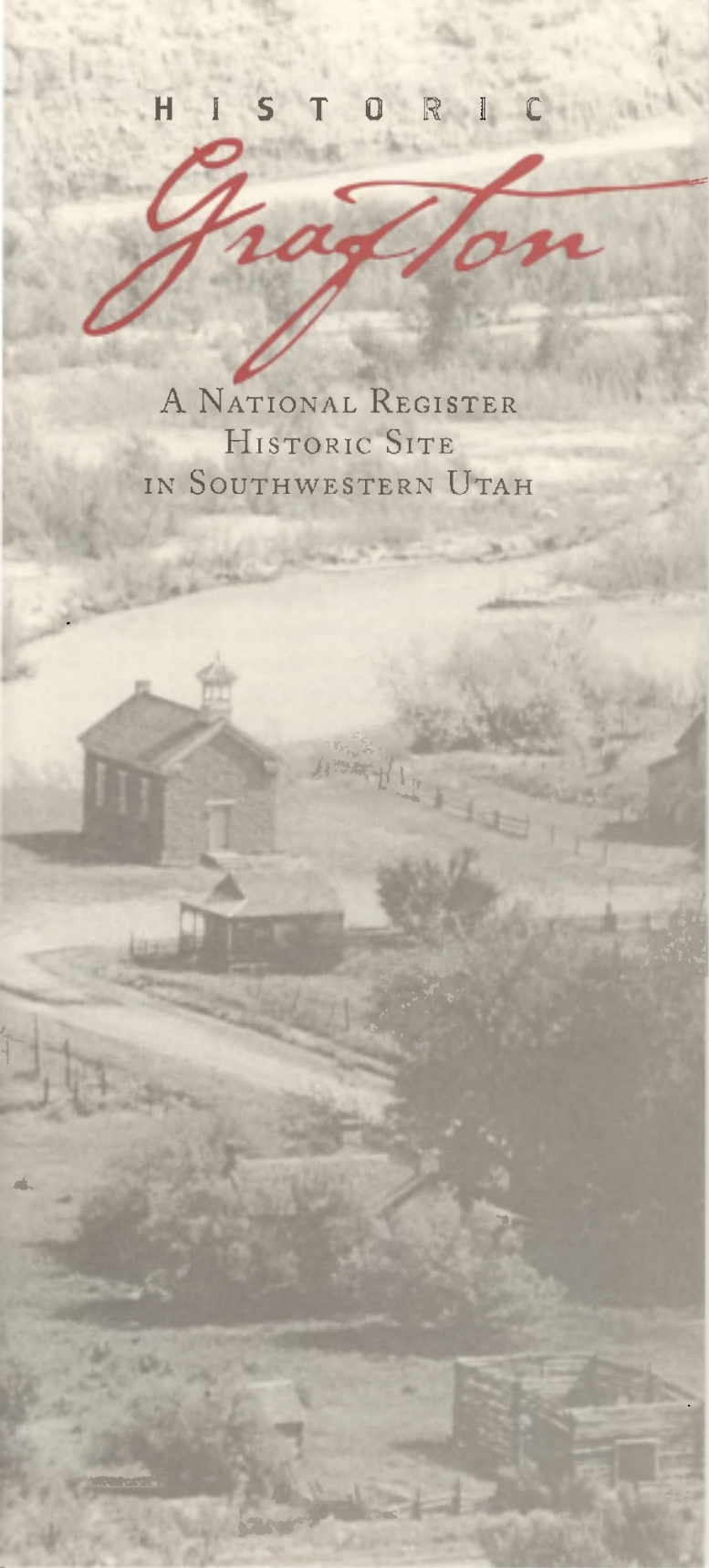


H I S T O R I C

# Grafton

A NATIONAL REGISTER  
HISTORIC SITE  
IN SOUTHWESTERN UTAH



# History and Settlement of Grafton

## West of the United States in Mexican Territory **1847**

In 1847 a tired group of pioneers stood at Emigration Canyon gazing at the valley of the Great Salt Lake. Their leader, then-president of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Brigham Young, said, "This is the place." The Saints, also known as Mormons, arrived in what was then Mexico after fleeing religious persecution in the United States. There, outside the U.S., Young hoped to establish the "state" of Deseret where Mormons could practice their religion freely. In 1850, after the Mexican-American War, Deseret became a U.S. Territory.

Between 1847 and 1900, Mormons settled perhaps 500 villages throughout the West in an effort to claim territory and secure resources for self-sufficiency. Skilled craftsmen and volunteers were called on colonizing missions. In the Utah Territory, Brigham Young reasoned that warm southern lands might, if irrigated, produce a costly and U.S.-dependent staple: cotton. He was right. Cotton flourished in an experiment at Santa Clara (1854), and Young sent numerous families to Utah's "Dixie" as part of the Cotton Mission. To grow cotton, or anything else, pioneers needed two things—land flat enough to farm and water enough to irrigate—and both were scarce. Eight farming settlements grew along the upper Virgin River in the only places they could: Virgin (1857), Grafton (1859), Adventure (1860), Duncans Retreat and Northup (1861) and Shunesburg, Rockville and Springdale (1862).



## Grafton, Utah Territory **1859-1862**

In 1859, Nathan Tenney led five families—the Barneys, Davies, McFates, Platts and Shirts—from nearby Virgin to a site one mile downstream of today's Grafton. The small group cooperated to plant crops, dig irrigation ditches and build homes—the idea was never profit, but rather community and faith. In 1861, as the U.S. Civil War began, cotton became scarce, and Brigham Young's vision of Utah's Dixie began to bear fruit.

Grafton was so zealous in its first year of cotton cultivation that farmers didn't plant enough corn, cane and other crops to feed their families. In coming years Virgin River farmers would scale back cotton in favor of food production. Survival in this arid place alongside a tempestuous river would require their undivided attention—and all their land.

Cotton wasn't the only thing that consumed precious land. In January 1862, a raging flood destroyed most of Grafton, Duncans Retreat, Adventure and Northup. A resident of Virgin wrote, "the houses in old Grafton came floating down with the furniture, clothing and other property of the inhabitants, some of which was hauled out of the water, including three barrels of molasses." Grafton's settlers relocated to higher ground one mile upstream of their first town, where the current townsite now stands. Grafton's existence is a testament to the early settlers' perseverance and industrious spirit.



*Looking south across the Virgin River to Grafton in 1929.*



## Grafton, Utah Territory 1862-1866

Even in its new location, Grafton's troubles were not over. Irrigation dams were repeatedly washed out, sometimes two or three in a single year. Even without flooding, irrigation ditches regularly filled with sand and required such continuous attention that one settler remarked, "making ditches at Grafton is like household washing; it's a weekly chore!"

Despite Dixie's limited farmland, scant rainfall and problematic irrigation, Grafton's settlers were optimistic and, for the most part, in good health. During these years death came in its usual manner, taking the old, the sick and the very young. The Grafton Cemetery holds six babies from these years, all under one year of age. Crops and fruit trees did well, and there was time for music, and a dance every Friday night. Grafton grew slowly as Saints from burgeoning Salt Lake City joined the community effort.

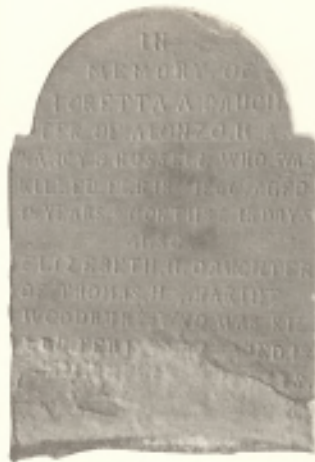
During these years, settlements were precarious, and pioneers moved often looking for stable ground. In 1864, a church census

recorded 168 people living in Grafton.

## Grafton, Utah Territory 1866-1868

A mere two years later, in 1866, Grafton became a ghost town for the first time.

When the Utah Territory was settled, the upper Virgin River valley was already inhabited by native Southern Paiute peoples. Pioneers, by necessity, settled the same places required by these preexisting people for their subsistence. This competition for land and scarce resources led to conflict, especially to the north.



*Headstone in the Grafton Cemetery for Loretta Russell and Elizabeth Woodbury, two young girls killed in 1866 when the swing they were playing on broke. The girls, best friends, were buried together.*

At the same time, Navajo people living south of the Colorado River were squeezed between pioneer settlement in Arizona to the south and Utah to the north. In 1866, when Mormon settlers were killed near Kanab by Navajo raiders, Brigham Young ordered villages in southern Utah to coalesce into towns of at least 150 men. Grafton and other Virgin River towns were deserted as townsfolk consolidated in Rockville.

Grafton farmers returned daily to tend their hometown fields and, by 1868, Grafton

was resettled as troubles ended. A visit to the Grafton Cemetery demonstrates that 1866 was indeed a very hard year along the Virgin.

## Grafton, Utah Territory to United State 1868-1945

In 1886 Grafton residents hauled lumber 75 miles from Mount Trumbull and gathered clay west of town to construct the adobe schoolhouse that still stands at the heart of Grafton.

In 1896, Utah became a U.S. state, and Grafton bustled until 1906 when a newly built canal delivered Vir-



*The Russell Family Band entertained the citizenry of Grafton, 1895. Music and dance were essential elements of Grafton life.*



*Life was hard and harder after the river flooded and washed out the crude existing roads, 1939.*

gin River water to the wide, flat Hurricane bench twenty miles downstream. To escape years of bare subsistence on limited acreage and loss of fields from repeated floods, Grafton's men helped build the Hurricane Canal. Then many Grafton families packed everything, some even their houses, and moved to Hurricane.

### **Grafton, Utah, United States 1945**

Without enough children to warrant a school, and lacking culinary water and electricity standard in other communities, Grafton gradually became a ghost town for the second time. And so it remains—uninhabited, but not forgotten.

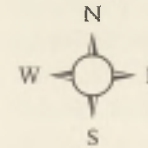


*The Grafton Schoolhouse and Alonzo Russell home before restoration, backed by Mt. Kinesawa in Zion National Park. In 1929, the mostly intact and barely inhabited Grafton became the setting for the first outdoor talking movie ever filmed. In Old Arizona starred Warner Baxter (who won the Best Actor Academy Award for his portrayal of the Cisco Kid), Raoul Walsh, Edmund Lowe and Dorothy Burgess.*

### **Grafton Historic Site, Now—The Future**

Listed on the National Register of Historic Places, Grafton's buildings recall a forgotten lifeway. Towns like this are rare; most pioneer villages lost their heart as they grew or were destroyed in flash floods. Prompted by fond memories of wonderful community, song fests and dances, former residents initiated yearly Grafton reunions that continue today. With your help, this historic setting will enrich generations to come.

# GRAFTON, UTAH



VIRGIN RIVER

State Route 9

GRAY HILLS

to Rockville →

VIRGIN RIVER

RIVER

ALONZO RUSSELL FIELD

DAVID BALLARD FIELD

HENRY SPENDLOVE FIELD

ALONZO RUSSELL FIELD

EDWARD BALLARD WHEAT FIELD

ALONZO RUSSELL COTTON PATCH

LUCERNE (ALFALFA) FIELDS



A scene from *The Arizona Kid*, 1930.

## Movies Shot in Grafton

- *In Old Arizona*, 1929 (First talkie filmed outdoors). Starring Warner Baxter (who won the Academy Award for this role as the Cisco Kid), Raoul Walsh, Edmund Lowe and Dorothy Burgess.
- *The Arizona Kid*, 1930. Warner Baxter, Carole Lombard, Theodore von Eltz, Hank Mann.
- *Ramrod*, 1947. Joel McCrea, Veronica Lake, Preston Foster, Lloyd Bridges.
- *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*, 1969. Paul Newman, Robert Redford, Katherine Ross (won four Academy Awards).
- *Child Bride of Short Creek*, 1981, TV. Diane Lane, Helen Hunt, Christopher Atkins, Conrad Bain.
- *The Red Fury*, 1984. Wendy Lynne, Calvin Bartlett, Katherine Cannon, Juan Gonzales.



RESPECT PRIVATE PROPERTY

### LEGEND TO GRAFTON STRUCTURES PAST AND PRESENT

1 Ed and Charles Jones home	13 Barn	25 Old log school
2 Ed and Charles Jones home	14 Alonzo Russell Jr. home	26 Home constructed for <i>Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid</i> film
3 Ed and Charles Jones home	15 Blacksmith shop	27 John and Thad Ballard home
4 Albert Russell home	16 Sarah Hastings home	28 Louisa Russell home
5 Will Isom home	17 Original John Wood home	29 Samuel Stanworth home
6 Frank Russell home	18 John Wood home	30 J. N. Stanworth home
7 Alton Jones home	19 Barn	31 James Ballard home
8 Dave Ballard barn	20 George H. Wood home	32 John Wood Jr. home
9 Dave Ballard home	21 Ambrose Stanworth home	33 Sorghum mill
10 Tithing house	22 Schoolhouse/Church	
11 Dan Morris home	23 Molasses mill	
12 Edward Ballard home	24 Alonzo H. Russell home	

KEY  
 ● Past structures  
 ● Existing structures

GRAFTON CEMETERY



# Grafton Heritage Partnership Project

*Bringing historic and landscape  
preservation together*

**T**he Partnership's purpose is to preserve and enhance the outstanding historical, agricultural, scenic, riparian and cultural values of the Grafton historic townsite for the benefit of present and future generations.

The Partnership is a cooperative nonprofit governed by a Board of Trustees selected from participating organizations and families. The Partnership unites the interests of private landowners and community groups as well as federal, state and local governments to protect and maintain the Grafton Townsite.

## Goals

- Stabilize and restore Grafton's historic structures
- Preserve the scenic rural historic landscape
- Preserve agricultural practices in pasture areas
- Preserve the Virgin River floodplain

## Completed Projects

- Restored Grafton Schoolhouse/Church
- Restored Russell Home exterior
- Restored Louisa Russell log cabin
- Purchased 150 acres in the Grafton area
- Obtained agricultural, historic and riparian conservation easements
- Restored historic fencing around Berry gravesite
- Established interpretive signage and brochure

## In Progress

- Nominate the Grafton Historic District to the National Register of Historic Places

## Proposed Projects

- Restore Russell Home interior
- Re-fence the Grafton cemetery
- Document cemetery headstones
- Research and create Grafton Cemetery brochure
- Maintain agricultural operations
- Maintain Virgin River floodplain

A former Grafton resident speaks:

*"The Grafton school/church building was built in 1886 by the dedicated people in this small town to meet their need for a school and church building and to use for social events. It shows what cooperation and togetherness can accomplish through donated labor and materials. I think it is symbolic in a larger sense of the faith, determination and perseverance of those who came and built. Integrity was basic to all their words and actions."*

—LUWAYNE WOOD

The Partnership is preserving traces of our past to honor early settlers' hard work, and remind us and our children who we are and where we came from. Please support our Grafton preservation effort by making a tax-deductible donation to the Partnership.

## PARTNERS

Private Landowners  
Town of Rockville  
Rockville Historic Commission  
Washington County  
Bureau of Land Management  
Utah Department of Agriculture  
Grand Canyon Trust  
Virgin River Land Trust  
Utah Quality Growth Commission  
Attiyeh Foundation  
George and Delores Doré Eccles Foundation  
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OC Tanner Company  
Utah Division of State History  
National Trust for Historic Preservation  
Zion National Park

## RECIPIENT

1999 Rural Heritage Award  
2000 Utah Heritage Foundation Award  
2001 Utah Heritage Foundation Certificate of Recognition

This publication has been funded with the assistance of a matching grant-in-aid from the **UTAH DIVISION OF STATE HISTORY** and the **NATIONAL PARK SERVICE**. Regulations of the U.S. Department of the Interior strictly prohibit unlawful discrimination on the basis of race, color, national origin, age, or handicap. Any person who believes he or she has been discriminated against in any program, activity, or facility operated by a recipient of Federal assistance should write to: Equal Opportunity Program, U.S. Dept. of the Interior, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, D.C.

## Please support The Partnership

The Grafton Heritage Partnership Project is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit corporation dedicated to preservation of the historic Grafton townsite. Donations are gratefully received and tax deductible.

*Checks may be written to:*

Grafton Heritage Partnership Project

Your support is crucial to our success in preserving the historic structures and maintaining Grafton's landscape.

Enclosed is my contribution of \$ \_\_\_\_\_

NAME

ADDRESS

CITY

STATE, ZIP

TELEPHONE

EMAIL

Put me on the Partnership's mailing list.

Please send us copies of your historic photos and histories to help us tell Grafton's story.

### Grafton Heritage Partnership Project

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Visit us at  
[www.graftonheritage.org](http://www.graftonheritage.org)

