

Leo Alva Snow History, Ron Snow

It was quite an event that September 17, 1925! Almost 1200 people were there and someone counted 190 automobiles. The Dixie orchestra played while people danced on the new bridge. After the dedicatory prayer everyone joined in singing "America". Leo A. Snow, chairman of the program committee and emcee then introduced the speakers, including Utah Senator David Hirschi, Mayor C.C. Heslin of Salt Lake City, B.J. Finch of the U.S. Public Roads Bureau, and President Heber J. Grant of the LDS Church. After speeches, the celebration resumed with a banquet of Dixie fruit and melons, and more dancing. This bridge across Ash Creek at the top of the notorious Black Ridge was the last link in the fine highway U.S. 91 between Salt Lake City and St. George, and from there on to Los Angeles. Prior to completion of this bridge motorists had to negotiate a rugged old road down the east side of the Black Ridge. A Utah Parks bus had recently been swept downstream while trying to ford the swollen Ash Creek. The journey could now be made in relative safety. There were smiles and handshakes all around, but it was a bittersweet success for the engineer and supervisor of construction who had won the bid on the project. A deposit of loose volcanic conglomerate was encountered on the south side of the creek requiring considerably more expensive concrete for that supporting end. A partner in the project simply declared bankruptcy, leaving the entire debt of \$20,000 [equivalent to \$400,000 today] to Leo A. Snow. Ash Creek Bridge is barely visible now by travelers on Interstate 15, but still serves a few farmers and ranchers just south of New Harmony. This vital connection on the old Arrowhead Trail is otherwise forgotten, but it holds important lessons for the posterity of the builder. In the October General Conference of 1861, Pres. Brigham Young called 309 families under the direction of Apostle Erastus Snow to leave the Salt Lake Valley and go south to the Virgin River Basin and there establish a community to be called St. George. Many of these faithful Saints had been with Brigham Young on the Westward trek of 1847 after leaving Nauvoo the year before. Now they were being asked to leave their comfortable homes, farms, and businesses and tame this barren desert land. It was a severe trial of their faith and obedience. The outbreak of the Civil War had restricted supplies of cotton and Brigham Young was convinced that the "Cotton Mission" of Utah's "Dixie" could produce it in quantity and bolster the self-

sufficiency of the Mormon territory. Refusing entreaties from Samuel Brannon and others to come and participate in the California gold rush, Bro. Brigham also sensed the importance of securing every source of water in the Great Basin against an expected flood of immigrants once the railroad was completed. Water, not gold, was the most precious resource in this arid land. . On Dec. 1, 1861, the main party arrived in the valley which was flanked by dark volcanic ridges and bordered on the north by red sandstone cliffs. They made their encampment near the current site of Dixie College. Culinary water was brought down from the east springs of the Red Hill and plans were made to irrigate the "fields" area from the Virgin River. On Christmas day it began to rain and continued intermittently for the next forty days. Living in tents and wagon boxes, the saints and their meager belongings got soaked. Crops planted with great expectation withered in the summer heat. The Virgin River repeatedly defied attempts to be tamed. Brigham Young visited the struggling community in Sept. 1862, and immediately recognized the problems and the peril to his plans to hold this part of the territory. He asked the faithful to begin building a meetinghouse large enough to seat 2000 people. For a community of 1200-1500 souls this would be a monumental task. All the tithing resources from Cedar City south were put at their disposal, and the work commenced June 1, 1863, infusing a new spirit of hope. The St. George Tabernacle stands today as a monument to their faith, craftsmanship, and hard work. Pres. Young spent winters here and in April 1871, with work on the Salt Lake Temple stymied, he decided that a Temple should be built in St. George. The Tabernacle project was nearing completion, thus skilled labor was available. Those who had administered the ordinances in the Nauvoo Temple were aging and needed a place where this could be done, and others trained. The relative isolation of St. George would keep it out of view of the Federal Govt., and the people needed another work project. With considerable effort and sacrifice, the beautiful white St. George Temple, first in the West, was completed and dedicated in April, 1877, just six months before the death of Brigham Young. Among those Saints was a young man named Erastus Beman Snow, son of Apostle Snow and first wife Artemesia Beman. He was eight when the family moved to Dixie and he stayed busy with all the chores of rural life along with carpentry work on the Tabernacle and Temple, casket making, and accompanying his father on frequent trips in the territory. He married Elida Crosby in October 1874, when he was 21.

Their first child, Artemesia, was born in November 1875, and a second child, Erastus Beman, Jr. was born in November 1877. One month later on December 25, 1877 he received a mission call to the Zuni Indians of Arizona, and to the people of Mexico, and New Mexico. He served several missions for the Church intermittently between 1878 and 1880, returning to St. George to resume his carpentry trade and tend his land in the Washington Fields. His third child, Leo Alva Snow, was born Sept. 5, 1881. After additional Church missions in Mexico, Erastus Beman continued his ecclesiastical work in St. George and established a home furnishings business that became E.B. Snow Furniture. Young Leo A. was an adventurous lad. At 2 & 1/2 he decided to have a visit with his grandmother Crosby. In the company of "Old Frank", the family dog, he was guided the 5 blocks to her house, never in danger, but causing his mother considerable grief until he was found several hours later. Leo's only recollection of his grandfather Erastus Snow was when he was five. He and his cousin Antone Ivins were playing in the basement laundry room of the Big House. He relates: "We had gathered together some chicks away from their mother hen and had put them in one of the wooden wash tubs that looked like one-half of a barrel with metal stays to hold it together. We were attempting to wash the chicks in the tub with a plunger and they were fleeing or dying with each stroke at the time we were caught in the act. We each fled in a different direction and I found myself running toward home by way of the path through the lot. My speed was halted by the extended arm of my grandfather who gently drew me in front of him, having been warned by the screaming voice at the Big House to catch the culprits. My grandfather tilted my head up with a thumb under my chin and peered deep into my eyes as he kindly said: 'You do not look like a bad boy.' I felt that he was looking through to my toes. That incident has been a powerful influence and given me a desire to always live worthy of his great name." One day cousin Antone and Leo were playing at Antone's house and they were admiring Uncle Tone's beautiful horses and jersey calves. Leo said he'd like one of the calves and Antone said, "You can have it for six dollars." Leo took it seriously and somehow he raised six dollars, met Uncle Tone on the street, handed him the money and said, "Here is the money for my calf." Uncle Tone asked what calf that was and Leo explained what Antone had said. Uncle Tone smiled but Leo got his thoroughbred calf and he raised it to be a wonderful jersey cow that supplied the family with milk and produced a dozen calves.

With daily chores of chopping wood for the stove, milking the cow, feeding the chickens, caring for the dog and horses, tending the garden, taking water turns, and helping with laundry, there wasn't much time for sports. There was no radio, TV, auto, air conditioning or phones which we take for granted today. Games were played outdoors, often with homemade toys. Communication was by letter and news came by the weekly paper or word of mouth. Dances were a regular social event and though described as awkward he did enjoy square dancing. Leo attended grammar grades in the basement of the Tabernacle and began high school in the new Woodward School. At age eighteen (1899) he went to Provo and attended the Brigham Young Academy (BYA) for business training, staying in the home of his married older sister Artemesia, and sharing in the cooking, washing, and other household chores. Returning to the BYA in the fall of 1900 he was forced to drop out almost immediately at the sudden death of his father, age 47. Erastus Beman, Jr. was away on a mission until November, and the responsibility fell to Leo to be the casket maker, tend the farm, and help with the furniture store. He resumed his studies at the "Y" in January 1901. Upon return to St. George he completed high school at Woodward as President of the first graduating class in 1903, and resumed an earlier interest in a Miss Penelope Bleak. He applied for and quickly obtained a teaching certificate and began teaching school in Santa Clara for \$50 a month, riding his mustang "Kinkie" to and from that assignment. In the summer of 1904 he was appointed Water Master in the Washington Fields, a prime agricultural area. On that job he developed a terrible respiratory illness thought to have been TB, and was sent to Pine Valley for recuperation. Leo recognized the need for further education and entered Univ. of Utah School of Mines in the fall of 1904. This was made financially feasible through the generous hospitality of his sister Artemesia and her husband, who had since moved to Salt Lake City. Summers were spent in the mines at Alta and he received his B.S. in Mine Engineering in June 1908, one of only two people in Washington County to hold a college degree. In addition to his studies he was Business Manager for the Utonian yearbook. He married Penelope Bleak Sept. 24, 1908, aware that she was quite ill, but feeling it was the honorable thing to do after courting her for eight years. Work began almost immediately for the newly appointed U.S. Deputy Surveyor, Leo A. Snow, when he took a Contract for a U.S. Public Lands Survey. Interest in the area of Southwest

Utah had been building since a description and paintings by artist Frederick S. Dellenbaugh had become available. His artwork became the center of attraction in the Utah section at the St. Louis Worlds Fair, but skeptics remarked that there couldn't be such a place. A young man from Rockville, UT, David Hirschi [who would later become UT Senator], heard these comments as he passed through St. Louis on return from his European mission and testified to a gathering crowd that they were indeed real. Leo Snow was the first to formally survey the picturesque but very rugged territory and was struck with its beauty. In his report he stated that from Observation Point: "A view can be had of this canyon surpassed only by a similar view of the Grand Canyon of the Colorado. At intervals along the west side of the canyon streams of various sizes rush over the edge of the chasm forming water falls from 800 to 2000 feet high. The stream in the bottom of the canyon appears as a silver ribbon winding its way among the undergrowth and occasionally disappearing from view. In my opinion this canyon should be set apart as a national park." The report was dispatched to Washington in June 1909 and President Howard Taft signed a proclamation in July creating Mukuntuweap National Monument. Awareness of this scenic jewel grew over the next several years and Utah Senator Reed Smoot eventually introduced a bill to change the name and designation. In November of 1919 the bill was passed by the Senate and signed by President Woodrow Wilson establishing Zion National Park. Leo Snow was honored for his work at the dedication of the ZNP Visitor Center in 1961. His surveying transit and other memorabilia are on display in the recently renovated Zion Natural History facility, recognizing him as a major force in preserving this unique gem for the enjoyment of travelers from around the world. His affinity for this natural wonder was like that of a father for his child. Meanwhile, many things had transpired in the life of Leo Snow. His wife, Penelope, died of kidney disease in 1910 as he was launching his General Civil Engineering practice. They had no children. Despite his grief, he busied himself with a survey of the town of Ivins, with plans for and construction of a reservoir and canal system. The previously arid land at the mouth of Snow Canyon could now be farmed, substantially raising its value. He never asked for a dime beyond his standard fees, but his benefit to the landowners was recognized years later. He designed a canal and siphon pipe under the Virgin River bridge to bring water into the St. George valley. The block "D" on the West Black ridge was

engineered by Leo Snow and then whitewashed by Dixie College students. He wed Lula Pendleton, eleven years his junior, on Sept. 24, 1912, and their first child, Esther, was born Nov. 15, 1914. As a member of the St. George City Council from 1913-17 he was involved in many projects that improved the city infrastructure and services. He served as Washington County Attorney from 1917-18, and began service with the Washington County Selective Service Board, a position he would hold through two World Wars and into the Korean conflict, eventually retiring as Chairman in 1950. He fulfilled a one year contract with the Bureau of Public Roads in 1920 and took a job in Overton, NV, surveying for a canal and reservoir off the Muddy River. This was a lonely time away from home missing his family that now included Nellie, born in Apr. 1917, and Alva, born in Oct. 1919. From 1921-29 he was the St. George City Engineer and Watermaster with the responsibility for designing and constructing the first sanitation system and installation of curbs and gutters. During this time three more children were born into the family including Clarence in Sept. 1921, Beman in Dec. 1922, and Vivian in May 1927. While Clarence was still an infant they camped in a tent near Pintura while Leo worked on bridges in the area including the Ash Creek Bridge, that final expensive link on Hwy 91. In the mid 1920's Leo became a member of the Washington County Board of Education and was Chairman when he retired from that in 1942. Fourth of July was always a time for community celebration. Nellie relates being awakened by several rounds of the cannon fired from atop the Red Hill above the house. She and Esther, sleeping on the screened back porch, really got the full effect. Then they would hear the music of the old "Marshall Band" which played in all the parades important occasions. Father Leo frequently dressed as "Uncle Sam" and rode a horse during the parade. Later in the day, there were gunny sack races and relays, prizes and food and music on the Tabernacle grounds. There were no paper cups and paper plates in those days and no hotdogs or hamburgers. They barbequed half a beef, things were all homemade, and the lemonade was in a barrel with a tin cup tied to a string for everyone to use. Clean culinary water was a precious commodity in Dixie and Leo Snow recognized the need for improvements in the supply from Pine Valley. A ditch had been constructed many years before, but the water was frequently fouled by grazing livestock and diminished by evaporation and other losses in its long course to St. George. In one of his crowning achievements, Leo engineered

and completed the Cottonwood Project in 1931, which replaced the open ditch with a pipeline to bring water down from the 7,000' level of Pine Valley, sixteen miles over lava rock into the city. With modifications and upgrades that pipeline is still in use. Sometime in the early 1930's Leo was driving with some of his children out on the Ivins Bench. Remember that this previously worthless land was now fertile through his efforts to engineer and construct a reservoir and irrigation system. Stopping near a field of ripe melons he crossed the fence and picked a few. As he was loading the fruit into the trunk an irate farmer came running toward them, intent on preventing such blatant theft. Upon reaching the car, the farmer recognized Leo, instantly quenched his anger and politely said: "Oh, it's you! Do you have enough? Can I give you some more?" Our country was now in the grips of a Depression after the Crash of '29. Paying jobs of any kind were difficult to find. Leo was trying to feed his family and pay down his debts. For a while in the early 30's they rented out their house on the hill and moved into the Arrowhead Hotel, down in the city, after the manager left town one night with all the week's receipts. Lula managed the little restaurant while Esther, Nellie, and Alva tended the rooms and washed dishes. Katherine joined the family in Jan. 1931, as the seventh child. The Civilian Conservation Corps, or C.C.C., was initiated in 1933 under the New Deal of Pres. Franklin D. Roosevelt and employed two million men planting trees, building dams, and fighting forest fires. Another New Deal program during the Depression Era was the Works Projects Administration, or W.P.A. It put eight and a half million unemployed workers into construction jobs building roads, bridges, parks, airport runways, public swimming pools, etc. The W.P.A. also created jobs in the arts for actors, musicians, writers, etc. Though criticized for "make work" or unnecessary projects, Roosevelt believed that offering employment for wages was better for the worker's morale than simply giving them welfare checks. From 1933-35, Leo Snow worked as a Supervisor on several CCC projects and with the U.S. Forest Service at Widstoe (now a ghost town) near Escalante, UT, building a dam and bridge across the Escalante Creek. These were hard times as he lived on the site in a tent away from his beloved family for months at a time. His daily letters described his loneliness and the difficulty of managing a diverse group of men from all over the country who lacked the work ethic and morals to which he was accustomed. In one such letter he writes: "No one is dearer to me than you and the family. I long to be at home

and I sometimes wonder if the time will come when I can again be home and help you carry the load.” Finishing that assignment near Escalante, UT, he returned to St. George and assisted L.M. Winsor in drawing plans for the Winsor Dam, which still stands, on the Santa Clara Creek. He then began a two year stint as the St. George City Engineer and jobs with the Public Works Administration. From 1937-39 he did general planning for the city of Kanab including supervision of pipelines and a water storage tank. He was also the Resident Engineer Inspector for Beaver County, supervising school and library projects in Beaver, Milford, and Minersville. This took him away from home and family for extended periods and he missed the infancy years of Rosemary born in Dec. 1933, and Margaret born in Nov. 1935. Esther had married in 1934 and moved to Kanab, but there were still eight children under his roof. In 1939-40 he was back in St. George and Washington County as the Engineer, supervising construction of the Virgin River bridge below the city of Washington. In the summer of 1939, oldest son Alva left to serve in the Eastern States Mission with assignments in New York State. Regular letters to Alva kept him advised of happenings at home and usually included a few dollars to cover monthly expenses. A long letter written each Christmas day would recount the excitement of the younger sisters with their gifts of the day and some fatherly advice like the following: “Truly it is more blessed to give than to receive. . . We grow by giving, if not of money then of ourselves, our time and our thoughts. We get joy out of service to our fellows and remember it the longest. That is one reason why men work for the public without compensation. Their pay is the joy and satisfaction they get out of it all.” A milestone event in Leo’s life occurred in 1940, which he recalled in a written history. His pattern of living had been simple and not given to luxury. Raising a large family during the Depression was particularly difficult and made more so by failure to be paid for work he had provided on a wide variety of jobs. But by faithfully paying his tithing and fulfilling his various Church responsibilities the Lord always provided adequate means. Though rarely mentioned, Leo carried a heavy load of debt from the over runs on the Ash Creek Bridge of 1925. Quoting from his life history: “I lost \$20,000 on the contract to build bridges in connection with the highway. This money was repaid at the Bank of St. George and the Hurricane Bank . . .while my family was growing up. Finally, I received my cancelled note marked “Paid in Full” from the Hurricane Bank where the last of this money was owing. I took the

note to the President of the Bank stating there had been some mistake for I had not paid the last \$1,300 [today's equivalent of \$25,000]. He looked up the account and told me my brother Ras had paid it. The tears burst forth and failing words, I left. Reporting to my precious brother, he'd always been so gentle with me as a boy, he was four years older, and now he had done this wonderful thing! He merely said to me, 'I know of the struggle you are making and I had it on hand and couldn't think of anything better to do with it.'

Through the selfless generosity of his older sib, the burden of fifteen years had finally been lifted. The relief was inexpressible. The first public swimming pool in St. George was constructed just below the Sun Bowl as a WPA project in 1940 under Leo's supervision. The recreational benefits to the community were substantial and he took great pleasure in that project. He was also instrumental in establishing the adjacent municipal power plant that provided reliable electricity through diesel generators, augmenting the capricious hydroelectricity generated from the Cottonwood Pipeline. In May 1941, tragedy struck when his oldest daughter, Esther, died of complications following an appendectomy. Her four children – Ben (5½), Gale (4), Norman (2½), and Steven (14 mos.) – were brought into Leo and Lula's home and lovingly raised as their own. Leo's older children were now beginning to leave the nest through marriage, military and schooling, so these grandchildren gave continuity to the household. Vivian, Katherine, Rosemary, and Margaret now became "big sisters", playmates and Mother's helpers during the transition. With the U.S. entry into WWII, the CCC and WPA soon ceased operation, and our country's young men were sent to fight on two fronts. Many would never return. Leo began a twelve-year career with the Soil Conservation Service and supervised an important agricultural census in 1950. He retired from that job in Oct. 1955 at the age of 72, assured that his own children and Judd grandchildren could now manage on their own. Ecclesiastically he had served faithfully as Sunday School Superintendent, Seventy and High Priest Group Leader. He had a firm testimony of the gospel of Jesus Christ as expressed to Alva in one of his many letters: "We do not fully realize what a wonderful age we live in nor what a wonderful opportunity we enjoy through the light and knowledge of the gospel. We need to be thankful for the light that has come to us and the understanding that is ours. When one meets with men who have studied the Bible all their lives and seem to be well informed, still they do not understand

the gospel as we do. It seems to take modern revelation to make it [plain]and simple to us. . . . It takes the Spirit of God and the testimony of the Holy Ghost to make it clear, and that is where the Latter Day Saints have the advantage if they live worthy of it.” Leo’s beloved Lula passed away in August 1959 after years of ill health. She had been a faithful companion and wonderful Mother to a large family and extended family and he missed her sorely. He married Marva Spencer the next year and she helped him through his declining years until his death July 1, 1963, at age 81. Leo A. Snow had fulfilled the dream of Brigham Young and the mission of his grandfather Erastus Snow to “make the desert bloom like a rose”. The community of St. George and surrounding areas of NV and AZ are indebted to him for his contributions to their well being through provision of culinary and irrigation water resources, the building of roads, bridges and buildings, sanitation systems, and recreational facilities. His posterity has honored his legacy through exercise of the principles he silently taught – hard work, honesty, sobriety, faithfulness, education, service, integrity, and love. May we strive to emulate these qualities in our own lives as we remember them in his.

Ron Snow 6/1/08