

FROM NATIVE AMERICAN TRAIL TO INTERSTATE EXIT

A LOCAL HISTORY OF PASSAGE

The earliest desert routes in the West followed water. Having drinking water for person or pack animal was critical in negotiating the extreme heat and rugged terrain. Springs of water are located near where you stand and elsewhere in the vicinity of Leeds. Until the 1900s, these springs were significant features in defining early travel routes for travelers in this part of the West.

Native Americans, the Paiutes or Pah-utes, lived in the Leeds area along Leeds Creek. Pah is the native word for water. The Paiutes were somewhat nomadic, traveling along routes where life-giving water was available. The earliest pathways in the Leeds area were those of the Paiutes and their ancestors.

McMULLIN HOUSE—THE MORMON HOTEL

Between 1878 and 1881, the renowned stone masons of the day, Willard G. McMullin and Sons, built the house on this corner for Brigham Young McMullin and his wife Ada. One of the oldest homes still standing in Leeds, it has undergone many changes since its inception as a one-room stone home. The walls are 18 inches thick and the ceilings are 9 feet high. In the late 1800s, the house was referred to as the Mormon Hotel, as many church authorities visiting from Salt Lake City would stop and stay with the B. Y. McMullins.



Brigham and Ada McMullin, seated. The house was maintained for the latter half of the 1900s by their daughter, Ethyl McMullin George. Local people during this era often referred to it as the George Home.

Fur traders, trappers, and explorers used the trails as well. In the 1860s, as the Mormons began settling southern Utah, the area that would eventually become Leeds was known as Road Valley. The springs were the site of a wagon rest stop. After Leeds was settled in the 1860s, its main street became part of the route connecting Salt Lake to St. George and other Mormon settlements in southern Utah.

When silver was discovered in the early 1870s at nearby Silver Reef, a symbiotic relationship between the new little farming community and the mining town was born.

Farmers sold their produce to the residents of Silver Reef. Residences, a church, dance hall, mercantile, boarding house, and other businesses

sprang up along the main road in Leeds. For several decades, the economy of southwestern Utah thrived as a result of this interdependence of farming and mining.

With the advent of the automobile in the early 1900s, long-distance travel became more common. In the early days of the automobile, the road through Leeds became part of a route known as the Arrowhead Trail. In 1926 the federal system of numbered highways was initiated, and the Arrowhead Trail became known as U.S. Highway 91. In 1931 the final stretch of Highway 91 from Harrisburg through Leeds to



Looking south on Main Street in 1915. The schoolhouse is on the left, and the traveler's rest, the Log Cabin Inn, is on the right.

Toquerville Junction was paved. The highway became the major route between Los Angeles and Salt Lake City. Well into the 1950s, travelers continued to pass through Leeds. The small Main Street businesses were utilized by residents and travelers alike.

In 1956, with a good paved highway and faster automobile travel, the residents of Leeds started sending their children to St. George to school. Many Leeds residents worked and shopped in St. George as well. In 1964 the section of Interstate Highway 15 was completed parallel to Leeds, officially retiring Highway 91 as the major route. Leeds was reduced to just another interstate exit. The change brought more residential tranquility to the center of town but produced an economic coma for the local businesses. Over the next several years, Main Street became almost exclusively a residential street with only a few businesses.



Civilian Conservation Corpsman standing in front of the Leeds Mercantile, circa 1933-1942.

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LEEDS MERCANTILE ON MAIN STREET

In 1932 Charles and Kate Allen traded their Hurricane home for the Leeds Mercantile, which was owned by Hurricane merchant E.J. Graff. The couple built it into a compact department store, selling groceries, hardware goods, textiles, pharmaceuticals, housewares, and even gasoline. The residents referred to the store as "Kate's." Leeds had two phones at the time, and one was located in the Leeds Mercantile. Kate often found herself taking personal and heart-wrenching messages for local residents from their family or friends living out of the area.

This was particularly true during World War II. In

1964 the Allens sold the store just as I-15 was completed. In 2008 Lance and Pamela Fry restored the Leeds Mercantile building.