

The Washington Cotton Factory in Washington City was built in 1866 by Mormon pioneers sent to southern Utah to grow cotton. The factory, constructed of massive timbers and stone, wove the cotton grown by the settlers into cloth. The completion of the transcontinental railroad in 1869, however, made it cheaper to import cotton cloth than to produce it in Utah's Dixie. The cotton industry gradually died and by mid-century the factory was abandoned. It deteriorated until part of the roof fell in.

The long process of restoring the cotton factory and returning it to community use began in 1985 when Norma Cannizzaro adopted the old factory as her personal crusade. She purchased the building and invested a considerable sum in repairing the exterior and renovating the interior as an events center. After nearly a decade of pursuing the factory's preservation, however, Norma Cannizzaro could no longer support the project.

Hyrum and Gail Smith stepped up in 1993 to carry the project forward. They purchased the factory with hopes of creating a historical village around it. This plan, however, encountered difficulties and the Smiths were forced to put the factory up for sale.

In 1998, Star Nursery picked up the torch when it purchased the cotton factory to house its second St. George area store. Star nursery carefully adapted the main floor of the building to house its garden shop while preserving the cotton factory's pioneer era construction. The exterior and upper floors of the factory remain unchanged. A community-minded organization, Star Nursery makes the second floor available for public use and tours. This area also contains many artifacts associated with the history of the cotton factory.

Star Nursery enthusiastically embraces its new role as the steward of a unique piece of Utah's heritage. "This building will be standing for a long time after we're gone," explains Star Nursery manager Steve Flannery. "We consider ourselves caretakers. We're excited to have a chance to take care of this building." And after many long years of worrying about the future of the cotton factory, the people of Washington County are thrilled to see the building back in use.