

# SPOTLIGHT



The old Silver Reef jail was returned Tuesday to the historic mining town.

PHOTOS BY BRIAN PASSEY / THE SPECTRUM & DAILY NEWS

# HISTORIC JAIL RETURNS HOME

## Old building moved to Silver Reef Tuesday

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It's been a jail, an ice house and a granary. Now it's about to become a tourist site.

That's the annotated history of the Silver Reef Jail. It probably has more tales to tell and now that it's back home in Silver Reef, those stories will be heard.

After more than a century away from where it was built, the jail was moved Tuesday afternoon through the efforts of five prospective Eagle Scouts. It joins the nearby Wells Fargo building and the ruins of other historic structures in the former mining town that has become a rural residential neighborhood of Leeds.

"It's just a dream for us," said Bobbi Wan-kier, executive director of the Silver Reef Museum, which is housed in the old Wells Fargo building.

Wan-kier said the museum staff often hears questions from tourists who expect more of a ghost town when visiting Silver Reef. They wonder where all the buildings have gone.

But Southern Utahns in the late 19th century were a resourceful people. When the boom town went bust in the late 1880s, Silver Reef quickly faded away. One enterprising Leeds resident named William Stirling realized the empty wooden buildings in Silver Reef could be "mined," according to the website for the Washington



Boy Scouts prepare the old Silver Reef jail to move Tuesday from a pasture in Washington City back to its previous location in Silver Reef.

County Historical Society.

In 1895, William Stirling purchased and moved the vacant St. John's Catholic Church to Leeds, where it was converted into a social hall. Perhaps it was around this time that the jail was moved as well. What is known is that Eldon Stirling, William Stirling's grandson, remembers the jail on his family's property when he a child.

Eldon Stirling, who is now 94, said he

believes his father moved the building to the corner of Center Street and Valley Road in Leeds. That intersection is approximately two miles away from the jail's original location at the corner of East Street and Center Street in Silver Reef.

"The only thing I knew that he used it for was he would store ice in it in the

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## Jail

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winter time and people would come and get ice in the spring and summer," Eldon Stirling said. "I don't know whether he sold it or gave it away. He probably sold it."

Then, at some point, the old jail was moved again. This time it traveled a bit farther to Washington City, about 12 miles away from its ice house location in Leeds. It's unclear when the building first arrived in Washington City, but Dennis Gibson remembers seeing it near the intersection of 100 West and 200 South when he was a child. He is now 60.

That wouldn't be its final stop before being repatriated to Silver Reef. But the next move was only a couple of blocks to the west, to approximately 300 W. 200 South. It was Gibson's father who moved it there to serve as a storage building near a pasture.

"It was a granary," Gibson said. "We would keep grain in it and store things."

Gibson eventually learned of the

building's history and said his parents' "last wish" was to see it returned to Silver Reef. When they began talking with members of the Silver Reef Foundation about moving it back, Gibson's grandson, Tayvin Gibson, volunteered to take it on as a project for his Eagle Scout award. Soon the project ballooned and four other Boy Scouts took on various aspects for their own Eagle Scout projects.

Tayvin Gibson initiated the project and began preparing the building for a move. Then Dakota Shammo continued preparations, building wooden braces for the structure's corners and wrapping it with straps so it would hold together during the move.

"I'm really excited about it," Shammo said. "A lot of people will see it."

Tolman Knighton began coordinating the transportation with Reusch Machine, which donated the use of a crane and flatbed semi to the project, while Brant Paxman prepared the site at Silver Reef, including the pouring of a concrete pad. Through it all, Jaron Spencer was in charge of documenting the project.

Three of the five Scouts were there Tuesday afternoon as Dennis Gibson, volunteers from Reusch Machine and

others moved the structure. After loading it onto the trailer in Washington City, the truck traveled along Telegraph Street into Hurricane and then up Old Highway 91 through the Harrisburg Area into Leeds. After continuing northeast along Main Street in Leeds, it squeezed through the underpass beneath Interstate 15 and continued northwest along Silver Reef Road to its new home.

The entire move from crane to crane took less than three hours.

"I thought it was going to take the rest of the day," Knighton said. "They actually did it really fast."

Although the jail is back in Silver Reef, it's not located at its original spot. It is now located just northeast of the former Cosmopolitan Restaurant, near the Wells Fargo Building. Its former location was about one block to the east. Eric Fleming, former director of the Silver Reef Museum, said it was placed in this location near the museum for visitor ease.

Fleming volunteers as a tour guide for the Silver Reef Foundation and one of the stories he tells is about the jail. He said that back in Silver Reef's mining days, the price of silver dropped and a large group of miners

went on strike.

"They arrested a group of them and tried to put them in jail but it wasn't big enough to hold them," he said.

The jail only measures about 12 feet by 12 feet. So the law came up with creative idea. They marked a circle around the jail and told the "jailed" miners that they couldn't step outside of the circle or they would be shot.

Wan-kier said she is excited to have the jail in place for the Smithsonian Institute's exhibit that is coming to Silver Reef in mid-September.

Ron Cundick, president of the Silver Reef Foundation, said the foundation has identified other buildings throughout Southern Utah that were originally from Silver Reef but he said it's unlikely that any of them will return to the ghost town. He is happy to see the jail return, though.

"I think bringing it back will help the community identify with the history more," he said.

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