

DIXIE WINE



DENNIS LANCASTER

THE DIXIE WINE MISSION

At the general conference of the Mormon Church in Salt Lake City on 6 October 1861, 309 family heads were called to found St. George and to reinforce the settlements already established. In October 1862 President Young stated that the southern colonies should supply the territory with wine "for the Holy Sacrament, for medicine, and for sale to outsiders."

This phase of the colonization effort in southern Utah was greatly bolstered by the call of 30 Swiss families headed by Daniel Bonelli. Many of the Swiss company had come from wine-producing areas in Switzerland, and knew how to make good wine. The mission was strengthened by a group of expert horticulturists called by Brigham Young. Walter E. Dodge, known as "the father of the grape in southern Utah," planted his seeds and cuttings at Dodge Springs, which became a principal source for starts and information. John C. Naegle, who was to be known as the best winemaker in Dixie, and whose product was marketed under the name of "Nail's Best," was called to

Dixie to build up the fruit and grape culture in 1866. He built a large two-story stone structure at Toquerville to house his polygamous family. In the basement of this impressive building, which stands today, was a huge wine cellar. He purchased a wine press and distillery in California, which he used to manufacture as much as 3,000 gallons a year of the most choice wine in the country.

The rich, fertile soil, warm, dry climate, and long growing season in Dixie proved so beneficial to viticulture that by 1866 one-third of the total acreage under cultivation at Toquerville was given to orchards and vineyards. Brigham Young remarked, "I anticipate the day when we can have the privilege of using, at our sacraments, pure wine, produced within our borders." Another important function of winemaking was to provide a cash crop for the cotton mission. In the mid-1870s the Dixie winemakers had a ready market among the miners at Pioche, Nevada; Silver Reef, Utah; and the settlements to the north. Miners, characteristically hard workers and heavy drinkers, were happy to pay cash for rich Dixie wine.



**"The habitual drunkard
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Saints."**



Brigham Young was emphatically against the frequent use by the Saints of wine and spiritous liquors. He felt that "wine should be an article of export and not drunk among the Saints except in taking the sacrament." As early as 1873, Brigham Young advised the Dixie Saints to be temperate and wise in the use of intoxicating drinks. And in a 19 April 1884 circular from the St. George Stake president, the bishops were advised that "... the habitual drunkard cannot retain a standing in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, neither can he, who for gain, or otherwise, puts the cup to his weak brother's lips." Several local Church officials were released because of sweet Dixie wine.

Ironically, when the Dixie Saints began to pay their tithes in grapes and wine, the Church tithing offices in St. George, Toquerville, and elsewhere entered into the production of wine. Soon the Church found itself to be the largest producer of wine in the area. The Tithing Office sold its surplus to the mining camps, but as the silver deposits began to give out and the mining towns began folding up the St. George tithing office stopped accepting grapes as tithing and abandoned its own wine press in 1891.

Wine was served for the sacrament in all the wards stretched along the Virgin River. This was *not* new wine or grape juice — it was good, aged

wine. When asked if wine used in the sacrament was new wine, one southern Utah native commented, "Isn't wine, unless it's fermented." One old-timer commented, "There was a good turn-out for church when wine was used in the sacrament, and it might even help to-day." But as the abuse of the Sacramental wine increased, wine was abandoned in favor of water in sacramental services. A directive to this end was issued by the St. George Stake on 9 July 1892.

It should be emphasized that the Word of Wisdom, as we know it to-day, was not considered binding upon the Church until the October 1880 general conference of the Church when the Pearl of Great Price and Book of Doctrine and Covenants were canonized. Until that point, the people of Dixie considered the Word of Wisdom a good piece of advice, but not a commandment.

And there were economic reasons for the end of the wine industry in southern Utah, besides pressure from the Mormon Church. Greedy winemakers began selling wine made from bad grapes, or wine not sufficiently aged, and the Mormon and gentile customers began to turn elsewhere. The railroad brought in better quality California wine. And the closing of the Silver Reef Mine in the 1880s eliminated a major market. Farmers began pulling up grapes



The Dixie Saints didn't consider wine a sin — wine was an important part of the social pattern.



and raising other crops, though a few diehards, regarding winemaking as part of their essential mission to Dixie, continued planting grapes. Private concerns have continued to make small amounts of the sweet beverage until this day.¹

THE FOLKLORE OF DIXIE WINE

Most people in Dixie drank wine socially. The Dixie Saints didn't consider wine a sin — wine was an important part of the social pattern. The early colonists didn't drink often or much, maybe a glass a day. "It was a common drink, somewhat like Pepsi or Coke is today."²

Prominent Dixie homes had three pitchers on the dinner table — one containing water, one milk, and the third Dixie wine. Members of the family and guests chose whichever they preferred. It was considered hospitable to offer wine to visitors. If the sweet beverage was not on the family table, it was more than likely available in the basement for any who desired it.

Wine was present in abundance on many occasions such as Christmas, weddings, and weekend dances. The fourth and twenty-fourth of July were special holidays for the Saints. The day's events on these holidays

included band serenades, foot and horse races, and a special patriotic assembly including songs, orations, and toasts. The day usually started when the town's musicians, riding in an appropriately decorated wagon, serenaded the townspeople. The appreciative listeners often treated the musicians with good Dixie wine. Following the parade and patriotic assembly, the afternoon was usually spent in horse and foot races as well as other forms of sporting events. Fellows from the surrounding communities used to come into town to compete in the races which took place on Main Street. Wine flowed quite freely and was often the commodity wagered. Sometimes the participants got a little too much wine and would "race up and down the streets, whip their horses, and holler like Comanche Indians."³

Dancing was a favorite activity of the early pioneers in the Cotton Mission. As with other social functions, admission tickets were paid in kind, and wine was used in this capacity. Musicians were often treated with the sweet liquid. Not only did Dixie wine contribute to rowdyism in the dances, but also offered encouragement to the bashful participant. The story is told of a bashful boy who would never dance unless he had a little Dixie wine under his belt," and then he was very sociable."⁴

Wine was almost always present at



We tarried too long — the
wine was too strong —
We got drunk on his
sweet Dixie wine.



wedding receptions in Dixie; it was expected. As one southern Utah historian candidly commented, "You were a cheapskate if you didn't serve wine."⁵ John D. Lee gave a wedding party for his daughter in which 200 people participated. The evening was interspersed with song, good talk, and "wine of our raising." Brother Lee concluded that "every person as far as I know enjoyed themselves to the hilt."⁶

Dixie wine also found a permanent spot in the pioneer medicine chest. An oft-used remedy for the common cold had as its basic ingredient good old Dixie wine. As Ivy Stratton explained, "When I had a bad cold, Mother would make me take a cup of heated wine with something hot like ginger in it and go to bed. It was really wonderful to cause you to perspire which helped to get a cold out of you."⁷ Cure or not, this remedy for colds was widespread and widely accepted by the early Dixie settlers.

Wine was often used to soothe and relax a nervous or tired pioneer. "If you drank enough wine," declared Ivy Stratton, "in a little while the feeling would come over you — you'd feel stronger, like I can live forever — just nothing bothers you. If you have a little ailment it goes right to that and soothes it. . . . It was a wonderful feeling."⁸ These attributes served as a bracer and helped the colonists over many a dif-

ficult time. Levi Savage, an early colonist, mixed wine with numerous things and said of the medicine, "Did me a lot of good; in fact I might say it even cured me."⁹ Dixie wine may not have possessed all the medicinal powers which early pioneers attributed to it, but it made them feel better and that was half the battle.

A cache of hundreds of colorful stories concerning Dixie wine exists as a heritage of the past. Although most of the stories have been handed down several times, often told for effect, they originated in actual experiences and enriched the folklore of Dixie.

One man was known as quite a drinker. In his later years his nephew stayed with him. The man asked his nephew to get him a drink of wine once when he was a little under the weather. The nephew got a glass of wine and brought it to the man. Uncle Leish poured it on the ground and said, "That's an insult to bring a man a glass of wine when he wants a drink of wine. Now go get me a drink of wine!" The nephew got a milk pan a little over half full, and Uncle Leish said, "Now, boy, that's what I call a drink of wine."¹⁰

Numerous people from St. George used to make the trip to Delamar, Nevada, to work in the mine. They would often stop in "Clary" (Santa Clara) and purchase wine for the trip. The story is told of one chap



Wine in the cellar was
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who stopped at the Boomer home and requested five gallons of wine, but explained he didn't have the money to pay for it until he got back from the mine. Brother Boomer balked at selling wine on credit until the miner said, "Well then, give me ten gallons and I'll leave five for security."¹¹

Karl Larson, prominent southern Utah historian, tells a story about playing trombone at a dance in Leeds. Everyone had been drinking, and at intermission the five bandsmen went out for some fresh air. They met a group of dancers who offered them a drink of wine. The drummer accepted, and after a couple more stops, "had more than enough to make him feel good. When we got back in there and started playing, man was he hammering those drums." When asked where he got all those notes, the drummer replied, "There should be one line of music here I'm supposed to play, but I can see three and I'm playing them all."¹²

It was advised that the early pioneers shouldn't give wine to the Indians. Once an old chief was invited to eat at the family table of John C. Naegle. The chief asked to say grace and was given permission by Brother Naegle. This was his prayer: "Oh great spirit, bless my friend John, all his squaws and papooses, and bless that good wine that my friend has in his cellar." The prayer

worked, because he was given wine to go with his dinner.¹³

The story is told of a Dixie peddler who went to Kanaraville with a wagon full of wine. Kanaraville was known for its rough youth, so the peddler took precaution against theft of his liquid cash by sleeping atop his load. Several young fellows outsmarted the peddler by drilling up through the bottom of the wagon and into a barrel of wine. The barrel was drained and several washtubs filled with sweet Dixie wine to be enjoyed by the youngsters.¹⁴

Thales Haskell, Ira Hatch, and Guthiel McConnel spent a winter living with the Hopi Indians at Old Oraibi. One morning, after their stay with the Indians had entered somewhat into the phase of boredom, the three noted Mormon scouts were seated on a ledge in the sun pondering their lot. At length, Thales Haskell spoke up and said, "I have just decided why we three were chosen for this mission. You, Ira Hatch, are more Indian than white anyway, having chosen an Indian wife; and you, McConnel, have long been known to have more zeal than good judgment; and I was chosen by Brother Young so that the Dixie wine would get one year older."¹⁵

There are several stories concerning the fermented grape pulp or pomace that was left when the wine was pressed off. Georgiana Millet speaks



"President Young, it is utterly impossible to drink five gallons of wine and stay sober."



of a horse named "Old Billy" who "ate profusely of fermented grape pulp and was ludicrously drunk."¹⁶ Josephine Hamblin remembers throwing the "pummies" (pomace) out to the chickens and watching them "flappin' all over the place — couldn't walk, just flapped."¹⁷

During one of the winters Brigham Young spent in St. George, he was much perplexed by the indiscriminate tipping among many of the local Saints. To solve this dilemma he recommended that the municipal government pass an edict that wine could not be purchased in quantities smaller than five gallons. This, he reasoned, would put an end to the tipping. Not long after the passage of this ordinance Brigham Young chanced to meet Brigham Lamb on the street. Brother Lamb was more than moderately intoxicated. As he approached his Church leader and before President Young could reprimand him, Brother Lamb said, "President Young it is utterly impossible to drink five gallons of wine and stay sober."¹⁸

A rich Spaniard from Pioche, Nevada, was marrying one of the "girls" from Silver Reef. For the wedding celebration at Silver Reef he ordered several kegs of Toquerville wine. The party was a great success, but the spigots were too slow for the thirsty celebrants, so they poured the wine out of the kegs into a huge wooden tub from which it could be

more rapidly dispensed. The next morning the bride and groom with their attendants mounted their horses to ride to Pioche, but something was wrong. The two leading horses were not behaving with proper decorum. They side-stepped and danced and wove from side to side. Their eyes sparkled and their lips were lifted as if in ribald grins. No one could explain their actions until it came to light that the boy who tended the horses had watered these two from the very same wooden tub that had held the wine the night before. The dregs left in the bottom — and you may be sure there were not many — diluted with the water put there for the horses and sufficed to intoxicate the animals.¹⁹

The story is told of two Toquerites who were guests at a Relief Society social. The sisters had been asked to bring different kinds of fruit juices to be mixed together for the refreshment. The two brethren brought their own form of juice and during the party succeeded in spiking the punch with a gallon of sweet Dixie wine. It is said that the sisters would "come over and pour themselves a glass, comment at how good it was, and by the end of the evening were feeling pretty happy."²⁰ One of the better winemakers in Dixie was a man named Schmutz who lived in the little town of Middleton, between Washington and St. George. It is said that whenever



"Oh great spirit, bless my
friends, John, all his
squaws and papooses,
and bless that good wine
that my friend has in his cellar."



Brigham Young passed the Schmutz place he would stop and come in for a glass of wine. "Just one glass of wine, that's all he would drink, and he always wanted a sandwich to go along with it. He would sit there and sip that wine just like a cup of tea."²¹

Olive Burt relates an interesting story about two government agents named McGeary and Armstrong who came to Toquerville to catch a polygamist. McGeary told his aide to go around to the back to watch while he stayed in front. Armstrong cornered the small house and noticed a barrel with a canvas tight over the top. He thought he'd step onto this canvas to get a look in the window, but his weight dislodged the canvas, and he fell into the barrel. The fragrance of ripening wine quickly informed the agent that it wasn't a rain barrel he'd fallen into. He climbed out, licked his chops, and then, using his hands as a dipper, went to work. McGeary, curious about the stillness at the rear of the cottage, tiptoed around the house and found his companion stretched out on the ground fast asleep. He took in the situation and, following the example of his partner, partook freely. The brother and his plural spouse had an undisturbed night, and in the morning two red-faced agents hurriedly left town.²²

Wine in the cellar was often a great temptation to Dixie youngsters. Bert Covington remembers one escapade

when he was about twelve. He and two friends "visited" his uncle's wine cellar and snatched two five-gallon kegs of good Dixie wine which they hid in a haystack. "My uncle never found out who swiped his wine, and we thoroughly enjoyed our ten gallons of wine."²³

One day a fellow stole a gallon of wine from Ivy Stratton's grandfather, William Lang, and hid it in the hay in the barn. He was so proud of this accomplishment that he ran to tell Ivy who promptly restole the treasure. Ivy and two of his pals tried to drink the gallon of wine. Ivy said he went to bed Sunday night and didn't get up until Wednesday at noon.²⁴

Singing was a favorite pastime of the Dixie settlers, and wine figured in many a lyric. It is impossible to record the actual song and accompaniment, but the words to two Dixie favorites are as follows:

SWEET DIXIE WINE

Billy Lang we all knew and William Hall too
Both were makers of very sweet wine.
They said to pay up or they's take our pup
To pay for their sweet Dixie wine.
To pay for their sweet Dixie wine.

Alex Fullerton next we paid our respects,
Respect for his Isabella wine.
He gave each a cup, and told us to sup,
To sup on his Isabella wine.
To sup on his Isabella wine.

Then over to Leeds, we hasten our steeds.
The roads were so dusty, but fine.
Brother Sterling we found and he was sure
bound



Dixie wine also found a permanent spot in the pioneer medicine chest.



To serve us his malaga wine.
To serve us his malaga wine.

Then on to Bellevue, Brother Gregerson too
A maker of very sweet wine.
We tarried too long — the wine was too strong

We got drunk on his sweet Dixie wine.
We got drunk on his sweet Dixie wine.

Now on to Springdale we followed the trail,
The trail of the sweet Dixie wine.
Bill Duffin was there and he said beware,
Beware of his sweet Dixie wine.
Beware of his sweet Dixie wine.

Then on to Pioche with a broken-down coach
And a harness all mended with twine.
Jake Johnson was there and he said beware,
Beware of their whisky so strong.
Beware of their whisky so strong.

Next morning we woke a bunch of old soaks
And found that we were all broke.
We vowed never again, oh, never again
To drink of Jake's whisky so strong.
To drink of Jake's whisky so strong.

Then homeward we're bound.
A great lesson we'd found.
We vowed never again, oh, never again to
leave our home,
The home of our sweet Dixie wine.
The home of our sweet Dixie wine.

Josephine Hamblin, a Dixie native now residing in Salt Lake City, frequently favors her family and friends by singing "Sweet Dixie Wine."²⁵

Moses E. Gifford, a well-known Dixie musician, wrote the words of the following song to the tune of "In the Good Old Summertime." Carl Gifford, who sang the song to me, said that his father wrote the song based on an actual experience.

THE GOOD OLD KEG OF WINE

There's a time in each year, when the boys do
feel queer
With the good old keg of wine;
Like birds of a feather, they all flock together,
Where the sun refuses to shine;
Forgetting their sorrow, no trouble they borrow,
When giddy they think it is fine.
Their neighbors annoying, themselves are enjoying
The good old keg of wine.

Chorus:
The good old keg of wine, boys, now don't
you look fine
Strolling up and down the street, singing
keggy mine;
I'll hold your head, the keg holds mine,
And that's a very good sing, they get boozy
woozy on
The good old keg of wine.

When the weather is warm, like bees they will swarm
With the good old keg of wine.
And when it is cold, if a wife she will scold
At the good old keg of wine.
When the stomach grows sour, they'll heave
for an hour
When called to a meal, they'll decline,
They try not to show it, think the women don't
know it,
With the good old keg of wine.

Chorus:
The good old keg of wine, boys, now don't
you look fine
Sprawling out upon the ground, singing
keggy mine,
I'll hold your head, the ground bumped mine,
And that's a very good sign
That they got boozy woozy on the good old
keg of wine.

They gather in groups, go out in hen coops.
With the good ole keg of wine;



The Dixie Wine Mission was, for a while, one of the most successful of Brigham Young's "self-sufficiency" missions.



Their deeds are not mean, they're heard but not seen,
 With the good old keg of wine;
 In the pig pen they tumble, they don't seem to grumble
 When rooting around with the swine;
 They think they're advancing
 Hog music for dancing, with the good old keg of wine.

Chorus:

The good old keg of wine, boys and pigs do look fine.
 Their voices now together blend,
 singing keggy mine;
 I'll hold your head, the pig roots mine,
 And that's a very good sign
 That they got boozy woozy on the good old keg of wine.²⁶

The vast storehouse of personal experience existing in the memories of pioneers now living is the greatest resource available. The stories related by these people actually took place; they are part of an exciting oral history. These colorful anecdotes are a vital link in the history of Dixie and make the story come to life.

The Dixie Wine Mission was, for a while, one of the most successful of Brigham Young's "self-sufficiency" missions. Beet sugar, iron mining, cotton, pottery — all met with failure. But the Saints, the weather, and the marketplace combined to make the Wine Mission a far-too-smashing success. And in the long run it, too, failed, as pioneer life became easier and the rigors of Mormonism came from commandments

rather than daily life. The history of the Wine Mission remains, however, as a witness of what the Saints can accomplish when their hearts are in their work.

For a detailed history of the Dixie Wine Mission, see: Lancaster, Dennis R. "Dixie Wine" (unpublished master's thesis, Brigham Young University, 1972).

²Interview with Frank Hafen, Washington, Utah, May 13, 1972.

³Interview with Josephine Hamblin, Salt Lake City, Utah, May 11, 1972.

⁴Interview with Mary Naegle, Toquerville, Utah, May 12, 1972.

⁵Interview with Juanita Brooks, Salt Lake City, Utah, March 11, 1971.

⁶Robert Glass Cleland and Juanita Brooks, eds., *A Mormon Chronicle: The Diaries of John D. Lee 1848-1876*, II (San Marino, California: The Huntington Library, 1955), p. 107.

⁷Interview with Ivy Stratton, St. George, Utah, May 13, 1972.

⁸Interview with Ivy Stratton, May 13, 1972.

⁹As reported in an interview with Karl Larson, St. George, Utah, March 12, 13, 1971.

¹⁰Interview with Athole Milne, Washington, Utah, March 13, 1972.

¹¹Interview with Moroni McArthur, St. George, Utah, March 12, 1971.

¹²Interview with Karl Larson, St. George, Utah, March 12, 1971.

¹³Judith Moss, "Reminiscences by Manuel Naegle," (tape recorded account, August, 1976, five-page typewritten copy in possession of Mrs. Iona Moss, Salt Lake City, Utah), p. 2.

¹⁴Interview with Bert Covington, St. George, Utah, May 13, 1972.

¹⁵Reed W. Farnsworth, M.D., "Wine Making in Southern Utah," (paper presented to a



local history group in Cedar City, Utah, copy in writers possession), p. 8.

¹⁶Georgiana Angel Millet, "Historical Sketch of George Edward Angell and Rebecca Ann Wilkinson," (Pamphlet in Utah State Historical Society Library, Salt Lake City, Utah).

¹⁷Interview with Josephine Hamblin, May 11, 1972.

¹⁸Reed W. Farnsworth, M.D., "Wine Making in Southern Utah," pp. 8-9.

¹⁹Olive W. Burt, "Wine-Making in Utah's Dixie," *Lore of Faith and Folly*, ed. Thomas E. Cheney (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press), pp. 147-148.

²⁰Interview with Robert Naegle, Toquerville, Utah, May 12, 1972.

²¹Interview with Frank Hafen, May 13, 1972.

²²Olive W. Burt, "Wine-making in Southern Utah," p. 150.

²³Interview with Bert Covington, May 13, 1972.

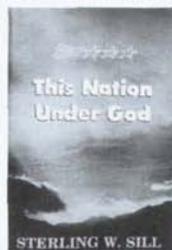
²⁴Interview with Ivy Stratton, May 13, 1972.

²⁵Interview with Josephine Hamblin, May 11, 1972.

²⁶Moses E. Gifford, "A Collection of Songs, Poems, and Tributes," (Springdale, Utah, 1930. Pamphlet in possession of Carl M. Gifford, St. George, Utah). Carl Gifford sang this song to the writer in a personal interview, St. George, Utah, May 13, 1972.



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