History of Kanab and Kane County
A Town Full Of Treasures

Kanab, Utah has left its mark on the map and claimed its fame in many ways. Among the most noted ways would be its history with the motion picture industry. For many years the streets of Kanab were flooded with movie stars and film crews, giving it its nickname, “Little Hollywood.” To this day, once a year they bring in the Movie Stars that once frequented the small town and Honor them with a weeklong street fair called “Western Legends.”

Kanab is also known as the “Gateway to the Parks.” In less than 100 miles in any direction you will find recreation on every level. To the south of Kanab, is The Grand Canyon National Park, to the North West is Zion National Park, north east is Bryce Canyon National Park, and east of Kanab is the Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument and Glen Canyon National recreation area. (Lake Powell)

But for the local folk, the top of the list would have to be Kanab’s search for Montezuma’s treasure and its controversial saga spanning nearly a century. If you ask the people they are more than willing to share what they know about the treasure and how their families were involved in the most exciting community undertaking that Kanab has ever known.

It was in the early 1900’s when a strange character by the name of Freddie Crystal rode into town on his peddle bike, with a mouth full of gold teeth raving about a premonition and a map he had of a lost treasure. The town folk were less than impressed with this strange little fellow and would have liked to see him head back out of town. But Freddie worked his charm, befriended a few of the town folk, and landed himself a job with a local rancher. Freddie told many stories of Montezuma’s treasure, intriguing many of the young cowboys, making them hungry for adventure. Most of them willing to use any free time stomping the back trails, scouting the canyons, and following Freddie with only a promise of a small cut when the treasure was found.

Freddie hired on and worked as a ranch hand for Oscar Robinson, a well known family in Johnson Canyon while he pursued his search for Montezuma’s gold. Everyone said it was a mystery why old Oscar kept him on, because he was always too busy to milk a cow or slop the pigs.
Freddie had chased the rock writings shown on his map all over the southwest, but it wasn't until he arrived in Johnson Canyon that he was able to match the writings on the rugged torn map he kept closely guarded in his shirt pocket as if it was his most sacred possession. Eventually his determination started to pay off. He started finding small things at first, symbols and signs like the ones scribed on his half of the map. Then one day as Freddie stood on Sheep Mountain, he saw it clearly as if he was looking at the map itself. A canyon with four sides draws branching off, four mountains to the north, a mountain to the east, one to the west, and one to the south. His war hoop echoed though the canyon like a wounded animal. "Who's crazy now?" Freddie said to Cowhide Adams through his tobacco stained grin. "Who's crazy now?"

Alvin Judd, still not entirely convinced they had found the place, took the map for his own interpretation of what it was they were supposed to have found. Sure enough there they stood on the south mountain and according to the cross bars on the map, they need to be on the third mountain to the north west which was White Mountain, a good 20 miles ride from where they were now. Few horses in history were ridden harder than those three horses, as their riders carelessly raced through the canyon toward White Mountain.

It was there on White Mountain that they found a secret wall plugging the entrance to a cave. They frantically started digging using pocket knives, rocks and sticks trying to penetrate the false cliff face. Knowing that any second they would be staring at one of the greatest reassures still lost to man. It was past sunset when they left the mountain, still unable to break through the wall. With the suspense of what they would find weighing heavily upon them, they agreed not to tell a soul about what they had found. It wasn't until they returned in the next morning's light that they realized just how much sand they had moved, a good sixty feet! Then they came upon a limestone wall mortared together with marsh mud and needle grass. The closest limestone was 30 miles away, proving someone put forth a lot of effort to conceal what had been hiding for centuries behind that wall. It soon became apparent that they had found the opening to Montezuma's treasure vault and could now enlist members of the town to help excavate the treasure cave. News spread through the town like wild fire, every man, woman and child in Kanab wanted to help dig just for the small cut of Montezuma's gold.

A town meeting was called and every able body in the territory was present. At that time, Kanab had a woman mayor and an all woman city council, even the London Times joked that Kanab had the first petticoat government in the modern world. But this group of ladies was no laughing matter, they were strict, every meeting, court hearing and school day was opened with prayer. Everyone knew these ladies meant business. Before the town meeting it was decided amongst themselves that it would be foolish to share this treasure with any outsider. Therefore they put into motion an order of secrecy. Anyone caught speaking of the treasure had stiff fines imposed upon them, a punishment no one in town could afford to pay. So, for two years Kanab was able to keep their little secret just that, a secret.

The community pooled economically, every person in town, contributed all their worldly goods for the same common interest; finding the treasure. A tent city was built at the base of With Mountain where the workers were fed and cared for. Kanab was literally nothing more than a ghost town for those two years. Persevering through 110 degree summers digging bucket after bucket of sand, Aztec booby traps, and the disappointment they had when they peeked into another empty room, finally someone started thinking like an Aztec and spoke up.

"Those Aztecs were smart ones, they were." The voice echoed through the canyon catching the attention of every worker on site. "I have read about them Aztecs and what we are doing is too easy. I think we are burying it deeper with the sand we are digging from the mountain."

It was the new hope everyone was looking for. All attention shifted from the hollowed out White Mountain to the wash 600 feet below where loads of white sand was being discarded. Months passed and the wash had turned into a giant sink hole, changing layers from sand, rock and clay. Then they hit rock bottom. Some sort of cement type substance so hard that the workers were unable to penetrate it. Through all their efforts and two years of nothing but disappointment sent the town back home with empty pockets and broken hearts. No treasure was ever found. Some people still believe in old Freddie, and then there were those who were ready to run him out of town, so it was no surprise when Freddie disappeared one day, just as mysteriously as he arrived. Some believe he just up and left while others think a few men, still mad
for their wasted two years done Freddie in and took the map for themselves hoping to find what Freddie couldn’t.

Alvin Judd, although skeptical at first, was one of those who kept looking. Throughout the years he dug occasion with his son Vaughn and an old ranch hand by the name of Bill Jons. Jons was even more determined than old Freddie to find the treasure. In fact it was Jons that dug most of the caves you will find out there in Johnson Canyon. Every now and again someone would come along that had heard of Montezuma’s treasure in Johnson Canyon, poking around town and asking questions. Eventually they would end up with Jons, searching and digging for the elusive hoard. But few lasted more than a couple of weeks. After hard work and no sign of treasure in sight they packed up and left. But not Jons, he was sure that the next bucket would show treasure, then the next one... and the next one...But it never did.

Eventually Jons moved to Page, AZ, his health was failing and he was no longer able to do the labor required to hunt the treasure. But he never gave up, each waking day was accompanied by hours of research, looking for that one clue that Freddie and the town folk had overlooked. Finally, he had the answers he had searched decades for, and Alvin was no longer here to share the reward of hard work and determination. So he called Alvins’s son Vaughn who also spent many years with Jons hunting the gold. The call was shot and to the point, he told him that he was dying and needed to tell him what he had found. But before Vaughn could get there, Bill had died. Through the phone call, Vaughn kept that piece of information stored in the back of his head, and it wasn’t until years later when the Dillmans arrived on his property that he actually thought that maybe it had some credibility to it.

It was in the summer of 1982 when the Dillmans family arrived on Vaughn’s property also claiming to know where the treasure was hidden. Using only photos of stone tablets that had been found in the Arizona desert, Dillman, an aged man of Aztec decent who had been legally blind for many years, was able to decipher the code etched in their surface taking him straight to Johnson Canyon. The same place Freddie Crystal’s ragged map had taken him 70 years earlier.

Dillman showed Vaughn several pieces of 2x2 papers that he had wrote symbols on. Each worn paper piece holding only one crudely drawn symbol. He held up the paper with a spiraling circle and asked Vaughn, “Is this symbol over there on your property?” Vaughn was shocked, they had just explained to him they had driven from California following the clues on the stone maps and it led them straight to his front door. Vaughn knowing that these people had never been on his property before, was more curious than convinced that they actually pinpointed Montezuma’s Treasure to his property, after some negotiation Vaughn agreed to excavate the property where Dill man told him the treasure would be. He would tell Vaughn where he should dig, and then walls still adorned with the symbols Dillman had pointed out on his papers. As they dig in the cave, they began finding artifacts such as pots, turquoise and spearheads, then burial cysts still capped with a flat round piece of sandstone. Inside each cyst was a skeleton, folded neatly into a fetal position. One of the skeletons was usually large, a giant, over seven feet tall. Although surprising to see it, it wasn’t the first known skeleton of huge stature to have been found in the area. But the most fascination artifact that was found at that site had to be a round stone type object approximately the size of a golf ball. It was very heavy for its size and had three divots carved into it where you could place it in your hand or a stick, possibly using it as a tool of some sort. The material it was made from was very unusual, even impossible to scratch it with a file, but amazingly someone had etched into it the Masonic symbol, or sign of the compass. Unable to identify the composition of the object, it was sent to BYU, and then the University of Nevada hoping to find an answer. Both universities, through all their research, came up with only one conclusion, that it was very old and appeared to be some kind of hardened gold, a method which we are unable to do to this day. Excavating the site ended when a disagreement between Vaughn and Dillman broke out over missing artifacts. Dillmans claim they have a fifth tablet they found on Vaughn’s property and the Judd’s to this day claim to know nothing of a 5th tablet. The excavation on Vaughn Judd’s property ended and so did their search for Montezuma’s Treasure. Vaughn sold his ranch in Johnson Canyon and left Kanab, while the Dillmans are still searching for answers, and hoping someday to solve the mystery of Montezuma’s Treasure.

It was 1993 when Brant Childs a Kanab resident made a discovery that would soon have the town wondering if indeed he had found the final resting place of Montezuma’s treasure. Childs had taken his canoe out on a small pond the local’s referred to as Three Lakes and happened upon what he called the key symbol.
Only this one was small and pointing downward to the water. It was moss covered and tucked under the overhang at the back of the pond, almost invisible until you are all the way under the overhang. Upon further investigation, Childs also found a large carved symbol on a flat rock not far from the small lake where he found the first one. Convinced he would be able to solve the mystery of Montezuma and his lost gold, he bought the property and pursued his dream of finding the one thing that Kanab residents had failed to find, a treasure.

Little did Childs know that the hidden treasure would not give itself up easily. One thing after another proved that this quest was bound to end in failure. Several divers came to Three Lakes on more than one occasion to help Childs, in hopes of gaining fame and fortune. Instead, leaving in fear, claiming they had seen ghosts and that they were being choked as they entered the underwater cavern they had found. All of the divers left claiming they would never return to the lake because it was haunted. Childs was persistent and refused to let a small set back beat him. After all, there was an underground cavern directly under the key symbol that the divers had found; surely the treasure would be in there. It made perfect sense that it would be hidden in a water trap. The Aztec’s had unbelievable skills and had used water traps before to hide other mines and treasures of great value. Child knew the easiest way to gain access to the underwater cavern would be to drain the pond, and that is what exactly he tried to do. It was then that the government stepped in and claimed that Three Lakes was the only known habitat for an endangered species, the amber snail: the same snail that the Aztecs held very sacred in their culture. It is documented that this same kind of snail was taken in water carriers to Montezuma’s sunken Garden. Could that sunken garden be Three Lakes? Within a few days, a mysterious flock of seagulls arrived at Three Lakes and started eating the Amber Snails. But the government got rid of them in a hurry. Childs would not be defeated: he would gain access to the cavern one way or another. This time he planned to drill from the top through solid rock all the way down to the treasure room where a camera would be inserted so they could view the contents of the cavern. This attempt was successful.

In a personal interview I had with Mr. Childs before his death, he assured me the treasure was there and he himself had laid eyes upon it. He claimed the carved key symbols were the answer to unlocking the secret to Montezuma’s Treasure.

Childs died before he could show his discovery to the world. If indeed there was a discovery to be seen. The property was sold by his family and many more dive attempts have been made looking for Montezuma’s Treasure. Through all the searching, the only treasure that has been found is a treasure of Kanab’s history that can be handed down for generations.*

*The sources for this story were interviews with Brent Judd and Brant Childs who is now deceased.
The Kanab, Utah Town Council consisted entirely of women. From left to right are Luella McAllister, treasurer; Blanche Hamblin, councilor; Mary W. Howard Chamberlain, president; Tamar Hamblin, clerk; Ada Seegmiller, councilor.

The women were upset with the men for not running the town as they should. They were informed that if they did not like how things were being done “then run it yourselves”. One of the men put their names on the ballot. It was done just for humor and even the women treated it as a joke, never believing they would be elected. However, no one ran against them. As circumstances would have it they were elected on November 11, 1911, sworn into office on January 2, 1912, and remained in Public Office until January 2, 1914. During their term of office they were given full support from the leading men in town.

After demonstrating how a civilized town should be run, they finished their term and returned to their already busy lives. Lives of having babies, running households, and their many other duties, both civic and religious.

Many important things were accomplished during their tenure. A few items were: they initiated the registering and licensing of dogs, prohibited livestock from running loose upon the streets, passed a liquor ordinance, prohibited “flippers” (wrist-rockets) in town to protect the birds, had bridges built over all irrigation ditches in town, and they had the cemetery surveyed and platted. The first fine for using a “flipper” in town was 25 cents and all subsequent offenses were 50 cents. They prohibited gambling and all games of chance; prohibited all noisy sports on the Sabbath day; they appointed a town Clean-up Day; and they increased the license of peddlers and traveling merchants. Plus many other good things for the town.
Tragedy of the Stewart Family

In December of the first year in Kanab 1870 for the Levi Stewart family, came the tragedy that was to leave its scar on the lives of this family and almost disrupt the entire settlement. The Navajo and Northern Indians had been making raids on the settlements. The young men took turns guarding the cattle at night from a small dug-out in the side of a hill. The other men took turns guarding the fort. Once Jacob Hamblin persuaded the Navajos to come to Kanab and hold a peace conference as there was always tension.

On the night of December 14, the guard who was to relieve Brother Pugh as guard at one o'clock did not awaken but seemed to be overpowered with sleep. He was roused once, then twice, and even started to dress. Brother Pugh went home and to bed, thinking all was well, but in some way the guard fell back over on the bed asleep, leaving the fort unguarded. At four o'clock, fire was discovered in the Stewart section of the fort. Little Lucinda remembers how her father rushed to see what he could do-how her mother quickly threw a spread around herself and rushed over to the burning portion. Their own room was safe as it was separated from the burning part by many feet-a space left for another room which had not yet been built and which was protected only by a row of wagons drawn together. These wagons were used as sleeping quarters for some of the older children. The kitchen roof was already ablaze so there was no hope of saving that part of the house. But in the bedroom next to it, the one on the corner slept the boys, Margery's three, Artimacy's two, a hired man, and Levi the youngest son of the first wife, Melinda. This room had no windows as did none of the outside rooms of the fort in order to make them impregnable to the Indians. The only exit was through the flaming kitchen. Levi and other men, knowing that this bedroom held stores of kerosene and powder, seized axes and started battering out the logs of the wall. They got two logs out and crawled through into the suffocating smoke-filled room they found the beds empty and no one in the room. It was impossible to get into the blazing inferno of the kitchen. They knew that the smoking powder and kerosene might explode any minute, so they crawled back out. Levi ordered the others out and carried two kegs of powder already smoking and dumped them into the creek. Then the kerosene exploded and went up in flames.

Little did Levi realize what was happening on the other side of the kitchen. When Margery rushed out of their bedroom, she immediately took in the situation and knew that the only hope for the boys was through the kitchen. Her mother love was greater than her fears or her reasoning power, and unseen by any except her daughter Ella, who happened to be there from Pipe Spring, she rushed into the flames. Ella tried to follow her mother but was held back by the men. Once in the kitchen, Margery met Artimacy's boy Lon and the hired man, Harvey Stout, who, blinded by the smoke, were grouping around trying to find an exit. She pushed them through the door and turned to find the others. No one knows what really happened then. The explosion prevented anyone else from entering. They found the six charred bodies; the mother and three boys were found huddled in the immense fireplace as if she had been trying to lift them up the chimney. One was under the pig stove, less burned than the others. They dug out the bodies and sadly buried them in one grave. Alonzo told afterward of how Levi had tried, when they found themselves trapped, to lift the sod roof off the bedroom but it had been too firmly packed with grass and willows.

The funeral was heart-rending. Some of the neighbors tried to sing but it was no use. One after another, several brethren tried to speak but no words would come. It was the heartbroken father and husband who alone could control his emotions enough to offer his tribute to the beloved wife who had given her life to save her sons.

It is hard to imagine the heartbreak and gloom that enveloped the little settlement. Levi was crushed by the terrible tragedy, but still his valiant spirit held steadfast. When the other men said they wanted to give up the settlement-that they could not bear to live there longer-he begged them to stay and complete the mission President Young had sent them to perform. At last when they still wavered, he said, "Well, if you must go, God be with you, but as for me, I will stay if I have to stay alone." The other men remained.
Levi never dared give way to his grief before others because he felt that as their leader he must keep up the morale of the disheartened people. Jacob Hamblin told of finding him one day way up the canyon pouring out his grief and praying for strength. His health gradually broke until five years he begged to be released from the Bishopric.

As soon as President Young heard the news of the fire, he set out in his buggy for Kanab to offer what comfort and spiritual strength he could. He had greatly admired Margery and was always free in expressing his confidence in Levi and his admiration and friendship for him. He said, “Brother Levi, Sister Margery went to heaven in a flame of glory.” And indeed her memory has always been enshrined as a heroine in the hearts of her children and descendants.

Artimacy, who at the time of the fire was ill (expecting a baby in June) so that she fainted when she tried to get out of bed, was now the mother of the remaining family-her four and Margery’s four. (She later had two other children). Always she was a most devoted mother, doing as much for one as for the other. Lucinda testified later that if her own mother had come back she wouldn’t have known which she loved most. The older children sensed the loss more, but Lucinda was so terrified by what had happened that she never for months would walk past the burned corner of the fort, but had to be carried with her face hidden on someone’s shoulder.
Movies Filmed in Kane County

- Deadwood Coach - 1924 (Johnson Canyon) - Tom Mix
- The Big Train - 1935 (Johnson, Arizona) - John Wayne, Margaret Cheever
- Dadie Ranger - 1934 (Johnson Canyon, Eagle Arch) George O'Brien, Irene Hervey
- Emma - 1936 (Johnson Canyon) - Lorena Young, Don Amche, Kent Taylor, Pauline Frederick, Jane Darwell, J. Carroll Nash, John Carradine, Russell Simpson
- The Beat Man of Bel-Air - 1937 (Johnson Canyon) Wallace Berry, Dennis O'Keefe, Noah Beery, Bruce Cabot
- The Lake Robber - 1938 (Kanab Canyon) - Lee Powell, Bruce Bennett, Chief Thundercloud
- Under the Mohawks - 1939 (Kanab Canyon) - Henry Fonda, Claudette Colbert, Edna May Oliver, Ward Bond, John Carradine, Francis Ford, Russell Simpson, Chief Big Tree
- Stagecoach - 1939 (McDonald Ranch - Hwy 89) - John Wayne, Claire Trevor, Thomas Mitchell, John Carradine, Louise Platt, George Bancroft, Tim Holt, Tom Tyler, Francis Ford, Yakima Canutt, Chief Big Tree, Andy Devine
- Young Daring - 1939 (Iron Springs, Cedar City) - Joel McCrea, Barbara Stanwyck, Robert Preston, Akim Tamiroff, Brian Donlevy, Anthony Quinn
- Brigham Young - 1940 (Lone Pine) - Tyrone Power, Dean Jagger, Vincent Price, Linda Darnell, Mary Astor, Brian Donlevy, John Carradine, Russell Simpson, Moroni Olsen, Jane Darwell

Documentaries

- In Search of Noah's Ark - 1976
- Chuck Wagon History - 1983
- Hidden Secrets of the Grand Canyon - 1983
- Wagon Train - 1983

In more recent years, there have been several other movies filmed in the area, including: Wind Runner, Maverick, Broken Arrow, Point Break, etc.