

Dixie Cotton Mission Commemorative Wagon Train Planned Sept. 19-23

To celebrate the 170th anniversary of the founding of Washington County by way of the original "Cotton Mission," Washington County is hosting a five-day, 75-mile wagon company expedition from Enterprise Reservoir on Sept. 19 and ending in New Harmony on Sept. 23.

Although this expedition does not follow the original trail the early pioneer settlers traveled, the Dixie Cotton Mission Commemorative Wagon Train celebration provides an opportunity for individuals and families to experience life in a company as it winds its way through valley and canyon in southwestern Utah, according to Casey Lofthouse of Hurricane, one of the expedition's organizers.

In October 1861, leaders of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints called 309 families to establish the Cotton Mission. After the outbreak of the Civil War that same year, LDS Church President Brigham Young felt it necessary to grow cotton, if possible, according to the expedition's website, dixiewagons.com

Many of these families assigned to settle the area hailed from the South and possessed the necessary skills to grow cotton and establish a community. Paying homage to the nickname of their former home, these settlers called the region "Utah's Dixie."

To commemorate the founding of the Southern Utah Cotton Mission by these early pioneers, Washington County Commissioner Victor Iverson approached Casey Lofthouse and Leon Gubler in 2021, who had previous expertise conducting horse and mule-drawn wagons for the Days of '47 Parade and other local events in Washington County, to see if they could help organize a commemorative wagon train in celebration of the founding of Washington County 170 years ago.

After a year of planning and working out the logistics of putting together a wagon route and advertising for teamsters and other participants, the expedition leaders initially came up with a route from Enterprise to Washington City. However, because of several steep grades on the Shoal Creek Road in western Washington County, a revised and updated route was developed.

An estimated 20 wagons and 100 participants are expected for the five-day event. Lofthouse said the wagon train route will now begin on Monday, Sept. 19 at Enterprise Reservoir on Santa Clara Cattlemen's Association property and head north on Veyo Shoal Creek Road to the Washington County/Enterprise Road, then head east to the Enterprise Rodeo Grounds, 1003 East 100 North in Enterprise.

At 7 p.m., that evening, the Jim Sevy band from St. George, will provide musical entertainment.

On Tuesday, Sept. 20, the wagon train will cross State Highway 18 and head north onto paved Bench Road to Newcastle, Utah.

That evening, participants will enjoy visiting, storytelling and cowboy poetry around a campfire.

On Wednesday, Sept. 21, the wagon train will travel from Newcastle to Pinto, Utah. Another campfire gathering and informal entertainment is planned that evening.

On Thursday, Sept. 22, the wagon train will travel from Pinto to New Harmony, with entertainment on the last evening of the expedition planned for 7 p.m. on Brent Prince's property.

The event ends on Friday, Sept. 23, when participants break camp in the morning. Lofthouse said all the teams of horses, mules and wagons belong to private individuals who are donating their time to promote the commemorative event.

"It is a big commemorative birthday party," Lofthouse said, adding that "I think we have a genuine need to preserve our heritage and preserve the agricultural roots of Washington County."

The historic wagon train commemoration of the Dixie Cotton Mission is similar to another commemorative wagon train expedition organized in 2012 by the City of St. George. Anyone wishing to donate to the event, may contact Susi Lafaele at the Legacy (Fair) Park, 500 West 700 South, Hurricane, Utah 84737. For more information, contact dixiewagons@washco.utah.gov or call 435-922-2766.