

The Cotton Pickin' Story

Why "Dixie" ?

Tourists, visitors, and even some locals all seem to ask the same question---"Why is the area called Dixie?" "What's with the "D" on the hill?" As Paul Harvey would say "Here is the rest of the story."

The "Mormon" pioneers enter the Salt Lake Valley in 1847 and almost immediately Brigham Young started to colonize the west. He sent Parley P. Pratt in December 1849 with 50 men to explore the Virgin River Basin in Sothern Utah. Parley P. gave a good report of the area and recognized the fertile soil and abundance of water in the area. In 1852 John D. Lee with 11 men explored the area from Ash Creek to the Beaver Dam area and gave a glowing report on the area. In his report he stated that : " Here we can raise cotton, flax, hemp, grapes, figs, sweet potatoes, fruits of almost every kind and be independent of our kind Christian friends who drove us from their midst."

In 1854 Santa Clara was started and was the headquarters of the "Indian Mission". Jacob Hamblin was the leader of the group. Due to the hard work and exposure to the elements Jacob became ill and Augustus P. Hardy was sent to Harmony to obtain medicine for Jacob. The medicine was sent back to Santa Clara but Hardy continued on to Parowan. During his short stay in Parowan, Sister Nancy Anderson a Southerner gave him a bottle of cotton seed. He returned to Santa Clara and planted the seed in 1855. A good crop of cotton was produced. Thirty yards of cotton cloth was woven from the 1855 harvest and a sample of the cloth was sent to Brigham Young. The seed of 1855 was planted in 1856 and produced a larger crop.

Brigham Young knew the prophecy made by Joseph Smith on December 25, 1832 that there would be a war in the U. S. between the Northern and Southern States and the conditions of the nation in 1857, Brigham Young knew that war was near and cotton would not be available for the Saints to make clothing. With the sample of cotton cloth in hand, grown in Santa Clara, and also the glowing report of John D. Lee, Brigham called 38 Southern families in the early spring of 1857 to come to the area and established a town, to be called Washington after the first president of the United States, and specifically to grow cotton. He wanted the Saints to be independent and self sufficient and not relying on the "Gentile's" world of trade. Keep the money at home was Brigham's motto. This unique colonizing mission was called the Cotton or Southern Mission.

Two groups of pioneers came. Ten families under Samuel J. Adair arrived at a spot that was later called Adair Springs on the 15 of April 1857 and twenty eight families under Robert D. Covington arrived at the same location on the 5th or 6th of May, 1857. They knew exactly where they were going since they stopped in Harmony on the way down and John D. Lee and others told them exactly where to go to secure water and tillable land. At Adair Springs they founded the City of Washington during a two day meeting with President Isaac Haight, president of the Cedar City Stake. They assigned every position needed to have the city operate even down to fence viewers and a stray pound keeper. Why only Southerners in this group of 1857? Because they were from the South and knew how to raise cotton or at least had seen it grown. It was unusual that all 38 families were from the

South. There were a few Yankees in the group but they too had lived in the South and knew how to grow cotton. One year after they arrived in Washington they planted 400 acres of cotton (1858) but because of the salt and other minerals in the soil and their lack of experience in irrigating the land, only 130 acres out of the 400 grew a crop. It was said the yield would be 156,000 lbs. of seed cotton. About half of the weight of cotton is seed so they must have produced around 70,000 pounds of ginned cotton. It turned out that they over did the cotton acreage in 1858 and not enough food was grown so the next year, 1859, was a starving year. Building dams on the Virgin River, tending the stock and helping to care for the sick, it was second nature for them to intermingle and soon started to call this new area "Dixie" after their homeland. The song "Dixie" was also popular during this time which helped the Southerners to reminisce about their homeland. "In Dixie's Land I'll take my stand to live and die in Dixie!" Washington City is Utah's Dixie birthplace. The name spread over the general area. Soon the area was known as "Utah's Dixie", the Palms Springs of Southern Utah.

The area around St. George never was a major producer of cotton. Some years the agricultural reports did not even list St. George. The 309 families called by Brigham Young in 1861 to augment the Cotton Mission did what they were called to do. They provided help where needed in providing services and new blood that were not available prior to the establishment of St. George. It was not long after the new arrivals came and started St. George, that Brigham could see further help was needed to secure the success of the Cotton Mission, so he instructed Erastus Snow to build a building, the Tabernacle and the Temple. These projects plus the Cotton Factory insured the success of this area.

It was soon realized that there was a need for a factory that would produce cloth, which made a ready market for the cotton grown. The cotton lint would not need to be baled and sent to others to produce cloth. A public company was formed and built the Cotton Factory, started in 1865 and finished as seen today (2004) in 1879. It was always known as the Cotton Factory, not the Cotton Mill, since Snow's gristmill, built in 1866, was located about 2-300 yards south of the Factory and was known as the Mill. The factory never was a money maker but it did much to hold the pioneers here in "Dixie". It gave them work and an income which they could not get in any other way. It also supplied cloth that reduced the amount of work required in the home to produce clothing.

Thomas Judd of St. George leased the factory for a few years in the 1890's and producing wool as well as cotton was woven into cloth. Silk was also tried but most of the cloth made from silk was spun and woven at home.

Every time you look at the "D" on the side of the mountain, think of the Southerners that came to Washington in 1857. They started to call this new home after their homeland "Dixie". Utah Dixie's best kept secret.....Washington City 1857.

That's the rest of the story.

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for

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