



1847 *PIONEER* 1997  
— sesquicentennial —

GREAT SALT LAKE

BEAVER

NEPHI

# THE I M O R I M

FILLMORE

UTAH VALLEY

PAROWAN

LINKING GREAT SALT LAKE CITY TO THE PACIFIC

BY KELLENE RICKS ADAMS

LAS VEGAS

CEDAR CITY

# ON CORRIDOR

SANTA CLARA

SAN BERNADINO

PACIFIC

Passing by a town lot he owned, an early Utah pioneer was startled to see a stranger working the land. Although the first pioneer wasn't farming or living on the land himself, he was still perturbed.

"What are you doing here?" he asked.

The reply was direct: "Making me a house and home."

"What right have you to build on my land?" the pioneer wanted to know.

The stranger indicated that the local bishop had given him the land. So the frustrated landowner confronted the bishop.

"By what authority, Bishop, do you give away my property?" he asked.

"By the authority of the priesthood of God."

Enough said; the matter was settled. Throughout much of pioneer Utah, there was no greater authority than the authority of local and general leaders of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. More personal and property disputes were settled by bishops than judges. Fathers left their struggling families, often for years at a time, to serve missions because they honored and respected the authority of church leaders to send them. And entire families were uprooted and sent to distant colonies when LDS priesthood leaders issued "the call."

So it was with the creation of Brigham Young's Mormon Corridor, a string of settlements stretching from Great Salt Lake City southwest to the Pacific Ocean. The Great Colonizer saw the Corridor as a way to ensure safe passage between church headquarters in Utah and the West Coast while making room for the hundreds of immigrants who were arriving monthly—primarily from the Eastern United States and Great Britain. And while few of Utah's pioneers were eager to head out again after being battered and

bruised all the way to their new home in the valley of the Great Salt Lake, fewer still were willing to risk the wrath of God by refusing a call from His prophet. Their commitment to their religious principles had brought them to Zion. So when they heard their names read in general conference announcing their assignment to a colonizing company, most obediently packed their wagons, gathered their families and bade farewell to friends and neighbors.

Historically, the Mormon colonization effort that resulted in the establishment of some 500 communities in the western United States, southern Alberta and northern Mexico was one of the most significant enterprises in U.S. history. No other attempt to colonize combined such careful planning, wise leadership and willing cooperation.



Parley P. Pratt

That was particularly true of the settlements along the Mormon Corridor, the first of which sprang up in Utah Valley when 30 families settled there in the spring of 1849. The neighboring population blossomed to more than 2,000 residents within a year. Later that same year, 50 families settled further south in Sanpete Valley.

Under the direction of LDS Apostle Parley P. Pratt, the Southern Exploring Party spent three months carefully examining almost 800 miles of land beyond the Sanpete settlements. They took notes on topography, grazing potential, watering sites, vegetation, timber supplies and favorable location for future forts. Upon their return, more colonizing missionaries were called.

One of the places Elder Pratt and his company had recommended for colonization was a hill rich with iron ore bordered with thousands of acres of cedar trees. In December of 1850, a group of 167 pioneers was sent to what was called the Little Salt Lake Valley to plant crops and prepare for future mining missionaries. Thus Parowan, one of the most important colonies along the Corridor, was born. This small community eventually served as a nucleus for

several nearby settlements and proved to be a crucial stopping point on the trail between Salt Lake City and Southern California.

But even as weary pioneers were securing footholds in what is now Utah, their brothers and sisters were venturing beyond state boundaries. In 1851, under orders from President Young, apostles Amasa Lyman and Charles C. Rich led a group to California. There a ranch was purchased with funds donated for that purpose by Mormons throughout the West, and the fledgling community of San Bernardino was founded.

This small colony quickly became extremely important to the growing church. Not only did it provide a rest and supply stop for both in-bound and out-bound missionaries, but it also became a port of entry for converts arriving from the Pacific missions and a gathering place for pioneers settling in California. Within four years the original 450 colonists had grown to number approximately 1,400, and San Bernardino had become a busy and successful pioneer community.

About the same time, another corridor colony began its rise to prominence. In 1855, a group of pioneers was sent to what is now Las Vegas, Nevada, to work with the Indians in the region, to mine lead and to raise semi-tropical agricultural products. Although this small community enjoyed limited success as a Mormon colony, not even Brigham Young could have envisioned its eventual prosperity as a resort town and gambling mecca.

Although none have become as internationally recognized as Las Vegas, many communities along the Mormon Corridor continue to flourish today. Many attribute this long-standing success to Elder Pratt's work, which enabled church leaders to make well-reasoned site selections. Credit is also due to the painstaking colonization process, which included the careful selection of colonists based on skills and abilities and the cooperative efforts of all to make their new homes safe and secure. These seedling settlements were close-

knit and unified in faith and purpose. In many cases, those beginnings are still reflected today among the colonist's contemporary counterparts.

The glory days of the Mormon Corridor, while historically significant, were relatively brief. In 1857, rumors reached Salt Lake City that an army was marching west to subdue the "rebellious" saints. Determined to make a united stand, Brigham Young called his colonizing followers home. Once again, they obediently heeded the call. While some eventually returned to their homes along the Corridor, most stayed closer to church headquarters in the many small communities that were cropping up along the Wasatch Front.

Still, the Mormon Corridor remains an intriguing chapter in western pioneer history. Clearly, it achieved Brigham Young's joint objectives of enhancing safe travel between Salt Lake City and the Pacific Ocean and providing room for the rapidly expanding church to grow. Its impact can be seen in a long line of similarly structured cities and towns in central and southern Utah—and beyond.

### The Mormon Corridor

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