

The Story of Chicken Creek, Levan History of It's People

By Fern Rutledge

Introduction

One or two other wagons were already there when the wagons of William Cazier and his family arrived. Together they worked to build up Salt Creek which later was named Nephi.

Nephi became the home of William Cazier and his large family. As they grew, married and raised their families, they made homes in Nephi. Willows grew lush and thick along Salt Creek and they came in handy for building their homes and furniture.

It was quite funny a year or two ago when one of my cousins was telling a group of people that his grandfather was one of the first settlers of Nephi, settling what was then called Salt Creek. Another member of the group objected. He said, "No, that was my grandfather". They had quite an argument until it was discovered that his grandfather was the man in the other wagon.

As the years flew by, the families of these two men became the backbone of the little city of Nephi. Both left their marks upon the progress of the community. Both were skilled in different ways and they meshed their talents together to build up the City of Nephi.

Levan, A Pioneer Community

Levan was the name of the community that "just grew" out of a decision made by Brigham Young and the City Fathers of the little town called "Chicken Creek". It was located 3 ½ miles Southwest of the present town of Levan.

Chicken Creek today is not to be found physically anywhere in the region. I know it was there because one of family ancestors, their Grandmother, Sarah Molissa Harris, once lived there.

In searching genealogy for my Cazier Family, I went with a cousin, Dale Cazier, of Cleveland, Ohio to Las Vegas to search out relatives we knew were there. After locating them, they told us that Dale's Grandmother, Sarah Molissa Harris Cazier lived at Chicken Creek when she was young. Just why she was there, or how she came to live there, we have yet to learn.

Being desirous of finding his "roots", so to speak we decided to explore the region near Levan to see if we could find anything left of Chicken Creek. Accordingly, on approaching Levan, we began to look for signs of the little community of "Chicken Creek", but found none.

It was the 24th of July. The town of Levan were celebrating “Pioneer Day”. Flags were flying and the church at Levan was holding an “old time picnic in the park”, when we arrived. We talked to the Bishop of one of the Wards there in Levan, and he told us about Chicken Creek. It was the forerunner of the present town of Levan.

Chicken Creek was ideally located. There were springs for drinking water. Water flowing from the canyons to the East merged there. It was pleasantly shaded by thick willows and cottonwood trees. There was meadow-grass growing extensively in the bottom of the stream. Many groups of people traveling through the region paused there to rest in the cool shade of the willows and to allow their tired animals to graze on the tall meadow-grass.

The Spanish Expedition, led by Father Dominguez and Father Escalante rested there. It was a spot much favored by the “red-men”. In fact, it was here, in May 1854, that Brigham Young and a group of the little town’s leading citizens and citizens of repute in the State of Utah met here with Chief Walker to discuss the possibility of ending the hostilities between the white settlers and the red-men know as the “Walker War”.

My own family, William Cazier and his sons and daughters, his sons-in-law and daughters-in-law had been sent by Brigham Young to what at that time was know as “Salt Springs” to help colonize the area. It was along the Salt River that bushes grew lush and thick. As time went by, some of the sons of William Cazier ventured into the little town of Chicken Creek in search of young people with which to associate. My records are full of marriages and other activities stemming from this interaction. Some of my Cazier Uncles were actively engaged in the Walker War. Samuel Cazier and Benjamin Cazier were in the Black Hawk Indian War.

In the book, “Utah In Her Western Settling”, by Milton R. Hunter, we quote:

“In May of 1854, Governor Young decided to visit Chief Walker with the hope of bringing the War to an end. He and a number of leading Citizens went to the Indian Camp at Chicken Creek, Juab County, about 15 miles south of Nephi. They took 16 head of cattle, some clothing, blankets and trinkets to be given to the red-men as presents. About 15 Chief’s were present at the Peace Parley, among them were Chief Walker, Kanosh, Peteetneet, Squaw Head, and San Pete.”

It isn’t hard from this to determine where Kanosh, Sanpete, and Peteetneet got their names.

Quoting again:

“As Governor Young and his associates entered Walker’s tepee, the Ute Chief extended his hand and then motioned for the Governor to sit down beside him on the buffalo robe. Walker remarked, “Brigham Young great Chief, Walker also great Chief”. Dimick Huntington, the interpreter, informed the Indians of the purpose of the white-men’s visit, and after much discussion a peace pipe was passed around. Brigham Young then suggested that an ox be killed and a feast prepared for the red-men. The next morning Walker was presented with the 16 head of cattle and the other presents that had been brought by the white-men for that purpose. Chief

Walker seemed very pleased. Then Governor Young and his party and the Indian Chiefs assembled in Walker's Wickiup to continue the peace parley. After more discussions, Governor Young and his associates made a Treaty of Peace with Walker and the leading Ute Chiefs. This concluded the Walker War, which up to this time, had killed many Indians and 19 white people."

Chicken Creek, with its good water supply and luxuriant grass, was an ideal place to stop for a short or a long rest. Most of the travel to the South passed there. A junction was formed at this point, one road going Southwest to Round Valley and the southern settlements, and the other going Southeast to Gunnison and the settlements there.

Thus we see Brigham Young's strategy in placing settlements that would grow throughout the State of Utah. Distances between these settlements were not too great for the western frontier. And make no doubts about it, this was a western frontier.

During the time of the Utah War of 1857, when Johnston's Army was on its way to Utah, Brigham Young instructed the people to leave the northern part of the state. Many people moved South through this area and most of them took the opportunity to remain a few days to rest and let their animals graze on the lush grass in the meadows. No doubt some of these people decided to remain and took up land and built houses. It is believed, however, that the first building erected there was a Stagecoach Relay Station, which did operate several years.

I told Dale Cazier that, this may be when the Harris's came to Chicken Creek. It could be and it does fit. But, we have no idea exactly when they came. And furthermore we have no proof that Sarah Molissa and Tobias were married or even courted there. She said that she did not want to share her husband with anyone, so she was going to move out of Utah. But there is, so far, nothing to say that the man she did not want to share was Tobias. It could have been a decision she made, for when she got married. She knew the Customs of the County of Utah.

Not much is known about the community of Chicken Creek. An item in the Deseret News reads, "On June 26, 1865 the following settlers of Chicken Creek petitioned the Church Authorities for a branch organization: Martin Rollins, Edsil Elmer, George Ellison, William Morgan, Robert Rollins, Seth Ollerton, Antomina Tidwell, Nancy Sly, Norman Wilson Hartley, Frederick Green, Jiner Palmer, Charles Dalton, and James Kettleman made up the group. These people and others had built homes at Chicken Creek. They had planted gardens, orchards, and fields of wheat. They had built a meeting house which doubled as a schoolroom and social hall, and had in fact established a community. They had also built the Chicken Creek Dam across the creek in order to store water for irrigation purposes.

As the years went by however, they came to the conclusion that this was not a very good site for a community. The soil proved to be poor, quite unsuitable for farming and the growing of gardens and orchards. Frost came early in the fall and in the spring, making the growing season very short. The water which was very ample in the spring, dwindled considerably in the fall, and their crops were often devoured by locusts. So, after about six to eight years they decided to try to find a better place.

In the spring of 1867, Erastus Snow and others from the Southern settlements paused on their way to Salt Lake City. A decision was made to explore the valley for a better site. At this time a tract of land lying between Pigeon Creek and Chicken Creek and about three fourth of a mile West of the mountains was selected and plans were made for the laying out a new community.

In December of that year, Charles Price, the Juab County surveyor, surveyed the area, laying out in blocks 499 feet square. The streets were ninety feet wide, and there were forty-nine blocks in the first plot. Each person who obtained a lot received one half block. One block in the center of the plot was set aside as a public square. The first lots taken were primarily in the West part of the Town. The land West of town was laid out in plots for farming, with the land to the North designated as a "community pasture".

It is interesting to note that the first project of most communities of those times were to select areas for pastures and to provide for the basic needs of the people. When the Huguenot peoples came to New York State it was still in its wild state and thick with Indians. The people had to learn to care for their basic needs as well as plan for the future. One of the first duties that a new community had to do was elect a Magistrate. His first duties was , "to plan for the more careful placing of fences, barns and houses". This particular site late became New York City, and the area referred to is now Harlem. Again the planning for basic needs of the present and the growing expansion of the future was first priority. I think it rather ironic that my own Cazier people were involved in both of these ventures. It was my first and earliest known 8th Great-Grandfather who was this Magistrate, just as Rosannah Cazier's Husband Edcil, was one of the that group that decided to work for changing the location of their little community of Levan and to plan for farms and pasture land.

The first dwelling of any kind at this new location was a dugout built by William Dye. William was another of my ancestors. Some of the houses were moved from Chicken Creek and the other families lived in dugouts until logs could be brought down from the mountains. Sometimes adobe was used to build more stable houses.

The first families moving form Chicken Creek were those of William Morgan, Jabez Broadhead, Jacob Hofheins, and James Wilson. Others soon followed and by the end of the first year 23 families were in the new location. Some of the posterity of that very people, that we met that 24th of July when we drove to Chicken Creek and then to Levan to find our ancestry, were still living there.

An article in the Deseret News, April 27, 1868, told of this new townsite, and explained it's new location from Chicken Creek. This article was written by Samuel Pitchforth and I met some of his posterity that 24 of July.

When the move to the new community took place, James Wilson and William Morgan were placed in charge of local affairs by Elder Snow. Samuel Lee from Tooele was sent to preside over the people in LDS Church affairs. He remained only a short time. On May 3, 1869, Samuel Pitchforth was appointed branch president and was sent to preside over the new

community.

The very first summer the people celebrated Pioneer Day July 24, 1868. Captain G. Eliason's Company of Infantry welcomed the town by firing a salute. Then the National Flag was raised at Sunrise. There was a meeting in the Bowery at 10:00 AM. This was part of the land set aside for a Public Square a year before. Songs, prayers, and oratory filled the morning hours. In the afternoon there were horse races and a dance for children and at 8:00 PM there was a dance for the older people. It was a very festive occasion.

On September 25, 1868, Brigham Young and his party left Gunnison early, arriving in the new settlement at lunchtime. After they had eaten a sumptuous meal prepared by the ladies of the town, a meeting was held in the Bowery. At this time Brigham Young named this new settlement, Levan. It has been learned that Brigham Young had a very dear friend whose name was Levan.

Other speakers at the meeting were Joseph Young, Wilford Woodruff, Erastus Snow, and Daniel Wells. After the meeting the company left immediately for Nephi.

In the Fall of 1868, a number of men heeded the call of President Young for Families to go to Levan to help settle the new town. John Worlock Shepard, Nephi Shepherd, Eli Curtis, and William Tunbridge came from Springville. They reported favorable conditions, ample water and grass tall enough to cut for hay, and a friendly and thrifty group of citizens.

The next spring, 1869, these families returned to Levan with their fathers and husbands. There was Thomas Bell, George Garner, Hans Peterson, John Ollerton, Christian Christensen, and these families swelled the number of families and homes in Levan.

Many of these new families were Danish converts to the Mormon Church who had been sent by Brigham Young. Few could speak English. These people had a hard time adjusting to this new way of life. These people were skilled in many things and made a great contribution to this fledgling community. By the end of the year of 1869, there were 50 families at the new location.

An Article in the Deseret News January 23, 1870 extolls the virtues of this new community. It tells of its gardens, orchards, and states there is an abundance of range for stock. It says timber is nearby, for the building of houses, sheds, granaries and corrals.

Timber from Timber Canyon, Flat Canyon and Deep Canyon were used in building Meeting Houses in the summer of 1868. The Meeting Houses were 36 by 20 feet, and was constructed of Adobe. Up to this time school had been taught in Seth Ollerton's Home.

In 1870 the Census states there were 67 families in Levan with a total of 320 people. In Chicken Creek there were still 28 families with a total of 113 people. So we know that the community of Chicken Creek had not been abandoned at this time.

When Levan was first laid out, the fields West of town were plotted into 10 and 20 acre plots. Then in 1869 more farmland was needed to take care of the growing population. A new area to the North was opened up and fields were extended farther West. A ‘bull-fence’ was built around the settlement to keep livestock out. The community’s cows were taken to the Public Square each morning and from there they were taken to the rangeland outside the fenced area to graze. Boys were paid so much per day to herd the cows.

Water for the community, for gardens, orchards, and fields came from Pigeon Creek. It was diverted by smaller ditches for use on town lots and fields. Later on water from Chicken Creek was used. All culinary water was dipped out of the ditches and the animals were led to the same ditches night and morning to be watered.

To better serve the needs of the community, two water-powered mills were built at the mouth of Chicken Creek Canyon, a saw-mill and a flour or gristmill. There was a creamery, a molasses mill, and a brickyard in the South part of town.

On main street going toward Nephi, there was a cooperative store, and farther on a meat-market. Daniel Morgan started a broom factory, making brooms from fine straw. Enoch Lambert started a blacksmith shop on the West side of the street. John Shepherd sat up a general store on the East side. Christian Christensen started a hotel know as the Levan House. Rasmus Sorenson had a livery yard on the South side of the Chicken Creek Wash. One block North of Town was a furniture and wood-working shop where they made furniture and coffins. There was a shoemaking shop and a small saloon.

Bartering was a way of life. One man sent his son to the saloon with a bucket of wheat. He wanted 25 cents worth of whiskey. A bucket of eggs could be exchanged for sugar, coffee, or other necessities.

In 1879 grasshoppers damaged their grain. It was said that the Female Relief Society, the Cooperative Store, the Sunday School and day school were in a flourishing condition. Good health was said to prevail and the people are alive to the work of God.

Levan, since July 24, 1868, always celebrated Pioneer Day by starting at day-break with a volley of shots. Then a flag-raising ceremony, a band serenade, a parade and a program. The same format was followed each year as the first 24th of July Celebration. Dances were held every Friday or Saturday night. A group of fiddlers led by Hans Fimboe provided the music be it in the church or in various homes.

On October 27, 1870 three bandits held up the stage coach a few miles West of Levan. One of the bandits was caught, and though most of the registered mail was destroyed, \$440 was recovered. These men had spent several days in Levan prior to the Robbery.

Many men served as Branch Presidents. In 1877, Levan was made into a ward, with Niels Jenson Aagard as the first bishop. During the year of 1875, the United Order was set in

operation with 133 persons participating. By 1878 a total of 273 members had joined. Bishop Aagard was a strong advocate of the Order. He lived and worked hard to keep it alive, but it was disbanded because the people were not ready to live under the United Order. Bishop Aagard died in February 1892 and Niels Peter Rasmussen was ordained Bishop. James E. Taylor was next called to serve as Bishop.

Polygamy was not generally practiced here, though there were a few men who did have more than one wife and family. Many new innovations, stores and businesses took their place as the town expanded. There was a plaster mill at the mouth of Chicken Creek which turned out a high-grade plaster. A railroad line was built from Salt Lake to Juab. It was only a spur. There was a "Y" so the engines could turn around and go back to Salt Lake. A large hotel and saloon was built by the end of the railroad spur. Anyone wanting to ride the train could flag it down.

The streets were dusty, rutted thoroughfares in the summer and muddy quagmires in the stormy seasons. Finally the men of the town hauled gravel to be spread on the roads. A big supper and dance followed.

The first telephone came in 1904. A new Relief Society Hall was completed in 1911. The town was not incorporated until October 8, 1906. Up to that time the affairs of the community were administered by the Bishops of the LDS Church. Between 1909 and 1913 the town got its first culinary water system. Electric lights were finally made available in 1920, but the water supply has always been the major problem of the community.

The inhabitants of Levan have always been a hardworking, friendly, and thrifty people. They have had to work hard to earn their living. The earth's strata is very hard to work with and it is this problem that caused them a lot of worry about their water supply.

No one has ever become rich. It has always been a rural community and remains so until this day. There has been many changes. Old buildings have been torn down and new ones have been erected. Old businesses have been abandoned and new ones have taken their place. But the characters of the people remains the same, friendly, frugal and hardworking.

Tragedies have occurred over the years. Two young men rode into the first church house on horses while a social was in progress and proceeded to fire their pistols into the air. When these same two young men were later found harassing an old gentleman and his wife at their home one of the boys was shot and killed. At one Fourth of July parade the Marshal of the day was shot and killed by a slightly deranged young man. Several children have been drowned in the irrigation ditches and one boy was run over and killed by "Old Maude" the engine used to move the plaster from the Plaster Mill. Homes and barns have been destroyed by fire. But through it all caring friends and neighbors have shared the burden and the reconstruction both of lives and property.

Levan has always provided its inhabitants with entertainment. Dances, up until the 1940's, were looked forward to all week. Elder's dances were staged once or twice each winter and were

always what was termed “picnic”. Every lady was expected to bring a cake, pie or sandwiches. And in the west end of the Amusement Hall under the orchestra stand, stoves were set up where cocoa and coffee were kept hot. The dances would continue with everyone taking their turn at the refreshment table, during the evening. The dances were varied, but contained quadrilles, polkas, varsovianna’s, the Danish Tucker, waltzes, and modern dancing. Levan has always had it’s own orchestra and it’s members give freely of their time and talents.

When the Park North of town was built, the community, for many years, hosted a baseball tournament. They always loved baseball and their teams were the pride of the community.

Because so many of the town’s citizens were from Denmark, it was often referred to as “Copenhagen” or “Little Denmark”. Regardless of what it is called, it is home to people who love it and always call it “Home” and “Our Community”.

(Some of the information was taken from the “Daughters of the Utah Pioneers” lesson Manual compiled by Maurine Stephensen).