

story (4)
Contributed by Pat Aagard Richins

EARLY BEGINNINGS

It is probably no departure from truth to assume that had it not been for the new arrivals in the winter of 1861-1862 and the needed strength they gave to Washington, the settlement would have been abandoned. Washington drew confidence too from the establishment of St. George and the addition of new settlers of Santa Clara and towns up the river.

Records of those who arrived are incomplete. Among those who came were a number of Scandinavian Saints who had first located in Sanpete County.

They were organized for the move south by Apostle Orson Hyde who acted under the instruction of President Brigham Young,

story (4)

who under date of October 13th, 1861, told Hyde to raise from 30 to 50 families for the Southern Mission. Among those who came in 1861-1862 were the families of James W. Wilkins, Wandle Mace, Thomas Blazzard, George Pectol, Niels Sorensen, Robert F. Gould, Henry Harriman, Jacob Bastian, John Chidester, John P. Chidester, NIELS AAGARD, Washington L. Jolley, Jeppe Iverson, Peter Nielson, George W. G. Averett, Elijah Averett, Andrew Larson, Francis Boggs, George Prince, Richard Price, Joseph H. Heywood, & others.

"THE 'FORTY DAYS AND NIGHTS"

They arrived after winter had set in. Shortly after most of them had reached their new location, the great storm set in, making life very miserable for those who had no shelter but the wagons they came in. All during the month of January

story (4)

the rain fell incessantly. February came and still more rain.

In later years the early settlers at Washington, undoubtedly linking this downpour with biblical events of Noah's day, always referred to this deluge as "the forty days and nights of rain". The Virgin River carried a huge flood, the cumulative outpouring of every creek and was draining into the stream. Grafton, some thirty-five up the river was destroyed; Virgin City suffered heavy losses; the Fort at Santa Clara, housing most of the people was washed away by the swollen waters of the Santa Clara Creek; Tonaquint Village at the junction of the Santa Clara with the Virgin was obliterated; while Fort Harmony on Ash Creek collapsed under the incessant pounding of wind, snow, and rain. Washington stood on ground not generally subject to floods and so escaped its worst ravages, but John D. Lee's

story (4)

combination lumber and grist mill of Mill Creek was washed away and its parts scattered along the river as far as Heberville five miles below.

They paid a high price to come to this land. Malaria was rampant, killing many and making others almost useless to perform manual work. Dysentery and typhoid fever were common, and more of the babies and youngsters died than survived. "Ague" was the name used to cover many an illness. Food was scarce; they called it 'the starving times'. Workers were malnourished and could hardly work a full day. In the midst of all this, men and boys dug ditches and canals.

THE MIGRATION OF 1861

The promise of new blood to bolster up the discouraged settlers came none too

story (4)

soon. After several years of colonizing there were in 1861 only 79 families located south of the rim of the Great Basin of which 20 were at Washington. There had been about 50 there during the spring and summer of 1857, but many had gone elsewhere for reasons readily understood. Others came to stay. Wandle Mace, who came to Washington when the colonists of 1861 arrived, says they found the discouraged settlers about to desert the place.

Floods had again torn out their dam and they were too few in number to replace it. But the arrival of the new settlers gave the old ones fresh courage, and the dreary task of dam-building was taken up again.

But it would be a mistake to assume that all the settlers at Washington had lost heart. There was still a strong spark of perseverance and a will to make the

story (4)
community a success.

Niels Jensen Aagard and his wife Sorina Kerstina Sorensen remained in Washington for about seven years. Niels had taken sick and couldn't seem to recover at which time they returned to Levan.

Information taken from "The Red Hills of November" A Pioneer Biography of Utah's Cotton Town by Andrew Karl Larson