

Our Bloomington Memorial Day Legacy

May 27, 2024

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Let's take a time travel! It's 1864, one of the most important years in the settlement of the Bear Lake Valley. In the fall of the previous year, 32 families led by Charles C. Rich had settled Paris. **Thomas Sleight**, one of those early settlers wrote concerning the valley, "The country was not a desolate waste, but a howling wilderness. Wildlife was abundant with bears and mountain lions inhabiting the forested area, wolves, wolverines, coyotes and badgers occupying the plains, and the ground squirrels, our greatest pest, were living everywhere the earth was dry." Fortunately for the new settlers, the first winter was a relatively light one.

On April 10, 1864, two families, **Mrs. Miranda Campbell**, her two sons, David and Warren, and **Mr. John Dunn and his wife, Juley Ann** with their 3 daughters, **Charlotte, Harriet, and Pamela** along with their nephew, **James Dunn**, started from Providence, Utah, with one wagon and two yoke of oxen each, and a few beef cattle. The trail through Emigration Canyon was impassable with snow, so they followed the Bear River through Soda Springs and entered the valley from the north. They crossed the raging Bear River on the ferry which was located west of present-day Bern. Arriving at Paris, the Dunns and Campbells decided to pass on through. Three miles south on the northern edge of a beautiful creek, they found their home. It was **April 18, 1864**. The first settlers had arrived at Bloomington!

A short time later a larger company, which had traveled from Cache Valley along the Emigration Canyon trail arrived. This second company brought a small herd of sheep. **Samuel Payne** later recounted: During

the first night, the sheep were frightened away from the camp by wolves. The next morning several of the men followed the trail left by the sheep and found the ones which had not been killed, in a gulch above the hill on which the cemetery is now located. From this position they were given a fine view of the country which they expected to make their home. The only sign of civilization was the small cluster of covered wagons standing in the tall bunch grass with the oxen tied to the wheels. The magnitude of the thing they were undertaking must have been impressive, and the more imaginative visualized houses surrounded by trees, lawns, and gardens, and the expanse of wild grass transformed into fields of grain.”

Look around you. Can you see what they saw in 1864? Now look and see the fruition of the dreams they imagined that day.

It was in 1864 that four lines of my ancestors gathered to Bloomington. **William Hulme and Phoebe** arrived in July with 3-year-old Willie and 4-month-old Alice Ann. They drew from a hat a lot for a choice one-acre piece of land located on the **southwest corner of Main Street and Canyon Road**. Several generations of Hulmes have since called that beautiful lot “home”.

Three weeks after William and Phoebe arrived, William arose early and left their wagon box to care for his livestock. Phebe cautioned him to move quietly to avoid waking the baby. Shortly thereafter she was horrified to discover that little Alice Ann was dead. This was the first death in Bloomington and a sight for a new burial ground was selected on a low foothill overlooking the new community. Shortly thereafter settlers set about building a road to the little cemetery.

Look and find Alice Ann’s grave, it’s the one with the little fence around it. Look at all the graves that have followed. People who lived in Bloomington their whole lives. People who moved away and always

wanted to come “home” to be buried. And people who have just found this beautiful little cemetery the perfect place to rest until the resurrection.

On **July 5, 1864**, the day after their 4th of July celebration a severe **frost** destroyed the spring crops. They were rapidly replanted but again, an early fall frost destroyed most of the grain and vegetables. Teams from Paris went to Cache Valley for flour but before they got back it had snowed so hard they were unable to reach the settlements. Also, there had not been time to provide sufficient shelter for their animals or to build root cellars to protect their potato crops.

It was during this time of early snows and freezing weather, my great-great-grandparents, **Isaac and Leah Dunford** and family arrived with **James H. Hart** and his family and James Hart’s nephew **James Nelson** and family. The only available shelter for these 3 families was a crudely built log cabin that measured 14x18 feet. Sixteen people spent the winter there.

There were around **41 families** who struggled to survive in Bloomington that first winter. Besides those already mentioned they included the *Aland, Bennett, Haddock, Huckvale, Jacobson, Kroque, Haws, Long, Nelson, Osmond, Patterson, Payne, Rasmusson, Reese, Roberts, Rogers, Thomas and Welker families.*

By November the snow had come to stay and from then on it was three to six feet deep on the level. High winds and falling snow caused frequent, blinding blizzards, which people soon referred to as “Bear Lakers”. When it was cold and windy during the night, it was difficult to keep fires going inside the roughly built log cabins. When people arose from their beds in the morning, water and milk were frozen in their containers, potatoes frozen in their sacks, and an axe was frequently

used to slice the frozen bread for breakfast. Soup bones were passed from house to house as long as they could flavor the soup.

Buffalo robes kept the people from freezing to death. Children were often kept in bed all day, not only to keep them warm, but to conserve their strength when food supplies began to run low. The bodies of loved ones, who passed away during the winter, were buried in the snow until the ground thawed in the spring. Because of no shelter, many cattle perished.

In **June, Elder Rich** wrote to Brigham Young and reported that *snow was still on the ground and crops would be planted late. Spring runoff had flooded the bottom lands, high waters had damaged the trout harvest and there were more suckers than they knew what to do with.*

The recent winter of 2022/23 is said to be a repeat of that long-ago winter. Except for one huge difference...we experienced it inside a warm home with running water, electricity, and a pantry full of food.

Death, hunger and loss of livestock spread throughout the valley. And so did discontent. Many of the people demanded a meeting with **Elder Rich** to voice their complaints and express their desires to leave.

Although he later admitted that the valley seemed *“to have ten months of winter and two months of summer,”* the climate was not his major concern for the Saints...It was their willingness to remain faithful to the call they had received to settle the valley. He said to the people who had gathered, *“I came up here with a few brethren. We looked over the valley, and although the altitude was high, the snows heavy and the frosts severe, there was plenty of water for irrigation purposes and plenty of fish in the lake and streams. So with a company, I came here and settled with my family.*

There have been many hardships; that I admit brethren. And these we have shared together. But if you want to go somewhere else, that is your right, and I do not want to deprive you of it. If you are of a mind to leave here, my blessing will go with you. But I must stay here, even if I stay alone. President Young called me here, and here I will remain till he releases me and give me leave to go.

A number of families chose to leave, but most of them remained. Almost all of those 1864 settlers of Bloomington remained, and you will find their graves, and the graves of their descendants all around you. They remained faithful to the call they received to settle this valley.

A snapshot of some of those early settlers:

Soon after **Charles Harrod and his wife, Elizabeth Matty** arrived in 1864, Charles was killed on July 31 in a wagon accident as he went to get a load of sand. Despite this tragedy, Elizabeth remained in Bloomington along with her 3 sons from her first marriage, William, David, and Henry Roberts who also raised their families here. Charles' grave is unmarked.

James Claybourne Thomas and Tena Nelson met in Hyde Park Utah. When Tena's parents, Soren and Christine Nelson came to Bloomington in 1864, James followed his sweetheart and continued his courtship. James and Tena were married the following year on Tena's 19th birthday.

A baby boy, **Robert Bowman Jr.**, was born on November 29, 1864 to Robert and Mary Ida Bowman. His father listed his birth as occurring at noon. 4 1/2 years later, the father again listed in his journal Robert's death, April 16th, 1869 at midnight. Little Robert's grave is also unmarked.

John Bott Thornock arrived in the spring of 1864 and was involved in surveying and laying out the townsite of Bloomington. He fell in love

with the area because of the flowers that bloomed profusely on the foothills and in the meadowlands. He had to return to Farmington in the fall, but he was certain that Bloomington was the place where he wanted to spend the rest of his life. The next year he married his childhood sweetheart, **Emma Ward** from England and in 1866 after the birth of their first child they moved to Bloomington and made their home.

Stories could be told about every one of those Bloomington pioneers. I hope you know the stories of YOUR ancestors.

There is a special **spirit of peace** in this valley and in this town. It is mentioned by many. It is the spirit of these early settlers, those who came in 1864 and continued to come throughout the 1860's. Most of these settlers had been born in foreign lands. After their conversion to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, they made their way to the United States and then to Utah. They sacrificed and struggled through each of these journeys.

Again, they heeded a prophet's call to move. They climbed over the mountains to settle this valley, their final home. Their faith and trust in God were evidenced in the living of their lives. Their graves surround us. We add flowers to their graves to remember and honor them. But the best tribute we can give is by remembering and following their **legacy of strength, sacrifice, faith, and love**. 160 years have passed since those first settlers arrived, and stayed. We are so grateful for the enduring legacy they left.

To help you individually and also as a community to know and remember these stalwart pioneers, there is a **Legacy Room** provided by the James H. Hart family and housed in the City Building. It is a repository for books, journals, pictures, maps, documents, and letters that can be researched. We encourage families to donate these items to

this library where they will be safely kept and available for use. There is also a scanner, printer, and computer. Please make an appointment with any of the Legacy board members and we'll be glad to show you what is available.