

Virgin Water
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Tonaquint 1855

The Tonaquint Indians lived where Santa Clara Creek and Fort Pearce Wash joins the Virgin River. A small settlement was located here by Mormon missionaries that arrived in 1855 to help the Indians farm, build dams and improve their lives. The Indians had previously grown crops with the aid of irrigation but not the type practiced by the Mormons.



Prior to the arrival of the Mormons, Indian irrigated crops by diverting water from both perennial and seasonal water courses. Taking water from the stream may only have happened at times when it was plentiful. Small flat areas could be flooded and seeds were inserted a few inches deep into the wet soil with the aid of a “planting stick”. It is debated how the Indians tended these fields but it is clear that without iron plows they would not have created furrows allowing frequent and efficient watering of the crops.

A hallmark of Indian agriculture is “three sisters planting beds” where corn, beans and squash were planted in small mounds of soil in a flood irrigated field. Bean tendrils wound up the corn stalks and large squash leaves shaded the soil from the hot sun reducing water evaporation. These fields could be untended for weeks while the Indians foraged or hunted for other food. Native grasses were harvested by collecting grass seed which supplemented the wheat and corn grown in irrigated patches. A variety a berries, roots and nuts, especially pine nuts, were gathered at some distances from Indian villages.

When the first Mormon missionaries arrived in the summer of 1854, the elders found several Tonaquint villages along Santa Clara Creek along with at least one diversion dam and one ditch (less than a mile in length) which delivered water to small fields where wheat, beans and corn were grown.¹ The missionaries brought iron implements (shovels and plows) and leather harnesses allowing horses to



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be productively used for agriculture. These Mormon tools allowed the construction of a 14 foot high, 100 foot long diversion dam above the 1854 Mormon settlement of Santa Clara through a combination of Indian and Mormon labor. A 100 acre field was irrigated with the water this dam provided. By 1857, there were 13 different corn fields along the Santa Clara.²

Tonaquint's hovels and irrigated fields both Indian and Mormon were washed away in the devastating flood of 1862.



*Kwi-toos and his son, Paiute Indians from the vicinity of St. George, Utah
photo by J. K. Hillers of the J. W. Powell Expeditions,
Smithsonian Office of Anthropology, 1872*

The Tonaquints became increasingly impoverished in the years after the settlement of Saint George and Santa Clara by members of the Cotton Mission. Their old way of life was spoiled by the incursions on their fragile resources made by both the Mormons and their livestock. While Santa Clara creek water was depleted by pioneer logging in Pine Valley, making the new farming methods they learned from the Mormons useless without a reliable water supply.

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Heberville 1858

In 1858 an experimental cotton farm was started by sixteen men under the direction of Joseph Horne at Heberville, named in honor of Heber C. Kimball. Cotton was raised at a cost of \$3.40 per pound. 545 pounds of cotton were ginned and 160 gallons of molasses were sent to Salt Lake. In 1859 the farm was continued and the cost was reduced to \$1.90 per pound.³

In the spring of 1859, the Horne company built a log house and established a post office with George Pectol as postmaster.⁴



George Pectol, Heberville Postmaster

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Johnson's 1861 Map of California, New Mexico and Utah

Only two other settlements in Washington County had post offices, Harmony and Washington. At this time, Washington County extended the full width of the Territory of Utah. Johnson's 1861 Map (above) shows the new territorial boundaries superimposed over the prior county boundaries.

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Historic Petroglyph Inscription of Jacob Peart with Cotton Plant

One of the members of the Horne Company was 19 year old Jacob Peart, who took time away from his irrigating, weeding, cultivating and harvesting of cotton and sorghum in order to chip the desert varnish off the sandstone cliff on the west side of the Rio Virgen above Heberville's fields to write...

“I WAS SET HER TO RAIS COTTEN MARCH 1858 JACOB PEART”

This inscription is still plainly visible on the upper portion of the cliff where Interstate 15 crosses over the Virgin River, although it is surrounded by many newer messages chipped into the stone.

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New Sand Deposits along the Virgin River after December 2010 Flood

In early 1862, the log house (post-office) was washed away by flood waters and some five hundred acres was submerged under the Rio Virgen's waters. The flood waters quickly receded but deposited sand from two to six feet thick onto the previously farmed land. Twenty men including Ellis M. Sanders commenced farming and reoccupied Heberville in 1863. Between 1870 and 1874, only a caretaker lived at Heberville.

On February 17, 1874, some of the farmers at Heberville with others from St. George, Washington and Santa Clara were organized into a company by President Brigham Young with the purpose of extending the old ditch and building up the place. The Heberville name was dropped in favor of the new name Price. George A. Smith recorded the direction given by President Young in the Millennial Star.⁵

"Dear Brother, --Since we have been in St. George we have been moved by the Holy Spirit to preach to the people more fully the principles of the United Order of Enoch, and many of the brethren have requested to be organized for the purpose of carrying them out. One company is established at Price, and will cultivate what has heretofore been known as Heberville District; they have good land and abundant water, as they draw it directly from the Rio Virgen River. They will cultivate cotton largely, as well as other agricultural products. The farmers of Santa Clara and Washington, as well as St. George, have been organized into companies for the same purpose.

Because of sickness (malaria) and flood danger, the settlers were directed to move to higher ground farther to the south. This location became Price.

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Price 1874

Milo Andrus was the presiding elder of the settlement when the United Order was established. Some 500 apple trees and 200 peach trees were planted instead of cotton. Many acres of alfalfa (lucerne) was planted.⁶ In 1876, a wardhouse (combination church and school) was constructed.⁷ The principles of the United Order of Enoch required all the members of the community to place their worldly good into a cooperative pool and the fruits of their labor were to be equally shared. Each man had his own house but there was a common building in which meals were prepared and consumed.

Many believed that the Latter-day Saint Temple, then under construction in St. George, would usher in a new era of spiritual living when it opened and looked upon the United Order principles as necessary for the dawning of that new day.



*Grape vineyard, cherry orchard and almond trees
Washington County, 1935*

While the ditch had been extended and new crops had been planted, the Virgin River water still smelled and tasted like the sulfur emitted from the hot spring above the La Verkin creek confluence. Drinking water was brought from St. George in barrels transported by wagon throughout the settlement's existence. The settlement was relocated to a small bluff south of the irrigated lands which is sometimes referred to as Price City Bench. (Bench is the term for land which is elevated above the valley floor.)

The United Order at Price lasted for only a short period of time due to dissension among the people, it had disappeared almost completely after Brigham Young's death in 1877. In

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January of 1879 the Price Ward was organized with Robert Gardner as bishop and Margaret Ann Andrus as Relief Society president which marked the end of Price's United Order experiment. Many of those living the United Order at Price had already left by this time. Only about fifty residents remained in 1879.

The abandoned land became a bargain. Samuel Miles who became a Justice of the Peace and a school teacher purchased 11 town lots for less than \$150 each in 1881. In 1883, he bought another 80 acres.⁸ In 1884, Bishop Nephi R. Fawcett of Price reported that the Virgin River had been "on a rampage" for two months, tearing out dams and washing away some of the best lands with their growing crops. By 1900, all his children had left home and he and his wife Hannah were living in Bloomington. What had once been a town became just farm land.

In 1904, the Price City Ward was disorganized and incorporated into the Bloomington Branch which became part of the Bloomington West Ward. In 1908, native stone from the old Price City chapel (warehouse) was used for the construction of the Wallace Blake Farm House.



*Wallace Blake Farmhouse, 1978
National Register of Historic Places*

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Bloomington 1875

By 1870, William H. Carpenter, David H. Cannon, Harrison Pearce, and John D. L. Pearce irrigated a small piece of land on the north side of the Rio Virgen, opposite what was then the town of Heberville. Water was taken from the Rio Virgen. After the first years work with little success, the Cannon's and Pearce's sold their interests to the Carpenter's.

In 1875, the St. James company of the United Order was established at on the north side of the river. This company was just as short-lived as that of Price City and was dissolved by 1877. Lars Larson, a stone mason, and his son, Lars James Larson, were sent to Dixie to work on the temple. The place names St. James and Jamestown are probably derived from Lars James Larson's middle name. The Larsons built homes in Bloomington, where they farmed for a living. Lars James Larson also built the Bloomington Schoolhouse of which only the foundation remains.



Bloomington School circa 1940

Also in 1875, the land north of the river was surveyed. Joseph W. Carpenter, a printer, changed the town's name to Bloomington on the map, but the settlement had no formal organization. Religious and educational activities took place across the river because there were more children there. The Bloomington name may derive from an observation made by the residents that the native flowers bloomed in this place sooner than they did in the other parts of Washington County.

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During the late 1870's, the ditch bringing water to Bloomington was extended to the north so that water could be taken from Santa Clara Creek rather than the Rio Virgen. Santa Clara water smelled better and you could drink it if the silt had settled out. This improvement may have been the primary reason for the migration of Price City residents to the north side of the river.



*A Portion of Elwood Mead's Map of the Virgin River
from Irrigation in Utah, 1903*

Travel between the communities of Price and Bloomington was made by fording the river on horseback, by wagon or on foot. High water would limit communication between the towns a few times every year.

The Carpenters went into the broom making business by planting spindely-stalked broom corn. A small broom factory (or shop) was established in Bloomington. Brooms were shipped as far away as Lund, Nevada. Brooms put a little cash into the otherwise cash poor economy. Farming was supplemented with stock-raising, especially after the turn of the century. Wallace Blake and J. M. Larson among other had brands registered in Arizona and Utah.

Blake Farmhouse Area 1960 and 2009



Across from Wallace Blake's Farmhouse was Ern Larson's house and granary and at the bend in the road the Bloomington Schoolhouse, shown in a 1960 aerial photo.

After 1900, Bloomington had quite a few homes, a branch library, a post-office with daily mail, a school and a small factory which made brooms and a few barrels. Bloomington also had orchards, vineyards, melon patches and many shade trees. The shade attracted Price residents across the river for celebrations including the 4th and 24th of July festivities. In 1922, a "Bloomington" peach variety was registered with the American Pomological Society.

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Price City Abandoned Foundation, 2010

While Price City became no more than a scattering of abandoned foundations after 1900, Bloomington continued to grow until the Great Depression. In 1926, the school was closed and the children traveled by bus to St. George. Just as the demolition of Price City's church had signaled its end, the closing of Bloomington's schoolhouse foreshadowed an exodus from the north bank town.

The Virgin River channel cut deeper and deeper as the years passed complicating the difficult task of getting water to the land. The diversion dams were moved upstream and the canals were lengthened to water the same fields. Not until the 1950's was it practical to pump water out of the river to alleviate this difficulty when electricity became more affordable and available. The distance that crops needed to be transported to be sold also changed. Towns lining the Arrowhead highway (later US Highway 91) had an advantage over those like Bloomington. During the 1930's and 1940's it became increasingly difficult to make a living in Bloomington, by the early 1950's the alfalfa fields and fruit orchards had survived but nearly all the residents had moved on.

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Atkinville 1877

William Atkin and his sons established a one family settlement farther down river from Bloomington in the late-1870's. The small village based on raising livestock became a local resort of sorts in the 1880's attracting Mormon church President Wilford Woodruff, among others, to its small park of cottonwood trees surrounding a large pond. It attracted people from St. George for picnicking, swimming, boating, and fishing. In winter's cold, William cut ice from his pond and stored it in a cave hollowed out at the base of the natural cliff below the village. In summer's heat, the ice was sold in blocks to St. George business and homes.

During the 1880's the pond had another use as a hiding place for polygamists like Wilford Woodruff, who when hunted by federal marshals could seclude themselves on a boat behind the tall reeds at the water's edge.



ATKINVILLE: THE LAST VISIT
Painting by Roland Lee Courtesy of J Ralph Atkin

In 1906, a major flood nearly destroyed Atkinville. After the flood, buildings were dismantled and the lumber salvaged. Most of the lumber for the structures in Atkinville, Bloomington and Price came from Mount Trumbell in Arizona and was highly prized for both its strength and fine-grained appearance.

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Dan Heaton's carrot farm was located where the Bloomington Country Club golf course is now in 1965. The Virgin River Pump Station was built in 1965 to lift water out of the river and up to the level of the farmland. In addition to the Virgin River water, water from the San Clara River (taken out by a diversion dam and conveyed via Bloomington Canal Company's ditch) was also used to water the farm and after 1969 the new golf course.



Virgin River Pump Station 2010

Lateral movement of the river's channel (to the other side of the river) and continuing erosion and deepening of the river made this pump station unusable by 1982 when it was abandoned.

Dan Heaton's farm was purchased by The Johnson Land Company in 1966. Clark Ivory, a real estate broker, who had found the land for the Johnson's was frequently interrupted while supervising the farm by people seeking homesites. Ellis Ivory, Clark's son, and Roger Boyer, a graduate of Harvard Business School, organized Ivory and Boyer Company in 1967 and 1968 merged with the Johnson Land Company to form Terracor in order to develop and sell Utah's first master planned community... Bloomington. The marketing began with *Bloomington Ranches* on the Price side of the river and continued with lots in *the Gardens* fronting on the Bloomington Country Club golf course designed by William Neff of Salt Lake City which opened in 1969.

Bloomington was an unqualified success with sales far exceeding expectations. It put Terracor and St. George on the resort community map in a big way at the start of a new decade. Interstate 15 wasn't completed through the Virgin River gorge until 1973, when the Bloomington exit was the first one in Utah.

In July 1975 there was a severe flood that washed away the southern approach to the Man O' War bridge, with the water topping out only a foot or two below the bridge deck.

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1777 Map of the Dominguez and Escalante Expedition
with the Bloomington area highlighted.

Discovery 1776

Padre Dominguez and Father Escalante had a map made of their 1776-1777 expedition which clearly shows their route as it neared this location where 3 watercourses join. (The Virgin, the Santa Clara and Fort Pearce Wash.) The unique geography of this confluence along with the markings of longitude and latitude confirm this historic event.

On this journey on October 16, Dominguez and Escalante spoke with the (Paiute) Indians “who plant the crops (maize) on the banks of the Rio del Pilar (Ash Creek) and live downstream for a long distance.” On October 17, the expedition obtained herbs (seeds) and pieces of

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calabash (squash) from these Indians and a little sugar, when their food supplies were nearly exhausted. On October 18, the expedition turned east and then northeast in search of water.

The Indians could read the direction and distance from one water source to the next from petroglyph lines incised into shallow depressions on sandstone mesas about six feet in diameter made for that purpose by their ancestors.

Prehistoric Artifacts

The petroglyphs made by the Anasazi, Pueblo, and Hohokam Indians while yet to be deciphered are very similar.



Petroglyph near St. George 2010

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Petroglyph near Gila River, Arizona



Newspaper Rock Petroglyph, San Juan County, Utah

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That similar cultures created these messages seems obvious. Why they created them and what they mean is much less apparent. Major John Wesley Powell made a comprehensive report of pictographs and petroglyphs to congress in 1882. The following series of artist's conceptions may be helpful in pondering their meaning.



Are the petroglyphs an account which details the achievements of each band from year to year? Could information regarding the population or health of sheep or deer be deciphered from the inscriptions?

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Who was responsible to record this information? Did the petroglyph sites have any ceremonial purpose?



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Was the information recorded in the petroglyphs useful in finding game? Do the symbols represent what happened or what was dreamed (hoped) to happen in the future? Is the information a representation of the “good life” lived by each band over the years?



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- 1 Edward Leo Lyman, “Southern Paiute Relations with Their Early Dixie Mormon Neighbors”, Juanita Brook Lecture, St. George Tabernacle, March 10, 2010.
- 2 Ibid,
- 3 James G. Bleak, “Annuals of the Southern Utah Mission, Book A”, Typescript, 1996 by Wanda T. Gocha, great-great granddaughter.
- 4 List of Post Offices in the United States, 1st of April, 1859
note: (Carson City, Carson County, Utah not Nevada had Postmaster John F. Long) (Harmony, Washington County, Utah had Elisha H. Groves) (Washington, Washington County, Utah had Harrison Pearce) (Pine Valley, Iron County, Utah had Samuel Hamilton) (Cedar City, Iron County, Utah had Isaac Haight) Parowan, Iron County, Utah had James Lewis) (Washington County, Utah listed Harmony, Heberville, Santa Clara, Tokersville and Washinton) (Iron County listed Cedar City, Fort Johnson, Parowan and Pine Valley) (Kane County didn’t exist yet) (Western Territories include California, Oregon, Washington, New Mexico, Utah, Nebraska, Kansas and Texas... no Colorado, Nevada, Wyoming, Montana or Arizona)
- 5 President Jos. F. Smith, Millennial Star Correspondence, AMERICA, St. George, Utah, March 15, 1874.
- 6 Stephen L. Carr, “The Historical Guide to Utah Ghost Towns”, Western Epics, Salt Lake City, 1972 (reprinted 2009 third edition).
- 7 Wallace Blake Farm House, National Register of Historic Places Inventory -- Nomination Form, National Park Service, November 1978.
- 8 Samuel Miles Family Website, 2010