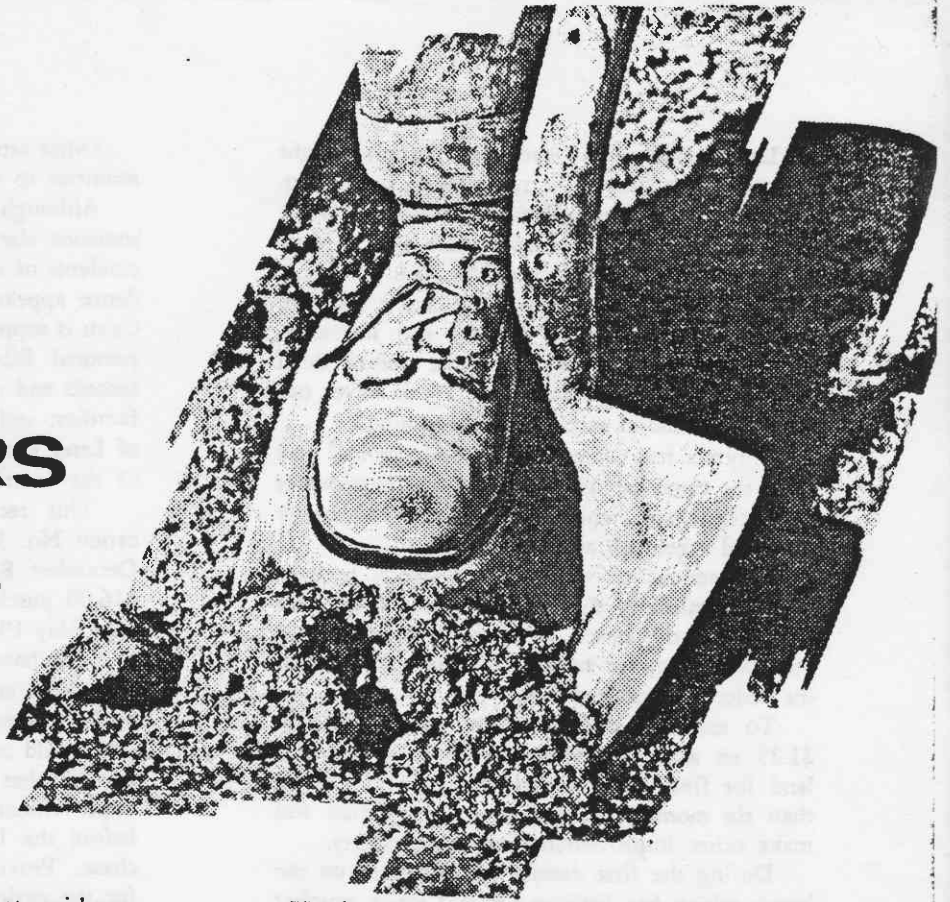


OREM'S FIRST SETTLERS — 1861 —



Water—that magical ingredient without which life is impossible—has made the desert blossom as the rose where earnest men have channeled the earth to carry it to the brink of their greatest need.

This, then, has been the history of Orem—the place which the first settlers one hundred years ago found desolate and arid—populated only by rattlesnakes, jack rabbits and coyotes.

Their fight for survival and ultimate prosperity has been one which has closely paralleled the construction of irrigation ditches, culinary water systems and development of new sources of water supply.

The year 1861 saw the first handful of part-time settlers from nearby valley settlements venture out onto the bench lands that now comprise Orem City. At that time the area had very little to recommend it, since streams or springs were non-existent.

The prospects of somehow bringing water onto the parched soil, however, lit the ambitions of a number to whom homesteading virgin territory presented a challenge and an opportunity.

For several years settlers on the bench were only "summer farmers." During the winter months they lived in nearby communities where the necessities of life were more readily available.

Located near the center of Utah valley, the high bench lands of Orem were at one time a delta in the ancient Lake Bountiful, which has diminished to the present Utah Lake.

The bench lies at the foot of the magnificent Mt. Timpanogos—highest peak in the Wasatch Range—12,008 feet above sea level. The western slope of the bench comprises the beach lands of Utah Lake.

The bench constitutes an area of approximately thirty square miles elevated about 250 feet above the level of the valley. It is located 40 miles south of Salt Lake City.

The first homes on the bench were typical of the most primitive which have been built by white men in America. For those who had no oxen or horses to haul logs from the Provo river for cabins, dugouts were built in the ground.

For cabins, logs from Provo Canyon were split in two and the chinks were plastered up to keep out icy winds. Walls were uncovered, and roofs were often covered with dirt or thatched with rushes gathered from the shores of Utah Lake. A fortunate few enjoyed the luxury of having unbleached muslin stretched across the ceiling inside the cabin.

Most cabins had only one or two small windows and only one door.

Cast iron stoves as well as fireplaces were used for cooking and heating the cabins.

The smell of boiling lye and tallow often permeated the early homes of residents as home-made soap making occupied the women.

Lack of water on the bench made life extremely difficult during the earliest years. Regular trips to Utah Lake and Provo River were necessary to secure necessary culinary water.

Little wonder that even the Saturday night bath seemed a luxury for residents in those days.

Adequate food was often a problem, too. Grace was often said at the dinner table over a meal of jack rabbits, or carp from the lake.

In 1863 water did come to the bench. Through the combined efforts of settlers and interested people from the surrounding areas, a small canal was dug, conveying water from Provo River out over two thousand acres of thirsty ground.

Only six feet wide and two and one-half feet deep, the canal brought a slender stream of water to parched earth which for centuries had barely sustained sagebrush and reptile life.

The advent of water to the bench brought fresh optimism to the hardy settlers. Water also brought to the bench an increasing number of pioneering families anxious to take advantage of the federal homestead law.

To establish eligibility for buying land at \$1.25 an acre, a homesteader must live on his land for five years without leaving it for more than six months. He had to build a house and make other improvements on the property.

During the first decade of settlement on the bench which has become Orem City, a number of industrious people established themselves here and stayed to populate and build the community.

For some, the trials and hardships were too much. The names of those who came and traveled on to what they considered "greener pastures" were not recorded.

But those whom history names as some of the earliest residents and builders of the community are: Thomas J. Patten, Andrew G. Johnson, John S. Park, M. J. Knight, Alfred N. Billings, Samuel Hadfield, J. W. King, James Loveless, Samuel Skinner, Joseph Evans, David S. Park, Peter M. Wentz, James Stratton, Amasa Mecham, Thomas Barrett, Sam Baxter, Newell Knight, August Johnson, Charles Johnson, Elliott A. Newell and Thomas Cordner.

The Thomas Cordner family became the first permanent residents on the bench. They were required through circumstances to remain in their cabin through the winter of 1877.



Thomas and Mary Ann Cordner had left their Provo home and moved onto the bench during the summer of 1877. They had sold their two acres in Provo, so there was nowhere else for them to go when winter came.

Other settlers had homes in neighboring communities to spend the winter.

Although consideration is entitled claims that someone else may have been the first permanent residents of the bench, the preponderance of evidence appears to favor the Cordner claim. This claim is supported by entries in Thomas Cordner's personal Bible written by him; verification of records and reports of family members and other families; and a certification made by the Bureau of Land Management, United States Department of the Interior:

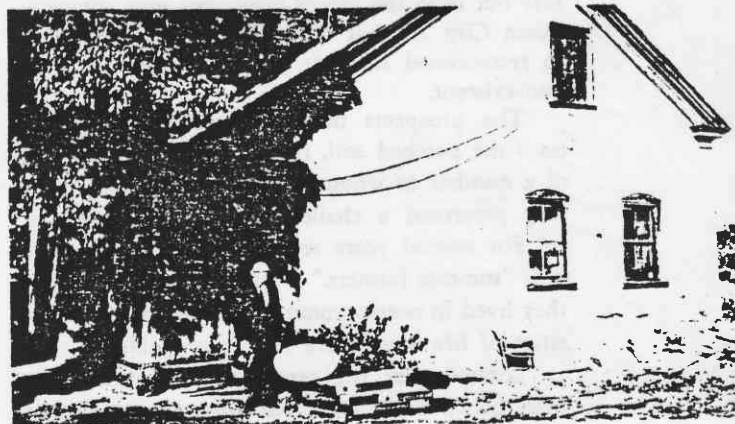
"Our records show that Homestead Application No. 3344, was filed by Thomas Cordner, December 8, 1877, \$1.25 per acre, 160 acres, \$16.00 purchase money. Final certificate was issued May 19, 1885.

"We have no record of anyone filing a prior homestead entry for these lands.

"The deed would be dated 1886 and the property would be occupied prior to 1877 because the laws at that time and now require that certain improvements be made on homestead applications before the lands may become eligible for purchase. 'Proving up' on these lands would account for the period of approximately nine years from the filing of the application to the acquiring of the deed to the lands."



Who were the first white children born in Orem? Alexander Cordner was the first boy born to the Thomas Cordners March 17, 1879. Ella Malinda Newell was the first girl born to Mr. and Mrs. Elliot A. Newell on April 10, 1880.



Thomas Cordner, grandson and namesake of early settler, is pictured standing in front of the old Cordner home, one of the very first such homes built on the bench; located at 03 South 1000 East.