

Looking Back - A.J. Simmonds

The second Cache Valley land rush: Apostle Benson's colonies - Petersburg - Clarkston – Stockton – North Creek - Oxford

With sites explored and locations picked for future settlements, E.T. Benson took steps to drain off the surplus population from Cache Valley's established towns.

The colonial plan was simple. Benson or his subordinates determined upon an area to be settled and either "called" people to settle there or allowed to do so those who wished to move to the new areas of their own volition. As soon as the colonists were in place at the new sites, Colonel James H. Martineau, the Cache County Surveyor, rode out from Logan to lay out the new towns and farm plots: Petersburg on April 20, 1864; Clarkston on July 22; Stockton and North Creek on September 22; Oxford on September 23.

In April Benson invited Wellsville's surplus population to move to the new site of Petersburg - a colony on the Little Bear River midway between Hyrum and Paradise. (It must be remembered that in 1864 the town of Paradise was located on the present site of Avon). Petersburg was platted just north of the present site of Paradise. Its main street was the county road a block below Utah Highway 163. On April 21, 1864, County Surveyor J.H. Martineau distributed town lots and farm plots to the new settlers: Samuel Mc Murdie, Robert Mc Murdie, Samuel O Bray, John Kay, and James Rollings. Though records are not extant, it is likely that these initial colonists were joined by others in 1864 and 1865.

While Petersburg drained off some surplus from Wellsville, those who left were not necessarily landless newcomers. Some of the town's earliest settlers went looking for better locations as late as 1869 a correspondent for **The Deseret News** noted that Wellsville had not been an unqualified success:

"Wellsville, it is now generally conceded, would have been better located on an inviting bench across the creek and east of the present site. Her settlers, though untiring, have never reaped any fruit from their labors. A warmer soil would remedy this and peradventure other disparagements and transform the fettle lands now held under tribute by municipal exactions into profitable farms."

Petersburg is the most obscure of E.T. Benson's post Bear River colonies. We can name but a few of its settlers, though it is likely that some of those listed as pioneer settlers of Paradise were originally with the Petersburg colony. And what is a particular rarity in Cache valley, we do not know who was appointed by Benson as Bishop or Presiding Elder of Petersburg, the colony's civil and religious leader.

As the Valley's capital, Logan easily acquired the largest number of new settlers in the early 1860s, and her need for expansion was certainly as critical as any other town. Thus, when the west side site of Clarkston was chosen in the spring of 1864, E.T. Benson specifically called its colonists from west Logan. Israel J. Clark of the Logan Second Ward, veteran of the Salmon River Mission and Cache County's official Shoshoni interpreter was chosen to lead the colony - which was named in his honor. With Clark were fellow townsmen from Logan: Jesse Clark,

Andrew W. Heggie, James J. Myler, Joseph Louis Thompson, John Griffiths, Simon Smith, Oscar Myler, Johannes Dahle, Gideon Harmison, Ole A. Jensen, Cyrus Clark, John Thompson and Andrew McCombs. The men arrived at the site of Clarkston in July 1864 - a nine block city on the banks of Clarkston Creek - built dugout shelters, dug the first ditches, began their farms, and returned to Logan for their wives and children. A dozen families spent the winter of 1864-1865 at Clarkston.

In late September Benson began draining off the surplus from Richmond and Franklin by establishing the twin settlements of Stockton and Oxford in Round Valley at the far north end of Cache Valley, south of Swan Lake. The sites had been picked by the Marriner W. Merrill party the previous July. Oxford was no doubt named by Benson after the England University town and as a part of the English cities names which Cache had acquired: Hyde Park, Smithfield, Richmond. And Stockton took its name from the herds of Cache Valley cattle which were grazing Round Valley in 1864.

Stockton settlers that fall included Shannon Stevenson, Jerome J. Adams, Niels Georgeson, John Gratz, Hamilton W. Packer, A.N. Clemens, Phillip Cardon, Agrippa Cooper, James Clemens, William G. Nelson, and W. Whitehead. The Stockton colony consisted of two sites: the town and ten-acre farm plots south of Swan Lake and 5 acre hay lots at North Creek, north of the Lake, the present site of Swan Lake village.

Three miles south of Stockton was platted the village of Oxford. Noah Brimhall of Hyrum, T.C.D. Howell of Franklin, and William Boyce are known to have moved to Oxford in the fall of 1864. Other settlers that fall may have included Vincent Cooper, Joseph S. Nelson, John Boyce, Reuben Barzee, and William Home. But major settlement at Oxford seems to have been deferred until the spring of 1865, for in the fall of 1864, a herd of about a thousand head of cattle, made up of the combined beef animals and dry stock of many owners in the southern Cache Valley towns, was driven to Round Valley to winter in the Oxford area. The presence of the herd at Oxford no doubt persuaded most would-be colonists to settle further north at Stockton. William G. Nelson of Franklin, was called by Apostle Benson to move to Stockton and take ecclesiastical charge of both Stockton and Oxford.

References: Looking Back, a weekly magazine published by the Herald Journal, date unknown. Merrill/Cazier Library at Utah State Library, Special Collections; Logan, Utah