

Ghost towns prove sturdiness of Dixie Pioneers



ST. GEORGE - The ruins of two pioneer homes can still be seen at this Atkinville site, four miles south of Bloomington. Bloomington homes can be seen in the background.

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ST. GEORGE - The early pioneers in southern Utah were a sturdy lot, to say the least, and hard work was a major component of their lives. Remnants of their hard work can still be seen throughout Dixie in the ruins of their rock homes and towns.

These ruins were the subject of a lecture by well-known area explorer Bart Anderson. Anderson gave a presentation Tuesday on "Ghost Towns of Southern Utah" as part of Dixie College's week-long LernFest '87 program.

Beginning with Atkinville, about four miles south of Bloomington on the frontage road, Anderson gave a brief history of ghost towns in the area.

Many of the pioneer towns were settled by families who moved into an area and built their homes near each other, Anderson said. Atkinville was named after its founder, William Atkin, and the tumbled-down remains of two rock houses can still be seen there, along with the foundations of other homes in the area.

"Building homes was a great project," said Anderson. "The pioneers had to build their homes while farming the land and working to build the Temple." Atkinville was built along the line of the Virgin River that flows through that area.

Part of the folklore of Atkinville lies around a large pond that William Atkin built about 1886, Anderson said. The pond served two purposes - it provided a reservoir for irrigation water and, once Atkin had stocked it with chub and other fish, it provided a new source of food for the villagers.

A large hill on one side of the pond shaded the water near its base and, Atkin discovered, water in the shade of the hill would freeze during the winter. Thinking of the hot summer months, Atkin would use a kind of trough to push more water on top of the one-inch thick layer of ice that had frozen overnight, repeating this process until he could cut whole blocks of ice from the pond.

Atkin built an icehouse, the first in St. George, to store the ice blocks in for summer use. "Ice to the Saints was a good thing in the hot Dixie summer," Anderson said. "Having a cold drink was the next best thing to being in heaven for them."

Squawberries were mixed with sugar to provide a substitute lemonade for the pioneers, according to Anderson. And soon after the icehouse was built, another room was added beneath. This room was dubbed "the ice cream room" and a container of ice cream was always on hand to cool the pioneers after a long day's work.

The pond had another use after anti-polygamy laws were passed in 1886, Anderson said. With the new laws, some of the stauncher believers in polygamy moved to Dixie, thinking the Washington County area was far enough away from Salt Lake City to escape federal prosecution. LDS Church President Wilford Woodruff was

one of those who moved to Dixie. But the long arm of the law reached even into Dixie, and raids were sponsored from time to time to round up the polygamists. Woodruff was one of the luckier pioneers and, when word came by telegraph of an impending raid, he would hide on the pond in a type of houseboat, complete with a bed and stove. He would push the boat into the reeds and hide until the federal marshals had left.

Nearby Bloomington was one of the largest pioneer settlements in the area, and the first stone home was built there, Anderson said. The town was originally named St. James.

Lars Larsen, one of the first settlers, began the St. James Broom Co. there, in response to the need for some way to clean rugs thrown over the dirt floors in the pioneer homes.

Anderson said while his idea is purely conjecture, he thinks Bloomington got its current name because some of the Swiss settlers in the Santa Clara area would refer to the town as "Broom City," because of the broom factory there. The Swiss pronunciation of "broom" was something like "bloom," and the name stuck.

Bloomington was unique, said Anderson, because it was one of the few towns that had its own newspaper. It was something like the "Mother Earth News" is today, he said, more of a newsletter, with the settlers exchanging recipes, ideas and new and better ways to do things.

Malaria and the great flood of 1889 played a part in the town's deterioration, but it was one of a small number of towns that lived past the turn of the century. There are still a few of the pioneer homes from that era in the area, Anderson said, but they are hard to find as

they are situated below a hill.

The settlement of Tonaquint, just south of the Black Hill, is now the home of various businesses in the area. It was a small town, settled by Rufus Allen, who moved to the Dixie area with Jacob Hamblin. Allen became tired of Hamblin's "too serious" attitude and doing everything "Hamblin's way," said Anderson, and moved downriver from where Hamblin had established the Fort Clara/Santa Clara area.

Wanting to break the "too serious" mold of Hamblin, Allen built his town around a more playful theme. He named the town "Never Sweat" to begin with, and would change the name on a whim. "Licksillet" and "Never Stop" were also names of the town at other times.

Brigham Young's diary shows 12 people lived in Tonaquint at one time. He marked the number while visiting the town, Anderson said. When the great flood came, it washed out a large amount of the farmland around Tonaquint and the town soon died out.

Harrisburg, reached by way of Leeds, "was a very unique town," said Anderson. It was first established as Harrisville by Moses Harris, who began building near the Virgin River. When farmland was washed out in 1889, the town moved to higher ground nearby and was renamed Harrisburg.

Folklore of the area says that Harrisburg was inhabited by Silver Reef miners and gentiles. It was known as a "wild and wicked" town, and LDS missionaries were sent there to teach the church's doctrine.

One story tells about two missionaries visiting the town. They knocked on the door of a miner, who, it turns out, was very drunk and threw them out of his yard.

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The missionaries walked to the edge of the town, where they kicked the dirt off their shoes and clothes. This action was symbolic and meant that they would have nothing more to do with the town. The town eventually dwindled and died.

The most famous of all southern Utah ghost towns is Silver Reef, Anderson said. When silver was discovered there around 1870, mines in the Pioche, Nev., area were drying up. The Nevada miners simply picked up their homes and moved them, piece by piece, to

Silver Reef. The "stampede" brought in nearly 2,000 people and during its heyday boasted eight stores, six saloons, two breweries, six dancehalls and more, Anderson said.

Three separate graveyards in the area show the inhabitants were made up of Catholics, Protestants and Chinese workers. Few Mormons lived there, said Anderson.

The Catholic graveyard holds a gambler by the name of Henry Clark, who was known as a "cheat." One night he had broken the bank in a Silver Reef casino, and was then asked to leave. While arguing with the manager, the lights went off and when they came back on, Clark was lying dead from a gunshot. With all the money from his winnings that night, he was given a fancy funeral and headstone to mark his grave.

A large population of Chinese were brought in to work in the mines. They brought opium with them, and many of their opium-based medicines were used in town. A number of opium producing factories could be found in Silver Reef at that time.

The Chinese were buried with a cache of food for "the journey to the free land," said Anderson. Nearby Indians soon learned of this and would sneak over to the graves at night for a free meal. Later, when the town dried up along with the silver vein, a wealthy Chinese businessman in San Francisco learned of the graveyard. He had the site dug up and the bodies shipped back to China for burial there.

With the 1889 flood ruining a great deal of farmland and an Indian massacre of a small family around the turn of the century, settlers in the smaller towns moved into the larger towns for protection.

There are still a number of ghost towns in Washington County where some of the original buildings can still be seen. Anderson said people wonder why there are not more buildings at the sites, which once housed a number of settlers. "The pioneers were extremely practical and building materials were hard to find," said Anderson. So the settlers moved their homes along with them, tearing down the structure and taking what building material they could.

Above Hurricane, there is the ghost town of Mountain Dell, and along the highway to Zion National Park, there are some pioneer buildings in Virgin, Rockville and Springdale. Ghost towns along the route include Dalton, Grafton, Adventure, Northrop and Shunesburg.

Along I-15 to Leeds, there are Harrisburg, Silver Reef with parts of buildings still intact, and some ruins in Red Cliff Park. Between Silver Reef and Red Cliff Park, there are the remains of a home that was part of a movie set, "They Came to Cordoba," starring Gary Cooper.

In the St. George area, there is Tonaquint, Bloomington, Atkinville and a little-known ghost town site of Price. Price sits between Bloomington and Atkinville, just a mile off an obscure dirt road.

THE STORY OF ATKINVILLE,
A ONE-FAMILY VILLAGE

by
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STORY OF ATKIN VILLE, A ONE-FAMILY VILLAGE

Uncle Bill Atkin, the oldest of grandfather William Atkin's seven sons, stood on a low pudding rock hill overlooking the Virgin River and watched incredulously the destruction a flood was bringing to his land. Usually the river bordered by grass didn't give them any trouble, but today the Virgin River wasn't living up to her name.

There had been thunderstorms on the Markagunt Plateau upstream and the wandering little river had been transformed into a destructive torrent that was destroying dams, ditches, farms, roads, and villages. Uncle Bill watched a wall of water hurl itself over his alfalfa field and saw the tumbling haybocks mix in with the ^{STOCKS} chicken coops, corral gates, fence poles, currant bushes and willows that had come from further upstream.

With a single gulp, the flood swallowed the duck pond, then widened the canal that ran along the base of the hill on which he stood. Great chunks of the wheat land were undermined and fell heavily into the stream. "Oh, Lord, not the fruit trees," Uncle Bill prayed as the river headed toward the orchard and one by one, many of the peach, pear, plum and apple trees toppled into the churning water.

That was the breaking point; Uncle Bill could bear no more. Tears rolled down his rugged cheeks. He shook his clenched fists savagely at the roaring flood and shouted in a strong quavering voice, "You may be a virgin to some folks, but you're nothing but a raging whore to me!" He then turned and walked down the hill muttering, "By hell, I gotta get home and tell Liza." This marked

the beginning of the end of the little settlement.¹

But, before all this happened, William and Rachel Atkin and nine of their ten children lived and prospered in this area-- one of the most isolated spots of southwestern Utah. This big flood took place about 1905.

BACKGROUND OF WILLIAM ATKIN

William Atkin began as a farmer in England. He was strong, ambitious, resourceful and adaptable. He was born in Empingham, England, in the country of Rutland, on the 27th of March, 1835, of poor parents. The only schooling he had was before he was seven years old. He was religiously inclined and went to all different kinds of churches. His mind was mixed up because he feared Hell, but didn't know what to do. He had been frightened by the Methodist's, who had given him a picture of Hell, and he often wished that he had never been born. In 1852, age 17, he stopped to hear a Mormon missionary on the street who sang, prayed and talked. The missionary quoted ^{from} the street and people had gathered around him. He gave scripture, including "And I saw another angel flying in the midst of heaven having the everlasting gospel..." (John 14:6-7). He was impressed by the two missionaries and he continued to attend the meetings until he was baptized on September 12, 1852. He became very active

¹Paraphrased from Grace Atkin Woodbury. THE Story of Atkinville, (Salt Lake City: Publisher Unknown, April, 1957), p. 1.

in the church and then he met, fell in love with and married a new convert to the church.²

He married Rachel Thompson, who was four days younger than William. About two years later, they decided to go to America and left Liverpool, February 28, 1855, for Philadelphia where they arrived penniless. They found work thirty miles away and helped other immigrants less fortunate than themselves to move on westward. He was very industrious and could find work, even though no one else could find it. More than four years later, with a good record of ~~help~~^{aid} people, they left the East and went to Florence in the Missouri River, where immigrants were gathering to go to Salt Lake City. They had two children.³

They moved to Salt Lake City on November 10, 1859. They stayed there until in the fall of 1868, ^{when} he was called by the church to move to St. George. It was a thriving settlement when William and Rachel and their five children arrived there. He helped with the temple and the tabernacle. They lived ⁱⁿ St. George for about nine years and then moved.

THE FOUNDING OF ATKINVILLE

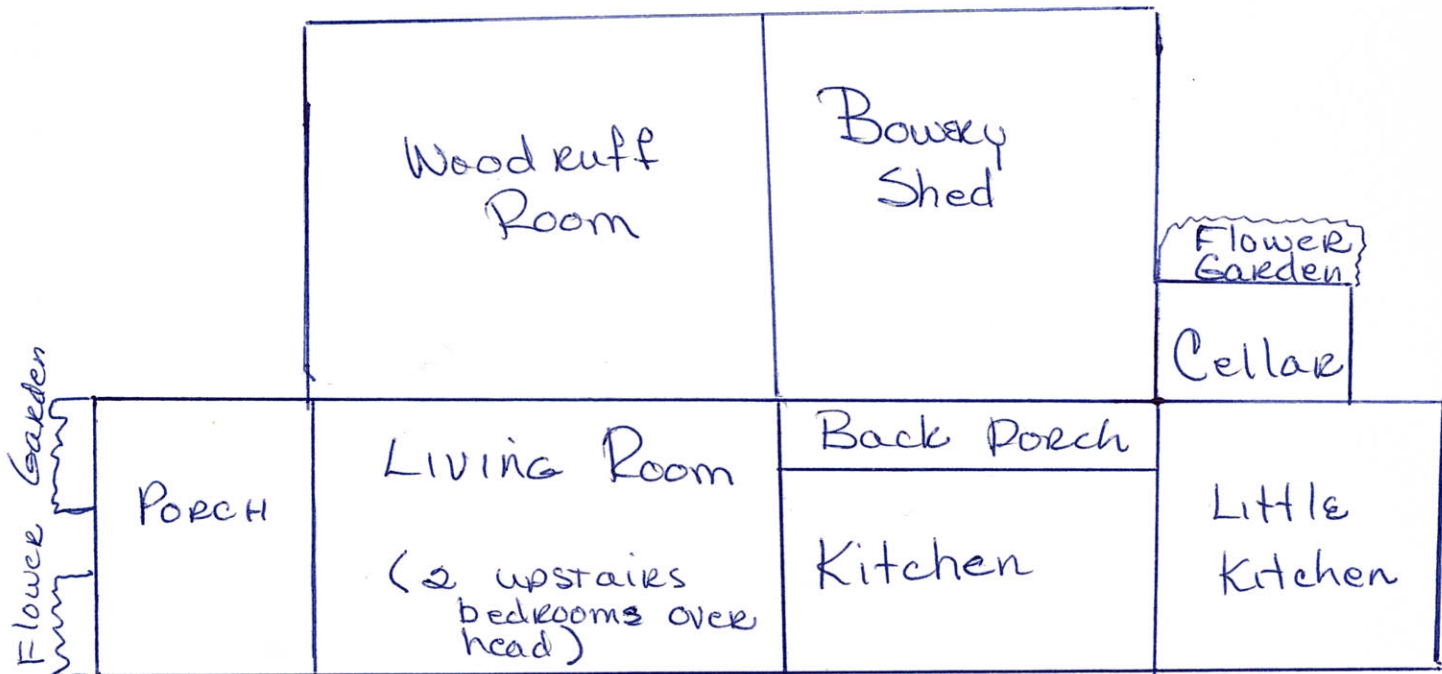
There isn't very much information about the founding of Atkinville. It was explored by William when he was working at Price City, about two miles from St. George. Price City was the first experiment of the United Order of the ^{Church} Chruch. He finally decided to move to this spot where he picked out and from then on,

²Ibid., P. 5.

³Ibid., p. 6.

it took about two years to change it into a farm. It grew into a small village as the family grew by marriage. The village did well for about 25 years (1877-1905). Then the river began flooding all of the time and William moved out.⁴

When he first found the place, he picked a good spot where there was a small pond, where he could irrigate his crops. Before moving his family to the farm, he built a stone house from rocks at hand in the area and later he built a smaller house across the yard for his young brother and his wife, but they did not like the place and soon moved back to St. George. He had a comfortable home.



⁴Ibid., p. 10.

Schooling for the Atkin children was difficult. The seven younger children walked to Price City, but they didn't have to attend for many years. Beyond these years, the children got their education mainly from nature. As they grew older, some of the boys wanted to go to the Brigham Young Academy at Provo, but circumstances always prevented fruition. Then, some of them went on missions for the church.⁵

Atkinville consisted of three homes, cattle and horse corrals, stackyards for hay and grain, hay sheds,, a grainary, pigpens and chicken coops. It was a good-sized farm. There was no vegetation around the house, except two small ^{tamarix} tamarix trees by the front porch and small flower gardens watered by hand. Winds often blew through the gap and left sand all over the house, in the food, and beds. Rachel was heard to exclaim by one of her children, "Nothing tries my faith so much as one of these sand storms; I feel like apostatizing." But still, with all the troubles they had, they still had peace, and they owned the place, which made it all worthwhile.

"And yet there was the peace of isolation, the restfulness of silence, the total absence of neighbors. There was also a sense of ownership. The day's needed doings brought the luxury of wholesome physiological fatigue without weariness. At night a breeze from the river, cool and sweet with the fragrance of willows along its banks, blows over the parched farm."⁶

After the chores were finished in the evening and supper was over, it was pleasant after a long hot day to walk down the long tamarix-bordered land to the orchard, the garden, or to the duck pond, especially when a full moon glorified the hills, fields,

⁵ Ibid., p. 11.

⁶ Grace Atkin Woodbury. The Story of Atkinville, (Salt Lake City: Publisher Unknown, April, 1957), p. 13.

and river; but at dusk hordes of mosquitoes from the low pasture land drove the strollers back to the stone houses that were too hot to stay in. The people had to haul their water in and they were always low on it. They had trouble getting enough water to wash their many clothes and for all the bathes. The water was never wasted.⁷

William sometimes took his produce---pigs, chickens, fruit and soghum, to the mining camps of the region where he usually found buyers. This was a source of ready cash that helped to buy the things they needed that could not be raised on the farm. According to tradition, on one trip to the mines at Pioche, Nevada, he was "held up" twice by highwaymen on the way back home, but neither time did they find his money. He had hidden his \$20 gold pieces in the bottom of a cleverly plugged hole bored in one of the legs of his wood rack that he used on his wagon in place of a wagon box. So he got home with all his money and gladly paid an honest tithe. Not only did he go on trips, but Rachel, his wife, went to see her daughter in Sanpete county. Hebe was a good cook for a man and when she was gone, he cooked. On one of her trips with William and the girls to see their daughter, Al gripped about Hebe's cooking, so was elected to take over. After talking it over with the boys, he decided to serve chicken and dumplings. "Anybody can cook a chicken and stir up some dumplings." So he killed and dressed the chickens and put them in the pot without salt or other seasoning. When he mixed the dumplings up, he forgot to put in the baking powder and shortening. At dinner, he proudly

⁷Paraphrased from Grace Atkin Woodbury, The Story of Atkin-
ville, (Salt Lake City: Publisher Unknown, April, 1957), p. 20.

served it to the boys. He soon found that his efforts were not appreciated. The boys called the chicken tough and tasteless and the dumplings soggy. He told them what they could do if they didn't like it. Dack in disgust, picked a dumpling off his plate and threw it at Al. It caught Al on the side of the head and floored him.⁸

Wilford Woodruff became acquainted with the Atkins and he often came out there for many reasons, one of which was hiding. In those days they were all afraid of having a "raid" because it was against the law to live ^{polygamy} polygamists. There seems to have been quite a few. William even built an extra room onto his house for Wilford. They were the closest of friends. They shared each others' joys and sorrows, happy marriages, home building, trips, floods, fires, friends, foes, sickness, and health. William could have had two wives, but Rachel would not stand for it. She held tight.

After the flood in 1906, ^{wrong dates} Williams was completely discouraged and he moved away. Soon after that Atkinville declined. William passed away on May 22, 1901 and Rachel followed him in June, 1903. From their obituaries we get the following:

"Brother Atkin was a faithful Latter-day-saint and died in the full hope of a glorious resurrection and Sister Atkin died as she lived a faithful Latter-day-saint. Gladly they lived and gladly they died."⁹

The village of Atkinville went with them.

⁸ Ibid., p. 28.

⁹ Grace Atkin Woodbury. The Story of Atkinville, (Salt Lake City: Publisher Unknown, April, 1957), p. 37.

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president of the Women's Republican organization in St. George. She was later honored by the Literary Arts Club as an Orchid Lady.

She supported her husband in



Leona Cox Atkin

his many civic and church positions and as an active member of the LDS Church, has served in the Primary, Relief Society, ward choir as president and for 66 years as a loyal visiting teacher. Her church service was highlighted by her service as the St. George LDS Temple Matron, where she served for nine and one half years. She continued for many years as a temple ordinance worker. She loved the St. George area and was very supportive of others throughout her life and was a strong Dixie College supporter.

Surviving family members include: four sons and one daughter: R. Clayton Atkin, Lee C. Atkin, Sidney J. Atkin, J. Ralph Atkin and Mrs. Harry (Lou Jean) Lundin, all of St. George; 34 grandchildren; 68 great grandchildren and one great great grandchild; one brother and three sisters: V. Loraine Cox, Mrs. Walter (Irene) Brooks and Noma Bently, all of St. George and Mrs. Athe (Marie) Meeks of West Valley, Utah. Two sons, Bruce C. Atkin and Dennis W. Atkin, preceded her in death.

Funeral services will be held Wednesday, January 29, 1992 at 11:00 AM at the St. George LDS Fifth Ward Chapel, 85 South 400 East. Friends may call at the Metcalf Mortuary, 300 West St. George Boulevard on Tuesday evening from 6 to 8 PM and on Wednesday from 9 to 10:30 AM prior to services. Interment in the St. George City Cemetery. In Lieu of flowers contributions to the Rudger C. and Leona C. Atkin Scholarship fund at Dixie College are suggested.

Leona Cox Atkin

St. George, Utah- Leona Cox Atkin, age 86, died Thursday, January 23, 1992 in St. George after a short illness. She was born December 21, 1905 in St. George to Warren and Mary Etta Lee Cox. She married her High School Sweetheart, Rudger Clawson Atkin February 5, 1925 in the St. George LDS Temple. He preceded her in death July 22, 1989.

A lifetime resident of St. George, Mrs. Atkin grew up in the Northwest area of the city known then as "Sandtown". She liked sports and enjoyed swimming in Dodge's pond with her family and friends. She worked at the Arrowhead Hotel doing laundry and waiting tables. Her family enjoyed many outings to Panaca and traveled to California once a year to swim in the ocean.

Active in the community, she helped organize the first Alice Louise Reynolds Literary Club of St. George and was the first