

Christmas 1852

CAPS OFF FIRST EVENTFUL YEAR IN CEDAR CITY

by Jay Jones

FOR IRON COUNTY TODAY

Cedar City was settled in November 1851 by 36 men sent by Brigham Young to establish iron manufacturing in southern Utah.

The settlers camped near a knoll off what is now North Main Street in Cedar City. They originally lived out of their wagon boxes, but soon enclosed a fort nearby (referred to by Morris and Kathryn Shirts as the “Compact Fort” in their book, *A Trial Furnace*). Logs were cut nearby and used to construct homes inside the fort.

The Shirts’ book documents 67 men and 27 women living and working in Cedar City by the end of December 1851.

Brigham Young visited Iron County in May 1852. His message for the iron workers of Cedar City included “the fullest expectation that you will bend your united and untiring Efforts to this purpose [manufacturing iron] with the fullest assurance that but a few weeks shall roll around before the cheering intelligence will salute our Ears, – ‘send your orders – we are prepared to fill them. The Iron is piled up in our houses and in our streets – send your teams and carry it away.”

However, building an iron manufacturing operation in the frontier West proved to be complicated. Partially successful results would require more time than the few weeks optimistically hoped for by Brigham Young.

President Young also recognized that the “Compact Fort” was in a vulnerable position, and that an enemy gathered on the nearby knoll could have some strategic advantages in a potential attack. He told the settlers to move their homes and build another fort in a new location across Coal Creek and to the southwest (referred to as “Plat A” in the Shirts’ book). This location later proved to be prone to flooding, and in a few years, settlers ended up moving their homes once again.

In May 1852, a stake was

organized for Parowan and Cedar City. John C. L. Smith was the stake president, with John Steele appointed 1st Counselor and Henry Lunt as 2nd Counselor.

On October 17, 1852, Brigham Young wrote: “The iron manufacturing will receive a new impetus. Franklin D. Richards and Erastus Snow, having formed a company, will make it their business. The brethren furnished a specimen at conference which, although showing the result of faithful efforts, was not as good as could be desired. The sulfur in the coal, they say, is the reason, as it flowed freely and seemed to separate. It is strongly hoped that their continued efforts will be crowned with success.”

Erastus Snow and Franklin Richards visited Cedar City as agents of the Deseret Iron Company and purchased the iron works on Coal Creek.

Investments in the company had been made by several individuals in Great Britain. Several local iron workers also subscribed to stock in the company.

In a letter to the

Deseret News, Erastus Snow wrote: “Considerable excitement prevailed through the County, on the subject of iron at the time of our arrival, much heightened by the arrival of those whom we had recently sent there who had been operators in the Iron business in Wales and in Pennsylvania.”

As 1852 drew to a close, time was taken to celebrate Christmas. From the diary of Henry Lunt, we gain a few insights into some Christmas celebrations in Cedar City in 1852.

For December 23, Lunt writes: “Tremendous stormy night of wind,

rain and snow from the south, snow on the ground about 4 inches. Br. John Hamilton and George Shirts came with a carriage and pair of horses for me and wife and a few others for to go to a party at Br Hamilton’s.” His home was located at Shirts’ settlement, present day Hamilton Fort.

Lunt continues: “Myself, Wife, James, Mary and Ann Chatterley went with them, got to Br. Hamilton’s about 5 o’clock P.M. It was very cold, and the Mountains looked most beautiful and sublime all white over with snow. Enjoyed a most excellent supper, afterwards enjoyed ourselves in dancing and talking, and speaking on principle. The party consisted merely of us, and Br. & Sister Shirts. Snowed and stormed all night. Very strong south wind”

For Friday, December 24, Lunt records: “Very sharp frost, snow on the ground at Shirts’ settlement 3 inches, drifted in some places 2 feet deep. . . . Br.’s George Shirts and John Hamilton brought us back in his carriage, arrived home about Eleven o’clock. Went up to the Iron works. Attended the dinner party in the School house at 3 o’clock P.M. [A] very excellent dinner was provided and about 60 feasted thereof, and perfect order was kept.

“After dinner was over there was an intermission until about ½ past five P.M. when the guests again assembled together in the school house and after singing and prayer, dancing commenced and together with songs, glees and pieces which were performed, the amusements were continued until about 12 P.M.

“The Choir then went about the Fort singing Christmas Songs which serenaded the Town most beautifully.

They then returned to the school house and partook of some refreshments, and received some instructions and danced again until daylight. The house was most beautifully decorated with evergreens interspersed with artificial flowers, and a number of pictures hung around the room.”

Henry Lunt’s journal provides the following description for Christmas Day, 1852: “Fine pleasant day -- very sharp frost, Meeting at one o’clock P.M.

I spoke some little on the birthday of Christ and the life he led, and how he came to redeem the world, followed by an excellent and appropriate discourse by Bishop [Philip] Smith. Myself and wife dined with bro and sister Walker and a small party. Had an excellent dinner of good Roast Beef and plumb pudding.

“About six o’clock the meeting house was crowded with brethren and sisters ready for dancing. Myself and wife

HISTORICAL
THREADS



Henry Lunt pictured with a historical marker indicating the Deseret Iron Works.



PHOTOS COURTESY JAY JONES

see 1852 » 13

1852

« CONTINUED FROM PAGE 9

attended the party, after dancing a little while the room became so densely crowded that it was impossible for to dance with any degree of pleasure, in consequence of which I preached a little and called upon others to do so. I invited the brethren to make a contribution of provision for to give to the Indians and take it to the Bishop. After some time preaching, the room became a little thin[n]ed and we commenced dancing again.”

All did not go perfectly. Lunt continues: “About 11 o’clock Br. Adsheed interrupted the amusements by stamping the floor as he was dancing. I invited him to not make such a noise, but he continued worse, and I then stop[p]ed the dancing and reproved him severely, and he insulted me by saying that he should do as he liked. But I told him he could not do that. In a short time the meeting was dismissed.”

On December 25, 1852, the Deseret News in Salt Lake City published a letter from Henry Lunt which summarized recent activities in the Iron Mission.

“Sir: – The weather has been very severe for the last week; Snowfall eight inches, but is now nearly all disappeared, and the weather is becoming warm and pleasant. Our little number has been increased this season by some fifteen families.



Another historical marker near the hospital symbolizes the first Cedar Encampment.

JAY JONES

“While Br. Blad[e]n was searching into the Blast Furnace about a fortnight since, he discovered a quantity of pure malleable iron of very superior quality run in a solid lump some 400 pounds weight. The intelligence has caused considerable excitement amongst the iron mongers: and the greatest difficulty, in my opinion, is the Ore is so very rich that we are not acquainted with a system easy and simple enough to convert it into Pig Metal. We have been favored with a visit from Br.’s Snow and Richards, and have had our souls refreshed with their inspired instructions.

“There has been a thorough organization for the manufacture of Iron under the firm of the Deseret Iron Company. A large sum has already been subscribed, and extensive contracts made, and the manufacture of Iron goods are certain, and all that is wanted is Mormon Capital: ‘Bone and Sinew.’”

Cedar City was off to a promising start.