



Face of Fillmore

By Sherry Shepard
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Fillmore City is home to one of the most attractive cemeteries in Utah, the destination this month for many relatives of our forefathers. Located at the southeast corner of town, this serene spot offers an inviting look into the past of the early settlers as well as their descendants.

A few years ago, the entrance to the cemetery was changed from the old traditional one to a larger one with a circular paved area where several flags are displayed with our national flag standing in a place of prominence. The five other flags are those of the branches of the military: Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines and Coast Guard.

Shortly after the settlement of Fillmore, plots were laid out as a final resting place for the residents. In the years that followed grass was planted, the pine trees donated, planted, and watered by hand by Oscar Anderson and his grandsons. A sprinkling system was added later on to help keep the grass green and the trees watered. Constant care is still given to keep the cemetery one of the most beautiful in the state.



Old Fillmore City Cemetery entrance

A close look at the history of the cemetery says much about the way our forefathers laid it out. It was the practice at the time to locate cemeteries on dry hillsides outside of towns and away from water sources and irrigated fields. This was a public health issue. The worry was that those who died of communicable diseases might contaminate the water sources for the town and cause additional problems.

The plots in the cemetery were laid out in a grid much like city blocks although smaller in size. This was called the Plat of Zion and was given by Brigham Young for communities to follow.

Another reason the cemetery was placed away from town was to allow for future growth. As the capital of the Utah Territory, there were plans in place for much growth in the city.

A visit to the cemetery reveals much about those resting there.

Fillmore was settled beginning on October 28, 1851. On March 20, 1852, Leroy King, the year and half old son of Thomas and Matilda King, died of scarlet fever. Family histories show that his grave was the beginning of the cemetery in its present location.

The first burials that were officially recorded in the Fillmore City archives took place in 1854 with four that year.

The first person recorded as being interred in Fillmore's cemetery was George Nixon. He was buried there on January 19, 1854. The records showed he died from "inflammation" at the age of 35. George Nixon was born in Valenciennes, France, August 16, 1818. He was the seventh son of William and Margaret who were originally from Leek, England. George lived with his parents until he married Fanny Hart in 1839. In 1840 they were baptized into the LDS church by an elder named R. Rushton. In September 1844, they left England with their two children, Charlotte and Emma. After traveling for 60 days, they arrived in Nauvoo. A son, George William, was born to the couple in St. Louis, Missouri in 1847. The family came west with the Saints, and in 1853 they moved to Fillmore. After George's death, his wife and children moved to Holden in 1855 and were among the first ten families there.

Next came the burial of young John Russell on February 1. This three-year-old died of scarlet fever as did his one-year-old brother William. Allen and Harriet Hutchins Russell have six children buried side-by-side. After John and William (who was buried on June 1, 1854), a third child died in 1856, two more in 1862 just ten days apart and a sixth was stillborn. Stopping by these graves, one cannot help thinking of the heartache these years must have brought to the Russell family.

Cynthia Eldredge, originally of New York State, was buried in Fillmore in April that first year the cemetery was in use. She was among the earliest of Fillmore's settlers, coming in 1851.

While reading about these is informative, we find through a letter from Robert L. Hatton in 2009 that there were other burials before these. Mr. Hatton had read the Face of Fillmore and graciously added his family history. I certainly appreciate knowing the "rest of the story". He explains that he and his family were in Fillmore to decorate graves for Memorial Day that year and had bought a local newspaper. The Face of Fillmore in it was about the first burials, so he wrote to complete the information.

Mr. Hatton explained the Hatton story. Quoting from his letter: "The first 'white man' buried in the Fillmore cemetery was William Hawthorn Hatton who died on September 13, 1853 while standing guard at Fort Fillmore. The word "white man" is in parentheses because according to family history, there were a couple of Indians buried there first in unmarked graves. William H. Hatton and his wife Adelia Almire Wilcox Hatton were traveling to California and stopped in Fillmore for a rest and supplies. William was reportedly killed by Indians although there is some question as to the truth of that. Adelia was a member of the Mormon Church, unbenounced to William, and a theory surfaced that he was killed to get his wife away from him, a non-believer, and keep her and her two kids in the Mormon faith. A new headstone was placed on the grave of William H. Hatton by the Daughters of the Utah Pioneers many years ago, and is the only one I remember every seeing although I was told it was originally made of stone. The Daughters of the Utah Pioneers also placed a plaque on Main Street honoring William H. Hatton and stating that he was the first person buried in Fillmore. I'm not sure if it is still there or not. Adelia remained in Fillmore and later entered a polygamist marriage as the second wife. This turned out to be an abusive situation and she was granted a temple divorce by Brigham Young. She was later sealed to Heber C. Kimball, believing that she needed to be sealed to a good man to obtain her salvation. She never lived with Heber C. Kimball as a wife but is buried in Kanosh, Utah as Adelia Kimball. Adelia's kids later had her sealed to their father William H. Hatton. There followed a long line of Hatton's from the Fillmore area. "

Once again, my thanks to those like Mr. Hatton and many others who are willing to share their family stories with the Face of Fillmore.