

The Face of Fillmore

By Sherry Shepard

May brings patriotic thoughts and with it visits to places that remind us of our great American heritage and the servicemen who gave their all to preserve it.

A ride around Fillmore has a few sentimental stops. The most prominent patriotic sight is the huge flag that flies on the hill at the North Park. Being visible for blocks around, Fillmore's citizens have all enjoyed this addition to our community. Going south along Main Street, one should stop at the Millard County Courthouse. There you will find the military wall with names of hundreds of our county's servicemen over the years. The National Guard Armory once housed a unit with history going back to the Korean Conflict and others since. The American Legion Hall is another historic building built in 1924 and became part of the National Historic Registry in 2011. The Gold Star Park at the curve on the south end of Main Street is a smaller reminder of our past. Finally ending with the impressive flag display at the new entrance to the cemetery, we see displayed flags of all of the Armed Services.

This year's Memorial Weekend brought another patriotic ride I would recommend. We traveled to Vernal where we stayed with our daughter and her family. One afternoon, we rode up Dry Fork Canyon only a few miles to Remember the Main Park, formerly known as Merkley's Pasture. Their LDS Ward includes all of the homes in the canyon as well as spilling out in the valley a short distance. During warmer weather all of their ward activities are held in this park with its covered pavilion, large grassy area, children's playground, and a few individual picnic tables tucked into shaded areas around the park. The original park was built by the Lions' Club in 1943.

Across the canyon road from the park is an immense rock cliff approximately 400 feet in height. Partway down its face is the painting of a large American flag and the words "Remember the Main". Just to the left and slightly above the flag it also says, "Pearl Harbor". The names of the painters are written on the rock face. It is mind-boggling to think of doing the painting, obviously suspended from ropes down the cliff's face.

We all remember hearing about the tragedy at Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, when the United States fleet was bombed by the Japanese, leading to the entrance of the United States in World War II.

The sinking of the U.S.S. Main is a lesser-known event which also brought the United States in to a war – the Spanish American War.

The American Battleship Main was blown up the harbor at Havana, Cuba in 1898.

A member of the Utah House of Representatives, Billy Gibson, thought of the idea to paint the flag and motto on Ashley Canyon as a tribute. He paid Leo Voight \$50 to paint it high

off the ground to make it safe from vandals. Volunteers lowered him 225 feet over the edge of the cliff. He completed the painting using a mixture of lamp black and linseed oil. The flag has since been repainted using modern paints.

Looking to our right, a huge American flag is visible silhouetted against the sky. The flagpole is anchored to the top of the tallest sandstone cliff in that area of the canyon.

The original flagpole and flag are credited to Chellus and Ernest Caldwell, who were grandsons of Mormon Battalion member Matthew Caldwell. He was one of the first to settle Dry Fork Canyon. Chellus wrote, "Ernest and I thought it would a good idea to put a flagpole on top of the high rock directly west of the park. After getting permission from the Lions' Club, completing the project turned out to be a difficult and hazardous experience. When we finally hoisted the flag and saw from the park how beautiful it was, we felt more than repaid for our efforts: the flag could be seen for miles around."

When the lease for the park was revoked, the flag was taken down. The old pole can still be seen, but it has been many years since a flag flew on it.

In 1999, another flag was put on the pole on this property which now belongs to Doug Murphy. The idea for the new flag came as a group of Boy Scouts approached Doug and asked if they could fly a flag on his land. He said to them, "Why not put it up there on the rock?"

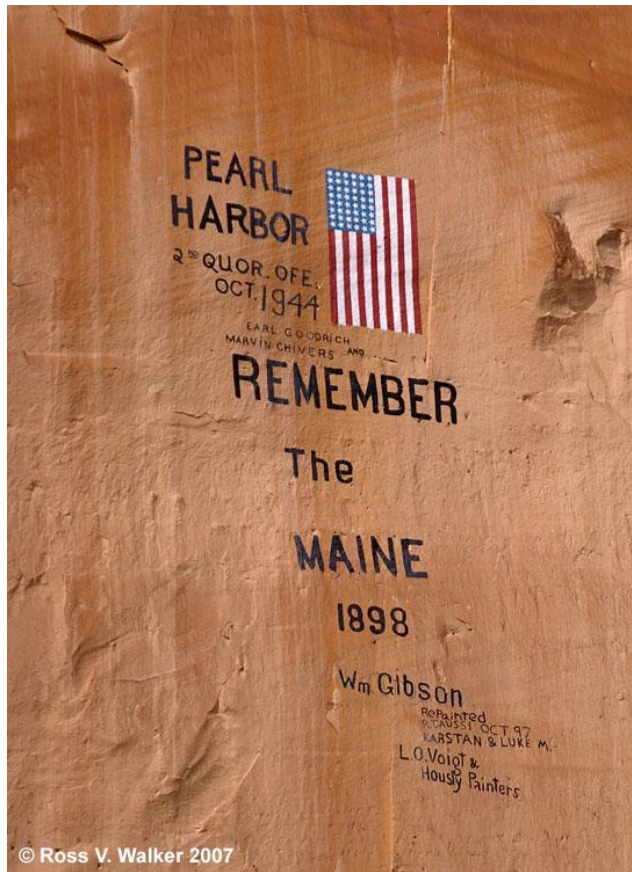
The first flag could hardly be seen from the canyon road so Lou Ann and Randy Merrell donated a larger flag, 14 feet by 21 feet, to mount on the flagpole. Another problem: this flag was too large for the pole. At this point Ivan Merrell decided to replace the flagpole as an Eagle Scout Project. He received help from his father Randy, as well as Doug Murphy and Kim Rinderknecht.

Because of the danger involved in the project, the flagpole was relocated 50 feet to the northwest. This peak was eight feet higher.

It was impossible to carry the forty-foot pipe up the winding trail to the summit, so the pipe and other materials were airlifted. Work began on July 4, 2000. By the end of the day two support pipes were in cemented in and on July 7, the larger flagpole was put into place and bolted in.

Multiple times each year, a group of the flag enthusiasts ascend the cliff to replace the weather-worn flag. This happened last week as we rode by. A daring group was busy high on the cliff with their changing of the flag.

On a rock at the ranch below, an inscription explains why we honor our flag: "The American flag is a symbol of our freedom and flies to honor those who have given their lives for our country. GOD BLESS AMERICA"



The Main Flag



Dry Fork Flag



Flag at Murphy's

