Peaceful is Their Rest!

The Monument at Mount Pisgah Bearing Many Familiar Names—The Old Mormon Trail.

MOUNT PISGAH,
Union county, Iowa,
Sept. 20, 1893.

Editor Deseret News:

In visiting the waste places of Zion I find that each particular locality possesses its own peculiar merits, both historically and otherwise. Thus the elevation of ground on which I am standing at the present time is entitled to special mention as a sacred spot which consoole the earthly resting of about three hundred weary travelers—martyrs—yes, for such they were indeed. They were composed of men, women and children, assembling that memorable year, 1846, when one of the most flourishing cities in the state of Illinois was reduced to a mere village; were driven by a relentless mob from their comfortable homes out into the wilderness. There, exposed to snow, sleet, rains and storms, they perished by the wayside, while journeying toward the "land of the setting sun" in search of a new home, where they hoped to worship God in peace according to the dictates of their own conscience. Had the Saints, who were thus driven from Nauvoo, been permitted to remain in possession of their homes till the morning rays of the spring sun had forced away the chilly blasts of a severe winter, the death rate among the weary pilgrims would not have been so great—but bearing in mind that they were forced to leave in the beginning of the month of February, when the frost was severe enough to make a natural bridge of ice across the Father of Waters—the great Mississippi—who can wonder that so many perished? Had it not been for a kind Providence, and wise leaders who controlled the affairs of the "Church of Jesus?" In that memorable year, perhaps the great majority of the exiles would have closed their eyes in death before the then almost unknown and unbeaten prairies of Iowa could have been crossed and the banks of the Missouri reached. And this, in fact, was expected by many of those who drove out the people of God; and it was further anticipated by many that those of the exiles who did not succumb to the hardships and exposures of the journey would be cut up on reaching the Missouri, by the poisoned arrow and the sharp or blunt tomahawk in the hands of the Pottawattamie and Omaha Indians. But the Lord ruled it otherwise. It was Him who gave His wandering sons and daughters who were fleeing from a heinous religious persecution strength and endurance, both mentally and physically, in the midst of storm, snow and mud, to still cling to life, until a better day dawned upon them; and it was Him who softened the heart of the red man of the forest toward the weary Mormon brother, so that instead of murdering or harming the Saints the most timid Lamanites received them with such kindness and hospitality as their uncultured nature were capable of bestowing. And thus the "Camp of Israel," and the majority of those who were driven away from their homes in Nauvoo, lived to see the latter-day Saints permanently located in the valleys of the Rocky mountains.

I arrived at this place this morning and was kindly received by Mr. Albert C. White and family, who own a large farm of 500 acres that embraces the site of the old Mormon settlement called Mt. Pisgah. Mr. White is the man who superintendent the erection of the Pisgah monument, which was raised here on the old Mormon graveyard five years ago from means contributed by people in Utah.

Mount Pisgah now called Pisgah grove is situated in section 8, Jones township, Union county, Iowa, about six miles by road northwest of Afton, the nearest county seat, on the east bank of Grand river, about 82 miles due east of the Missouri river at a point opposite Plats mouth and about 160 miles (175 miles the way the called Saints traveled in 1846) west of the Mississippi river. It is also about 35 miles in an airline northwest of Garden grove, but the way the roads now run it is much farther.

Between the Pisgah hill and Grand river on the west is a fine strip of bottom land well cultivated and very productive. This is where the Mormon pilgrims had their revealed big field. There is considerable timber along the river at this point and the Pisgah hill is covered with groves of young oak and hickory trees. From the summit of the hill which is perhaps 200 feet above Grand river, the view is most excellent, especially in looking to the west, where beautiful farms, interspersed with groves of timber, greet the eye as far as it can reach.

As there are no traces left of the old Mormon settlement, except a few small mounds of earth—"depressions" or primitive chimneys, such as were built as necessary appendages to the old pioneer cabins—the attention of the visitor is at once directed to the old Mormon graveyard which occupies a conspicuous place on the west slope the Pisgah hill or ridge. Near the center of the graveyard, which contains just one acre of ground, stands the monument already referred to on the slope about 150 yards west of the top of the ridge. This monument rests upon a solid limb rock foundation four feet square and four feet deep, all in the ground. On top of this and level with the top of the ground is placed the base of the monument proper, which consists of a foundation two feet thick; next comes a square block of Italian marble, upon the top of which is placed the main shaft, nearly ten feet high and seventeen inches square at the base. The shaft consists of light-colored Italian marble and weighs 4200 pounds. It requires the combined physical strength and ingenuity of seven or eight able-bodied men to place it in position. The capstone is of the same material as the main shaft. The whole labor of making and raising the monument was superintended by Mr. White who added at great inconvenience for those in Utah who had the monument erected. The accompanying cut shows the east side of the monument, which is about fifteen feet high, exclusive of the finished foundation laid in the ground. The lettering is cut deep into the rock and is as follows:

The names on the north side of the monument are as follows:

Hyrum Smith	Wm. M. McIntire
Asa Dickson	Mr. Thompson
Gardner Stevens	[illegible]
Phineas Wing	Joseph Fish
[illegible]	[illegible]
Joseph Cook	Angelo Carter
[illegible]	[illegible] on the
Francis Gale	[illegible]
Mr. [illegible] and wife	Henry Jackson
[illegible]	[illegible]
McIntire	Hosea Stout
[illegible]	[illegible]
Joseph Harrgrave	Harvey A. Doty
Mr. Cook	

West side.

Rice T. H. Allen	Ann Gates Harris
Samuel Woolsonde	Lorenzo Harris and
Samuel Holladay	Parley Gardner
Salmon Gates	Sarah [illegible]
Joseph Taylor	Sarah [illegible]
Jonas Thayer	Mary [illegible]
Jesse Shedrick and wife	Anna Thomas Rogers
Clark Walker	Mary Adams Evans
Phebe Harris	Margaret Georgeline Independence

South side.

Esther Bailey Shipp	Elisha Whitney
Sophia Young	Betty Whitney
Helen Mohair	Widow Dana Whitney
Polly Wood	Elizabeth Adams
Lucinda Cox	Lucinda Adams
Eliza Cox	William P. Harris
Mary Davis	Lydia Ann Harris
Ann Campbell	Jessica Harris Adams
Betsy Whiting	Nancy Jeffersonville

The monument stands about 40 rods southwest of Mr. White's residence and about the same distance west of the Chicago, Rock Island and Western railway track; the hill at this point, which is at about the same height as the top of the monument, prevents a view of the same from the east, but from the railway track about a quarter of a mile south the cemetery is in plain view. In fact the monument can be seen for miles around from the west, north and south, even from the main Burlington railway line, which closes Grand river about two miles south of Pisgah. Our friends in Utah who contributed means to erect the present monument and fence the land paid Mr. White $40 for the ground which is enclosed with a respectable wire netting fence. A few of Lorenzo's poplars were planted in Utah all around the lot just inside the fence for the purpose of ornamentation and shade; but the unusually severe frosts during the winter of 1892-93 killed nearly all of them, so that only a very few are growing at the present time. There are, however, a number of native trees and smaller plants on the ground.

As Mr. White and myself made close survey of the grounds today we discovered among the undergrowth two or three small depressions, or sinkings, near the corner of the present enclosure, with the latitude 41 N. and 93 W. number of old graves are easily traced, from the fact that there are depressions in the ground, where there were no graves formerly. This, of course, is easily accounted for on natural principles. At Mr. White's farm house there are preserved two headstones with inscriptions on them, which were carried off from the old cemetery and used as steps by friends who occupied the premises some years ago. When Mr. White returned to his farm he was unable to place these stones where they stood originally, hence he has kept them at the house in order to preserve them.

About a quarter of a mile northeast of the monument on top of the hill is a beautiful grove, in the outer edge of which Mr. White pointed out the identical spot where the old Mormon meeting house once stood. It appears that at the time the Saints lived here they cut down most of the timber to make farms, but they left a little cluster of trees standing to give shade and protection to the spot where they met together to worship the Lord. In the summer season the meetings were sometimes held in the shade of the trees instead of in the meeting house. The fact that the place now is called Pisgah Grove, instead of Mount Pisgah, is due to the presence of said grove.

Mr. White's farm embraces most of the ground where the main Mormon settlement was situated in 1846-52. The monument stands near the south end of the farm. The old settlement consisted of one or more rows of houses erected on the top of the ridge which extends from Grand river on the southwest to a northeasterly direction. The houses were built with short sections of fencing between them so as to form the east line of the town, including the "Big Gulf," which lay between the ridge and Grand river, that stream serving as a fence on the west side, especially in times of high water. About a quarter of a mile east of the point where the monument stands, is a fine spring of pure water, it is called Pisgah spring and is the source (except in high water) of the little creek known as Pisgah branch which empties into Grand river about a mile below. The high elevation rising up between this little creek and Grand river is what is known as Pisgah Hill. It is supposed that this beautiful spring, which is said to be equal to any water to be found in the state of Iowa, was one of the main attractions for the Mormon pioneers who on account of its presence, located their temporary settlement on the Hope beyond, so that they could easily secure their drinking water from the spring, which they did.

It is writing of note that nearly all the streams in this neighborhood which were named by the Mormons still retain the original names. One a stream which was crossed by the old Mormon trail four miles east of Pisgah is still known by the appropriate name of Four Mile creek; another three miles further east is still called Seven Mile creek, this named by the Saints because it was seven miles east of Mount Pisgah. West of Pisgah are Three Mile creek and Twelve Mile creek, which denotes the respective distances west of the temporary settlement.

The old Mormon road across Grand river almost due west from where the monument stands, about half a mile distant, Mr. White says that when he and his folks first came into the county the old Mormon trail was a very good road; it had been fenced with good hedgerows and followed the straight line and had gradually made a smoother road nearly each year, so that heavy loads could be hauled through the country which would be impossible over the present road, which, of a fact, follows the main a less smoother section. Hence, and it seems quite clear that the Saints generally crossed the steep ridges and narrow ridges that intersect the highways. These ridges are very conspicuous in the vicinity of Grand river. The old Mormon trail was so well so beyond the land came into market.

About the time the last Saints left Mount Pisgah in 1852, arrangements were made to have the graves and tombstones many of the faithful were carried instead with an original intent. It appears, however, that only a small portion of the original ground was moved. William H. Lock, who was one of the early settlers of Union county (having located in and around Mt. Pisgah since 1850) tell me that he furnished nearly one hundred carts himself to help move the graves; but that some time afterwards a man by the name of D. T. Gatewood entered the land on which the graveyard stood, and being a person who appears by possession had little respect for the dead, he cut down the trees around the cemetery and used the material for constructing his barn and horse. This happened about 1855, when which time still stands, when the posts and fence was put up by Mr. White, the ground was not exposed to the trampling of cattle, hogs and other animals, which broke off the few footstones, mutilated the tombstones, and generally destroyed the sacred resting places of the dead. Subsequently the stones were carried off by people who resided in the neighborhood. About 17, White, who located at Mt. Pisgah in 1850 with the pioneers, tell me that some of these stones were a number of hundred stones, some of which were plain and full descriptions. He recollects distinctly that there was quite a handsome monument with the name of William Huntington on it; but that it was knocked down by the cattle which were allowed to roam over the ground at pleasure, and finally it was broken to pieces and the fragments carried off by the youngsters from the neighboring farms for whetstones.

Although so many in Utah have friends and relatives buried in the Pisgah grave-yard, I was informed, as I was the first person from Utah to visit the place where the monument was erected in 1893. Mr. White and family, who are fine, respectable people and friends to the people of Utah, invite others to call and see the monument and surrounding country. Any one coming east or west over the Burlington route should stop off at Afton, where Mr. White, if they request him to accompany, will meet them with team to convey them to Pisgah.

ANDREW JENSON.

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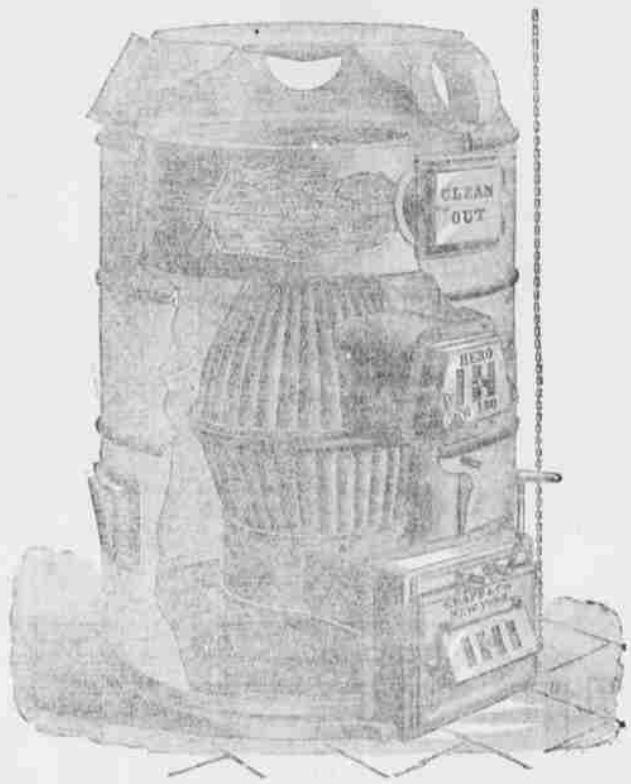

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