SAINTS ON THE GILA.

Ecclesiastically They Compose the St. Joseph Stake.

LIST OF WARDS AND OFFICERS.

Also the History of the Settlement, the Water Sources, the Products and the Prospects.

THATCHER, Graham Co., Arizona, May 3, 1894.

Editor Deseret News:

On the 13th of April last I finished my labors in Sonora, and in company with Elder James W. Hay left Oaxaca, with a light conveyance bound for Colonia Diaz. After traveling ten miles up the river we encamped at the foot of a high and almost perpendicular bluff for the night. In starting early the next morning our mules (after fording the river, at a point where the water was quite deep) refused to take us up the opposite bank, and wheeled suddenly around into the river again. With considerable exertion we saved the baggage from being dumped into the water and the vehicle from turning over; but it cost Bro. Hay an involuntary plunge bath, and his little daughter, who traveled with us, a genuine scare. The stupid animals were made to pay for their little "frolic" in speed, as the driver, somewhat offended at his undesirable contact with the cold water, did not forget to apply the lash; hence the hundred miles' travel to Diaz was completed within forty-eight hours after we had said goodbye to our friends on the Bavispe river. After spending Sunday, the 15th, at Diaz, Elder John S. Harris took me to Deming, N. M., from whence I traveled 119 miles by rail to Bowie station, in Arizona, where I arrived on the 19th.

On the 20th one of President Christopher Layton's stage coaches brought me safely to Solomonville, a distance of nearly forty miles. This is the county seat of Graham county, and being informed that the stage would stop here half an hour, I took a fifteen-minutes ramble through the town, which contains perhaps a thousand inhabitants. When I got back to the postoffice I found that the stage had gone on and left me on foot. Looking ahead I saw a Mexican on horseback traveling along at an easy gait. By doubling my own speed I soon overtook him, and my next endeavor was to put the half dozen Spanish words or more which I had learned in Mexico to the best possible advantage. By signs and words both I tried to make this Mexican understand that the "carro" (wagon) which he could see on the "camino real" (road) ahead of us had left me, and that I would like him to urge his "caballo" (horse) on and tell the "hombre" (man) who was driving to stop for me. "No sabe," was the reply. I tried to explain further, using two or three more Spanish words, but all to no purpose. Then I commenced to abuse him in Danish; but instead of getting angry, he looked pitifully at me. With "broken" Swedish and "unconnected" German I fared no better, and getting reconciled to my fate, I started out on foot, determined to reach Thatcher, the point of my destination, eight or nine miles away, at all hazards before night. Having walked half that distance, one of the brethren came along with a wagon and took me on board, and I arrived at Thatcher about half an hour after the stage got in. It took me ten days to "catch up" that half hour. For that length of time I was thirty minutes late in filling most of my appointments, and my experience with the stage was my standard excuse for this while laboring in the St. Joseph Stake of Zion. The stage driver, who was a new hand at the business, afterwards apologized and promised never to leave another missionary as he left me, so I forgave him and withhold his name from the public.

Arriving at Thatcher, I found that President Layton had not yet returned from the General Conference held in Salt Lake City, but his counselor, Elder William D. Johnson, "took me in," and I made his hospitable home my headquarters during my sojourn in this Stake.

From the time of my arrival in this Stake till date I have been busily engaged in gathering historical information about the Saints residing on the Gila river. I have held special meetings in all the settlements of the Saints here (Graham excepted), and have been successful in my labors, though I have found both ward and Stake records very imperfectly kept, in consequence of which I am afraid there will be "gaps" and "cuts" in the history of the St. Joseph Stake. This is partly due to incompetent clerks and partly to neglect of duty on the part of some who "could" but "would not."

The St. Joseph Stake of Zion comprises eight settlements of the Saints on the Gila river, and one ward (St. David) on the San Pedro river far off to the southwest. The numerical strength of the Stake consists of 406 families, [illegible] souls. There are one Patriarch (Philemon C. Merrill), 72 Seventies, 41 High Priests, 135 Elders, 22 Priests, 18 Teachers, 141 Deacons, 1,105 lay members and 909 children under eight years of age. Christopher Layton, formerly Bishop of Kaysville, Davis county, Utah, is the president of the Stake. Wm. D. Johnson, formerly Bishop of St. David, Arizona, is first, and M. H. Merrill, a son of Patriarch Philemon C. Merrill, is second counselor in the Stake presidency. Among the members of the High Council is Elder Henry G. Boyle, famous for his successful missionary labors in the Southern states and in other parts of the world.

The valley of the upper Gila, in which most of the Saints comprising the St. Joseph Stake live, is about 75 miles long, extending from southeast to northwest; the lower valley or river bottom varies in width from one-half to five miles, but taking in the mesa and highlands—that is, extending from the base of the snow capped Graham mountain on the south to the hilly range on the north—the valley is all the way from ten to twenty miles wide. The altitude of that part of the valley where our people reside is about [illegible] feet; hence the climate is warm and pleasant. The Gila valley is one of the leading farming districts of Arizona; it contains something like 40,000 acres of land, some of which is as fertile and rich as any in the United States. It certainly has a charming situation. To the southwest from Thatcher the towering Graham peak rears its lofty head, and directly west are seen the dark and sombre outlines of Mt. Trumbull, 8,300 feet above sea-level. This is not the same Mt. Trumbull from which the lumber for the St. George Temple was obtained. North and east are the Gila and Peloncillo ranges, while to the south and southeast stretches the wide plain of the San Simon. "Like an emerald lake, the lovely valley sits surrounded by giant mountain sentinels, a picture of perfect repose and prosperity." At present when the snow capped peaks of the Graham range flash in the spring sun-time, the fields near its feet are a mass of green, with here and there the bright blossom of the orchard and garden. The valley is specially adapted to fruits of all varieties, such as apples, plums, cherries, apricots, peaches, etc.; grapes also do well, being large, juicy and of fine flavor. There is perhaps no better locality in Arizona for strawberries, currants, blackberries, gooseberries and other small fruit. Wheat, corn, barley, oats and other grains, give a yield of from thirty to sixty bushels to the acre. Wheat and barley are sown in January and harvested in June. Corn is then planted on the same land, and is ripe in October. Two crops of potatoes are also raised in one season. Snow seldom falls in the valley, and then only in very small quantities, to disappear again before the next day's sun.

Alfalfa does exceedingly well on the Gila, the yield being nearly as large and quality as good as that of the Salt River valley. Four and five crops are raised. On the 22nd ult. we visited a field of alfalfa at Thatcher, belonging to Brother Wm. D. Johnson, in which we measured stems that were over three feet long.

The Saints occupy the central and most desirable part of this lovely valley; all their settlements are adjacent to each other and extend up and down the river for a distance of about 22 miles. There are only a few non-Mormons in that particular locality. Five of the settlements are on the south and three on the north side of the river. On the south side they irrigate from seven principal ditches, named respectively the Montezuma, Union, Central, Dodson, Mormon, Dodge and Mathews ditches. On the north side is the Graham canal, the old Oregon ditch, the Bryce ditch, and two ditches supplying Curtis with water. These ditches vary in length from four to fifteen miles and tap the river at different points, one above the other. The Gila river possesses a number of peculiarities; one of them is this, that in times of low water, when it is tapped dry at a certain point, water rises to it again, so that another large ditch can be supplied with a sufficient stream a mile or two below any dry dam. Of all the localities inhabited by the Latter-day Saints in the Rocky Mountains there are but few, if any, places that are more desirable to live in than in the valleys of the upper Gila.

Thatcher, thus named in honor of Elder Moses Thatcher, is the headquarters of the St. Joseph Stake of Zion. It is situated on the south side of the Gila river. The Thatcher ward embraces a strip of country three miles wide extending from the river on the north to the Graham mountains on the south, but only the lower part of this tract is under the canals and ditches. The townsite embraces the south half of a section of land and is regularly laid out, but some of the streets have not yet been opened. The center of the town is about nine miles northwest of Solomonville, forty-eight miles northwest of Bowie station, the nearest railway point on the Southern Pacific railway, and ninety miles northeast of [illegible], a noted mining camp. Thatcher is known for its exceedingly rich and productive soil, its fine orchards, neat and comfortable brick buildings, beautiful flower gardens, shady groves and industrious inhabitants. The present strength of the ward is ninety-eight families or [illegible] souls. Samuel Claridge presides as Bishop with Isaac N. [illegible] and Francis W. Moody as counselors. Thatcher was first settled in 1881 and organized as a ward in May 1883.

Layton ward, thus named in honor of President Christopher Layton, lies immediately east of Thatcher, between it and Solomonville. It includes also the old town of Safford, which is still the name of the postoffice. In Layton proper nearly all the inhabitants are Saints, while in Safford the population is half Mormon and half Gentile. With the exception of a small cluster of houses in the center of Safford, the people in the Layton ward live on their respective farms. Layton has a fine meeting hall, extensive orchards, good farming land, a commodious meeting house, a modern school house, a social hall and several other distinguishing features. The distance from the center of Layton to the center of Thatcher ward is about three miles. John Welker, Abraham [illegible] and Austin Evans constitute the Bishopric. Layton was first settled by Latter-day Saints in 1883, and the ward organized November 1, 1884. Seventy-three families, or [illegible] souls constitute the present membership.

Central ward comprises the Saints living in a scattered condition on their farms between Thatcher and Pima. Like Thatcher, it embraces a strip of country three miles wide extending from the Gila river on the north to the Graham mountains on the south. Thirty-five families, or 175 souls, constitute the Mormon population, and there are only two other families in the district. The Central meeting house is nearly three miles northwest of Thatcher. Joseph Cluff is Bishop, with Wm. George Clemens and Geo. Clemens as counselors. This place was first settled in 1883, and organized as a ward in the fall of the same year.

Pima, formerly called Smithville, in honor of President Jesse N. Smith, is the oldest Mormon settlement on the Gila river. It was settled in 1879 by an organized company from the Eastern Arizona Stake of Zion, Joseph K. Rogers being the first presiding Elder. For several years he presided over all the Saints in the valley, and it may be said consistently that all the other settlements on the Gila river are outgrowths of this first colony. Pima is five miles by nearest road northwest of Thatcher, fourteen miles northwest of Solomonville, twelve miles southeast of Thomas, a non-Mormon town on the Gila, about fifty-five miles by road or twenty-five miles by trail over the Graham mountain south of Fort Grant, and seventy miles south of Fort Apache. The townsite of Pima is regularly laid out into blocks thirty-two rods square, separated by streets eight rods wide. Nearly all the inhabitants live on the townsite. They are all members of the Church except four families. Pima has the best and most commodious meeting house in the St. Joseph Stake of Zion, two district school houses, two social halls, four stores, a roller flouring mill (in course of construction), two saw mills and a shingle mill (located about seventeen miles southwest of the town), fine brick residences, beautiful shade trees, fine orchards and flower gardens. It was formerly the headquarters of the Stake, and the quarterly conferences are still held here. It is yet the largest ward in the Stake, as it contains 361 Latter-day Saints, divided into eighty-eight families. John Taylor is Bishop, and his counselors are James Foster and James A. [illegible]. Among Pima's most enterprising citizens is John H. Nuttall, a member of the High Council.

Mathews ward embraces the Saints residing in a tract of country lying west of Pima on the same side of the Gila river. The settlement is a scattered one as most of the people live on their farms or homesteads and along their main irrigating ditch. Thus the place is a sort of a string-town, extending east and west about two miles. The center of the ward, or the point where the meeting house stands, is about one-third of a mile from the river and four miles northwest of Pima. The settlement was first founded by Joseph Mathews (one of the Utah pioneers of 1847), who settled in December, 1883, and organized into a ward April 29, 1885. The present Bishop is David H. Matthews, a son of the pioneer mentioned. His counselors are Levi Larsen and Francis Kimp. The numerical strength of the ward is at present nineteen families, or [illegible] souls.

Curtis, thus named in honor of a family by that name, who were among its first settlers, is situated on the north side of the river, and nearly opposite Matthews. Nearly three-fourths of the inhabitants live on and near the townsite, which is about four miles northwest of Matthews and twelve miles [illegible] Thatcher. The people irrigate from two canals which tap the river several miles above the townsite, but splendid water—perhaps the best in the valley—is obtained from some beautiful springs located adjacent to the townsite. The natural advantages of Curtis are very similar to those on the other side of the river, and there is room here for many more settlers; hence invitations are extended to Latter-day Saints, who are looking for homes, to come here and see for themselves before settling elsewhere. The same invitation is extended by the Saints in all other settlements on the Gila. Hundreds, and I may say thousands of families, can still be accommodated with homes in this land.

Curtis was first settled in 1881, and organized into a ward May [illegible], 1883. It has quite a history; at present the ward is not fully organized, but Brother Lochonias Halvin has charge as presiding Elder. The inhabitants consist of 25 Mormon families, numbering 142 souls.

Bryce ward consists of 19 families (111 souls) of Saints residing on the north side of the Gila river and opposite from Thatcher. They all live on their respective homesteads and no townsite has yet been laid out; but the parcel of land on which the meeting house stands in the northwest quarter of section 7, township 6 south of range 25 east of the Gila and Salt River meridian, is considered the center of the ward. This point is [illegible] north of Pima, five miles [illegible] of Curtis, seven miles northwest of Graham and nine miles northwest of Thatcher. Most of the lands under cultivation are watered from the Bryce ditch, which taps the river about four miles above the center of the ward. This place was first settled in 1884 by the Bryce family (after which the place was subsequently named) and others; it was organized as a ward March 10, 1890, and the present Bishop is Alma Naphi Bryce; his only counselor is Thomas E. Nelson.

Graham is a scattered settlement, situated on the north side of the Gila river, opposite Thatcher; it extends up and down the river about four miles, as the people nearly all live on their respective quarter sections. A townsite has been partly surveyed, but only five families live on it. The meeting house, which is built on the townsite, is two miles northeast of Thatcher by nearest road, and nine miles northwest of Solomonville. Graham, thus named after the county and the mountain of that name, was first settled in 1881 and organized as a ward in May, 1883. Its present numerical strength is fourteen families, or 80 souls, and George Skinner is the presiding Elder, Bishop Peter O. Peterson having resigned his position.

I am now bound for St. David, on the San Pedro river.

ANDREW JENSON.

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Fowler,
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Mr. Thad Naylor bought No. [illegible] Gendron.

Mr. George [illegible] bought Albion [illegible], and Hamilton Coffin bought Stearns special, [illegible]. All on Monday last.

"Valor's" statement that the "Sterling" was the only and first wheel to be ridden up Capitol Hill is an error. A Union and Gendron were both ridden up to the top of Capitol Hill last year before the grading, which has been going on all winter, was done. On Tuesday, Hamilton C. Coffin, [illegible] years old, took the Stearns special, weighing [illegible] pounds, good [illegible] to the [illegible] Capitol grounds. Mr. [illegible] accompanied him on a Fowler [illegible].

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