

EARLY HISTORY OF GRANITE

The history of Granite begins about 1859 when the L.D.S. granite rock quarry was first opened at the mouth of Little Cottonwood Canyon. This occurred when work was resumed on the Salt Lake Temple after the return of the Saints from the general exodus south to avoid Johnston's army. After that time, a regular force of men were kept steadily at work getting out granite rock for the temple until the capstone was laid in 1890 and the quarry shut down. These workers used the Granite area as a camping ground for several years until the easily accessible granite became scarce and the quarries had to be moved further up the canyon. Then the quarrymen selected Wasatch Resort (1½ miles up the canyon) as their base camp.

In August of 1861, Solomon J. Despain, a convert to the L.D.S. Church from Illinois, arrived with his family in the Salt Lake Valley; and, looking for a place to build his home, selected a tract of land on the Little Cottonwood Creek, a short distance below the mouth of Little Cottonwood Canyon (present location of the LaCaille Restaurant). Thus, he and his family became the first permanent residents of the town of Granite. He owned and operated a shingle saw mill at Hogam Flat several miles up the canyon, farmed and had orchards. Gradually, other sturdy Mormon farm families such as the Archibalds, Thompsons, Neeleys, Egberts and Eberts moved into the area.

Through the years Solomon Despain became loved and revered as the patriarch of this area. He was the Justice-of-the-Peace; he homesteaded 320 acres of Granite; he had three wives and 27 children, most of whom were very prominent in early Granite history. When the residents had to decide on a name for their town, many of them suggested Despainville in honor of Solomon, but he and his family were too modest and felt that it should be named for the magnificent granite rock that lay in huge boulders everywhere and formed the canyon walls. Solomon Despain gave the community its cemetery, land for its first school house, and became the first bishop of the Granite Ward on July 1, 1877 and served there for 9 years until Federal agents hunting down polygamists forced him to flee to Arizona.

In 1868 the Little Cottonwood Mining District was organized at Alta and extensive mining and smelting began in the canyon. (The world-famous "Emma Mine" over one of the nation's largest silver veins, had recently been discovered.) Thus, the mining settlement period of Granite was founded in 1870 and for several years it was a town of considerable importance. There was a telegraph office at Solomon Despain's home. During its greatest prosperity (1872-74), Granite City consisted of about 50 buildings---mostly stores, saloons, boarding houses and cabins for the accommodation of the workman employed at the Flagstaff and Davenport smelters (located where the polygamist complex is today) and the teamsters who hauled the ore from the Alta mines down to the smelters and supplies and mining timber to Alta. In fact, teaming was the main financial support of the town for some time. Mormon farmers with a wagon and team of horses earned extra money that way.

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At this same time, the boisterous town of Emmaville against the mountains on Willow Creek (about 8200 to 8600 So.) was settled by silver miners and teamsters hauling granite rock back to Salt Lake City. Later in the 1870s, this town's inhabitants moved to the Glacio Park area of Granite (west of the "Y" intersection). This was known as Ragtown because of the many tents used for living quarters.

In the late 1870s when the mines in Alta petered out and the smelters ceased operations and were moved elsewhere, the mining town portion of Granite vanished. The only commercial store to remain was Alex Brand's mercantile store at 9760 South on 3100 East, and it closed in the early 1900s.

In 1891 James Muir started his own rock quarry in Bell Canyon and from it furnished the base stones for the original Joseph and Hyrum Smith monuments on Temple Square and the 20 ton base for the Brigham Young monument at the head of Salt Lake's Main Street. He also sold foundation block for the Salt Lake City and County Building, and other public and private buildings in the valley. Later he supervised the building of Bell Canyon reservoir for irrigation and culinary water and financed the bringing of electrical power to Granite. He served as Granite Ward's third bishop, succeeding Alva Butler (the founder of the Butlerville-Cottonwood Heights area) who presided as the second bishop after Solomon Despain fled to Arizona.

Granite's first public school was a one-room building of granite foundation; crude lumber and adobe brick. It was built in 1891-92 at 3175 East 9800 South on Despain property that was deeded to the Utah 42nd School District (and still stands as a home). This building was also used for all Granite church and civic affairs until 1905 when the white church and a new school house were built on 3100 East.

The white church on 9800 So. 3100 East was begun in 1901 with a high granite block foundation and reddish brick walls, a steep roof with a steeple, and a tower. After its completion in 1905, entertainments and dances were held in the large basement room that complemented the chapel, stage and fine pump organ on the main floor. During the next 25 years as necessity and invention warranted, additions were built on the east side of the church to include Scout and Relief Society rooms, plumbed kitchen and rest rooms and a furnace. After the new red brick church on 9600 So. 3100 East was completed in 1965, the old white church was abandoned; to eventually be sold to the sculptor Avard Fairbanks.

At the turn of the century, Dimple Dell hill was the young people's toboggan slide. Summertime brought dances, excursions to Saltair, hikes to the mountains, picnics to the Beaver Pond weir, and serenading of the townfolk by the young people. It was, and still is, a great place to live!