

History Question of the Month

What early Cottonwood Heights resident was a member of the van guard company of pioneers led by Brigham Young that entered the Salt Lake Valley in July of 1847?

Answer

As a 6 year old slave, Green Flake was given as a wedding present, by Jordan Flake to his son, James Madison and his bride Agnes. Green traveled with the Flake family as they moved to Kemper County, Mississippi. The family was converted to the LDS Church during the winter of 1843-44. Green Flake was also baptized by John Brown, in the Mississippi River, on April 7, 1844. The Flake family decided to move to Nauvoo, Illinois and Green went with them. After the martyrdom of Joseph and Hyrum Smith, the Flakes and Green were driven out of Nauvoo along with the other saints living there. When Brigham Young began preparations to move west, James Madison sent Green, along with his finest mountain carriage and team of white mules to assist the vanguard company and to carry Brigham Young on his journey.

About the time the vanguard company reached the Utah/Wyoming boarder, Brigham Young became ill. He sent an advance group ahead. Green Flake was driving the first wagon to enter the Salt Lake Valley on July 22, 1847. He helped in plowing, planting and digging irrigation ditches before returning to drive Brigham Young into the valley on July 24, 1847. Green Flake continued to help with the planting of crops and also built a house for his owner before returning to Winter Quarters, where he accompanied his owner to the Salt Lake Valley the following year, 1848.

In 1850, James Madison Flake was sent to California to find a place for the saints to settle. He was kicked in the head by a mule and killed. His wife decided to go to San Bernadino with the Charles C. Rich Company in 1851. She left Green to help Brigham Young as payment for back tithing. Green worked for a couple of years for both Brigham Young and Heber C. Kimball. About 1854, Brigham Young negotiated Green's freedom. Shortly after that the other slaves were also freed.

Green and wife, Martha Ann Morris Crosby, a half-sister to Oscar Crosby and Hark Lay, the other two black slaves in the Vanguard Company, made their home in Union. About 1881, Green purchased 20 acres of land from James Godfrey. This property was located on what is now the south east corner of 1300 East and Ft. Union Boulevard.

Green Flake was a faithful active member of the LDS Church. It has been said that he helped dig the grave of Brigham Young. He was a farmer and registered his own brand. He also tried his hand at mining and filed several mining claims with his brother-in-law,

Miles Litchford, in the Big Cottonwood Mining District. Among them were the Evergreen, Abraham Lincoln, Lake Cross, Union Blue and Rainbow. Due to lack of money to develop them, they sold the claims to the Elevator Prospecting Company. Green was well liked by everyone and was considered the leader of the black community. He had a beautiful singing voice and was also a popular speaker at Pioneer Day Celebrations.

Green's wife Martha died on January 20, 1885. She was buried in the Union Pioneer Cemetery on Creek Road. Green remained in Union until about 1896 when he went to Idaho to live with his son. In 1897, he received a special invitation to the Fifty Year Pioneer Celebration. He returned to Salt Lake for the celebration, one of just a hand full of the Vanguard Company that was still alive. He received a special certificate which he proudly displayed in his home. Green Flake died on October 20, 1903. His body was returned to Salt Lake where it was buried in the Union Pioneer Cemetery.

Green and his wife had two children, Lucinda, who married George Stevens and lived in Union before moving to Box Elder County and then to Idaho and Abraham who he lived with in Idaho.

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