

Iosepa, Utah *by Donald Rosenberg*

Location

The town site of Iosepa was located some seventy-five miles south west of Salt Lake City. It lies on the desert floor between the Cedar Mountain and the Stansbury Mountain Ranges, with annual precipitation of about 7 inches. Since 1917 it has been an integral part of the Deseret Livestock Company and the Skull Valley Company.

Little remains today to remind the casual observer of the historic role of this community. Looking over the ruins where at the height of the Colony, 228 people once lived, one has difficulty imagining the activity which once took place in this remote area. At the present time on this town site, there are only two or three of the original houses still being used. Up until a few years ago, when the town site area was plowed and planted to crested wheat grass, you could still drive along most of the ancient streets, dotted frequently by rusty fire hydrants, with an occasional home foundation protruding above the ground. Remains of old root cellars and fence posts marked the area which once was an industrious, thriving community. Gone are the church house, the school house, most of the dwellings, and the general store, which has been replaced with a ranch bunk house. Gone are the beautiful lawns, flowers, gardens and trees which won for the town, the State prize for the best kept and most progressive city in the State of Utah in 1911. The gallant little City of Iosepa has returned to the dust of the desert from which it came.

Why And Where They Came From

A few short years after the Utah Mormon Pioneers entered the Salt Lake Valley, in about 1852, Missionaries were sent to the South Sea Islands, and in 1854, Joseph F. Smith, a lad of only fifteen years old, and who would later become the President of the Church, was sent to the Hawaiian Islands as a missionary. As conversion to the gospel in the Islands took place, the converts were desirous of migrating to Utah so they could participate in the gathering of Zion and do temple work, which is such an important part of the Mormon religion. But at the time, leaving the Islands was forbidden by their own government. Because of their insatiable desire for unity, a gathering place was established in 1853 in the valley of Palawai on the Island of Lanai, but it proved unsatisfactory. In 1865 the Church bought a large tract of land at Laie, Oahu, in an attempt to establish another gathering place. However; the Hawaiians still had a burning desire to come to Utah. Beginning in the 1870's, the Hawaiian government began to relax its laws and the Hawaiians wishing to come to Utah were permitted to do so. By 1889, about 75 Hawaiians had gathered in North Salt Lake in the area which was known as Becks Hot Springs.

Utah Colonized

By this time, 40 years after the Pioneers entered Utah, the colonization of communities along all the mountain streams had already taken place. There was no place for the South Sea Islanders to go and settle as a group, which they desired to do. The need developed for a permanent place where they could obtain year round employment and again enjoy living their own customs and cultures. After much investigation by the Church to find a suitable settling place, the ranch of John T. Rich of Skull Valley, in Tooele County was selected and purchased.

Settling And Building Iosepa

On the morning of August 27, 1889, H.H. Cluff and Elihue Clegg, of the Tooele Stake, under assignment of the First Presidency, began the task of transporting the Hawaiians and their belongings from Salt Lake City to their new home. THIS WAS OVER 103 YEARS AGO! About 50 Hawaiians went by train from Salt Lake City to Garfield, which was a town just East of where Kennecott Smelter is located. There they were met by twenty teams and wagons and taken to Grantsville for the night. That evening the Hawaiians were prevailed upon to provide native music and dancing.

The next day, August 28th, this group of Pioneers reached the place that was to be called home of the Polynesian Mormons for the next twenty eight years. THUS, AUGUST 28TH WAS PROCLAIMED AS HAWAIIAN PIONEER DAY.

Town Site

On the afternoon of their arrival, a survey of the town site was begun by Mitchell, assisted by Francis M. Lyman Jr. It was completed two days later, but for some unknown reason the town site map was not recorded in the Tooele County Court House until 1908, 19 years after the town began.

The town was laid out resembling the shape of the state of Utah, being a little more than one half mile on the South side and a little less than a half mile on the West side. It contained a public square or park in the center, containing 16.9 acres, with 4 center streets 132 feet wide, extending from the outer limits of the town on the four sides of the town park. A row of trees was planted in the center of each street. All other streets were 66 feet wide and blocks were 363 feet square, and divided into 4 lots each containing $\frac{3}{4}$ acres.

Drawing For Lots

Drawings were held for the lots, and a land title was obtained by purchase. Lots sold from \$25.00 to \$75.00 each. Lots fronting the town square were reserved for the company. If the people did not have the money to pay for their lot, the purchase price was loaned to them by the Church.

Homes

Within two weeks after their arrival, arrangements were made to buy a nearby saw mill from Edwin Booth, for the sum of \$1,487.75. Booth was employed to operate the mill and 10 days later, construction was begun on the first home. Most had to spend that first winter in tents and wagons, to suffer through the cold winter and the cold blowing winds.

Original Purchase

The original purchase consisted of 1,920 acres of land, of which approximately 200 acres were under cultivation. During the next few years, a total of 5,273 acres were purchased or acquired by Homestead.

Cemetery

Less than a month after their arrival, a cemetery site was selected approximately one half mile Northeast of the settlement, and a burial took place for an elderly woman who had passed away. This was just a little more than two weeks after their arrival.

Water

From the canyons to the east, five streams were collected together and a rock and concrete ditch was constructed to convey the water to the Ranch with very little loss. Later a culinary water system was installed to and along each street and lot, with fire hydrants along the way. Also, an irrigation ditch supplied water to each lot to water the lawns and gardens.

The Town Site

The Store Was located where the ranch bunk house now stands. This is just south of the main existing farm house. The store burned down and the Deseret Livestock Company built their bunk house in the same location.

The store printed its own money or script to be used at the store as did many of the early mercantiles throughout the State at that time. This was done because at that period and time, the supply of real money was very limited. The people were payed in script for their work on the ranch, and if purchases were made outside of the community, the script would have to be exchanged for regular U.S. currency.

Church House

A meeting house was constructed on the Northwest corner of the community, which served as a church, school, meeting hall, and for social events. A few rocks and rubble still remain to mark its location.

Meaning of Iosepa

For those of you who do not know what the word Iosepa means, the town was named for Joseph F. Smith, who was President and Prophet of the Church at that time. As I understand, there is no "J" in the Hawaiian language, and Iosepa is the Hawaiian pronunciation of Joseph.

Typical Production

Mr. Cluff, who was the ranch foreman at that time reported the following as a typical year production from the ranch. "We have so far completed our new grainery, which has a capacity of 14,000 bushels of grain. We have of this year's crop now in the grainery, 1850 bushels of wheat, 1850, 1650 bushels of oats, 3700 bushels of barley, for a total of 7200 bushels of grains. We have enough breadstuff to supply the colony for two or three years. The other kinds of produce harvested are 500 bushels of potatoes, 200 bushels of corn, 650 tons of hay, 125 tons of squash and pumpkins along with other garden produce.

Sickness and Problems

Like most other communities in the State at that period of time, Pneumonia was the greatest killer. During the life of the colony, some deaths were by Smallpox and Diphtheria, along with child birth, heart attacks, etc.

Leprosy

It has been reported that a small number of Leprosy cases existed at the colony. A one story frame house was built in a field some distance from the town where two or three Leprosy victims were isolated to keep the disease from spreading. Those folks with the disease were well care for. In 1899, a Dr. Lowell came to Iosepa claiming to have a cure for the disease. Permission was granted for him to try his cure on those affected. However his efforts were in vain, for by the end of the next year, the Leprosy victims had died.

The Dedication of Iosepa

On the 28th of August 1989 which was the 100th birthday of the colony, President Gordon B. Hinckley, first counselor in the First Presidency of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints dedicated a \$30,000 monument along with the cemetery during a celebration honoring the memory of those who had lived at Iosepa. After the dedication, a giant Hawaiian Luau was held at the Grantsville Stake Center, where approximately 600 people attended. A few of those attending were original residents of the colony, and many were descendants of the original residents. Some of these folks traveled all the way from Hawaii to attend this dedication and festivities. It was a glorious affair for all who attended.