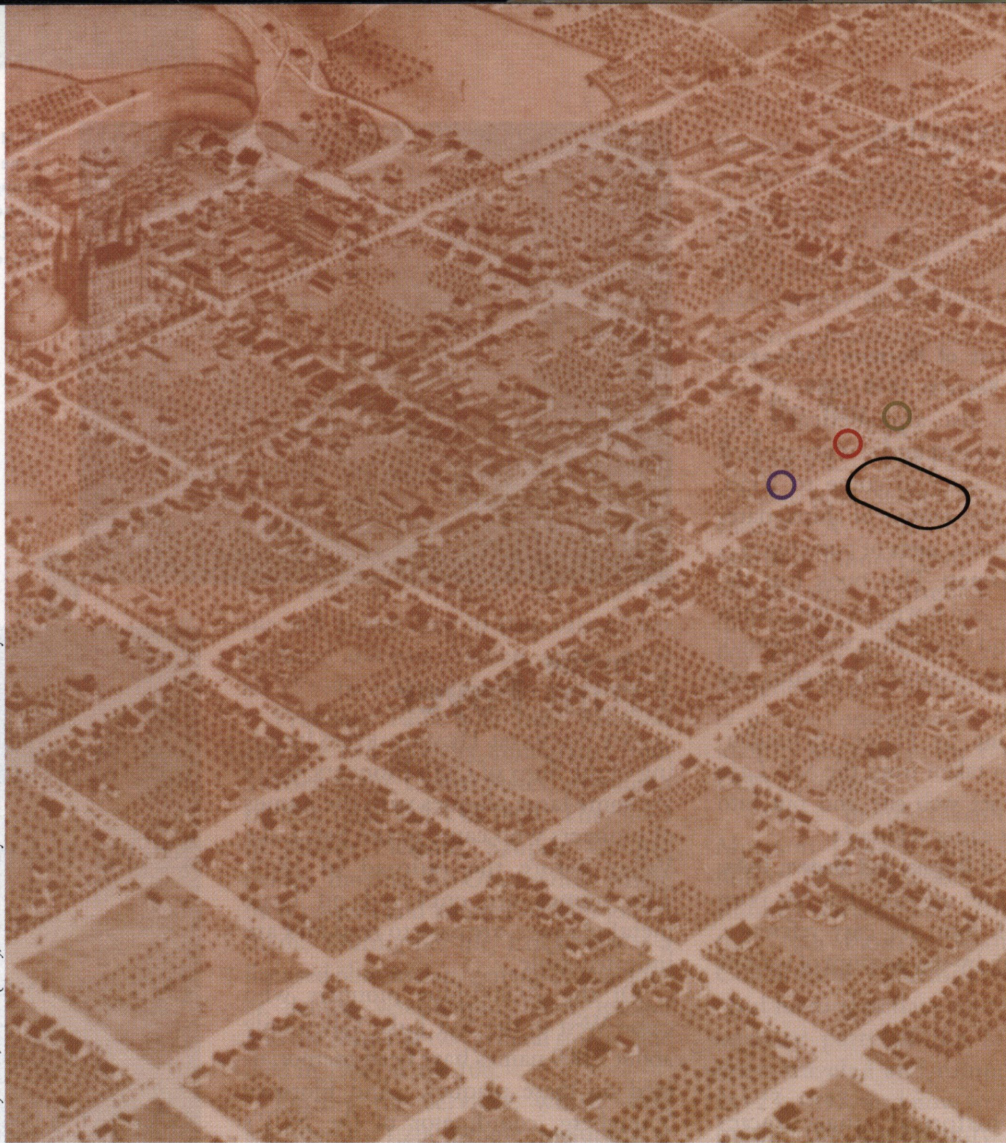


James Price,
member of Brigham
Young's vanguard
company, with
second wife Emma
in London, 1857

Birdseye View, Salt Lake City, 1870. Courtesy Utah State Historical Society.

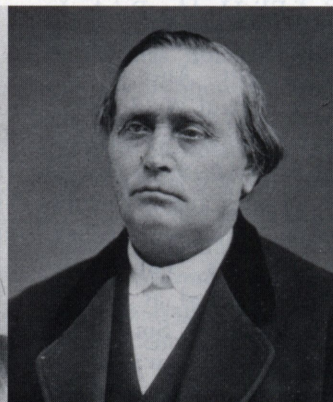
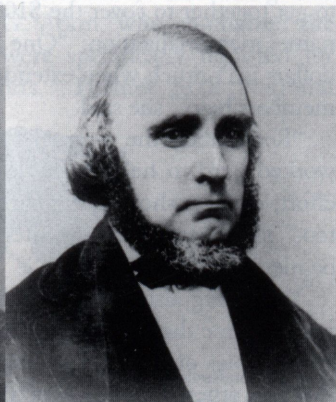


Future Site Methodist Church

Daniel Spencer Residence

Site of First Plowing

Site of First Encampment



Courtesy LDS Church Archives.

At noon on 23 July 1853, a few members of the 1847

Pioneer Company gathered in the Fourteenth Ward

schoolhouse in Great Salt Lake City. After spending the

afternoon recounting the events of that July day six years

earlier, they joined with Captain Dominico Ballo's band

and marched in procession to the sites of the first encamp-

ment, the first "ground breaking" or plowing and the first

irrigation ditch before returning to the schoolhouse for

dancing.¹ ¶ The sites of the founding events of 1847 were

important to the pioneers. Over time, however, the location

of one of the sites—the pioneer campground of 23 July

1847, which marked the end of the Mormon Trial—

became the subject of controversy. As early as 1890, while

many original pioneers were still alive, the *Salt Lake*

Herald noted, "It has been a source of conjecture and dis-

cussion as to what precise spot in the present city site the

pioneers made their first stopping place."² ¶ Perhaps this

"discussion" was prompted by the 1887 publication of

Andrew Jenson's story of the encampment in his periodical,

The Historical Record. After describing the visit of Orson

Pratt and Erastus Snow into the Salt Lake Valley on July

21, he wrote: "The day following the main body of the

Pioneers entered the valley, and encamped two or three

miles south of the city, moving the camps northward and

camping on the spot now known as Washington, or the

Eighth Ward, Square, on the 23rd."³ This he repeated in

other publications throughout his long career. Many writ-

ers accepted his interpretation, and it became the prevail-

ing opinion. In the Pioneer Centennial year of 1947, the

Daughters of Utah Pioneers placed a marker on

Washington Square (the location of the current Salt Lake

City and County Building) to commemorate the camp.

¶ A close examination of the evidence, however, leads to a

different conclusion about its location. Accounts left by

members of the pioneer company provide enough details to

determine where it was. ¶ William Clayton described the

establishment of the camp in his journal. His entry for July

23 stated, "We traveled two miles and then formed our

encampment on the banks of the creek in an oblong cir-

cle."⁴ Thomas Bullock's journal adds the fact that the

camp was made near "...a small grove of cottonwood trees

on the banks of a beautiful stream."⁵

'on the
banks
of a
beautiful
stream'

Daniel Spencer,

Jesse C. Little,

William Clayton

and Erastus Snow

(pictured opposite,

from left to right)

all play a role in

establishing the

actual site of the

first encampment.

The End of the Mormon Trail



TOP AND BOTTOM: Early views of Emigration Street (now Broadway) between Main and State Streets. On the North Side (ABOVE) are seen the old Methodist Church and, on the State Street corner, the two-story residence of Daniel Spencer.

North Side Third South

In an 1880 Pioneer Day speech, Erastus Snow put the campsite into the context of the modern city that had grown up around it. He recounted, "...On the 23rd we made our camp on City Creek, below Emigration Street...on the old channel of the creek...It was on the south branch of the creek we formed our camp."⁶ Three important landmarks mentioned in these accounts—City Creek's south branch, a cottonwood grove and Emigration Street—allow us to ascertain the actual location of the first campsite.

City Creek originally divided near the temple block, with one fork running south in a meandering course between Main and State streets. At Third South Street (known in pioneer days as Emigration Street), it crossed at mid-block near the cottonwood grove, described by pioneer John R. Young as "seven wind-swept, scraggy cottonwood trees." When Third South Street was laid out, a bridge was built over the creek.⁷

The camp's proximity to City Creek and to Third South Street is also mentioned by two other 1847 pioneers. John Brown reminisced that "on the 23 we moved north...and camped on the south side of City Creek (a little south of what is now called Emigration Street)."⁸ Andrew P. Shumway left a similar account: "We pitched our tents...on what is

Erastus Snow
recounted,
"On the 23rd
we made our
camp on City
Creek, below
Emigration
Street...on
the old
channel of
the creek...
It was on the
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of the creek
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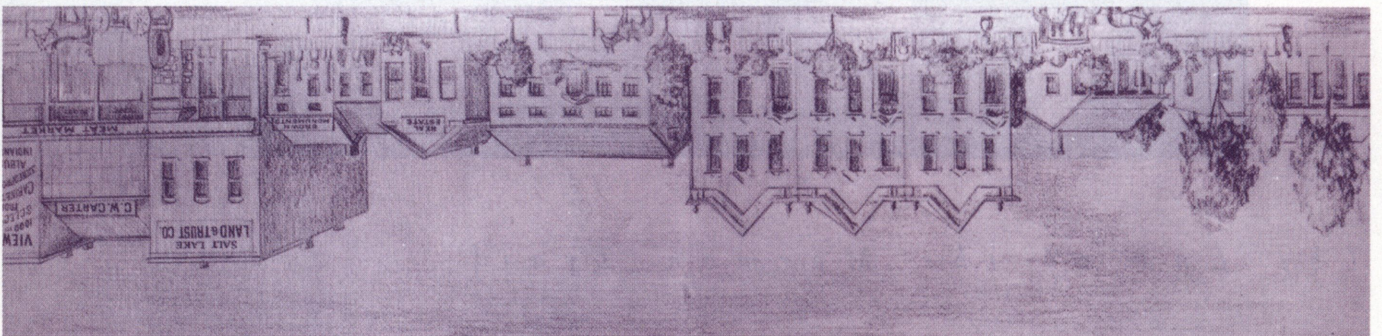
now known as City Creek and just below where Emigration Street crosses the creek."⁹

Other supporting evidence for this interpretation concerns the proximity of the residence of Daniel Spencer and of the old Methodist Church to the former campsite. The Spencer residence was located at the northwest corner of Third South and State streets. West of the residence at mid-block is where the Methodist Church was located. Jesse C. Little later recalled: "We made our first encampment near where Daniel Spencer's residence was."¹⁰ An 1890 biography of Harriet Page Wheeler Young, one of the three women in the pioneer company, described the first campsite as "running southward near the spot where the Methodist Church now stands."¹¹

It has long been known that the first plowing in the Salt Lake Valley occurred at the northeast corner of State and Third South streets. Since 1931, a handsome bronze plaque placed by the Daughters of the American Revolution has memorialized that event. The relationship of this site to that of the campground is established by William Clayton's diary. In his entry for July 23, he wrote, "The brethren immediately rigged three plows and went to plowing a little northeast of the camp."¹²

These sources thus document the location of the camp on the eastern part of the city block laying

South Side Third South



between main and State and Third and Fourth South streets (block 52 of Plat A), northwest of Washington Square.

There are several reasons why the location of the first campsite became misidentified. Early on, various identifying landmarks near the site were altered. In 1853, City Creek's south branch disappeared entirely with the consolidation of both branches of the stream down the middle of North Temple Street. The landmark cottonwood grove adjacent to the camp soon merged into the general landscape of the city. Daniel Spencer's house did not survive beyond 1891, and the Methodist Church was demolished in 1905.¹³

The longest-lasting landmark, located a block south and east of the campsite, was the Eighth Ward Square, or Washington Square, as it was later renamed. When the city was first surveyed, that block was reserved for public use because of the springs located there. Beginning in 1860, the square was used as the campground for incoming emigrant trains. This later usage probably led some to assume that the campsite of the original pioneers had also been there. With the passage of time and the disappearance of other landmarks in the area, Washington Square and the City and County Building became the reference point for describing the location of the original pioneer campground.

Perhaps the 1997 sesquicentennial of the arrival of Brigham Young and the pioneers would be an appropriate time to recognize the actual site of the end of the Pioneer Trail—on the banks of City Creek by a grove of cottonwood trees. ▼

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1. "Historian's Office Journal," 23 July 1853, Historical Department, Archives Division, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Hereafter referred to as Church Archives. 2. *Christmas Herald*, December 1890, p. 3. 3. "Salt Lake County," *The Historical Record*, December 1887, p. 304. 4. *William Clayton's Journal*, (Salt Lake City, 1921), p. 312. 5. Thomas Bullock, *Journal*, 23 July 1847, Church Archives. 6. *The Utah Pioneers* (Deseret News Printing and Publishing Establishment, Salt Lake City: 1880), p. 46. 7. "Reminiscences of John R. Young," *Utah Historical Quarterly*, July 1930, p. 83. 8. John Brown, "Reminiscences and Journals," Vol. 1, p. 70, Church Archives. 9. Andrew P. Shumway, "Reminiscences 1869," p. 9, Church Archives. 10. Jesse C. Little, "Letter," 15 April 1890, Church Archives. 11. "Pioneer Women of Utah," *The Contributor*, September 1890, p. 405. 12. *William Clayton's Journal*, p. 313. 13. Randall Dixon, "Forgotten Living Landmarks of Early Salt Lake City," *Pioneer*, Spring 1995, p. 22. See also "Brooks Arcade," *Salt Lake Tribune*, 3 March 1891, p. 6 (the Daniel Spencer house was replaced by the Brooks Arcade complex in 1889.) For information on the Methodist Church, see "Left with Sadness," *The Deseret News*, 18 September 1905.

the SAGA of a PIONEER LOCUST TREE

My poor Mother was heart-broken because there were no trees to be seen, for I don't remember a tree that could be called a tree," recalled Clara Decker Young of her first view of the future site of Salt Lake City on 24 July 1847.¹ She and her mother, Harriet Decker Young, were two of the three women who came to Utah in Brigham Young's vanguard pioneer company. Clara was married to Brigham Young, and Harriet to his brother, Lorenzo Dow Young.

Harriet, Lorenzo and their family passed their first winter in a log cabin built on their lot near City Creek. One of the first things that Harriet did at her new home was to plant the Black Locust tree seeds that she reportedly brought across the plains in the toe of an old stocking. Only those starts that she covered with buckets survived.²

Brigham Young later acquired the lot where Lorenzo and Harriet's cabin was located and erected the Beehive House in its stead. At least one of the trees survived and became part of the landscape around the new residence.

The ultimate fate of this tree was related by Harriet's granddaughter, Clarissa Young Spencer, who grew up in the Beehive House: "The back part of the Bee Hive House...consisted of a story and a half, entering through a small gate in the wall to the east side, right up to the loveliest tree, whose huge branches were laden with sweet smelling locusts and [was] planted by Harriet Page Wheeler Decker Young, my grandmother...Mother used to tell us how she carried that locust seed from Nauvoo and planted it in the ground where she first camped upon arriving here. The tree stood for many years. Later when I saw men taking it down, [I] went to President Joseph F. Smith, who at that time was President of the Latter Day Saint Church [sic], living in the Bee Hive House, and told him the history of that tree. I felt like I could not stand to have it cut down. He told me in his fine fatherly way, the tree had become a nuisance with its blossoms falling and filling the rain gutters, and the blossoms falling on the lawn, but promised me a good size stump of it should be left and would be covered with vines and a box of lovely flowers on the top. I could not help shedding a few tears, but the picture he painted appealed to me, and [I] realized that my association of 28 years in the Bee Hive, and the happy times I had spent under the protecting branches, did not and could not appeal to others as it did to me. It did help to know the stump could stand, but not long after the old stump was removed as it interfered with the cutting of the lawn. Nevertheless, the beautiful memories I have of that dear old sacred locust tree, so closely associated with my home, my grandmother, can never be taken from me. I never pass that way without my gaze wandering to the spot where it once stood."³

Part of a branch from the old locust tree is displayed in the President's Office next to the Beehive House. A remnant of the stump is preserved in the Pioneer Museum of the Daughters of Utah Pioneers in Salt Lake City.

—W. Randall Dixon

1. Young, Clara Decker, "A Woman's Experience With the Pioneer Band," *Utah Historical Quarterly*, Vol. 14 (1946), p. 175.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 176; "Trees, Flowers and Birds of Utah," *Heart Throbs of the West*, Vol. 2 (Salt Lake City, 1940), p. 240.

3. Spencer, Clarissa Hamilton Young, "The Bee Hive House, 1936," copy at LDS Church Archives, Salt Lake City.