

Elijah Thomas

Local Pioneer

-By Stephen Thomas

Elijah Thomas


Elijah Thomas was my great, great, great grandfather. He was born on January 22, 1815 in Rockingham, North Carolina. He was the fourth of eleven children born to Henry and Esther Thomas. His family moved to Mississippi after all the children were born when he was sixteen. Elijah's mother passed away shortly after arriving in Mississippi leaving his father, Henry, with seven children younger than Elijah to take care of. He was seventeen-years-old at the time. Elijah felt a responsibility to help his father raise his younger brothers and sisters.

Henry Thomas was converted to the newly founded Mormon Church and relocated his family to Nauvoo, Illinois when Elijah was twenty-one. In Nauvoo, Elijah helped run the family blacksmith shop. Eight years later, Elijah was converted to the Mormon faith and it became a motivating force in his life. When the Mormons were kicked out of Illinois, Elijah's blacksmith shop was one that built wagons for the pioneers.

Elijah followed the church in their movement west. It was during this western movement when the government asked Brigham Young, the leader of the Mormon Church, to furnish 500 men to help fight Mexico in the war. Elijah was one of the volunteers. He was assigned to company C of the Mormon Battalion and given a military issue musket, which my grandfather still has. They made the longest march in military history of over 2000 miles from Council Bluffs, Iowa to San Diego, California.

During the march many men wore out their shoes and they often did not have enough to eat. The Mexican army had built a fort in Tucson. When the battalion arrived, they were ready to fight, but the Mexican army had fled. The soldiers entered the fort and found a good supply of beans. Their hunger got the best of them and they ate so many beans they couldn't march because they were so full.

When the soldiers finally arrived in San Diego they stayed for a year as part of their enlistment and helped establish the town, building many brick houses and a schoolhouse.



DIXIE PIONEERS

SHORTLY AFTER VISITING THE LITTLE VILLAGE OF TOMAGUNT IN MAY OF 1845, BRIGHAM YOUNG, THE PRESIDENT OF THE CHURCH OF JESU CHRIST OF LATTER DAY SAINTS, STOPPED HIS PARTY, GAZED NORTH TOWARD THE PEACEFUL VALLEY AND PROCLAIMED: "THERE WILL YET BE BUILT, BETWEEN THOSE VOLCANIC RIDGES, A CITY, WITH SPIRES, TOWERS AND STEEPLES, WITH HOMES CONTAINING MANY INHABITANTS."

DURING THE NEXT CHURCH CONFERENCE, IN OCTOBER, BRIGHAM YOUNG READ THE NAMES OF 309 FAMILIES THAT WERE OFFICIALLY "CALLED" TO SETTLE DIXIE.

HOWEVER, THEY WERE NOT THE FIRST L.D.S. EXPLORERS TO THE REGION. IN 1847, BRIGHAM YOUNG HAD AUTHORIZED AN EXPEDITION UNDER THE COMMAND OF PEARLY P. FRAYT TO INVESTIGATE SOUTHERN UTAH; JOHN D. LEE LED A SIMILAR SCOUTING FORCE IN 1851. SHORTLY THEREAFTER, L.D.S. MISSIONARIES WERE SENT TO ESTABLISH RELATIONSHIPS WITH, AND IMPROVE THE CONDITIONS OF THE NATIVES IN THE AREA. THEIR SUCCESS AS A MISSIONARY FORCE AMONG THE PAIUTE AND SHOSHONE INDIANS MADE POSSIBLE THE FURTHER SETTLING OF THE ST. GEORGE AREA.

THEN IN JANUARY OF 1851, A GROUP OF MEN HEADED BY JOSEPH HORNE WERE OUTFITTED AND SENT TO TEST THE PRACTICABILITY OF PRODUING COTTON IN THE VIRGIN RIVER BASIN. THE FOLLOWING NOVEMBER THEY DELIVERED 315 POUNDS OF COTTON TO SALT LAKE CITY. HORNE'S SECOND GROUP IN APRIL OF 1851 HAD EVEN BETTER RESULTS. THE EXPERIMENTAL COTTON SITE HAD SURVIVED ITS PURPOSE.

ON DECEMBER 1, 1847, THE MAIN PARTY OF THE NEWLY CALLED FAMILIES ARRIVED AND CAMPED NEAR WHERE THIS MONUMENT IS LOCATED. OTHER PIONEERS ARRIVED LATER. THE FIRST CRUCES OF BUSINESS WERE DIGGING WATER TO THE LAND, LAYING OUT THE CITY AND PROVIDING FOR THE EDUCATION OF THE MORE THAN 150 WHO WANTED TO ATTEND SCHOOL. THESE TASKS WERE BEGUN IMMEDIATELY.

RAINS BEGAN ON CHRISTMAS NIGHT AND THE DOWNPOUR CONTINUED FOR 40 DAYS. ALTHOUGH THE RAINS BROUGHT GREEN TO THE LAND, THE FLOODS ALSO BROUGHT SWARMS OF PESTS AND MOSQUITOES FROM WHICH THE SETTLERS HAD NO PROTECTION. THESE INSECTS WERE NOT ONLY IRRITATING, BUT ALSO SPREAD DISEASE. FOOD WAS SCARCE, MALNUTRITION WAS COMMON AND UNSANITARY CONDITIONS CAUSED DISEASE. TYPHOID, DYPHTHERIA, MALARIA, WHOOPING COUGH, MEASLES AND SCARLET FEVER BROUGHT DEATH AND SORROW. WITHIN THE FIRST FOUR YEARS THERE WERE 134 DEATHS; OF THESE, 99 WERE CHILDREN UNDER THE AGE OF FIFTEEN. THIRTY OF FIVE FIFTEEN DIED IN EARLY DEATHS, SOMETIME INCLUDING THE DEATH OF THE MOTHER.

SEVERELY ILLNESS, DEATH AND SORROW WERE ONLY SOME OF THE PROBLEMS CHALLENGING THESE EARLY PIONEERS. THE HOT DIXIE SUN, THE BRISK CHERRY WINDS, THE RAIN THAT DROVE FALL FOR MONTHS AND THEN CAME IN TORRENTS PLAGUED THE SETTLERS. THE GREAT DISTANCES FROM FAMILY AND FRIENDS LEFT BEHIND CAUSED DEPRESSION AND LOWSPIRITS. ALL OF THESE HARDSHIPS WERE FACED BY MEN, WOMEN AND CHILDREN WHO WERE LIVING OUT OF WAGON BODIES OR IN CAVE-LIKE DUGOUTS AS THEY TOOK TO THE FIELDS AND LABORED AT OTHER GRUPELLING TASKS.

ENCOURAGED BY THEIR PERSONAL COMMITMENT AND BELIEF IN GOD, THEY REMAINED DEDICATED TO THEIR MISSION. THOSE WHO SURVIVED THEY ESTABLISHED AND BUILT THE CITY OF ST. GEORGE BETWEEN THE VOLCANIC RIDGES, AS BRIGHAM YOUNG HAD ENVISIONED HERE, WHERE THEY FIRST CAMPED, THEN FLOWED, LIVED, AND DIED. WE PAY TRIBUTE TO THESE COURAGEOUS DIXIE PIONEERS:

FROM THAT FIRST WAGON BOX SCHOOL, TO THE "DIXIE ACADEMY" FOUNDED IN 1851 TO DIXIE COLLEGE WHICH NOW SURVEILS THE ENCAMPMENT MOUND. EDUCATION AND HARD WORK HAVE COME HAND IN HAND, THEREFORE, THE SCULPTURE PIECES ON THE WEST REPRESENT EDUCATION, THE PIECES ON THE EAST REPRESENT INDUSTRY.

"CALLED TO DIXIE"

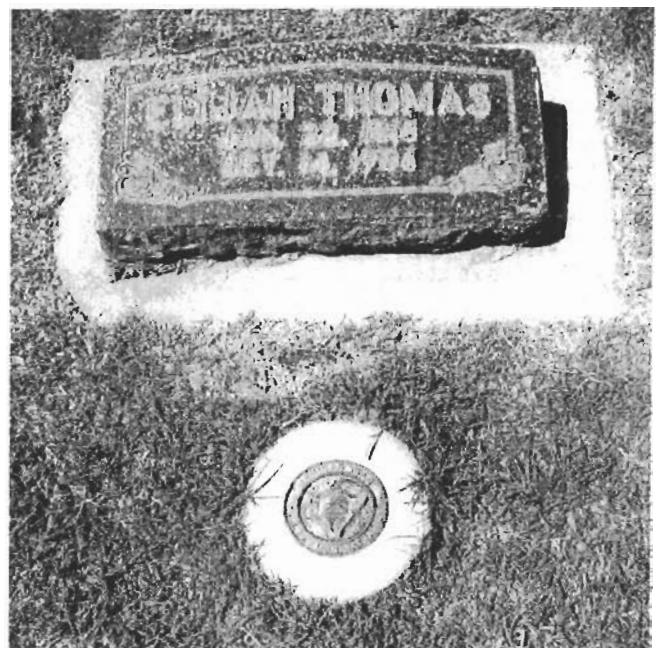


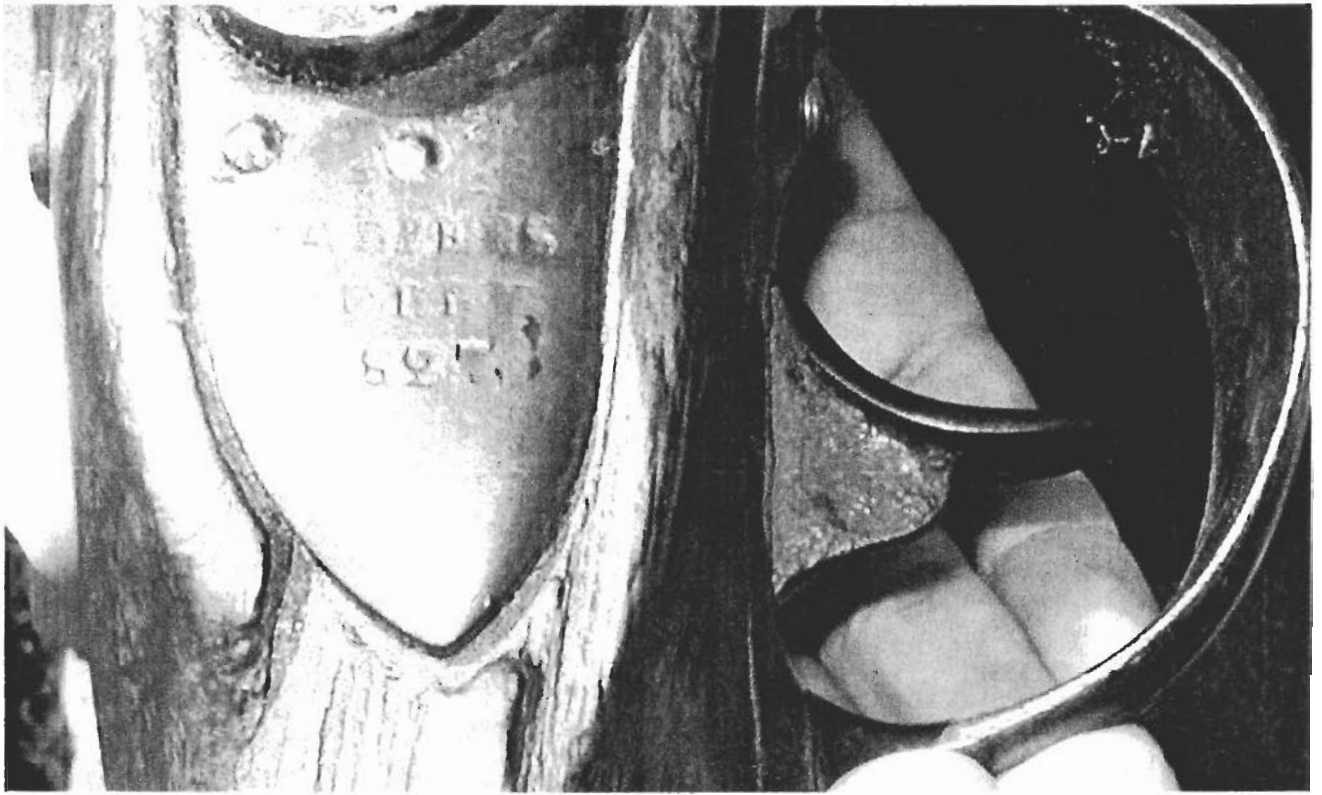
JANE M. CARPENTER
***THOMAS, ELIJAH +**
ANN HAYWARD
HARRIET R. JOHNS

**Above and Left:
Monument dedicated to St.
George's original pioneers.
Located at Dixie College.**



**Above: Mormon Battalion
Marker at Gravesite
Right: Elijah Thomas'
Headstone.**





Above: Date on gun - 1827
Below: Me and Great, Great, Great, Grandpa Elijah's Gun

