

CAPTAIN ASHLEY'S UTAH FORT.

(By Ike Russell.)

It was built on Utah Lake in 1825, was graced by a six pounder cannon hauled overland from St. Louis in 1827, and represented the first fight of Americans against Mexican and British rivals for the fur and Indian trade of the Great Basin.

Should the Wizard of the Wasatch carnival ever become a reality and bring the Wizard down from the snow-capped peaks of the eastward mountain chain, he probably would need an extensive "get acquainted" session before the people of the valleys were properly introduced to some of his earliest and best friends.

In this series of articles on the early explorers and trappers of the Great Basin, a small amount of data concerning James Bridger, one of the first great Utahns, has been brought out, and it has been intimated that could the record of other early citizens be brought forth from the shadows of neglect, their stories would be fully as interesting and as worth while in completing the record of those whose work stirred the interest of the east in the west, precipitated two wars for its possession, and started the stream of immigration with which history has more justly dealt.

This third article deals with Captain William H. Ashley, citizen of Utah valley, once commander of a fort on the shores of Utah lake, bearing the title of Fort Ashley, and graced by a six pounder cannon, hauled overland from St. Louis just twenty years before the Mormon immigration commenced the permanent settlements. Utah Lake should in justice bear his name, as once it did when he gave the name of "Ute outlet" to the Jordan river, and of Ashley river to the principal stream running in from the south.

Unlike the man who built the first house in Ogden valley, Captain Ashley was an American. His presence here resulted from a warfare of trade with Great Britain, while the presence of Peter Skeen Ogden only eighty miles to the north in exactly the same period represented the firing line of British opposition.

Ashley's record runs to the American archives at St. Louis, where he outfitted the "Rocky Mountain Fur Company," and moved his forces, consisting of 120 well-equipped men, to Utah Lake in 1825, brought out a six pounder two years later, and fifteen years afterwards, when the official investigators were making maps, Fremont, with the same abandon as he lifted the name of Ogden river from the Humboldt, and without rhyme or reason gave it the name it now bears, placed also the name of Utah Lake on Lake Ashley, "in honor of the natives there residing." Fortunately higher up in the mountains, where his influence still lingered when the map-makers came, he secured a slight recognition in the name of Ashley valley in the Colorado river system, and of Ashley fork of the Duchesne.

The great Green river, flowing so many miles across Utah as its principal waterway is dignified by the name of one of his subordinates, a lieutenant operating for him in that country while he trapped about the lake systems of the Utah, Salt Lake, and Cache valleys.

Cache valley, by the way, took its name from this same trapper, for with Henry, for whom Henry's lake is named, and Bridger, who was destined to become another resident of Utah for three decades, he camped in Cache valley, or Willow valley, as they then called it, during the winter of 1824-5.

This party had worked up the Missouri, as had Hunt and the Astorians a dozen years earlier, but they came at a time when the Nor-

Westers had completely looted the first American trading post at the Columbia's mouth, and had forced the Americans away from that river.

Thus it happens that while Peter Skeen Ogden's record runs back to the Montreal headquarters of the North West Company, that of Ashley is purely the property of Americans. He came to Utah up the South Pass in the summer of 1825, over the road later known as the Mormon immigrant road, and down the Bear river via Soda Springs into Salt Lake valley.

In order to understand properly the coming of Ashley with his American associates, it is necessary to couple to his work a summary of that occurring in the previous decade farther north.

Many peoples fought for the possession of the west before its title was clear, and in this fight the British, the Russians, the Americans, the Mexicans and the French all had more or less of a hand. Utah territory, too, was always a participating section. Witness the name of Duchesne, left by the French; Rio Virgen, left by the Mexicans; Ogden canyon, left by the British, and Forts Bridger and Ashley, left by the Americans, with Escalante valley remaining from the days of Spanish occupation in Mexico.

Nor was the country totally bereft of Russian influence. It was while Mr. Hunt of Astoria was absent from his post on the Columbia, traveling north to further cement friendship and to perfect a working agreement with the Russian trading settlements of Alaska, that a British born subordinate turned traitor, became the Benedict Arnold of the West, and surrendered the station to the Britishers who crowded down the Columbia after receiving news that the war of 1812 had broken out.

The western chapter of the war of 1812 has been overlooked, with the same abandon as has Wilson Price Hunt of New Jersey, who some day may emerge from the forgotten characters as a great American citizen and explorer, and one of the mighty forces in the making of the west, whose work was greatly altered, in its effect through the actions of the other man who may emerge likewise as the Benedict Arnold of the westward movement.

To begin with the struggle for the Columbia, the Americans there furnished Russian influences a point of southernmost contact through the fact that one of the objects of John Jacob Astor in founding Astoria was to supply the Russian posts in the northwest coast with supplies. To get a complete understanding with the Russian Government's Russian American Fur Trading company he had dispatched a representative to St. Petersburg in March, 1811. This agent succeeded in drawing up an agreement whereby the Russians and Americans were both to refrain from selling the Indians arms, to protect each other in times of danger, to refrain from trespassing on each other's trading grounds, and to unite against all interlopers. This of course meant a defensive alliance against the British, who were harassing Astoria with its fluttering American flag, from points higher up the Columbia, and were waiting with lustful eyes for an opportunity to swoop down upon it.

The whole story of the war of 1812 in its effect upon the Columbia country, and indirectly upon the Great Basin, through turning the tide of American trappers this way, deserves an extended mention, but here only a mention of its results can be made. While the Atlantic Americans were fighting at Detroit to keep back the Canadian incursions to the south, and on Lake Erie to clear the great waterways of British men-of-war, their brothers on the Pacific were fully as alarmed as were those to the east, and had difficulties to meet both on land and on sea. In January, 1813, we find John George M'Tarvish, a partner of the Nor'-Westers, hastening down the Columbia bearing the news that war had broken out, carrying a copy of President Mad-



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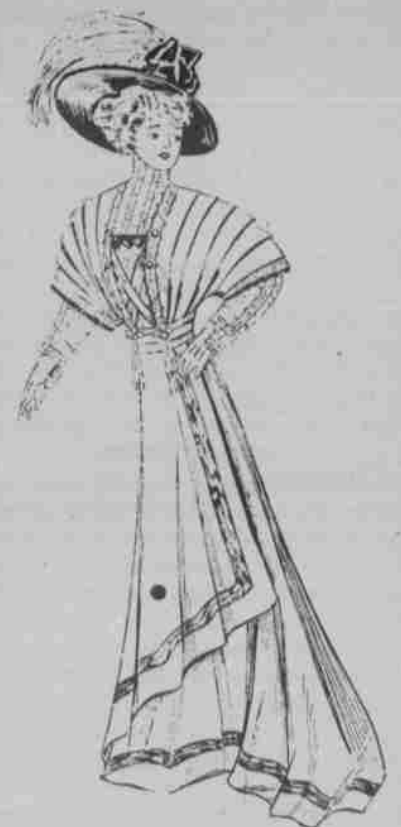
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