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## IN THIS ISSUE



**O**ne constant in history is nature. The forces, whims, and bounties of nature affect our lives in obvious and not so obvious ways. Hurricanes, floods, droughts, earthquakes, tornadoes, severe snow storms, global warming, set limits on our actions, disrupt our plans and dreams, and demand our resources, our time, and our energy. The disruptions of nature are never opportune, yet since the earliest days of history our ancestors have sought to avoid, anticipate, and prepare for disasters.

Our first article for the Spring 2009 issue recounts the ferocious Santa Clara River flood of January 1862 that swept away much of the infant settlement of Santa Clara in southwestern Utah. The flood spared neither recent Mormon settlers nor the Paiute people who had lived along the river for centuries and required adaptations that neither group had anticipated. In recent years, modern residents living along the Santa Clara have also been severely challenged notably in January 2005, when flood waters rampaged down the river's course toward its junction with the Virgin River, destroying scores of homes, disrupting hundreds of lives, and testing a new generation's abilities to deal with an unexpected crisis, floods in a desert.

**ON THE COVER: Rainbow Bridge.** UTAH STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

**IN THIS ISSUE (ABOVE): Forbidding Canyon and Rainbow Bridge before Lake Powell.** UTAH STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY.

**(RIGHT) An Aerial Photograph of Rainbow Bridge.** UTAH STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY.



In the minds of many people the history of the American West is the story of three groups—Indians, cowboys, and soldiers. Our second article examines the experience of soldiers in a remote area of the West—southeastern Utah during the decade of the 1880s. Ten years after the end of the American Civil War, during which approximately three million American men served in the armies of the North and South, the United States Army numbered only 27,000 men. Charged with defending the Atlantic and Pacific coasts, maintaining peace in the Reconstruction South, protecting settlers and placating Indians in the West, the United States Army faced no small challenge in carrying out its responsibilities. This was certainly the case for the few hundred soldiers at Fort Lewis, Colorado, and Fort Douglas, Utah, who served among the Mormons, cattlemen, Paiutes, Utes, and Navajo of the Four Corners area.



Throughout history individuals, organizations, and even nations have struggled with the difficulty of maintaining respect and fostering good will in the face of fundamental differences in belief and action. The failure to do so has resulted in tensions, animosity, hostility, and even war. When Isaiah Moses Coombs left his pregnant wife in Illinois to join his fellow Mormons in Utah and, in time, take up the practice of polygamy, his friendship with Dryden Rogers, a physician and Baptist, was put to the test. Their friendship overcame their differences as their correspondence between 1855 and 1886, the subject of our third article reveal.

Rainbow Natural Bridge is truly one of the natural wonders of the world. The sandstone bridge, rising 290 feet above Bridge Creek and spanning 270 feet, has been a sacred site for native peoples for centuries, however, it was not until two expeditions, one led by Byron Cummings of the University of Utah and the other by William B. Douglass of the United States General Land Office, reached the remote bridge on August 14, 1909, that the bridge became known to the outside world. Our final article for this issue commemorates the centennial anniversary of that 1909 “discovery” in fine historical tradition by considering the question did prospectors along the Colorado River see the natural bridge before 1909? As with many historical questions, there is no clear or easy answer.



CHRISTOPHER REEVES, PORTRAITS OF LOSS, STORIES OF HOPE

## The Big Washout: The 1862 Flood in Santa Clara

BY TODD M. COMPTON

The great flood that swept much of Santa Clara away in January 1862, including its solid rock fort, was one of the epic moments in southern Utah history, complete with the adventure, hair-raising escapes, humor, tragedy and heroism that epic requires.<sup>1</sup> The story that emerges from both the earliest and retrospective sources shows the cohesiveness of the Santa Clara saints, who somehow survived as their homes, mills, orchards were swept away, and their solid fort fell stone by stone into a monstrously swollen river. The “old” settlers of Fort Clara had just been joined by some ninety immigrants from the unlikely country of Switzerland when the flood occurred. Working together, the two groups survived and then settled together in the new town of Santa Clara, about a half mile below the older settlement. The old community had been entirely washed out; the new one began immediately.

The fate of the Paiute Indian settlement and their farms located on the opposite side of the river is not recorded in the white historical record. However, the probable destruction of their village, coupled with other problems caused by Mormon settlement in southern Utah, must have had a devastating impact on their way of life.

***Flood waters from the Santa Clara River cover the Jacob Hamblin home site in January 2005.***

Todd Compton is the author of *In Sacred Loneliness: the Plural Wives of Joseph Smith* (1997). He is currently writing a biography of Jacob Hamblin.

<sup>1</sup> This article often uses the modern name for the town; however, before the flood it was generally known as Fort Clara. Likewise, the Santa Clara River was often called the Clara.

While the 1862 flood was one of the worst floods in nineteenth-century Utah history, in some ways it was typical of the white pioneer experience in southern Utah, especially on the Virgin River.<sup>2</sup> Violent floods in southern Utah often arrived unexpectedly in usually dry territory and often these floods swept away houses, farms, dams and canals that had been built by Mormon settlers with enormous, painstaking labor. As a result, they were often faced with the heartbreaking option of starting again from scratch or leaving. In some communities the pioneers faced this choice repeatedly.<sup>3</sup>

This paper examines some of the sources historians have used to date and tell the tale of the Santa Clara flood and reexamines the story of the flood itself.

The date of the Santa Clara flood—January 17 to 19, 1862—has been disputed by some local historians and writers. For example, Jacob Hamblin's published autobiography dates the flood in mid-February, while Santa Clara residents have generally dated the flood on January 1, 1862.<sup>4</sup> Local historian Nellie Gubler, using James G. Bleak's "Annals of the Southern Utah Mission," dates the Santa Clara flood from January 17 to 19, 1862. But Gubler also states that a number of the survivors of the flood dated the flood on New Year's Day.<sup>5</sup> Many Santa Clara residents accept this date. John Staheli's autobiography dates the flood on January 1, 1862. "Just five days later [after the birth of Barbara Staheli on Christmas Day]," he wrote, "the big flood of 1862 came. The New Year's morning, with my sisters Wilhelmina, Elizabeth, and Mary and my brother George, I stood at the high window and watched the flood racing past. The west wall of the fortress had already fallen and there were great trees and boulders battering the place down."<sup>6</sup>

In recent years, new documents have come to light that allow us to tell a much more precise story of the Santa Clara flood, especially a letter by Daniel Bonelli (captain of the Swiss saints who had arrived in Santa Clara in late November 1861) to Brigham Young written on January 19, 1862.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>2</sup> A flood in 1889 may have been worse, see Andrew Karl Larson, *I Was Called to Dixie: the Virgin River Basin: Unique Experience in Mormon Pioneering* (St. George: The Dixie College Foundation, 1961), 367.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 357-75.

<sup>4</sup> James Little, ed., *Jacob Hamblin, A Narrative of his Personal Experience, as a Frontiersman, Missionary to the Indians and Explorer* (Salt Lake City: Juvenile Instructor Office, 1881), 75-76. A local historical marker erected in 1939 honoring the Swiss colony states: "The fort and many other buildings, darts and ditches were washed away by floods January 1, 1862." The Fort Clara historical marker dates the flood on February 4, 1862, apparently relying on Richard Ira Elkins, *Ira Hatch: Indian Missionary, 1835-1909* (Bountiful, Utah: n.p., 1984). However, this is not an actual autobiography; it is a modern biography which the author placed in the first person.

<sup>5</sup> Nellie McArthur Gubler, "History of Santa Clara, Washington County, 1850-1950," in Hazel Bradshaw, ed., *Under Dixie Sun: A History of Washington County* (St. George: Washington County Chapter D.U.P., 1950), 146-76, 164.

<sup>6</sup> See John Staheli, "The Life of John and Barbara Staheli, Ms 7832, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints Archives, hereinafter cited as LDS Church Archives. John Staheli was four and a half years old at the time of the flood.

<sup>7</sup> Daniel Bonelli to Brigham Young, Brigham Young Collection, Box 28, fd. 17, microfilm reel 39, LDS Church Archives. This letter was brought to my attention by Waldo Perkins' article, "From Switzerland to the Colorado River: Life Sketch of the Entrepreneurial Daniel Bonelli, the Forgotten Pioneer," *Utah Historical Quarterly* 74 (Winter 2006): 4-23.



UTAH STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

**George A. Smith.**

This letter gives the correct date for the flood, January 17 to 19, 1862, and conclusively resolves the dating debate.

There is also a letter about the flood from Jacob Hamblin to George A. Smith dated February 2, 1862.<sup>8</sup> While this letter is valuable, it fails to precisely date the flood; it merely states that the rains started on Christmas day, 1861. It actually gives the impression that the flood and the evacuation of the fort occurred the day after Christmas in 1861, which is incorrect. Nevertheless, it is a valuable early holographic account of the flood.

Other early sources that mention the flood briefly are the Harmony Ward Record by John D. Lee, an article on the flood in the February 12, 1862 *Deseret News*, and two letters to the editor in the same edition of the *News* — one by Chapman Duncan from Virgin City on the Virgin River, dated January 19, and the other by Jesse W. Crosby from St. George, dated January 20.<sup>9</sup>

A purported January 19 letter to George A. Smith from Jacob Hamblin, published in the *Deseret News* with the Duncan and Crosby letters, is a curiosity. There is no letter from Jacob Hamblin to George A. Smith dated January 19 in the George A. Smith collection at the LDS Church Archives. It appears that this letter was not really by Hamblin. It seems to take the beginning of the February 2 Hamblin to Smith letter, then inserts some of the January 19 Bonelli letter, rephrased. A few details in it come from sources other than Bonelli.

After these near-contemporary sources, there are many later reminiscences, autobiographies, and family histories. For example, James Bleak's "Annals of the Southern Utah Mission" is a valuable source; though it includes some primary materials, much of it is written long after the 1862 flood.<sup>10</sup>

Jacob Hamblin, Thales Haskell and Augustus Hardy founded Santa Clara

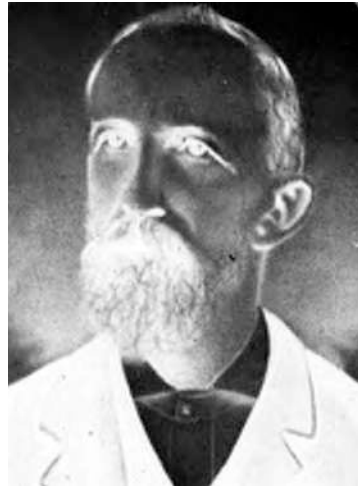
<sup>8</sup> Jacob Hamblin to George A. Smith, February 2, 1862, George A. Smith Collection, MS 1322, Box 6, fd 5, LDS Church Archives, available in Richard E. Turley, ed., *Selected Collections from the Archives of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, 2 vols. (Provo: Brigham Young University Press, 2002), v. 1, DVD 32.

<sup>9</sup> Robert Glass Cleland and Juanita Brooks, eds., *A Mormon Chronicle: The Diaries of John D. Lee, 1848-1876*, 2 vols. (San Marino, CA: Huntington Library, 1955), 2:4-7, "The Flood in Washington County;" and letters to the editor by Chapman Duncan and J. W. Crosby, *Deseret News*, February 12, 1862, pp. 4 and 8.

<sup>10</sup> James G. Bleak, "Annals of the Southern Utah Mission, circa 1898-1907," holograph, MS 318, LDS Church Archives, also in Turley, *Selected Collections*, vol. 1, DVD 19. James G. Bleak, a resident of St. George, never lived in Santa Clara.



on December 2, 1854, about a mile or so northwest of present-day Santa Clara. Three other missionaries Samuel Knight, Amos Thornton, and Ira Hatch arrived the following January and February.<sup>11</sup> The Santa Clara settlement was located on the northeastern side of the Santa Clara river while Paiutes lived and farmed on the southwestern side. The community grew steadily, and by January 1856 a sturdy rock fort was built. The fort was about one hundred feet on each side with two feet thick walls, standing eight feet and six inches high, rising twelve feet where houses joined the wall.<sup>12</sup> The fort's north side faced a bluff overlooking the valley.



**Thales Haskell.**

A company of saints from San Bernardino settled in Santa Clara after the Mormons abandoned San Bernardino in 1857-58. With these additional settlers, “a town site was laid off and those who built outside the Fort built on that town site.”<sup>13</sup>

By late November 1861, there were about twenty families living in Santa Clara.<sup>14</sup> Aside from houses in the fort, there were about seven homes built outside the fort, a schoolhouse (perhaps the same as the “abobe meeting house” that a Gubler family history refers to) and Jacob Hamblin’s grist mill on the other side of the stream.<sup>15</sup>

At the time of the flood there were about twenty acres under cultivation as well as many orchards (especially peach orchards), some vineyards, and some cotton fields.<sup>16</sup> Walter E. Dodge had a remarkable nursery that had received particular notice. When Brigham Young visited Santa Clara in May 1861, the settlers were expecting to harvest a thousand bushels of peaches

<sup>11</sup> See Jacob Hamblin journal, December 1-2, 1854, holograph, MS 1951, LDS Church Archives; Thomas Brown to Brigham Young, December 22, 1854, in Juanita Brooks, ed., *Journal of the Southern Indian Mission: Diary of Thomas D. Brown*, Western Text Society, no. 4 (Logan: Utah State University Press, 1973), 103-104. Other sources incorrectly have five missionaries arriving in Santa Clara in December 1854.

<sup>12</sup> The dimensions are according to the Jacob Hamblin journal for January 1856, and Zadok Knapp Judd, “Reminiscence on the Settlement of the Santa Clara,” in James G. Bleak collection, Box 2, Fd 6, Utah State Historical Society. John R. Young incorrectly states that the fort was 200 feet square, *Memoirs of John R. Young, by Himself* (Salt Lake City: The Deseret News, 1920), 118.

<sup>13</sup> Bleak, “Annals,” 79, cf. p. 62.

<sup>14</sup> Mary Ann Hafen, *Recollections of a Handcart Pioneer of 1860: a Woman's Life on the Mormon Frontier* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1983), 31. Bleak, “Annals,” 85, counts twenty families also. However, John Staheli remembered thirty families. See John Staheli, “The Life of John and Barbara Staheli,” LDS Church Archives, Ms. 7832, p. 5; “History of Brigham Young,” in *History of the Church, 1839-circa 1882* CR 100 102, LDS Church Archives; and Turley, *Selected Collections*, vol. 1, DVD 4) at May 25, 1861, records that there were thirty-four men and thirty houses in Santa Clara in May 1861. The 1860 census for Santa Clara “Tonaquint” Washington County, pp. 151-54, lists twenty-five households.

<sup>15</sup> Daniel Bonelli to Brigham Young, January 19, 1862; “Casper Gubler,” (n. a.), at <http://www.loft-house.com/history/GublerCa.html> (accessed January 7, 2008); and Young, *Memoirs*, 119.

<sup>16</sup> Zadok Knapp Judd, *Autobiography*, typescript at the Utah State Historical Society.

later that year, half of which would come from Jacob Hamblin's orchard.<sup>17</sup>

Other settlers soon added to the growing settlement. Between eighty-five and ninety-three recently emigrated Swiss were called by Brigham Young to settle in Santa Clara to raise grapes, indigo, cotton, figs, and olives. They arrived at Fort Clara November 24-28, and at first camped around the adobe meeting house, putting up shelters around it.<sup>18</sup> Some of the Swiss saints moved into the fort. The George and Sophia Staheli family, with a pregnant mother and seven children from twelve to two, moved into the second floor of the Ira Hatch home in the southwest corner of the fort.<sup>19</sup>

Settlement leaders decided that the Swiss saints should be permanently located on the "lower flat" on the "Big Bend" of the Santa Clara creek about a half mile or a mile southeast of the fort.<sup>20</sup> This site would eventually become the hub of modern Santa Clara. Some of the older settlers of Santa Clara had been using this flat, but at the counsel of church leaders, apostles George A. Smith and Erastus Snow, they gave up their claims to the Swiss. The land was surveyed by Israel Ivins from St. George in early December, and Daniel Bonelli headed the effort to divide the land into equal plats for farming and vineyards.

On December 22 Bonelli dedicated the land; the Swiss saints sang, prayed and drew numbered lots from a hat to receive their inheritances.<sup>21</sup> After this meeting, the Swiss began moving away from the fort and onto their lots. This location was not by any means the most attractive land possible for vineyards. Mary Ann Hafen remembered "dry, dead sunflowers" and "gray rabbitbrush" growing there. Ten-year-old Anthony Ivins, who helped his father Israel move a group of Swiss settlers to Santa Clara, remembered seeing nothing but sagebrush, and wondered how the Swiss settlers would survive.<sup>22</sup>

The Swiss saints dammed the Santa Clara near their site, and dug irrigation ditches to their lots, which they completed on Christmas day 1861.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>17</sup> "History of Brigham Young" May 25, 1861, p. 216.

<sup>18</sup> See Daniel Bonelli to Brigham Young, January 19, 1862; Waldo Perkins, "Christen and Samuel Wittwer," typescript in possession of author; and Bleak, "Annals," 99.

<sup>19</sup> John Staheli, "The Life of John and Barbara Staheli," 5. According to Mary Judd, the Stahelis lived in the Ira Hatch home. See Mary Judd autobiography, 27, Huntington Library, San Marino, California; Young, *Memoirs*, 119.

<sup>20</sup> Hafen, *Recollections of a Handcart Pioneer*, 32. One source uses the following language: "below the point of the hill on the bend of the river where homes would be safer from the flood waters of the creek." Selina G. Hafen and Eliza H. Gubler, cp., "Johannes (John) Gubler and Maria (Mary) Ursula Muller" at <http://www.lofthouse.com/USA/Utah/washington/gubler-johan.html>, (accessed January 1, 2008). Bleak, "Annals," 99, uses the language, "'Big Bend', or 'Bottom', below the Fort." According to Bleak, "Annals," 33, Fort Clara was "about half a mile above the present town of Santa Clara." Zadok Knapp Judd, autobiography, remembers the Swiss settling "a few hundred yards below where we had settled." See also John Stucki, "Autobiography," typescript, Utah State Historical Society, 12, and, Joyce Wittwer Whittaker, comp. and ed., *History of Santa Clara, Utah "A Blossom in the Desert"* (Santa Clara: Santa Clara Historical Society, 2003), 281.

<sup>21</sup> Bleak, "Annals," 99-100; Hafen, *Recollections of a Handcart Pioneer*, 32.

<sup>22</sup> Gubler, "History of Santa Clara," 161. For a contrasting view, see John Stucki, Autobiography, 10-11.

<sup>23</sup> Bleak, "Annals," 123D.

Some of the Swiss lived in their wagon boxes, and others gathered willows to make temporary shelters from the wind. The Samuel and Magdalena Stucki family, including their daughter, Mary Ann, lived in such a shelter. Mary Ann remembered her mother complaining that this wickiup was a poor substitute for the cozy home they had left behind in Switzerland.

Her complaints would undoubtedly multiply when the rain began to fall. Other Swiss began to build more permanent dugouts in the sides of the hill.<sup>24</sup>

On Christmas day, three significant events occurred. First, Barbara Staheli was born to George and Sophia Barbara Staheli in the upstairs room of the Hatch home in the fort. The Stahelis had moved into the fort to accommodate the childbirth, and since Sophia was ill for weeks after the birth, they stayed in the fort after Christmas. Second, the Swiss settlers finished their irrigation ditches and diversion dam. And third, it began to rain.<sup>25</sup> According to early sources, the rain lasted for some forty days, which would be about six weeks or until about February 8, 1862.<sup>26</sup>

The settlers of St. George had arrived in late November and early December. Bleak writes that it began to rain on them while they “were having a festive Christmas time.” The wagon covers and tents they were camping in turned out to be “but poor shelter” from a continuous forty-day “down-pour.”<sup>27</sup> The same would have been true for the Swiss saints.

Further to the north, heavy rain and snow fell on the upper Santa Clara creek and in Pine Valley, which swelled the lower Santa Clara creek. Daniel Bonelli refers to “incessant” rain and snow storms in the mountains above Fort Clara.

Many of the early reminiscences remember the Santa Clara before the flood as a creek and under normal circumstances one could walk across it in places.<sup>28</sup> In the weeks following Christmas 1861, the creek became a river in full flood, with banks widening continually and water level always rising.

The flood came “as a thief in the night,” in John Ray Young’s words, early in the morning of Friday, January 17.<sup>29</sup> When the flood struck, the once-meek Santa Clara indeed presented a fearsome sight. John Young remembered a “wall of water” ten to fifteen feet high.<sup>30</sup> Daniel Bonelli was equally impressed by the weirdness of cottonwood trees and huge logs

<sup>24</sup> Hafen, *Recollections of a Handcart Pioneer*, 34.

<sup>25</sup> For the rain starting on Christmas, see Jacob Hamblin to George A. Smith, February 2, 1862; Robert Gardner, Jr., Autobiography, holograph, written in 1884, pp. 20–21, in the Robert Gardner collection, MS 1744, LDS Church Archives; Bleak, “Annals,” at December 25, 1861, 113, 123D.

<sup>26</sup> Bleak, “Annals,” at December 25, 1861, 113, 123D; Cleland and Brooks, *A Mormon Chronicle*, 2:6–7. Mary Judd, autobiography, p. 26, remembered that the rain fell about three or four weeks after Christmas.

<sup>27</sup> Bleak, “Annals,” 113.

<sup>28</sup> Hafen, *Recollections of a Handcart Pioneer*, 33.

<sup>29</sup> Young, *Memoirs*, 118. For the date of the flood see Daniel Bonelli to Brigham Young, January 19, 1862.

<sup>30</sup> Young, *Memoirs*, 118.

careening down the Clara, rushing along “like arrows upon the turbid current.” This presented “a spectacle of dreadful magnificence.” In addition, the flood uprooted trees at Santa Clara “with astounding rapidity.”<sup>31</sup> Jesse W. Crosby wrote on the 17th that the Virgin and the Santa Clara “became mighty rivers, and both man and beast fled from them terrified.” In fact, a number of horses, mules and cattle were drowned.<sup>32</sup> Jacob Hamblin remembered the awesome sound of the flood, “the roar of the water awakened most of the inhabitation in and about Ft Clara.”<sup>33</sup> Mary Judd wrote that the flood “looked like the sea as it came out of the kanion and spread over the bottoms from hill to hill.”<sup>34</sup> Bonelli in his letter to Brigham Young wrote that the river “overflowed nearly the whole of the bottoms, destroying orchards and field.”<sup>35</sup>

On the other side of the river, the angry current swept away Jacob Hamblin’s grist mill at about this time. When the flood struck on early Friday morning, the elderly miller Solomon Chamberlain and his grandchildren, who lived near the mill, were rudely awakened by a stream of water pouring into their dugout.

They managed to escape this deathtrap by climbing a nearby tree, where they spent a miserable and terrifying night. “Old Father Chamberlen grandson and daughter ware in a long tree surrounded by the floods,” Hamblin wrote.<sup>36</sup> They stayed in the tree until Friday afternoon when the floods abated, and then the Chamberlains retreated to “a high spot on the mill-race.”<sup>37</sup> Soon after this, the tree in which they had taken refuge was swept away in the still-raging current. “Chamberlen had decended ^from his tree^ but a few minits when it ... was hauld into the distructiv element,” according to Hamblin.<sup>38</sup> However, they were now safe at their high point on the mill-race, and John Young reports that three days later he and Ira Hatch were able to cross the river and bring Chamberlain and his grandchildren back to the main settlement with them.<sup>39</sup>

By about midday on Friday the flood water in the bottoms retreated to the river channel. Daniel Bonelli wrote, “During the forenoon the floods seemed to abate and returned to the deeper washing bed of the river.” Hamblin wrote that on that afternoon the river had receded to its banks, but the channel of the river was eight feet deeper than it had been, and now “the banks [were] sliding in with great rapidity undermining houses stacks

<sup>31</sup> Jacob Hamblin to George A. Smith, January 19, 1862, in *Deseret News*, “Floods in Southern Utah,” February 12, 1862, p. 8.

<sup>32</sup> J. W. [Jesse Wentworth] Crosby, Letter to the Editor, dated January 20, 1862, in *Deseret News*, “Flood in Southern Utah” February 12, 1862, p. 8.

<sup>33</sup> Jacob Hamblin to George A. Smith, February 2, 1862.

<sup>34</sup> Mary Judd, *Autobiography*, 27.

<sup>35</sup> Daniel Bonelli to Brigham Young, January 19, 1862.

<sup>36</sup> Jacob Hamblin to George A. Smith, February 2, 1862. For this incident, see also the Bonelli letter and “The Flood in Washington County,” *Deseret News* February 12, 1862, p. 4. The fullest account of Chamberlain’s adventures is in Young, *Memoirs*, 119-20.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> Jacob Hamblin to George A. Smith, February 2, 1862.

<sup>39</sup> Young, *Memoirs*, 119-20.



of grain orchards and nurseries.”<sup>40</sup> According to one local history, “The mad river was slashing into the bank, carving out pieces as big as a house.”<sup>41</sup>

The Santa Clara pioneers evidently felt that the fort and houses near to it were safe. Hamblin, in his autobiography, wrote, “Our fort, constructed of stone ... with walls twelve feet high and two feet thick, stood a considerable distance north of the original bed of the creek ... and we had considered it safe from the flood.”<sup>42</sup> On Saturday night, Jacob Hamblin’s third wife, twenty-year-old Priscilla, warned him that the situation was dangerous. “Priscilla, you are too concerned,” Hamblin responded, and went to bed.<sup>43</sup>

Later that night, the flood waters began making inroads beneath the southwest corner of the fort, where the Hatches and Stahelis were living.<sup>44</sup> The Santa Clarans realized they might lose the fort, and quick evacuation was necessary. Someone knocked on Jacob Hamblin’s door: “Jake, are you going to lay there and be washed away?” was his brusque question. That got Hamblin out of bed.<sup>45</sup>

John Young described the waters hitting the west wall of the fort and dividing the flood water north and south. While the walls of the fort held for a time, the water on the north soon streamed into the entrance of the fort. A sheet of water four or five feet deep “swept through the gate like a mill race, flooding the inside of the fort to a man’s armpits.”<sup>46</sup>

The rescue mission to save people and remove the settlement’s possessions from the fort was quickly organized. The rescuers must have presented an eerie spectacle; while the chaos of the river roared, a black unseen monster, human forms moved about in near darkness, lit only by a few torches or makeshift lanterns.

Their first priority was to take women and children to higher ground. However, just outside the entrance to the fort a dangerous strong current was flowing that could easily sweep people away. To provide safe passage through the rushing water, the men tied a strong rope to a post inside the fort and to a tree higher up the hill.<sup>47</sup>

Thus, the women and children were evacuated, some clinging to the necks and riding on shoulders of men as they held onto the rope.<sup>48</sup> Many

<sup>40</sup> Jacob Hamblin to George A. Smith, February 2, 1862.

<sup>41</sup> Gubler, “History of Santa Clara,” 163.

<sup>42</sup> Little, *Jacob Hamblin*, 76.

<sup>43</sup> Pearson Corbett, *Jacob Hamblin: Peacemaker* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1952), 200. For Jacob Hamblin’s wives, see Todd M. Compton, “Civilizing the Ragged Edge: Jacob Hamblin’s Wives,” *Journal of Mormon History* 33 (Summer 2007): 155–80.

<sup>44</sup> Jacob Hamblin does not give the date, but says that this occurred at night: “when the darkness of the night had set in the south^west^ corner of the Fort comenced falling.” Hamblin to George A. Smith, February 2, 1862.

<sup>45</sup> Corbett, *Jacob Hamblin*, 200.

<sup>46</sup> Young, *Memoirs*, 119.

<sup>47</sup> John Staheli, “The Life of John and Barbara Staheli,” 5, remembers it in the middle of the fort.

<sup>48</sup> Young, *Memoirs*, 119, portrays the rope being used during all the evacuation. Jacob Hamblin, in his February 2 letter to George A. Smith, and his autobiography, Little, *Jacob Hamblin*, 77, seems to remember using the rope only for the rescue of Sophia Staheli.

of the refugees took shelter in a “stone corell” that Hamblin had built higher up the hill. Mary Judd later remembered, “A city of tentes and shanties around that stone fort.”<sup>49</sup>

Following the evacuation of the women and children, the men turned to saving what supplies they could. There were two hundred bushels of wheat stored in the northwest corner of the fort, and the men started to move the wheat, while John Young held a lantern and kept an eye on the flood. “We barly saved the grain that was stord in the Fort lard[er],” wrote Hamblin.<sup>50</sup> When they had removed 175 bushels, Young gave a warning, and soon after this the northwest corner of the fort fell into the raging Santa Clara waters.

At about this time a near disaster occurred, as the saints realized that most of George Staheli’s family was still inside the fort. (George Staheli had been attempting to “rake” wood out of the creek’s channel and did not realize that the fort was being evacuated.) Hamblin headed the rescue even as the back part of the fort was falling away “piece by piece.” Judd, Hamblin, and others waded through the water and were able to get to the family in time while George Staheli attempted to take his wife through the wild current north of the fort, but “the depth and swiftness of the water prevented him” from escaping the fort.<sup>51</sup> Hamblin, a large, tall man came to the rescue. “I then took the sick woman on my back and by the help of Bro Young and the roap conveyed hur safe to the shore.” According to one account, Hamblin nearly lost his own life while trying to save the gravely ill Sophia Staheli. Just as he and Sophia were nearly safe, the pole at the fort on which the rope was tied “gave way and tore the rope loose.” Someone was able to seize Sophia even as Hamblin was being swept away in the rushing water. A quick thinking Indian threw a rope to Hamblin who seized it and the Santa Clara men dragged him to safety.<sup>52</sup>

In Hamblin’s autobiography, he tells the story somewhat differently. Midway through the most dangerous part of the rescue, Sophia Staheli’s “arms pressed so heavily on my throat that I was nearly strangled. It was a critical moment, for if I let go the rope we were sure to be lost, as the water was surging against me.” However, he was able to persevere, and reached safety “to the great joy of the husband and children.”<sup>53</sup>

The other Staheli children were rescued by other men, with great difficulty. Zadok Judd took a Staheli boy about five years old, possibly George Staheli who had been born in January 1854, and carried him clinging to his back as he waded through swift water. As Judd fought the

<sup>49</sup> Mary Judd, *Autobiography*, 27.

<sup>50</sup> Jacob Hamblin to George A. Smith, February 2, 1862.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>52</sup> Gubler, “History of Santa Clara,” 163. “Life Story of Barbara Staheli Graff Stucki,” WPA biography, Utah State Historical Society, and Juanita Brooks, *On the Ragged Edge: The Life and Times of Dudley Leavitt* (Salt Lake City: Utah State Historical Society, 1973), 103. This may be a doublet of Hamblin’s fall into the Santa Clara described below, in which Albert, an Indian, throws Hamblin the rope.

<sup>53</sup> Little, *Jacob Hamblin*, 77.

waist-high current and tried to go forward, he stumbled and almost fell into the flood; but he just barely had enough strength to regain his footing while the boy held tight to him. They made it to safety.<sup>54</sup>

Just after the Stahelis were saved, the entire south wall of the fort dropped into the water.<sup>55</sup>

According to Mary Judd, Jacob Hamblin nearly lost his life while bringing his own wife to safety. “[B]r Jacob Hamblin came near going down to[o] trying to git out his wife,” Judd later wrote.<sup>56</sup>

John R. Young reports another close shave for Hamblin (or another version of the fall described above). After the rescue of the people in the fort and the wheat, Hamblin asked Young to hold the lantern while he moved some cordwood to higher ground. While he was engaged in this task, the section of earth on which he stood fell into the river. Young shouted for help, and Joseph Knight came running with the rope they had used to evacuate the fort. As Young tried to direct the light down the bank to where Hamblin was struggling to hold onto “snapping roots,” Knight made a noose and threw it down, lassoing Jacob with it.<sup>57</sup> As Hamblin seized the rope, Knight and Young pulled him from certain death, for, as Young later wrote, “no man could have lived long in that torrent of mud and water.”<sup>58</sup>

By three a.m. Sunday morning, the fort had been entirely swept away, along with the schoolhouse, and seven houses close to the fort.<sup>59</sup> There has been a local tradition that a wall of the fort still stood, and Jacob Hamblin used the rock from the wall of the fort to build his new home. However, in his February 2, 1862, letter to George A. Smith, Hamblin convincingly contradicts this: “by the next morning there was not a single rock of the old fort to be seen but a chanel where it once stood, [and] the schoolhouse and 7 other houses above the Fort had [also] disappeared and in their place roar now the wild torrents of the river.” Bonelli’s January 17, 1862, letter to Brigham Young also supports the idea that no part of the fort survived. The Santa Clara orchards, vineyards and Brother Dodge’s prize nursery were also entirely gone.

As the sun arose on Sunday morning, January 19th, the Santa Clara saints, camping out in the rain at Jacob Hamblin’s stone corral at the top of the bluff, must have witnessed a heartbreaking panorama of apocalyptic grandeur. Their fort, town, orchards, and vineyards were entirely gone. In

<sup>54</sup> Zadok Knapp Judd, autobiography. According to “Life Story of Barbara Staheli Graff Stucki,” WPA biography, at USHS, “My brother George was carried away by the flood but was saved by a man called ‘Little Bishop.’” Judd was the bishop of Fort Clara ward at the time.

<sup>55</sup> Elizabeth Staheli Walker, “History of Barbara Sophia Haberli Staheli,” in Nora Lund, Biographies Collection, 3, MS 8691, microfilm reel 3, LDS Church Archives.

<sup>56</sup> Mary Judd, *Autobiography*, 27. This may be a doublet of the incident of Hamblin bringing Sophia Staheli to safety.

<sup>57</sup> Juanita Leavitt Brooks, doubtless reflecting Leavitt/Hamblin traditions, wrote that Albert, Jacob’s adopted Indian boy, threw him the lasso that saved him. Brooks, *On the Ragged Edge*, 103.

<sup>58</sup> Young, *Memoirs*, 120–21, and Zadok Knapp Judd “Autobiography.”

<sup>59</sup> Daniel Bonelli to Brigham Young, January 19, 1862.

their place was a river “one hundred and fifty yards wide the banks on the north side of the creek 25 feet high.”<sup>60</sup>

Many accounts of the flood emphasize how the old town of Santa Clara was washed away, and even old settlers, along with the Swiss newcomers, had to make a new beginning. The flood “changed the prospects and circumstances of all to a great extent, reducing the first settlers to almost the position of new beginners,” writes James Bleak.<sup>61</sup> After the flood, the area even looked different, aside from the obvious lack of the fort and schoolhouse, homes, and orchards; the flood “gave a very different aspect to the country.”<sup>62</sup> This transition from destruction to new beginnings possibly provides a reason for the persistent misdating of the flood to January 1. It may have simply felt right that the flood should occur when the old year was ending and the new year was beginning.<sup>63</sup>

In the days and weeks that followed the flood, the men and women of Santa Clara set to work to provide themselves and their families with dry clothing, hot meals, and temporary homes as the forty-day rain continued. The Mormon pioneers such as Priscilla Leavitt Hamblin believed in a gospel of work, and now it was time to practice it. “There was no time for self-pity,” Priscilla later said. “There was work to be done and much of it; shelters were made, and the mothers had to make them pleasant to live in.”<sup>64</sup>

Priscilla had just washed and ironed the clothes of the large Hamblin family on Friday and had put them on a rack on a side wall inside the fort to dry. In the rush of evacuation, her clothes were washed away. Later Priscilla said, “I only owned two aprons [at the time of the flood], I was wearing the old one, and my good one was buried in the red Santa Clara flood.”<sup>65</sup>

The Ira Hatch family, who lived in the southwest corner of the fort, also lost everything they had. John R. Young wrote, “Suddenly the southwest corner of the fort, Ira Hatch’s home, fell into the flood, sweeping away everything he owned. Other families suffered, but he, taken by surprise, lost all.”<sup>66</sup> Other families evidently were able to salvage part of their possessions.

Some things that had washed down the Santa Clara were recovered. “A great many peaces of Heamlans grist mill did [go] down the clara, a distance of four miles for I helped to pick them up,” wrote St. George resident Robert Gardner.<sup>67</sup> Zadok Judd recovered some of his peach trees, which were “brought back and reset and afterwards bore fruit.”<sup>68</sup> The

<sup>60</sup> Jacob Hamblin, letter to George A. Smith, February 2, 1862.

<sup>61</sup> Bleak, “Annals,” 123D.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>63</sup> The transition from last day of old year to first day of new year is regarded in many cultures as a time reenacting the destruction of the world and new creation. Mircea Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return: Cosmos and History*, Bollingen Series XLVI, tr. Willard R. Trask (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1954), 49-92.

<sup>64</sup> Quoted in Corbett, *Jacob Hamblin*, 202.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>66</sup> Young, *Memoirs*, 119.

<sup>67</sup> Robert Gardner, Jr., *Autobiography*, 22-23.



people at Santa Clara spent much time and effort in the days after the flood trying to reclaim plants, machinery, and building materials that had disappeared into the violent waters of the Santa Clara.

Though the great rains and flood were a harsh welcome to the new Swiss arrivals at Santa Clara, they were actually somewhat fortunate. “On the ‘lower flat,’” Mary Ann Hafen wrote, “we were untouched by the flood.”<sup>69</sup> However, their new dams and ditches were entirely washed away, and they started rebuilding these on February 17 and finished a month later, on March 16.<sup>70</sup>

Remarkably, no lives were lost during the “big washout” at Santa Clara, though Jacob Hamblin, Zadok Knapp Judd, Solomon Chamberlain and his children, and the Stahelis, all had brushes with death. Elsewhere, the Lee family at Fort Harmony was not so lucky, as John D. Lee lost two children to a cave-in just as they were preparing to finally evacuate Harmony Fort.<sup>71</sup> The survival of the entire Santa Clara community in the face of a sudden, violent challenge from nature is a tribute to the cohesiveness of the little Mormon community, which had recently received a major, quite alien infusion of population—many of whom could not speak English.

Nevertheless, the Great Flood took its toll; a few people who were already ill obviously would not have been helped by the unavoidable exposure to cold, rain, and flood waters of the Santa Clara. There were a few deaths that were attributed to the flood. John Terry Young, the two-year-old son of John Ray and Albina Terry Young, died on February 22, 1862. John senior wrote, “During the damp and rainy weather that accompanied the flood, our little son, John T., took the croup, and after several days of terrible suffering, died. This was our first life sorrow, and the blow was a heavy one.”<sup>72</sup> Sophia Barbara Staheli, the mother of the child born in Fort Clara on Christmas Day died of typhoid fever on June 3, 1862, leaving her baby motherless.<sup>73</sup> Her son wrote, “Barbara was never well after the night of the flood.”<sup>74</sup>

Rachel Judd Hamblin, Jacob Hamblin’s second wife, died four years later, on February 18, 1865. Family traditions report that her health, already poor, was worse after the flood.<sup>75</sup> Caroline Beck Knight, the wife of Samuel

<sup>68</sup> Zadok Knapp Judd, *Autobiography*.

<sup>69</sup> Hafen, *Recollections of a Handcart Pioneer*, 34. See also John Stucki, *Autobiography*, 14; Corbett, *Jacob Hamblin*, 203: “The momentum of the stream’s current was directed to the south side of the creek’s channel away from the townsite [of the new Swiss settlers].”

<sup>70</sup> Bleak, “Annals,” 123D.

<sup>71</sup> Lee, Harmony Ward Record, February 6, 1862, in Cleland and Brooks, *A Mormon Chronicle*, 2:7.

<sup>72</sup> Young, *Memoirs*, 121.

<sup>73</sup> John Staheli, “History of John and Barbara Staheli,” 6.

<sup>74</sup> Frank Staheli, “Johann George Staheli,” in Whittaker, *History of Santa Clara*, 348–50.

<sup>75</sup> Compton, “Civilizing the Ragged Edge,” 180–81; Corbett, *Jacob Hamblin*, 200. Corbett reports that Rachel, when saved from Fort Clara, had an eight-day-old baby, Araminda. However, on p. 460, he gives the date of birth for Araminda as “January 27, 1861.” If this is the correct date—and it is the date in Vera Leib Miller, compiler, *The Jacob Vernon Hamblin Family* (Seal Beach, CA: by the author, 1975), 54—then Araminda was not eight days old, but almost a year old at the time of the flood.

Knight, had poor health before the flood, according to family traditions, and was eight months pregnant at the time of the flood. She bore her second child, Leonora, on February 8, 1862, while all the Santa Clara saints were undoubtedly living in crude shelters of some sort. The “forty-day rain” may have continued up through the date of the birth. Caroline died eight years later on February 13, 1870, at the age of thirty-nine. The flood may have worsened her sickly condition.<sup>76</sup>

There is today a persistent tradition that Brigham Young had advised the Santa Clara residents to move to higher ground before the flood. In Andrew Karl Larson’s account of the Big Flood in Santa Clara, he quotes the LDS church’s monumental daily scrapbook, the *Journal History*, which in this case draws from a contemporary source, “History of Brigham Young.” According to this account Brigham Young visited Santa Clara on May 26, 1861, and advised the saints there to move onto higher ground. This tradition suggests that old Santa Clara was destroyed partly as the result of the heedlessness and disobedience of the settlers there.<sup>77</sup>

However, upon closer examination of the *Journal History*, the statement in which Brigham Young advises the saints at Santa Clara to move to higher ground is written in pencil, while the main text is typed. The advice is thus a late addition to the *Journal History*, and when we examine the actual “History of Brigham Young,” the sentence on Brigham Young advising the move is not there.<sup>78</sup>

There was a quite early tradition that Young gave this advice, though it does not come from Santa Clara. In his January 20, 1862, letter to the *Deseret News*, St. George resident Jesse W. Crosby wrote, “This will learn us an important lesson, and all will now be willing to take President Young’s advice and get on high ground.” However, Crosby was not in Santa Clara when Brigham Young visited the community in May 1861. Crosby came south with the St. George group in late November or early December, 1861.<sup>79</sup>

James Bleak, another St. George resident stated that “President Brigham Young in his visit ... advised the people of Santa Clara to move to higher ground.”<sup>80</sup> However, this statement appears in the 1859 section of Bleak’s work, and Brigham Young did not visit Dixie in 1859 but in 1861. The text in “Annals” continues and gives Brigham Young’s well-known prophecy of

<sup>76</sup> Robert Briggs, a descendant of Caroline Knight, reports a family tradition that Caroline was sickly since the birth of her first child and the Mountain Meadows Massacre, but he wonders if the 1862 flood, and the wet, cold living conditions that accompanied it, might have been the more logical cause of her ill health. Personal communication.

<sup>77</sup> Larson, *I Was Called to Dixie*, 43.

<sup>78</sup> See “Church Historian’s Office. History of the Church, 1839-circa 1882” CR100 102, in Turley, *Selected Collections*, vol. 1, DVD 4.

<sup>79</sup> See Jeff Crosby, “Jesse Wentworth Crosby,” a biography of Crosby, at <http://www.angelfire.com/ut/jcrosby/history/jesse/jesse.html>, (accessed on January 7, 2008). Crosby is on the list of St. George settlers given by Bleak, “Annals,” 89. See also Bleak, “Annals,” 101. John Stucki also mentioned the prophecy by Young, Stucki Autobiography, 13.

<sup>80</sup> Bleak, “Annals,” 75.



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St. George, which occurred in 1861. So Bleak was probably referring to Young's 1861 visit to Santa Clara. And, as we have seen, there is no record of a warning from Young in the "History of Brigham Young" on May 25, 1861. Once Brigham Young declared Fort Clara to be "the best Fort in Utah." It would be hard to imagine him praising it in such glowing terms if he felt it had been built in a dangerous place.<sup>81</sup>

Undoubtedly, the Santa Clara flood also impacted the Paiute Indian community, both near Fort Clara and up and down the Santa Clara river. The Paiutes were remarkable for their agricultural accomplishments.<sup>82</sup> When Mormon Indian missionaries first settled in the Santa Clara area, they did so at the invitation of the Paiutes, in order to help them improve their farming methods and help defend them against Ute incursions.<sup>83</sup> One

***Flood waters destroy a home built along the Santa Clara River.***

***January 2005.***

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 34.

<sup>82</sup> For Paiute agriculture, see Thomas Brown diary, June 8 and 13, 1854, in Brooks, *Journal of the Southern Indian Mission*, 49, 57; Isabel T. Kelly and Catherine S. Fowler, "Southern Paiute," in William Sturtevant, ed., *Handbook of North American Indians*, 17 vols. (Washington, D. C.: Smithsonian Institution, 1986), 11: 368-97, 317; Catherine S. Fowler and Don D. Fowler, "Notes on the History of the Southern Paiutes and Western Shoshonis," *Utah Historical Quarterly* 39 (Spring 1971): 95-113, 101; Richard W. Stoffle and Maria Nieves Zedeño, "Historical Memory and Ethnographic Perspectives on the Southern Paiute Homeland," *Journal of California and Great Basin Anthropology* 23 (2001): 229-48; Robert A. Manners, *Paiute Indians 1. Southern Paiute and Chemehuevi: An Ethnohistorical Report* (New York: Garland Publishing Inc., 1974), 37-43.

<sup>83</sup> For the Paiute invitation, see John R. Alley, "Prelude to Dispossession: The Fur Trade's Significance for the Northern Utes and Southern Paiutes," *Utah Historical Quarterly* 50 (Spring 1982): 104-23. For Mormon-Paiute relations generally see Martha C. Knack, *Boundaries Between: The Southern Paiutes, 1775-1995* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2000), 48-94, and W. Paul Reeve, *Making Space on the Western Frontier. Mormons, Miners, and Southern Paiutes* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2006).



*James G. Bleak and his wife.*

wonders how the flood affected their farms and villages. However, the Paiutes were not writing history, and their fate during and after the great flood is not recorded in any substantial way. There are only a few references to Indians during this time period.

John Staheli recalled that when he and the others first settled at Santa Clara there were about three hundred Indians camped by the creek below the fort. For a time “they were troublesome” but Staheli and the other settlers were “fortunate... having Jacob Hamblin with us, since he was able to assist us in settling most of our troubles. However at times we had unpleasant encounters. Often Indians would come begging for bread and would not believe that

we could not supply them, even when assured we had neither bread nor flour for ourselves.”<sup>84</sup> The white settlers did indeed undergo great difficulties in the months and years after the flood. However, this reference suggests that the Paiutes may have been undergoing even greater difficulties.

Hamblin biographer Preston Corbett writes of the Swiss saints that they were alarmed when the Paiutes in the Indian village burned their wickiups throughout December, and Samuel Knight explained to them that Indians were dying, and the living were trying to ward off the ghosts of evil men who had recently died.<sup>85</sup> This describes the Paiutes before the flood.

Sometimes Mormons mentioned Indian memories of a previous comparable flood. Chapman Duncan in Virgin City wrote, “The Indians say their fathers told them there was a similar flood in this country many years ago.”<sup>86</sup>

<sup>84</sup> John Staheli, “The Life of John and Barbara Staheli,” 7. Staheli then lists a few incidents written from the viewpoint of white settlers being troubled by local Indians.

<sup>85</sup> Corbett, *Jacob Hamblin*, 198. Burning the wickiup of a dead man to drive his spirit away was a common practice. For Paiute death customs, see Reeve, *Making Space on the Western Frontier*, 136–56.

<sup>86</sup> Duncan, letter to the editor, January 19, 1862, in *Deseret News*, February 12, 1862, p. 8, in the section, “Flood in Southern Utah.”



These few references tell us very little about how the Paiutes survived the flood. Common sense argues that the flood must have had a devastating effect on their agriculture. If the Santa Clara changed from a creek you could step across to a river 25 feet deep and 150 yards across, then the Paiutes' traditional fields and gardens, which they depended on at certain times of the year, must have been swept away.

Another serious blow to the Paiutes and their gardens was the appearance of sizable groups of new settlers in Santa Clara and St. George at about the same time as the rains and great flood. The impact of these settlers on the usually very limited water supply of the Santa Clara creek and Virgin River would be immeasurable. Hamblin wrote that Mormons began seriously undermining the Paiute method of living at exactly this period, late 1861 and 1862.<sup>87</sup>

We might note that before 1862, Santa Clara was dominated by Hamblin and the Indian missionaries. The Swiss saints were sent to Santa Clara with an entirely different mission, economic in nature, and the ninety Swiss suddenly greatly outnumbered the old Santa Clara settlers. The great flood, combined with the major influx of new Mormon settlers with their need for irrigation water and land for cattle grazing, must have been a major catastrophe for the Paiutes.

Two statements by U.S. Indian officials perhaps help tell this story. On June 30, 1857, George Armstrong, an Indian agent, wrote, "Tot-sag-gabots,' the principal chief of seven bands on the river, has under cultivation about sixty acres, and expects to raise a sufficiency for himself and band, and a surplus to trade to emigrants ... 'Captain Jackson,' another of the chiefs on this river, has about twelve acres in corn and squashes."<sup>88</sup> This records successful and extensive farming operations among the Santa Clara Paiutes.



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***A Paiute Indian photographed along the Virgin River, 1873, by J.K. Hillers.***

<sup>87</sup> Little, *Jacob Hamblin*, 87-88; see also Jacob Hamblin to Brigham Young, September 19, 1873, Brigham Young Collection, CR 1234, LDS Church Archives.

<sup>88</sup> George Armstrong to Brigham Young, June 30, 1857, in *Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, accompanying the Annual Report of the Secretary of the Interior for the Year 1857* (Washington: William A. Harris, Printer, 1858), 309.



Some twelve years later, Indian agent R. N. Fenton, after a visit to Tutsegabits and his people near St. George, wrote, "The Pi-Utes are a very destitute tribe ... a few around the settlements engage in farming to a limited

extent. They raise a small quantity of wheat, corn and melons, using sticks to plant and knives to harvest with; therefore, the crops raised amount to almost nothing."<sup>89</sup> While Fenton is reporting on Paiutes in Nevada as well as in Utah, if the Santa Clara Paiutes had been pursuing remarkably successful agricultural operations, he probably would have commented on it.

The great flood thus was probably a factor that contributed to the Paiutes' decline in farming productivity and living conditions. The major influx of whites also was a major contributing factor, as were the diseases that the whites brought.<sup>90</sup>

The 1862 flood of the Santa Clara creek and Virgin River inevitably causes us to think of the January 2005 flood at the same places. Many of the same phenomena described in the 1862 flood occurred in 2005: the astounding widening of the usually quite small Santa Clara creek; the remarkable deepening and widening of the creek bed and the undermining the foundations of houses. Photographs of the flood show one detail that Priscilla Hamblin mentioned in 1862: the uncanny redness of the flood

***Paiute Indians in conference with the U.S. Indian Commissioner on the Virgin River, 1873.***

***Photographed by J. K. Hillers.***

<sup>89</sup> R. N. Fenton to E. S. Parker, October 14, 1869, in *Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, Made to the Secretary of the Interior for the Year 1869* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1870), 203.

<sup>90</sup> For the Tonequint (Santa Clara) Paiutes after 1862, see Edward Leo Lyman, "Caught In Between: Jacob Hamblin and the Southern Paiutes During the Black Hawk-Navajo Wars of the Late 1860s," *Utah Historical Quarterly* 74.1 (Winter 2007): 22-43; Knack, *Boundaries Between*, 115-17. Many Paiutes literally starved to death. For a Mormon view of disease as a cause of decline of Indians at Santa Clara, see John Stucki, *Autobiography*, 11-12.

<sup>91</sup> Dawn Love, "Utah Flooding Causes More than \$150 Million in Damages," *Insurance Journal*, March 7, 2005, at <http://www.insurancejournal.com/magazines/west/2005/02/07/features/51706.htm> (accessed September 24, 2008).

water. According to one report the total damages of the flood exceeded \$150 million and fifty houses were lost or condemned.<sup>91</sup>

As in 1862, the remarkable cohesiveness of the Latter-day Saint community was highlighted in the 2005 flood, as residents of St. George, Santa Clara and other Utah communities organized and worked together to save homes that would have otherwise been destroyed.

The 1862 flood, though one of the worst floods in nineteenth-century Utah history, was in some ways typical of the Mormon pioneer experience in southern Utah and Nevada. The Santa Clara saints were fortunate in that they apparently were not subject to ruinous flooding periodically, as was the case in the Virgin River settlements.<sup>92</sup> Nevertheless, the Santa Clara flood experience in 1862 is emblematic in some ways of the struggle with destructive floods in other southern Utah settlements. Joseph W. Young wrote in 1868, “The floods come now and then, and wash away these rich bottoms, carrying down with its foaming currents houses, corrals, vineyards, and all one has, and the toiling man feels almost disheartened.”<sup>93</sup>

It must have been especially disheartening, for “desert saints,” to see the more fertile bottomland swept away. W. Paul Reeve interprets these constant destructive floods as a winnowing agent in southern Utah history. Many settlers left, but those who stayed were firmly committed to their mission.<sup>94</sup> Ann Woodbury wrote of the town Shunenburg, as late as 1891, “If they ever had any land to farm worth speaking of, the floods of the last few years have taken it away, leaving the people with but poor prospects for the future; they certainly deserve credit for their staying qualities.”<sup>95</sup> Floods certainly tested the “staying qualities” of the saints in Santa Clara, and in most of southern Utah.



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**Volunteer workers place sand bags in an effort to save a home from the flood waters of the Santa Clara in January 2005**

<sup>92</sup> Bluff in San Juan county also endured some disastrous floods, particularly in spring 1884. Robert McPherson, *A History of San Juan County* (Salt Lake City: Utah State Historical Society, 1995), 227. Outside of Utah, settlements in southern Nevada were also subjected to dangerous flooding, see Larson, *I Was Called to Dixie*, 367.

<sup>93</sup> Quoted in Larson, *I Was Called to Dixie*, 367.

<sup>94</sup> Reeve, “A Little Oasis in the Desert,” 233-34.

<sup>95</sup> Quoted in Larson, *I Was Called to Dixie*, 365.