

# A History of the Rise of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Wyoming

Sources:

“Life of Archibald Gardner”, Delila Gardner Hughes, Alpine Publishing, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, 1970.

*Anyone with historical information about the rise of the Church is invited to share that information by sending it to this website and it will be added. Thanks. Hal Pierce*

## Star Valley

During 1877 **Moses Thatcher** and Bishop **William B. Preston** had explored this valley and were impressed by its beauty and potential. There was evidence that Shoshone Indians had previously been there but were not in the area at that time. On 29 August 1878 Elder **Brigham Young, Jr.** dedicated it as a gathering place for the Saints.

In 1880 the city of Afton became the first settling place and the valley was then named Star Valley because it was a star among valleys. The location was then praised in an article in the Logan Utah newspaper during September 1880.

**Archibald Gardner** visited the valley and asked Bishop **C. D. Cazier** for advice and explained he was looking for land and a good place to set up mill sites. Although he was happily settled in Jordan Utah he needed a place to avoid being arrested as a polygamist. The Church issued a Manifesto against polygamy in 1890 which eliminated the threat of his being arrested.

For a time Archibald boarded with **Catherine Carpenter** in a room that was exposed to the outside elements (garret) and without sufficient bedding. He suffered from exposure to the weather and never fully recovered from it. He also was regularly exposed to cold water in setting up his mills. One of multiple ironies in this situation is that he and his brother Robert had spent most of their lives

providing comfortable homes for thousands of others with their saw and shingle mills as well as their construction skills. Another irony is the sacrificing of his health for the sake of his morality while being chased by the federal government which wanted to force their moral code on him.

Although there was essentially no money the needed raceways for logs, dams and buildings were quickly erected by him and local people and Archibald promised them flour before Christmas, a promise he kept. He established his mills on Swift Creek. During 1902 he established a mill in Grover Wyoming about 4 miles north of Afton. His son Robert became the manager of that mill.

**Sylvester Low** became manager of the original mill and bookkeeper. A year later, Archibald's son-in-law became manager.

During the winter of 1888 there were 104 students in the school system and by May 1889 there were 50 families in the valley with others continuing to arrive.

In the spring Archibald foresaw a difficult winter coming after a good winter and he went to Salt Lake City to plead for help from President **Wilford Woodruff**. He received \$500 and purchased wheat, flour and corn in Montpelier Idaho. This action allayed much suffering during the coming winter as the snow and cold was so intense it became impossible to travel long distances. Many cattle were lost to cold and starvation including many of their precious milk cows.

Archibald moved his wife **Mary** from Jordan Utah to Star Valley and they arrived 1 October 1890. It was a difficult decision for Mary to move from her new and comfortable home in Jordan but she made the sacrifice in support of her husband. President Woodruff had counseled him to move his wife to Star Valley.

## Ft. Bridger and Ft. Supply

Fort Bridger was established on the Black Forks of the Green River by **Jim Bridger** and his partner **Louis Vasquez**, fur traders, in 1843 as a supply for Oregon Trail emigrants. Supplies provided to needy emigrants were such things as furs, iron and blacksmith services, food, ammunition, liquor, horses and other provisions. Fresh water was readily available with runoff from the Uintah Mountains. Later the Pony Express used the fort and the railroad and the Lincoln highway was established near the location.

Animosity between Bridger and the Mormons developed when the Fort began selling ammunition and liquor to the Indians. A group from the Church attacked the fort and destroyed the liquor. Jim Bridger barely escaped and claimed an excessive loss to the federal government which may have started the government's justification for the coming Utah war.

The Utah war began in 1857 and in October two forts in Wyoming that General Johnston's military might have used for housing during the winter were

burned to the ground by Bill Hickman and his brother who was a part of a Mormon hit and run unit. They were Fort Bridger and Fort Supply in southwestern Wyoming. Both forts were owned by the Church. Fort Bridger had been purchased from Jim Bridger and his partner and Fort Supply had been constructed by the Church as an aid to the pioneers coming through the area.

The winter of 1857-1858 brought extreme snow and cold in the mountains while the Salt Lake Valley enjoyed unusual warmth and gentle rains. This was obviously an act of God to the Saints in their warm homes. The military tried to winter in the general area of the burned out Fort Bridger. Many of their animals were lost to cold and hunger which meant there was an inability to move their wagons.

**Fort Bridger ownership dispute.** After Ft. Bridger was burned Jim Bridger claimed he still owned it although the Church claimed to have purchased it for \$8000. Who received the money was not confirmed as Bridger's partner, Louis Vasquez, had left the area and may have taken some of the money with him. Bridger obviously knew that the church had purchased the property.

The United States military took over the fort and claimed since the buildings were burned there was nothing to own. A soldier named William Alexander Carter took possession of the property and later became a prominent and wealthy part of Wyoming society. Carter became Wyoming's first millionaire.