

HOW DIXIE BECAME THE NICKNAME FOR SOUTHWESTERN UTAH

The history of the region is perhaps as equally enchanting as is its topography. After members of the LDS Church settled the Salt Lake Valley in 1847, Brigham Young soon sent Parley P. Pratt, along with 50 men, in December 1849, to scope out the region. Parley P. Pratt's glowing report of the fertility and water availability soon prompted colonization.

The reason why the region is referred to as "Utah's Dixie" is because of the establishment of the Cotton or Southern Mission in the city of Washington in 1857. Because of the Civil War, Brigham Young, knowing that the cotton necessary to make clothing would become scarce from warring states, hand picked and sent 38 experienced Southern families to till, sow, and harvest cotton, with the result that cotton was grown successfully on a small scale.

In October 1861, 309 families were called to go south immediately to settle in what is now called "Utah's Dixie." Representing a variety of occupations, they were instructed to go in an organized group and "cheerfully contribute their efforts to supply the Territory with cotton, sugar, grapes, tobacco, figs, almonds, olive oil, and such other useful articles as the Lord has given us, the places for garden spots in the south, to produce." They were joined in 1861 by thirty families of Swiss immigrants, who settled the "Big Bend" land at what is now Santa Clara. Their mission was to raise grapes and fruit to supply the cotton producers.

However, as was learned later, taming the Virgin and Santa Clara Rivers from drought and subsequent torrential floods became more than a challenge.

Yields in the test fields were not as high as expected and economic viability of growing cotton was never achieved.