

Peter Shirts

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History - Peter was a special missionary to the Lamanites. He was an explorer and true pioneer. He was one of the leaders of the Nauvoo Legion. He helped to build the Nauvoo and Kirtland Temples. On the 21st of January 1846 Peter Shirts and Margaret Cameron were endowed in the Nauvoo Temple.

He was closely associated with Joseph Smith, Brigham Young and others leaders of the church. He was appointed by Brigham Young to locate different parts of the county suitable for settlement and agriculture pursuits.

He came to Utah in 1849 and settled in Parowan. A fort was built there in 1852 and was named "Shirts Fort." In 1855 he and Rufus Allen assisted in surveying what is now Las Vegas. The surveying was done without instruments.

In 1857 he was appointed to work among the Indians. In 1859 he brought his family to Mill Creek and in 1860 they settled on the Upper Snake Creek in Provo Valley. Here he built a saw mill in order to get timber to build a road into the mountains. Part of the road up Snake Creek Canyon is still called "Shirts' Dugway."

He was a man with a restless, eager spirit, a true Latter-day Saint who was also a lonely trailblazer. He penetrated into many remote, hidden valleys and mountain passes.

One famous story concerning Peter and the Indians occurred during the winter of 1865-66. Peter, his wife, two daughters and a son had been pioneering the lonely valley of the Pahreah river, east of Kanab. Their friends had been expecting them back in southern Utah, but when the snow fell, Peter didn't arrive. The winter was hard and the Indians were hungry, so they had raided many small settlements, even killing some people. It was reported that Peter and his family had been killed also.

The next spring, as soon as the snow melted, twenty men from the Iron Military District went in to find them. They were surprised to see him tilling his fields with a group of men pulling his plow.

It seems that as he had been making preparations to leave the valley in the fall, the Indians had stolen all his stock but one cow, so he couldn't move. He walled up his windows and barricaded his door and kept his double-barreled shotgun with plenty of buckshot. He also kept his

pitchfork, pick and other tools ready for action, if needed.

Although the Indians planned all winter to kill Peter, he gave them food to keep them from starving. When the Indian chief was severely afflicted with boils, Peter was able to cure him.

The following spring, Peter told the Indians, "You have eaten my food. I must raise more for another winter. Because you ate my oxen, you must pull my plow."

He left Provo Valley in 1868 and settled about 35 miles east of Kanab. Here he built a grist mill. He later took his family to the Rio Virgin Country. He is said to have discovered Iron Mountain. In 1879 he assisted at "Hole in the Rock" helping to feed the starving emigrants.

In the spring of 1882, Peter packed his donkey and headed out into the wilderness as he had done many other times. This time he hadn't come back and no one heard from him again. In 1958, the family discovered that a man answering Peter's description, who called himself, had been in Fruitland, San Juan, New Mexico in 1882 and had become ill and died in the late summer of 1882. He was buried there. Whether the "Old Daniel Boone" is the one buried there, or not, the family has since put a tombstone there for him.