

Iron County History

Kanarraville, town of mystery

By Jean Hendrickson

(Taken from a history written by Marilyn Lovell and others)

The history of a town is much like the weaving of a tapestry, if the threads are placed in the right place a beautiful design is woven, if they are jumbled there may be a knot which will take much time and sweat to undo. Kanarraville is such a place. The threads have been knotted and broken, and fate has taken such a hand that there is even dispute as to how the town got its name in the first place.

It's name could have come from Indian Chief Kanarra, who resided along his creek, and when the people came to live by the creek they named their town after him and his creek. It could have been named for the kind of willows that grew along the creek's banks, the Kanarra Willows. William R. Palmer maintained the Chief's name was Kuanar. He was chief of the Tavahuich branch of the Piute tribe. These Indians were a group of sun worshippers who believed the sun had miraculous healing powers. When one of their own was ill, they lay him out in the sun to get well. If it were winter and he froze to death, it was the Sun's will and all right.

The threads of the tapestry become so knotted that the first settlers of Kanarra made four settlements before they finally founded the present town. John D. Lee made his first settlement along Ash Creek in 1851, but abandoned it during the Walker War in 1853. He again settled there in the fall of the same year. In 1854 Brigham Young suggested that the settlement be moved North and in the summer of 1854, buildings were commenced at Old Fort Harmony.

The second Fort Harmony was situated about four miles north of the first location. In the spring of 1861, a few of the people moved up Kanarra Creek to build a town site there.

The Great Raid of the winter of 1861 and 1862 marked the beginning of the end of Fort Harmony. With their adobe literally dissolving away, the people moved to Harmony and Kanarra, to safer ground. John D. Lee is said to have spent eight days and nights without taking off his wet clothes. Despite his efforts two of his children were killed when part of the fort collapsed. This caused the final split, John D. Lee took half the people and settled New Harmony and others settled the present town of Kanarra. Among those settling Kanarra were Elisha Groves, John R. Davis and William R. Davis and their families. Others came from Toquerville to help them settle—Josiah Reeves, Willis Young, Samuel Pollock and John Willis and their families.

Until 1862 meetings were held in private homes, which were log cabins, and at that time a new log school and church was built. This served for years for all public meetings and get-togethers.

A kind and liberal spirit prevailed in the new settlement and then tragedy struck. The threads were so hopelessly

twisted and broken that there was nothing to do but to take them all out and start over.

For three days the wind raged and the people couldn't open their doors. The wind was so severe that the sand piled up around their window sills, and when it was over the cemetery was left with the caskets sitting on top of the ground. When the wind subsided, the neighbors rushed to the home of Billy Thompson, who lived in a dugout. They started digging and when they got to the family they found that as the sand rose higher they had pushed the stove pipe up farther and the family had lived on that little bit of air the whole time of the storm. This was probably in 1865.

Lorenzo W. Roundy took charge as bishop of Kanarra in 1866 and almost immediately took steps toward building a new town. A town site was surveyed and they moved their settlement about a mile south to the present site. The homes were built in a barricade style by what is known as Public Square and the town lots were drawn for. They moved their log meeting house to the new site, it was finally destroyed by fire, all the ward records were also destroyed which was a great historical loss.

The people of Kanarra had never had trouble with the local Indians, but Oct. 31, 1869, a tribe of Navajoes raided them, taking all but a pair of hobbled mules and two or three horses. The men went to New Harmony for horses and also got some friendly Indians to go with them. They followed them over the Kanarra and Cedar Mountain and finally saw from a ledge over the lake, Indians warming their feet by a fire. As the Kanarra men and Indians rushed them they ran away leaving their moccasins and horses. The Navajoes made their way back to Arizona without shoes or horses, through the snow. The people of Kanarra

were never bothered by Indians again and from their one experience with them came the name, "Navajo Lake."

Before the town was completely settled, it was a member of Iron, Washington, Kane, and then Iron County again.