

Historical Threads

Priddy Meeks: Pioneer Doctor in Parowan

by Jay M. Jones

Priddy Meeks, the first doctor in Southern Utah, arrived in Parowan in May 1851, just a few months after the town was settled. The following week he was elected to the Parowan City Council.

Shortly afterward, Meeks obtained logs from the nearby mountains and built a cabin that still stands at the Meeks/Green Pioneer Farmstead on 400 West Street in Parowan.

Priddy Meeks was born in 1795 in South Carolina. His father moved to Kentucky, and then to Indiana, where he was killed in an 1812 attack by Native Americans.

Priddy married Mary Bartlett in 1815. They had four children before she died in 1824. He then married Sarah Smith in 1826, a widow with one child. They had five children together. They moved to Illinois, where their infant daughter Hulda died of whooping cough in 1833. Priddy believed that medicine given by doctors worsened her condition and contributed to her death.

Sarah then became sick for a period of about two years and despaired of ever becoming well. Priddy obtained the book "New Guide to Health" by Samuel Thomson, which focused on natural herbal remedies. By following directions in this book, Priddy was able to help Sarah regain her health. He also helped neighbors who became ill, and they recognized his skill and encouraged him to quit farming and devote full time to being a doctor.

Faced with a decision, Priddy Meeks wrote in his autobiography: "I studied much to know what was my duty to God and to mankind and myself and family."

Continuing, he wrote: "I saw my weakness and want of education, being raised in the backwoods, without learning but little only what I learned in the backwoods with my gun on my shoulder . . . Here was a trial you may be sure, for me to come in contact with learned doctors; I would not know what to say and would appear as a dunce."

As it turned out, Meeks took cases that other doctors had given up on and provided good results. Then in 1840 he joined The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and later moved to Nauvoo, Illinois.

As a member of the Jedediah Grant pioneer company, Meeks moved westward to Utah. Along the way, he successfully treated cases of black canker, high fevers and other maladies. He became a respected doctor in Utah following his arrival in October 1847 in Salt Lake City.



Cabin built by Priddy Meeks in Parowan, now part of the Meeks/Green Farmstead located at 40 N 400 W in Parowan.

Jay Jones Photo.

After moving to Parowan in 1851, additional opportunities came for Doctor Meeks to apply his experience and training to new cases.

James McCann, a teamster for the U. S. Army in its trek to Utah in 1857, was on his way to Southern California in winter-time via the southern route (roughly what is now I-15 from Salt Lake to Los Angeles). At Parowan, his feet were frozen, and he was taken to Doctor Meeks to have his legs amputated a few inches above the ankles.

Doctor Meeks observed that amputation was not immediately required. He gave the patient increasing doses of cayenne pepper (taken internally) over the next several days to improve circulation. After a few days, new flesh started to develop in the feet, crowding out the dead tissue. Although the process was painful, in 16 days McCann was well enough to walk from Parowan to Paragonah and back again.

Also while Doctor Meeks was living in Parowan, a man by the name of Bishop from Buttermilk Fort (Holden), Utah was brought to him. His back was bent and he could not straighten up. Meeks reports in his autobiography:

“His kidneys and urinary organs were all affected, so that he could not walk a step. I gave him nothing but burdock seeds and dandelion tea, and in twelve days he was well enough to go home rejoicing.”

In another case of a woman identified as Jenette Clark, Meeks writes: “The worst case of inflammatory rheumatism I think I ever saw was cured in one week by taking a little chew of Indian root and half that amount of yellow dock three times a day, swallowing it down every time.”

In 1856, Meeks married Mary Jane McCleve as a plural wife. In 1862, he settled in Harrisburg (near Leeds, Utah). In 1879, he moved to Orderville, Utah, where he died in 1886.

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