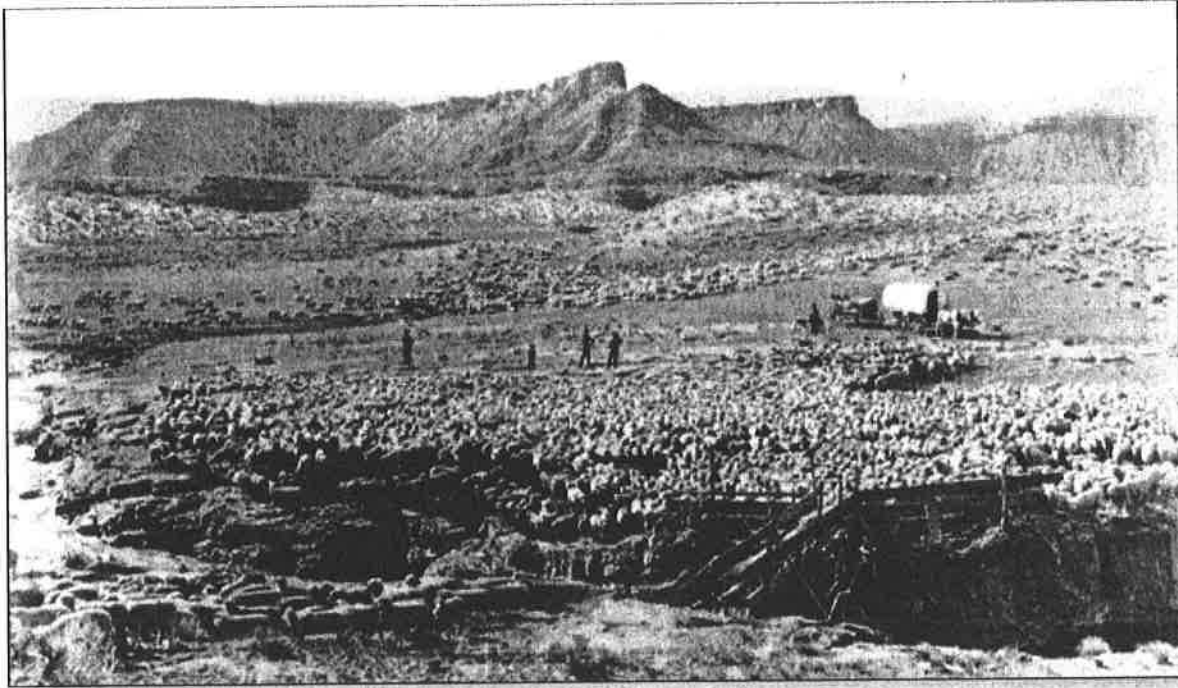


## **Virgin Sheep Bridge and Gould's Shearing Corral: Used by all Southern Utah Sheep Herds: 1907-1930s**

By Janet B. Seegmiller



**Virgin Sheep Bridge, Photo by John L. Sevy, Circa 1907**

In the 2007 chapter of "Selected Stories of the Livestock Industry in Iron County," this photograph is identified as "Iron County sheep crossing the Virgin River on route to the Arizona Strip." A recent trip to the Hurricane Pioneer Museum led to uncovering the details of this photograph which was taken at the "Virgin Sheep Bridge" even though some have said the photo was taken at Gould's Shearing Corrals, east of Hurricane in Washington County. Thanks to Stella Zeleski for her assistance in touring this area.

Early in the 1900s, sheepmen were taking their herds to and from the Arizona Strip each spring and fall. At that time, they also drove them to Modena to be to be sheared and then the wool was shipped out by train, as the San Pedro, Los Angeles & Salt Lake Railroad was completed through Utah and Nevada to California early in 1905. John L. Sevy, a well-known Panguitch businessman and livestock man, found the Virgin River gorge a barrier to moving the sheep and decided to do something about it.

According to Stout family members, Sevy hired Allen Joseph Fisk Stout to build the sheep bridge at Virgin about 1907:

"John L. Sevy had Grandpa Stout build this bridge below Virgin in the spring while LaMar was on his mission. He was taking his sheep to Modena to shear. When LaMar was on his mission Grandpa just didn't know what he was going to do to keep him there. . . but always something came up in time so he was able to keep him out in the field. The building of this bridge was one of

those such times. Grandpa, with the help of Allen, built this bridge. The water was high and it was dangerous work. Getting the stringer across was the difficult task, but Dad knew how. After that it was easier. A sheep was drowned here.

"Mr. Sevy stayed at our home when he came in to stock up on supplies. He was real happy to have the bridge go up, and Grandpa was grateful for the job. It furnished means to keep LaMar for two or three months on his mission. Dad used this bridge as a means for making money. Other sheep men were glad to pay the toll for crossing of their sheep. He later built the bridge large enough for the sheep wagons." (Written by Kate Stout who said the story was told her by "Alice.")

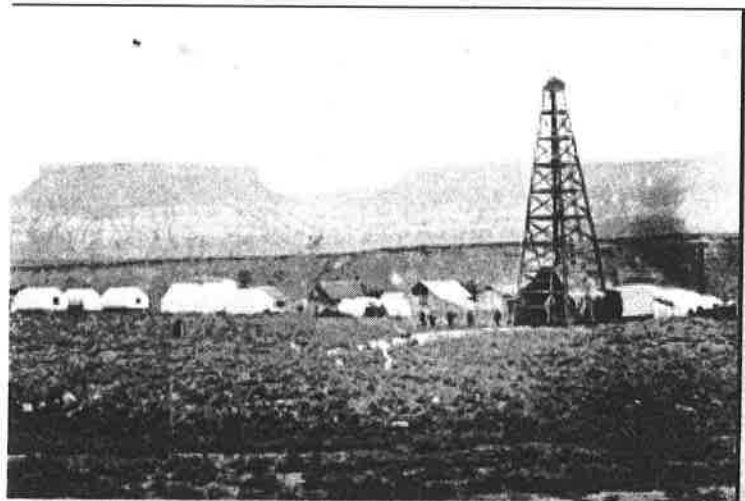
A *Deseret News* article (December 28, 2000) described three historic bridges across the Virgin. The first was built soon after the town was settled in 1858 and washed out in a flood of 1861. The second was likely John Sevy's sheep bridge that helped move sheep to and from the Kolob Plateau and Cedar Mountain for summer grazing, and a toll was charged for each sheep that crossed the bridge. The enlarged sheep bridge that allowed wagons to cross was taken out in 1958 and replaced by a steel I-beam and heavy timber bridge, still a single-lane bridge, but sturdy enough to allow trucks to cross. That bridge was replaced in 2000 with a modern steel two-lane bridge, but the road beyond it is still the improved dirt road that connects SR 9 with SR 59 and goes on south to Gould's Ranch.

#### **History of Gould's Ranch:**

In the 1860s, Samuel and Fanny Gould moved from Parowan to a ranch in Dixie which was a few miles east of the Hurricane Bench. Samuel had been the oldest soldier in the Mormon Battalion and in Pratt's expedition to explore Southern Utah. He married a widow, Fanny Ward Lister, in Salt Lake in 1851 and they helped settle Parowan. By 1861, they had a young family and Samuel had found what he thought was a great place for a ranch with a spring along the road from Fredonia to St. George. Indian problems arose and the family moved back to Parowan where Samuel died in 1869, but the area kept the name of Gould's Ranch into the 20th Century. [James W. Imlay bought the ranch in 1910, hoping to pipe its spring water to Hurricane, and Will Spendlove and Manti Workman bought it in 1914. Later the Shamo family ranched there and now it is the site of the Diamond Ranch Academy.]

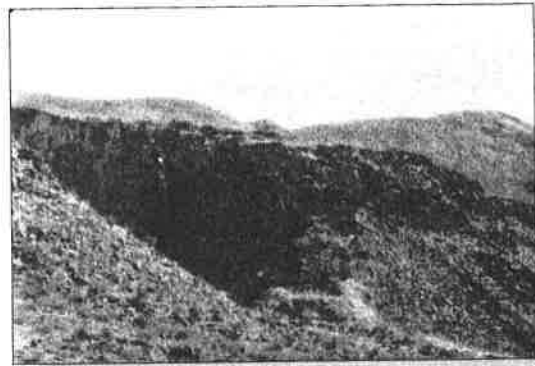
In the 1900s, new activities drew attention to the area. When oil drilling began at Virgin in 1908, wells were also drilled at Gould's, six miles south of Virgin, and prospects looked good for finding oil. Frequent Washington County News articles between 1908 and 1911 mention drilling for oil "at Goulds" but after reaching 2600 feet with no success, drilling was halted.

Alice Stratton, Hurricane (Utah) historian, began a study of the shearing operation in 1979 and later published, "Gleanings about the Gould's Shearing Corral."



**Virgin/Goulds Oil Fields**

Alice remembered that as a child, the sheep and cattle "pulverized the dusty road going past our picket fence. Every spring bleating herds of sheep pattered past, moving like a continuous woolly belt around the bend and up the hill. This was as much a part of spring as almond blossoms. I still relish the memories of the sights, sounds and the dusty smell of the many sheep herds that used to pass through Hurricane. . ." (Stratton, p. 1)



Hurricane Hill

She began by searching the Washington County News on microfilm from 1908 to 1927. Her first finding was 23 March 1908, which documents that they first sheared at Modena: "Almost 11,000 sheep belonging to Kane County people crossed the (Virgin) river between here (Hurricane) and LaVerkin a few days ago on their way to Modena to shear."

Just days later, the paper reported "Virgin: Two or three herds of sheep have been crossing the river just above the falls on the way back to the range from Modena." (20 April 1908). A week later, "J.W. Imlay returned from Modena Saturday. He had been superintending the shearing of his sheep there." (27 April 1908)

When the trip to Modena proved to be too hard on the sheep and the size of the herds began numbering in the thousands in southern Utah and on the Arizona Strip, the enterprising men of the area proposed and then built a shearing corral near Gould's ranch which became known as Gould's Shearing Corral. Men from Washington and Kane counties began building the corral in February 1910, using lumber from Frank Petty's sawmill and posts furnished by Eugene Cripps. Shearing began April 10, and concluded by the end of May. The newspaper reported on May 26, "The shearing of the sheep at Gould's has given considerable work and freight to the men and boys of this section."

From Gould's, wool had to be freighted to the depot at Lund, 30 miles north of Cedar City in Iron County, for shipping to markets west and north. The shearing, wrangling, filling the bags, and freighting provided employment for both men and boys for several weeks each spring.

Shearing continued through the 1911, 1912 and 1913 seasons, even though the corrals were "maliciously fired" in March 1913, reportedly in disputes between the sheep and cattle men. The corrals were quickly rebuilt and shearing commenced in April. As it ended on May 19, O. A. Robinson, manager of the shearing plant, reported that about 110,000 sheep had been sheared in 1913.

"The average sheep produces seven pounds of wool each clip. This means that our wool haulers received \$7,700 for their work. The price of wool this year is the same as last, 13 cents per pound, amounting to over \$100,000 for the clip at Gould's. The shearing here means much for Hurricane. The main tide comes in the spring when money is scarce and it furnishes us employment and a good market for all our products." (*Washington County News*, 22 May 1913, p. 5).

In April 1914, the paper reported that shearing was "in full blast" and that 20 teams were on the road carrying wool to Lund. "It is reported that more sheep are booked to be sheared at Gould's than any other shearing pen in Utah." By the end of May, 131,000 sheep had been sheared with an output of about 1,048,000 lbs. of wool. Freighters had earned over \$10,000, creating a market