

Arbon, Idaho

What is today called Arbon Valley was once known only as Bannock Valley. Bannock Creek runs from the highest part of the valley (at an area once known as Summit), north through the valley and on through the Shoshone-Bannock Indian reservation. In the beginning, the Arbon area was basically where the LDS Church and Arbon Cemetery are. The other areas were Buist, Summit, Pauline, and Crystal.

Much of the information discussed here was paraphrased from the wonderful book by Laurie Jean Ward Call titled *Bannock Valley*.

Bannock Valley had many inhabitants and visitors before the homesteaders, including native hunters, European trappers, California immigrants, and cowboys.

One of the earliest travelers through Bannock Valley was John C. Fremont with his soldiers, on his way to California during the Mexican War (1846). He had passed through what is today Weston Canyon, recording the site of Lone Rock in his journal of the trip. He and his troops stayed in the valley, close to where the spring is, just north of what today is called Andersen Lane.

Another early visitor in the Arbon area was Brigham Young on his way to the Salmon (Lemhi) LDS Indian Mission. Rumor has it that as he passed through the Malad Valley, he mentioned that it was nothing but a wasteland, not suitable for farming or settlement. But after exploring farther north, on his return through the area he thought the Malad Valley looked a whole lot better! Brigham Young traveled with men such as Heber C. Kimball, Daniel H Wells, Orson Hyde, and Franklin D. Richards. Traveling through Bannock Valley, he stayed in the same area where John C. Fremont had stayed several years earlier, by the springs north of Andersen Lane, below the old trail called Rocky Ridge. This spring is by an abandoned pink house that obviously wasn't there in 1846. Rocky Ridge can be seen by traveling east on Andersen Lane – but be sure to get permission before you go on private land.

A sad episode happened at the north end of Arbon Valley. "Five days after the orders came from Brigham Young to abandon the Lemhi mission, ten men left in advance of the main company to carry the report of conditions at Fort Lemhi to the Mormon church leaders. On March 31, 1858, the small party was suddenly and furiously fired upon by a party of Indians in ambush who killed Bailey Lake and robbed the company of horses, on Bannock Creek" (*Bannock Valley*, p. 5). This happened at the Rock Springs on the Reservation Road.

Literally thousands of other emigrants traveled through Arbon Valley on the Hudspeth Cutoff on the California Trail during the California Gold Rush, but this was in the Summit area, south of the Arbon area.

In June 1892, Dave Bowen and Samuel Davis came from Samaria, Idaho to look over available lands. At this time, many homesteaders took up "squatters" rights. When the

area was later officially opened for homesteading by the US government, the squatters had to file again to prove up and get title to their land only after the required five years.

Dave Bowen and Samuel Davis found water coming out of Knox Canyon, but this stream sank underground before it got far enough down into the valley to be useful to the homesteaders. With typical pioneer foresight and ingenuity, the men decided they could dig ditches to convey the precious, life-giving water to their fields. Other men came from both Samaria and Cache Valley to settle, and they assisted with this gargantuan task. All the men went back to their families when winter came that year.

Much of what is known about the early years of the Arbon area comes from the minutes of the Bannock Valley Irrigation Company, organized in Samaria, Idaho (by Malad) in 1893, and later the Arbon Irrigation Company (1898). These two irrigation "companies" were essentially the same organization, run by the same earliest homesteaders (joined later by others). Some of the surnames that residents today might recognize were Davis, Bailey, Hawkins, Williams, Arbon, Bowen, Roderick, and Evans. These men pooled their money and resources such as labor, equipment, and horsepower, to help dig ditches and bring water out of Knox Canyon and the Buck Wright Canyon (straight west of today's Church Lane) to the homesteaders' fields. Thankfully, these early homesteaders kept good minutes of their meetings, labor, and transactions, even down to the amount of pay each got for their labor or use of their horse teams by the company. By 1898, the ditch was several miles long, extending to the Jesse N. Ward homestead.

The stated purpose of the irrigation company was "to own and control by means of dams, ditches, pipes, flumes, and reservoirs, for irrigation purposes." At one time it was thought the water coming out of Buck Wright Canyon could be joined with the water coming out of Knox Canyon but according to long-time residents of the valley neither canyon turned out to be a very reliable source for water. (One of the early flumes can still be seen today when you drive into Knox Canyon, just past the cattle guard, and before you start down the hill, look up on the hillside south, up the first canyon.)

It is worth noting here that the concept of "dry" farming had not yet been developed, which is the practice of letting the land lay "fallow" (unplanted) every other season while it soaks up ground moisture like a sponge, hoarding enough moisture to hopefully grow a crop the following year. So most of the homesteaders necessarily settled near a water source. However, there aren't a lot of creeks or springs in the Arbon area itself. Bannock Creek runs through the valley from the Summit area north through the Shoshone-Bannock reservation, and water flows out of Knox Canyon at certain times of the year in good water years, but it mostly goes underground before reaching cultivated fields.

No one stayed through the harsh winters of Arbon until British immigrant George Dennis Arbon and his son, Joe, came to homestead and braved through the winter of 1893-94. As more homesteaders poured into the valley and paid their \$16 filing fee for their 160 acres (which was completed only after five years and a few other requirements, such as

fencing, breaking out ground, and building a homestead cabin), more people began to stay in order to take care of their livestock. Even today, with paved roads, heated cars, warm homes, and fiber-optic internet, Arbon winters are considered a long, drawn-out siege – we honor these early homesteaders from Arbon Valley.

Spring 1894 brought the returning Samarian homesteaders, along with others from Cache Valley (such as the Andersen brothers, who took up homesteads on the east side of the Arbon area). The irrigation ditch this year grew to be about a mile and a half long. Even while working together digging this ditch, the homesteaders had other dire tasks to complete. They had to build cabins (or dugouts), build fences, and plow their virgin ground and plant it. They also had to haul logs from the canyons for building and heating, and they had to cut meadow hay for their livestock to feed through the winter. That year, George Arbon plowed ten acres and planted it to rye. (Today, rye is considered the bane of Arbon wheat farmers.)

That summer, most of the men lived in their wagon boxes, but David Bowen built a 14x16 foot cabin. That next winter, George Arbon and his son Joe braved the Bannock Valley winter blizzards, the first white men to do so.

The following year, men returned again, this time with their families. That was the true start of Arbon Valley as we know it today. The families still moved back to Malad, Samaria, or Cache Valley for several more years until better homes were built and churches and schools were established. But for the most part, Arbon Valley has had year-round residents in the valley from the time George Arbon and his son Joe first stayed through the winter of 1893-1894.

In 1897 a post office was established. The first name proposed was “Mountain Side” but this was rejected by the post office as being too long. So, to honor the valley’s oldest homesteader, it was named “Arbon.” Ironically, George Arbon himself was only fifty-eight years old at that time. Even though the post office (and later the valley) was named for him, he stated that he was too poor that year to pay for the cost of a two-cent stamp. At first the mail came from Malad once a week, along with staples the homesteaders needed that the mail carrier was able to bring. Later the mail came from Pocatello.

The Arbon LDS Ward was organized in August of 1900 in the David Bowen home. The valley was still part of Oneida County at this time, and the newly-formed ward was part of the Malad Stake. The meetings were held in various private homes until 1901-1902 when a 20x36 foot log structure was built by the cooperative labor of the homesteaders. Several times through the decades, church was held only in the summer months when more of the residents were in the valley. The building was also used for school, church, dances, and other social events. The school here was called Valley View.

In 1928 a larger building was built where the Arbon Pavilion now is. This church house existed until 2005 when a new building was erected across the street, on the same site as the original log structure.

In January 1911, one of the worst tragedies happened in Arbon. Several families, including the D.C. Dalton family and the Ezra Taft Andersen families were visiting Sunday. They stayed overnight, and they all started home on Monday. Reaching a place where a creek was running fast due to the January thaw, the sleigh box in which the two families were riding (containing fourteen adults and children) overturned in the water. Only one father, Mr. Dalton, was able to free himself of the sleigh box as it overturned. In lifting the box off the trapped families underneath, he certainly saved their lives. Mrs. Dalton and Mrs. Andersen were holding onto some of the children by their feet. However, three children were swept downstream. Mr. Dalton's eight year old son George and two month old baby Dora were swept away, and Mr. Andersen's six year old son, Nicholas, was also swept downstream. One can't imagine the distress of the parents and siblings. The fathers searched for their children until dawn on Tuesday, when their little crushed bodies were found several miles downstream. They were all buried in the Pauline Cemetery (a half-mile west of Arbon Elementary). It is believed this accident happened between the roads now titled Newport Lane and Bowen Lane.

Today, the whole valley is known as Arbon, with the names of other areas now known only to long-time residents. There are two churches, an LDS church on the original site (next to the original George Arbon homestead on Church Lane) and the Arbon Bible Church on the Arbon Highway, between Knox Canyon Road and Evans Lane. Instead of five post offices, there is only one in the Pauline area. Instead of ten schools, Arbon Elementary is in the Pauline area, with two classrooms and two teachers serving grades K through 6.

Sources:

Ward, Laurie Jean, *Bannock Valley* (Providence, Utah: Keith Watkins and Sons, 1982).

Arbon timeline:

1846 – John C Fremont rides through the valley with his troops on his way to fight in the Mexican War. They camp at the springs that are now on Andersen Lane.

1849-1860s – Hudspeth Cutoff is an important road during the California Gold Rush.

1850s – Brigham Young came through the valley on his way to the Salmon Indian Mission. He too camped at the springs on Andersen Lane.

1884-1892 – Possessory Claims and Water Rights opened.

1892 – David Bowen and Samuel Davis come into the valley from Samaria.

1893 – Homesteading opens. Settlers with earlier claims have to reapply. This coincides with the first families in the valley, including the Andersens, Daniels, Arbons, and Evans. The first cabin was built by David Bowen, 2nd cabin by an Andersen. Most families lived in wagon boxes or dugouts.

1893 – George N. Arbon plowed ten acres and planted them to rye.

1893 – Bannock Valley Irrigation Company organized in Samaria.

1897 – First Post Office was organized. Originally called “Mountain Side,” the name was rejected by the post office as being too long, so “Arbon” was chosen in honor of the oldest homesteader, and the first to spend a winter in the valley.

1898 – Arbon Valley Irrigation Company is organized. Some of the first names were Davis, Bailey, Hawkins, Williams, Ward, Arbon, Bowen, Roderick, and Evans. The men pooled their resources and labor to benefit all.

1898 – Irrigation ditch out of Knox Canyon reaches Jesse Ward’s upper fields.

1900 – Arbon LDS Ward was organized under the Malad Stake. It originally met in the David Bowen home.

1901-1902 – A Log structure built to serve dual purpose of **Valley View School** and LDS meetinghouse. (This building was later moved to the county sheds, where road crew families have lived).

1911 – On January 18th, one of the **worst tragedies** happened in Arbon. Three children drowned during a January thaw. Lost were a two-month old baby and eight-year-old boy belonging to the D.C. Dalton family, and a six-year-old boy belonging to the E.T. Andersen family.

1928 – LDS church building built, across the road from the original Valley View School.

1997 -The Arbon Bible Church was started, with the building completed in the spring of 2000. It was in the former home of Charles Allard, donated by John and Judy Newport.

2005 – New LDS church building built across the road from the old building, with a pavilion built on the site of old church.