

Early Settlement

The 1847 arrival of Mormon pioneers in the Salt Lake Valley brought about the rapid settlement of surrounding lands before outsiders could move in. Settlement in present day Box Elder County began within sixteen days of their arrival in Utah when Mormon leader Brigham Young sent out scouts to explore the surrounding lands. Orrin Porter Rockwell homesteaded what became known as Porter Spring in 1849, and was followed by others in the fall of 1850 who created Davis Fort. By 1852, at the location of present day Brigham City, Davis Fort had nearly 1400 residents (Huchel 1999: 55-57). Within a year, the Mormon church had sent in more settlers to strengthen the community along with a large wave of new converts from Denmark, Sweden, and Norway. This Mormon settlement on traditional Shoshone homelands resulted in raids by Shoshone bands in the ensuing years. The fort became a haven for the white settlers, who only ventured outside its confines to tend to crops or livestock. In 1852, a slight decrease in hostilities led the residents of the fort to move onto farm plots which had been laid out the previous year. The Shoshone raids resumed in 1853, and Brigham Young ordered the settlers to return to the fort. In addition to the original occupants, about two dozen more families had made their homes at Davis Fort by that time (Tullidge 1889:291). In order to strengthen and develop the small settlement, Brigham Young ordered Mormon leader Lorenzo Snow to take 50 families from the Salt Lake Valley to Box Elder, as the settlement is now called, in 1854. The new settlers were specially selected to include a schoolteacher, a mason, carpenters, blacksmiths, and other skilled craftsmen who would ensure the economic success of the community (Arrington 1964:200). The area was known as Brigham City by 1855 (Huchel 1999: 63-71).

With the influx of additional settlers, residents of Brigham City resumed the establishment of farms. Hostilities between whites and the Shoshone increased once again in the early 1860s throughout northern Utah, due to the increasing number of farmers settling in the area and mining parties passing through on their way to Montana. Under the leadership of Chief Bear Hunter, the Shoshone struck back in 1862, raiding Mormon cattle herds and attacking miners. Conflict culminated the following year in the Battle of Bear River. During the battle soldiers dispatched from Camp Douglas in Salt Lake City killed at least 250 Shoshone men, women and children, along with Chief Bear Hunter, near the village of Franklin, Idaho (Christensen 1995:41). The remainder of his band, along with nine other Shoshone bands, signed the Treaty of Box Elder in July of 1863. With the signing of the treaty, Shoshone and white relations began to improve, bringing peace to the region (Powell 1994:498).

Prelude to the Transcontinental Railroad

Promoters of the railroad were foremost interested in its commercial importance, as well as connecting the east and the west. As historian, Robert Utley notes:

The settlement of the Oregon question in 1846, the discovery of gold in California in 1848, and the admission of California to statehood in 1850 swelled the population of the Pacific Coast. With commerce almost wholly dependent upon the long, slow journey around Cape Horn or across the Isthmus of Panama, both