

# HOLE-IN-THE-ROCK NEWS

*Preserving the History and Sharing the Legacy*



Barton Cabin, Bluff Fort Historic Site, L. CrabtreePhoto

## Message from HIR Foundation President

When I was a teenager, my summers always included riding the mail truck to Bluff with Dorothy Butt (Hurst) and spending days at her home there. Everyday we'd walk over Cemetery Hill to the old swimming pool, and then explore the Bluff hills and visit people. In the Barton cabin lived a quaint little woman named Mrs. Rapley. Her husband had come to Bluff in the oil boom years before.

"We were always welcome in her cozy cabin with the muslin ceilings patterned from the rain water that brought red dirt down through the rooftop."

Time moved on and took its toll on the old Barton cabin and the Kumen Jones house next door. The brush and weeds and tamarack grew so tall that only a small portion of the cabin could be seen. In fact, most of the block seemed to grow lots of weeds and wait silently for a purpose. No serious activity seemed to occur there for years. It was being preserved...waiting. The silent perseverance of the old Barton cabin was rewarded when Gary and Sharon Guymon acquired three quarters of the town block with the aim to preserve the site of the old Bluff Fort! Next I entered the story, acquiring from Gary and Sharon the Barton Cabin lot. Finally came "the boys from up north," Graig Taylor, LaMar Helquist and Lamont Crabtree who helped restore the cabin. By the time that project was finished, complete with signs and a picture bulletin board, the group had acquired a fever of fort restoration, Graig said, "Now what Corinne?" And I replied, "The log meeting house, of course."

This proved to be a bigger job than we had anticipated. Where could we find the cottonwood logs, let alone the money to pull it all together? Gary Guymon suggested using dead cottonwoods from the old irrigation ditch near Blanding, but heavy timber equipment and expertise was necessary to move them. David Kimmerle (a great-grandson of Bishop Jens Nielson) was prepared for the undertaking. He cut, sawed and hauled the heavy logs to Bluff. He repeated this operation four times. The next challenge was building with crooked logs. A Canadian old-timer, who just happened to be visiting the area, knew cabin construction. From a single picture, the great old meeting house was reconstructed right down to the dirt roof and the bell. What had originally cost the pioneers mostly time and labor cost us \$85,000.

We had restored the cabin and rebuilt a meeting house, but what about the early Bluff Fort inhabitants themselves?



Granite monument to the pioneers, L. Crabtree Photo

How could we preserve the story of our hardy pioneer ancestors who came in 1880? In 2004, a permanent granite monument to honor the Hole-in-the-Rock trekkers was built. It was dedicated by LDS Presiding Bishop H. David Burton amidst some of the worst weather I'd ever experienced in Bluff. It gave us an added appreciation for the elements the pioneers endured. The monument was built totally from donations from friends and descendants. Like them, it is solid and beautiful! Curtis Jones, Norman Nielson, and Mike Halliday and their wives spearheaded that drive.

The next fort project will be our biggest undertaking yet—to rebuild the stone Bluff Co-op store as an interpretive site and visitors center. It is anticipated that this will cost half a million dollars. Last year 5,000 visitors signed in at the little fort, and many indicated a desire for added historical preservation and history of the area. We will meet that request.

From the very beginning the "fort dream" has been challenging, exciting and scary as the amount of money needed grew larger and larger. Then the feeling would come, "don't worry, keep planning, and when the time is right, it will happen." This Bluff Fort is meant to be. I hope you will help us. Come visit the Fort and beautiful Bluff. Once the red sand gets in your blood, you will return again and again. I guarantee it!

-Corinne N. Roring

## PAROWAN: MOTHER TOWN OF THE SOUTHWEST



Parowan Rock Church, USHS Archives

It was within the walls of the Parowan Rock church that most of the calls to the San Juan Mission were issued. Parowan was the church center for the surrounding towns of Southwestern Utah. It has been called the "Mother Town of the Southwest." In addition to the San Juan Mission, it was from the Parowan Rock Church that calls were announced for pioneers to leave their homes and establish communities in Nevada, Arizona, Colorado, Wyoming and Oregon.

Thanks to the Daughters of the Utah Pioneers, the Rock Church has been preserved and turned into a must-see museum which is full of artifacts of pioneer life and the portraits of many Hole-in-the-Rock pioneers.

-Lamont Crabtree

The granddaughter of Joseph H. McEprang, who was born at the Bluff Fort, shared her thoughts after visiting the partially restored Bluff Fort.

"It was an amazing and special experience to be able to come here and see where my great grandfather Samuel Wilhelm Mackelprang and his family lived!"

## THE ESCALANTE HERITAGE CENTER

The Hole-in-the-Rock expedition spent six months carving a wagon road between communities in Southwestern Utah and the Four Corners area out of some of the most rugged terrain in North America. It finally came to an end in Bluff, UT on April 6, 1880. However the journey would never have happened at all without the lifeline extended from the small settlement of Escalante, Utah west of the Colorado river.

Residents of San Juan County acknowledge Bluff as their mother community, but if Bluff is the mother, then Escalante must be the grandmother. Largely unrecognized is the nurturing of the small Bluff pioneer community by the good people of Escalante. Escalante was an adoptive grandmother as none of the Bluff pioneers were originally from Escalante.

Perched at the edge of what seems like the end of the earth, Escalante was the last bastion of civilization for those pioneers. The Bluff-bound pioneers had prepared for a six week trip. It turned into a six month ordeal.

"Their only hope of survival lay in the kindness of the tiny community of Escalante."

The story of the significant role Escalante played in the creation of Bluff is safeguarded by the Escalante Heritage Center, an organization that is in the beginning stages of constructing a building where stories of the area's rich pioneer heritage can be told. Their focus will be the story of the Hole-in-the-Rock expedition, an epic journey that the Utah Department of Transportation has pledged \$625,000 to preserve.

For the past six years, the Escalante Heritage Center has sponsored an Escalante Heritage Day Festival. On the 125th anniversary of the Hole-in-the-Rock trek, an original play was written and performed which honored the pioneers whose history will ever be tied to the Escalante people. This tie will become stronger as the proposed building becomes a reality!

-Jerry Roundy

## DEAR DESCENDENTS AND FRIENDS OF THE HOLE-IN-THE-ROCK PIONEERS

The Hole-in-the-Rock Foundation has been established to preserve the memory and share the legacy of the heroic pioneers who colonized the Four Corners area. As you can see from the newsletter, much has already been accomplished. When the Bluff Fort is completed, it will be a fitting memorial to those who carved out the community of Bluff.

Future plans include a visitors center re-creation of the historic Bluff Co-op Store, the restoration of the Kumen Jones rock home and a number of log cabins that will show the structure of the original fort.

The fort site is located on highway 191, and in the past year the fort site was visited by nearly 5,000 people from across the U.S. and around the world. This number will increase as we continue with planned developments, making this fort a unique and informative place to visit.

We are in the process of building a database of Hole-in-the-Rock descendants. If you are aware of family members or other descendants who did not receive this newsletter, please send us their names, mailing addresses and email addresses.

Please join with us as we honor the sacrifices of our forefathers. Your contributions will help us build a fitting memorial to the legacy of the San Juan pioneers. All donations to the Hole-in-the-Rock Foundation — 501(c)(3) non-profit organization—are tax deductible. Thank you for helping us make this vision a reality.  
-LaMar Helquest, HIR Foundation Vice President

You can help by sending a check to:  
Hole-in-the-Rock Foundation  
PO Box 476  
Bluff, UT 84512

Or contribute online at: [www.hirfoundation.org/donate](http://www.hirfoundation.org/donate)



Children at the Bluff Fort dedication, David McPhie Photo

The Hole-in-the-Rock Foundation is pleased to announce that our official website is now live! The website features general information on the Hole-in-the-Rock trail, Bluff Fort and the HIR Foundation. Our new website will facilitate inquiries and provide updates on our projects and related activities. The site address is [www.hirfoundation.org](http://www.hirfoundation.org).

Future plans for the website include a bookstore and a searchable database of Hole-in-the-Rock pioneers including family histories and photographs and the provision for descendants to upload and share their ancestors' information.

The trail section of the website will be expanded to include trail guides, photos and aerial video clips. -Lamont Crabtree

**PRESERVING AND PASSING ON THE HERITAGE OF HOLE-IN-THE-ROCK**

Preserving and sharing the Hole-in-the-Rock story has been a dream of many Bluff pioneer descendants for years. Corinne Roring, President of the Hole-in-the-Rock Foundation has always said, "If the time is right, it will happen." It's happening now!

1. The Bluff Fort property was acquired in 1994 making it possible to preserve and restore the Barton cabin.
2. The adjoining Kumen Jones property was purchased including the land where the original meeting house was located. Pictures of the meeting house allowed us to duplicate the building. We found sufficient cotton wood trees for the structure, as well as a contractor with the rare knowledge of how to fit the problematic logs together.
3. Curtis Jones stepped forward and volunteered to head the fundraising efforts for the memorial project. Hundreds of people made the monument possible!
4. The Hole-in-the-Rock team at Escalante successfully identified and marked the trail from their town to the west side of the river. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints offered the Escalante group ten acres of land on which to build a visitor's center, and the funding has been raised to build it!
5. In the past year, the Hole-in-the-Rock Foundation has been established and accomplished the following:
  - We've been incorporated as a Utah non-profit entity and obtained 501(c)(3) status from the IRS.
  - We've set up financial accounts for receiving donations and funding future projects.
  - We've acquired the deed to the present Bluff Fort property from the Lettie Jones Heritage Foundation.
  - The Hole-in-the-Rock trail has been marked on the Escalante side, and work as begun on the Bluff portion.
  - We have designed plans for reconstruction of the co-op store as well as additional log cabins.

- We have applied for a grant from the Utah D.O.T. and are awaiting final approval.
- We have received approval for a \$50,000 matching grant and guaranteed status for the Interpretive Visitors Center from the San Juan County Commission.
- We are meeting with residents and business owners of Bluff to share potential plans and ideas for the site.

There have been many other inspiring circumstances which have given vision and strength to this historical project. The Hole-in-the-Rock Foundation is in stable financial condition, but we still need contributions to complete all of the planned projects. We invite you to join us in these efforts and come to Bluff!  
-Teri Winder

Questions and comments may be directed to:  
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Bluff Fort Monument ground breaking, L. Crabtree Photo



"Echoes of a time we should not forget."

A few of the comments left by visitors to the Bluff Fort.

A real sense of a courageous past. So much achieved by so few! Amazing!"—U.K.

"Marvelous place—echoes of a time we should not forget." —Canada

"Wonderful sanctuary, full of memory and peace. To be rebuilt? Yes!" — Belgium

"Atmospheric, a step back in time." —England

"Cool! But I'd like to have a bit more information!" —Germany

"Keep on [with] your endeavor." —France

"What a story of courage." —CT

"Better than many national monuments." —VA

"Interesting to imagine what a hard life was in the past! Very interesting." —The Netherlands "

"One never knows where the highway treasures lie."

Additional comments left by descendants of the Bluff Fort pioneers.

"This is wonderful! Kumen Jones is my great grandfather. I feel I know him better today because of what has been done here."

"It makes me proud and grateful to be descended from such noble ancestors."

"A real sense of a courageous past"