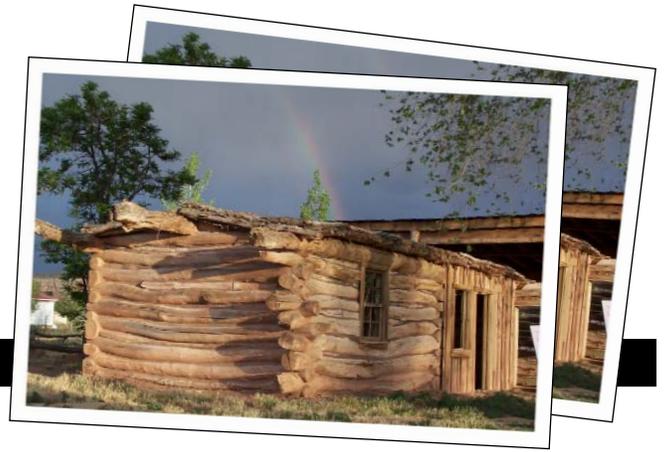


# HOLE IN THE ROCK NEWS

*Preserving the History and Sharing the Legacy*

Volume 3 Spring 2008



## LOOKING BACK: SUMMERS IN BLUFF

Springtime has come to Bluff and the cheat grass is bright green all over town. Its vivid color is so fresh and new, it is hard to believe that soon the grass will dry out and produce the burry seeds that become such a nuisance. The wild flowers are in full bloom in the cliffs. On days like this, I feel the pull of tradition and the call of my ancestors, and I climb those heights and survey the view below and beyond.

The cliffs beyond the river on the south have been washed clean by the winter snow. The Navajo sheep, with their new lambs, are eating the young grass along the roadside, and the perfume of the delicate flowers growing out of the rock behind me is intoxicating. Wonderful! This is a renewing moment I treasure.



I invite you to come and share this special tranquil time with me—only in beautiful Bluff. Only here can you find the cliff flowers. We love them, we value them, and we prize them.

At the fort, leaves are budding on the trees and the soil is sandy, soft and warm to the touch. I've planted Bluff flower seeds in a welcoming spot, and now we shall watch and see. Maybe they will bloom like in days past, for in my memory, I can still see Bluff as the little green valley with clean, well kept houses with their lawns, shade trees, gardens, fruit trees and small irrigation ditches winding around carrying water to all. Frogs and lizards added interest for us kids.

In the summertime, the crazy kids from Blanding traveled the dusty road for 50 miles (usually in the back of a truck) to go swimming at Bluff. There was a big rock to dive off of and the flowing artesian well made clear clean water. How lucky we were. All the Bluff kids lived in that pool in the summertime, and I never knew one who couldn't swim like a fish. Duke Simpson, now chief of the Twin Rock Trading Post, was the fastest fish of all. He and his buddies would swim through the rushes so quietly, they could capsize the floating sunbathers, or stay underwater long enough to grab a foot and hear the screams. Oh, the carefree summers in Bluff! I can't forget the sweet luscious watermelon at the end of a swim. Uncle

Freeman Nielson and Lum Gaines raised great melons, and if you were lucky, you could get in on Aunt Maggie Nielson's fried chicken dinner. A cool swim, fried chicken and watermelon--it doesn't get any better than that!

I must thank my dear friend Dorothy Butt Hurst, who in her teen years endeared me to her world in Bluff—a world of swimming, sunburns, sweet pickles from the cellar, sausages from the trading post, visiting most every house in town (and being fed), climbing the cliffs, throwing rocks in the river and riding the mail truck. As Dorothy used to say, "Bluff is the most peaceful and wonderful place on earth." I agree! Come stay awhile and you too will agree!

Corinne Roring, HIRF President

## DID YOU KNOW?

- Did you know you can have your family reunion at Bluff Fort?
- Did you know you can visit one of the Jens Nielson homes by contacting LaRue at [larueb@frontiernet.net](mailto:larueb@frontiernet.net)?
- Did you know we are looking forward to seeing you in Bluff? To catch the independent, adventurous spirit of Bluff, a visit to Bluff Fort is a must.
- Did you know there are great plans for more work at the Fort? But we need your help.
- Did you know, if everyone who receives this newsletter sent in just \$10.00 each month, the HIR foundation would have \$120,000.00 per year. We could see the Co-op store/visitor center /museum finished quickly.
- Did you know we want to see you at Bluff Fort? Call or come by!

**ANNOUNCING!**  
**THE OPENING OF**  
**BLUFF FORT**  
**WELCOME CENTER**  
**JULY 1, 2008**

## LESSONS IN STRENGTH AND COURAGE

The story of the Hole-in-the-Rock pioneers and the trail they forged through the Colorado River gorge is one of the most dramatic episodes in the history of the early mormon colonization movement. And each member of that party had their own remarkable story to tell.

In the Fall of 2007 at a broadcast for the Eastern and Southern Utah stakes of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Elder Jeffrey Holland related this remarkable story about Stanford and Belle Smith, members of the Hole-in-the-Rock expedition.



*With blasting powder and tools, working most of December and January of 1879-1880, they [pioneers] cut a precipitous, primitive road into the face of the canyon precipice.*

*With this roadbed...some of it literally hung on pegs drilled into the canyon wall—the task was now to get the first forty wagons down the “Hole.”*

*Twenty men and boys would hold long ropes at the back of each wagon. The wheels were then brake-locked with chains, allowing them to slide [while] avoiding the catastrophe of the wheels actually rolling.*

*In one of the great moments of pioneer history, one by one the company took the wagons down the treacherous precipice. When, miracle of miracles, they reached the canyon floor, they eagerly started to ferry across the river with a flatbed boat they had fashioned for that purpose. As it turned out, the Joseph Stanford Smith family were the last wagon to descend that day.*

*Stanford Smith had systematically helped the preceding wagons down, but somehow in their one-by-one success and consequent disappearance, the others apparently forgot that Brother Smith's family would still need help as the tail-enders. Deeply disturbed that he and his family seemed abandoned, Stanford moved his team, wagon and family to the edge of the precipice. The team was placed in front and a third horse was hitched behind the wagon to the rear axle. The Smiths stood for a moment and looked down the treacherous “Hole.” Stanford turned to his wife and said, “Belle, I am afraid we can't make it.”*

*She replied, “We must make it.”*

*He said, “If we only had a few men to hold the wagon back we might make it.”*

*Replied his wife, “I'll do the holding back. We will make it.”*

People from all over the world stop at Bluff Fort. The guest register, in May alone, boasts visitors from Australia, the Netherlands, Italy, New Zealand, France... the list goes on.

*“Fabulous, most interesting.” —Dover, England*

*“Beautiful!” “Ciao!” —Italy*

*“You kepted it very good.” —Germany*

*A quilt was laid on the ground. There she placed her infant baby in the care of her three-year-old Roy and five-year-old Ada. “Hold little brother til papa comes for the three of you,” she said. Then positioning herself behind the wagon, Belle Smith grasped the reins of the horse hitched to the back of the rig. (Now, remember, she and that one horse are going to try to hold back what 20 men and boys had done for the other wagons.) Stanford started the team down the “Hole.” The wagon lurched downward. With the first jolt the rear horse and Sister Smith were literally catapulted into the air. Recovering, she hung back, pulling on the lines with all her strength and courage. A jagged rock cut a cruel gash in her leg from heel to hip. The horse behind the wagon fell to his haunches. The half-dead animal was literally dragged most of the way down the incline. That gallant woman, clothes torn, with a grievous wound, hung on to those lines with all her might and faith, and with her husband muscled that wagon the full length of the incline all the way to the river's edge.*

*On reaching the bottom, and almost in disbelief at their accomplishment, Stanford immediately raced the two thousand feet back up to the top of the cliff fearful for the welfare of the children. When he climbed over the rim, there he saw his three children literally unmoved from the position their mother had placed them in. Carrying the baby, with the other two children clinging to him and to each other, he led them down the rocky crack to their anxious mother below. At that point, in the distance they saw five men moving toward them carrying chains and ropes. The Smiths had been missed from the larger party. Realizing the plight they were in, these men were coming to help. Stanford called out, “Forget it, fellows... [Belle] here is all the help a [man] needs [to make this journey].”*

See David E. Miller, Hole-in-the-Rock: An Epic in the Colonization of the Great American West, Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1959, pp. 101-18.

*“...thankful for what we have, thanks to the pioneers.”  
—PA*

*“Wow!!!” —New Zealand*

*“Many thanks for your kindness and loyalty;  
we enjoyed it.” —Holland*

*“A lovely reminder of the past; very interesting.”  
—Bristol, England*

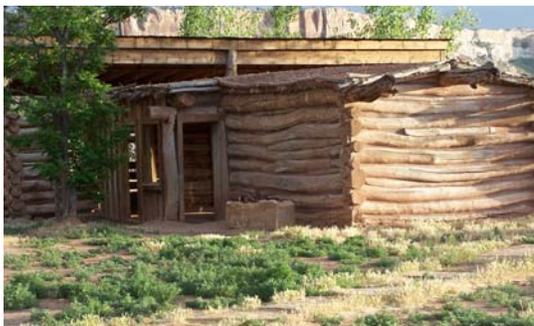
## ADOPT A CABIN

We want to thank everyone for their support of our recent "Adopt a Cabin" fund raising program. The following families have committed to help raise funds for their respective family cabins.

- The Eliza Redd Family Cabin: Their goal is to erect their cabin as a family project this fall
- The Jens Neilson Family Cabin: Their desire to present their family's story is strong.
- Amasa Barton Blacksmith Shop: The family is anxious to start their cabin and will accept donations.
- Albert Lyman Cabin: The family has committed to build a cabin in honor of this great leader.
- Riddell Cabin: This cabin will be built as a model for all of us to follow this summer.
- The Explorer Cabin: The George Hobbs Family has committed to take the lead in honoring the exploration parties of the San Juan.
- Haskell Cabin: It would be an honor to highlight this Native American peace maker with a cabin.

The opportunity is still open to all families. For \$15,000 and some sweat equity; we can recreate each one of these cabins. Let us know if you are interested by contacting any of Hole-in-the-Rock Foundation's board members.

Corinne Roring at [utia@frontiernet.net](mailto:utia@frontiernet.net)  
L. Graig Taylor at [eva@hirf.org](mailto:eva@hirf.org)  
Lamont Crabtree at [lamont@hirf.org](mailto:lamont@hirf.org)  
Karl and LaRue Barton at [barton@hirf.org](mailto:barton@hirf.org)



Barton Family Cabin

## THE SPIRIT OF PLACE

Places of historic, religious, and personal significance carry with them a special and distinctive spirit. We know it as "the spirit of place." This spirit unlocks feelings and understanding that invite us to be a part of things bigger than ourselves. We sense that the ground upon which we walk is sacred.

The doctrine of "sacred ground" finds frequent expression in scriptural texts. The Bible begins with the story of Eden which it refers to as "the garden of God" and the "holy mountain" (Ezk. 28:13-14); it ends with a reference to the "holy city" which it previously identifies as the New Jerusalem (Rev. 21:10; 22:19).

In Bible texts it is not only the appearance of God or angels that makes a particular place sacred but the faith and sacrifice

that it called forth. By such a standard, Bluff, Utah, founded April 6, 1880 by a hardy company of Mormon pioneers whose faith and "stickety tootie" is unmatched in the annals of pioneering, has claim to being sacred ground.

One does not walk the fields of Gettysburg without feeling that the land has been hallowed by the courage and blood of those who fought and died there. There is a spirit you feel when you enter the old Constitutional Hall in Philadelphia where our Founding Fathers risked both life and fortune to give birth to a new nation. To walk the streets of Old Nauvoo is to feel the presence of its original citizens who you sense are there to meet you. So it is at Fort Bluff now being reconstructed by the descendants of the Hole-in-the-Rock pioneers.

This is ground hallowed by the faith and works of its original settlers. Though the elevation is only 4300 feet above sea level, it stands as close to the stars and the heavens as one can get on this mortal earth. Fort Bluff is a magnificent monument to the faith and courage of its original settlers.

Monuments are the sanctuary of memory. They constitute the holy mountain from which vantage point we see the vision of the past, present, and future. They are the temple of memory which gives meaning and purpose to all we do.

Bluff becomes for us as Salvation Knoll was for the four scouts sent from the Hole-in-the-Rock to find a way for the main company to travel. Disorientated by clouds and bad weather they climbed this eminence from which they were able to see the Blue Mountains and thus chart their course. So it is that we as the descendants of the Hole-in-the-Rock pioneers return to this sacred ground both physically and in memory to assure that we do not get lost in a wilderness of lesser things.

How, it might be asked, does one return to a place that they have not been? The answer is that a memory has been bequeathed you by your forebears of that which they believed and did. The memory will be unlocked upon your return.

And so it was that our family went back. We felt the spirit of Bluff; we stood and shared the vista of Salvation Knoll; we climbed San Juan Hill, and we marveled at the faith and the strength of those who went before us. To share their vision, one must stand where they stood. To see is to believe. Their invitation is simple, "Come, and we will be here to meet you. As our blood is your blood, so our story is your story."

Joseph Fielding McConkie

### WANTED!

Pioneer memorabilia (clothing, diaries, furniture, personal items, etc.) to be displayed in the Bluff Fort museum.

Pioneer stoves to go inside log cabins.

Names of family and friends of the San Juan Mission.

Contact La Rue Barton

(435) 587-9917 or (435) 672-9967 [barton@hirf.org](mailto:barton@hirf.org)

Box #593

Monticello, Utah

## THANK YOU'S

As we restore the old Bluff Fort, we want to express our appreciation to everyone that joined us in this effort. Here is a short list of those who have contributed to our venture financially.

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints

The Lettie Jones Foundation

The Esther Foundation

The San Juan Foundation

Family and Friends including the following:

Stan & Gay Jones

GSBS Architects

Bennion Redd

Floyd Atkin

Lyman Holyoak

Helen Hurst

Enid Curtis

John A. Redd

Karen Thayne

Bobby Suttlemeyer

Anita Felton

Dwayne Bayles

Joseph McConkie

Kathern Paxman

David McConkie

Marian Bayles

Grant & Nina Taylor

Philis Soham

Marilyn Rowley

Amy Gregerson

J.C. Stimson

Joyce Martin

LaMar Helquist

Kathleen Black

LaDean Hill (Jones)

Cleo Johnson

Clisbee Lyman

Kathera Mathis

Geraldine Redd Dunn

Marian Woods

K. Holyoak

John Roring

David Pierce

John Neilson

Lindsay Jones

G. Redd Dunn

Jessie McDonald

Bonnie Taylor

Jeanette Williams

Dorothy Hurst

Andy Pierce

Cathy B. Miller

Stewart Aitchson

Ruth Nielson

Margaret Tew

Montel Seeley

**While our funds are currently equal to our present needs, we still need your help to continue the project. Your tax deductible contribution will be very much appreciated.**

**You can send your donation to:**

**HIR Foundation**

**P.O. Box #476**

**Bluff, Utah 84512**

Mike & Kelly Roring Family

Karl & LaRue Barton Family

Rocky Mountain Engineering

John Adams

Leslie Streeter

J. Lamontque

Steve Winn

Rebecca Pinegar

Kathleen McConkie

Ellen Atkins (Lyman)

George Bayles

Elaine Jensen

Joe Lyman/LaJune B. Leishman

Jay Redd/Wyman Redd

Duke & Rose Simplson Family