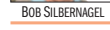


FIRST DRAFT

Nevada town has disappeared and re-emerged over 150 years

When John Wesley Powell and the five remaining members of his crew, who had struggled through the canyons of the Green and Colorado rivers, finally exited the Grand Canyon at the end of August, 1869, hungry and bedraggled, the first people they encountered were Mormon settlers from the tiny community of St. Thomas.

Had they arrived two years later, they might not have met anyone. By then, the community was largely abandoned, a victim of cartographic errors



BOB SILBERNAGEL

and political disputes. But St. Thomas would re-emerge a decade later and enjoy a relatively prosperous time until the 1930s, when it was flooded by Lake Mead, the reservoir created by Hoover Dam.

Even that didn't end the St. Thomas saga, however. As the waters of Lake Mead have risen and fallen over the years, the remains of the village of St. Thomas have reappeared, then disappeared again, only to re-emerge years later. It's a sort of Brigadoon for the southwestern United States.

These days, visitors to Overton, Nevada, can take a short drive south, then follow a 2.5-mile self-guided hike through the ruins of St. Thomas, along a trail with kiosks maintained by the National Park Service. The trail and the remnants of the village are part of the Lake Mead National Recreation Area.

Unless the West sees a significant increase in precipitation in coming years — not likely based on current climate models — the ruins of St. Thomas are expected to remain visible for the foreseeable future.

St. Thomas was founded in 1865 at the behest of Brigham Young, the leader of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, who wanted a Mormon community where cotton could be grown.

It was named for one of the leaders of the settlers, Thomas Sassen Smith.

The people who ventured there believed they were settling a new community of saints near the Utah-Arizona border, at the confluence of the Muddy and Virgin rivers and about 20 miles above where the Virgin flows into the Colorado River.

It was fertile ground, a place that had been farmed by Anasazi Indians centuries earlier. A small Anasazi village had once occupied land near where the Mormons settled. They, like the Mormons, also gathered salt from the saline hills to the south.

The community was not very large when Powell and his men emerged from the Grand Canyon in August, 1869. Still, it was prosperous enough to provide fresh fruit and other supplies to the weary travelers.

The people they encountered at the mouth of the Virgin River sent word to St. Thomas, 20 miles upstream, that Powell and his men had arrived. The Mormons knew of the Powell expedition, but feared the explorers had all died in the Grand Canyon.

A day after they appeared, alive but hungry, a bishop from St. Thomas arrived at the Powell camp "in his wagon (with) two or three dozen melons and many other little luxuries, and we are comfortable once more," Powell wrote in his account of the journey.

Jack Sumner, Powell's second in command, said the hungry boatmen were eager to consume all the food the Mormons provided.

"We laid our dignified manners aside and assumed the manners of so many hogs," he



NATIONAL PARK SERVICE, LAKE MEAD NATIONAL RECREATION AREA

St. Thomas School as it appeared in the early 20th century.



Unnam'd residents of St. Thomas outside their home before the flood.

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE, LAKE MEAD NATIONAL RECREATION AREA



The foundation, steps and fallen pillars are all that remains of the St. Thomas School in 2020.

BOB SILBERNAGEL/
Special to the Sentinel

wrote.

The next day, Powell and his brother Walter traveled with the bishop back to St. Thomas, then continued on to Salt Lake City and back east.

Sumner and three other men, having obtained fresh provisions for their boat, continued down the Colorado River to Yuma, Arizona.

Meanwhile, the residents of St. Thomas kept working their farms and growing their community, but not for much longer.

In 1870, a new survey showed St. Thomas and its farms were in Nevada, not Utah. Nevada authorities demanded five years of back taxes from the St. Thomas pioneers and decreed the taxes must be paid in gold or silver, which most of the settlers didn't have.

So the residents of St. Thomas took a vote, and with the blessing of Brigham Young, decided to abandon their community in 1871.

Only one of the founders, Daniel Bonelli — who had a farm, mine and ferry at the Colorado River — opted to remain in the area with his family.

By the early 1880s, however, other Mormon pioneers began arriving. They took up the farm ground abandoned by their predecessors and made peace with Nevada authorities.

They built adobe and stone houses, stores, a hotel, a school, irrigation canals and rock cisterns to capture the scant rainwater. Gold, copper and salt mining were undertaken nearby.

A railroad arrived in 1911,

connecting the community with southwestern Utah. In 1915, the Arrowhead Trail automobile road between Salt Lake City and Los Angeles began bringing motorists through St. Thomas.

Businesses like garages and stores enlarged their services and inventories to accommodate the travelers.

At its peak, about 500 people inhabited the little community with rustic amenities, and there were an estimated 1,500 people throughout the surrounding area.

Even so, St. Thomas homes and businesses had no running water or electricity, according to the National Park Service. That's a bit ironic, considering that what destroyed the town — Hoover Dam — was the largest hydroelectric generating plant in the world when it began operating in 1939.

A decade earlier, residents of St. Thomas learned their homes were doomed when President Calvin Coolidge signed legislation authorizing the construction of Hoover Dam and the creation of Lake Mead.

They began political efforts to either preserve their homes or to receive higher prices for their land than the government offered, but were unsuccessful.

Many St. Thomas residents left long before the waters rose high enough to flood the town. Others stayed until the waters restrained by the dam actually began to submerge the town in 1938.

A kiosk on the St. Thomas hiking trail tells of one resi-

dent, Hugh Lord, who set fire to his home, then stepped into a boat and rowed away on the rising waters of Lake Mead as his home burned.

When Lake Mead reached its highest level, the surface of the water was 60 feet above St. Thomas.

However, the lake's water level has fluctuated over the decades, sometimes revealing the remains of the town, sometimes submerging them.

When the waters receded, former residents of the town gathered at the town site. Reunions were held at St. Thomas in 1945, 1965 and 2012.

During the 1965 reunion, former Nevada Sen. Berkeley Bunker wore a battered old felt hat, which he said he had buried near his house in St. Thomas in the 1930s as Lake Mead was rising.

He had dug up the hat on the day of the 1965 reunion. Most of the town has been above the water since 2004.

Sources: Kiosks and online article about St. Thomas, Lake Mead National Recreation Area, National Park Service; "St. Thomas: Nevada's Ghost Town That Won't Stay Dead," by Tom Garrison, Moapa Valley Progress, Dec. 6, 2017; "St. Thomas: A High and Dry Ghost Town," by Matt Huffman, The Las Vegas Sun, Sept. 15, 2013; "The Exploration of the Colorado River and its Canyons," by John Wesley Powell; "Sumner Journal," by Jack Sumner.

Bob Silbernagel's email is bobsilbernagel@gmail.com.

2020 THIS WEEK IN THE LEGISLATURE

DENVER — The Colorado House is expected to give final approval to HB1003 by Reps. Janice Rich, R-Grand Junction, and Dylan Roberts, D-Avon, to expand the Rural Jump Start Zone Act. The measure would allow for more businesses to receive special tax breaks if they locate and create jobs in rural areas of the state.

■ **Today:** The Senate Business, Labor and Technology Committee is to hear HB1137 — introduced by Reps. Matt Soper, R-Delta, and Julie McCluskie, D-Frisco, and Sen. Kerry Donovan, D-Vail — that is designed to increase the number of Broadband Deployment Fund grants that go to internet infrastructure projects in underserved areas of rural Colorado.

■ **Tuesday:** The Senate Transportation Committee is to consider HB1145, a measure that sets to 20 mph the reduction in speed required to comply with the state's move-over-or-slow-down law when passing emergency vehicles on the side of the road.

■ **Wednesday:** The Senate Health and Human Services Committee is to discuss SB188, a measure requiring health care facilities to provide itemized

statements when billing patients.

■ **Thursday:** The Senate Transportation and Energy Committee is to debate HB1178, a measure that would require the Colorado Department of Transportation to study the possibility of raising speed limits on rural roads. An original version of the bill called for raising it to as high as 70 mph, but the current version gives CDOT more latitude in choosing speed limits.

■ **Next week:** A bipartisan group of legislative leaders, including the majority and minority leaders in the House and Senate, have introduced SB186, a bill that essentially codifies Amendments Y and Z, two constitutional amendments approved by voters in 2018 to create special commissions to redistrict and reapportion legislative and congressional district boundaries after each decennial census.

All floor action and committees can be watched or heard on the Colorado Legislature's website at leg.colorado.gov. Check that website to see which measures are available for remote testimony, and how to register to speak. — Charles Ashley

2 drivers dead after striking semitrailer

DENVER — A semitrailer was struck by two vehicles in back-to-back crashes in northeastern Colorado and the drivers of both vehicles were killed, the Colorado State Patrol said.

The semitrailer was traveling north, south of Greeley, at 1:20 a.m. Saturday when a southbound pickup crossed the center line and struck the semi head-on, killing a 27-year-old man from Keenesburg who was driving the pickup.

Six minutes later, a northbound vehicle ran into the back of the stopped semi, killing the 30-year-old woman who was driving. — AP

The Daily Sentinel (ISSN 1445-8962) Printed editions published Wednesday thru Sunday, electronic editions published every morning at 734 S. Seventh Street, Grand Junction, CO 81501. Periodical Postage paid at Grand Junction, CO. Annual home delivery rate: 13 weeks - \$95.00, 26 weeks - \$170.00, 52 weeks - \$320.00. Weekend delivery package: Wednesday thru Sunday - \$244.40, Friday thru Sunday - \$197.60. Saturday & Sunday - \$163.80, Sunday only - \$163.80. Weekend print only - delivery includes the following date in 2020: 11/26/2020. If you are an e-edition subscriber for 11/26/2020, you will not receive a printed paper. Single Copy: \$1.00 daily and \$2.00 Sunday. Mail USPS: \$30.00 per week, \$1,560 per year. *POSTMASTER: Send address changes to the Daily Sentinel, 734 S. Seventh Street, Grand Junction, CO 81501.

FREE ADMISSION

RV SHOW

RVs • 5TH WHEELS • MOTOR HOMES • TENT TRAILERS • VANS
• TOY HAULERS • TRUCK CAMPERS & MORE!

MESA COUNTY FAIRGROUNDS

THURSDAY March 26 10AM - 6PM	FRIDAY March 27 10AM - 7:30PM	SATURDAY March 28 9AM - 5PM
--	---	---

Featuring:

- Bob Scott RV's
- Centennial RV
- Mattas Marine & RV
- Transwest Truck & RV

• NO PRIVATE PARTY SALES • NO PETS

• RV Factory Representatives
• Seminars • Vendors
• Food Trucks • Music
• Beer Garden and more!

SPONSORED BY:
WESTERN ROCKIES

DailySentinelRVShow.com / 970-256-4256

Dementia



Caring for or making decisions for a loved one who has Dementia can be a difficult journey. I am a Certified Dementia Practitioner who will help you navigate this path. *Together we can find solutions*

Lori A Sommers, CDP
LASDementiaNavigation@gmail.com
970-314-1054

All contents copyright © 2020 The Daily Sentinel. All republication rights are reserved. Material in this publication may not be published, broadcast, rewritten for broadcast or publication or redistributed directly or indirectly in any medium.

How to reach us: 242-5050. Business hours 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday, excluding holidays. Circulation phones are open 7 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. on weekends.

CIRCULATION
Subscription and delivery questions:
242-1919 or (800) 332-5833

ADVERTISING
Managing advertising: 256-4289
Classified advertising: 242-1313

Pick 3 Midday Sunday: 7, 5, 9 Evening Sunday: 1, 8, 8
Cash 5 Sunday: 1, 8, 9, 17, 19
For information, go to www.coloradolottery.com.

NEWSROOM
Managing editor: 256-4252
City desk: 256-4213
Features and entertainment: 256-4224
Sports: 256-4203
Commentary: 256-4236

coloradopress ASSOCIATION



2011-2012-2013
2014-2015-2018