

Green Flake of First Pioneer Company, Idaho Pioneer

A little-known aspect of the Mormon Pioneer trek of 1847 is the part played by a few African-Americans. Some of these pioneered a second time into East Idaho and have descendants here.

Green Flake, who died in Idaho Falls in 1903, was a member of the advance Pioneer company led by Orson Pratt, which entered Salt Lake Valley July 21, three days before Brigham Young.

Green had been born a slave in 1828 on the plantation of James Madison Flake in Anson, North Carolina, so took the surname of Flake. He moved to Nauvoo, Illinois, with the Flake family when they joined the Mormon Church. As a husky 16-year old he was baptized in the Mississippi River in 1844.

In order to emigrate West with the Saints, they sold their plantation at a loss, taking as part payment several mules for the journey. They freed their slaves, but Green was one of three who remained with them. He was given the job to take mules and carriage to assist Brigham Young's party to their destination in 1847. Then he was to send the outfit back and to remain himself in the valley to build a house for the Flake family. When the Flakes reached the Salt Lake Valley in October 1848, they found the log house awaiting them in Cottonwood, just south of Salt Lake City.

Green was later married to Martha Crosby, and they had two children born in Cottonwood, Lucinda in 1854 and Abraham in 1857. Both later married and in the 1880s settled in Idaho. After his wife died, Green joined Abraham and his family in Gray's Lake, where he lived for several years, then moved with them to Idaho Falls where he died in 1903. His daughter Lucinda had married George Stevenson and settled in the Teton Valley.

In 1897 when the LDS Church and Utah celebrated their Pioneer Golden Jubilee, Green Flake traveled from Gray's Lake to Salt Lake City, an honored guest and eye-witness to the original Pioneer Day. In 1947 when Utah erected "This Is the Place" monument at the mouth of Emigration Canyon in Salt Lake City, Green Flake's name was inscribed upon it.

The Idaho Register, Friday, Oct. 23rd, 1903, reported on its front page:

"Green Flake (colored) died at the home of his son Adam Flake in this city on Tuesday evening last, aged 76 years. The body was embalmed by C.E. Dinwoodey and sent to Salt Lake City.

"Mr. Flake came across the country with the first company of immigrants that came to Salt Lake valley. There are now only about a dozen of them living. He lived in Utah until a few years ago when he moved to Gray's Lake country in this county, and a few months ago came to Idaho Falls."

He was buried beside his wife in Utah. Abraham and Mary Flake remained in Idaho Falls, where Mary died in 1916 and Abraham died in 1936. Both are buried in Rose Hill Cemetery. Their daughter Blanche married Edward Leggroan, son of Ned Leggroan, another Utah Pioneer who early homesteaded in this area. Blanche died in Idaho Falls in 1948.

The Ned Leggroan family, free Negroes, had come to Utah as converts to the LDS Church in 1870. After living about 10 years in Cottonwood, they homesteaded at Milo, Idaho, east of Rigby, in the 1880s. In about 1910 they moved to Idaho Falls. In a time when few blacks resided in our city, both the Flake and Leggroan families were members of the Idaho Falls LDS First Ward.

Graves of Abraham (Adam) Flake and Blanch Leggroan in Rose Hill Cemetery (old part). Daughter Lucinda Flake Stevenson (Stevens) also.