

St. Johns Arizona to Salt Lake City between 1880s and 1890s
Phoebe Tenney Gardner

One of the thrills of a lifetime came recently to Phoebe Tenney Gardner (Mrs. Horace B. Gardner) of 2008 E. Copper Street, Tucson, Arizona. Traveling from Phoenix to Salt Lake on July 22, 1959 in some two hours seemed like a dream compared with several of the long six week wagon treks made from St. Johns to Salt Lake City when Mrs. Gardner was a child. She best remembers the trip taken during her tenth year.

Phoebe Gardner was born February 10, 1876 in Kanab, Utah to Ammon M. Tenney (born November 16, 1844 in Lee County, Iowa) and Eliza Ann Udall (born June 20, 1855 in Nephi, Utah). Early in 1880, Mr. Tenney was sent to St. Johns to find out the possibilities for Mormon colonization in that region. He not only spoke Spanish fluently but also had served on a mission for the Mormon church in Arizona, New Mexico and Mexico in the 1870s. He kept a diary of his experiences in which he tells of a land inhabited by a few white men with Indian wives--a land of white men who were interested in only exploration and mining. He was, therefore, well qualified to study the future possibilities for successful colonization in Arizona.

Ammon Tenney's report on the St. Johns area was followed by the arrival of Jesse N. Smith and D.K. Udall, his brother-in-law, with the Mormon settlers in 1880. During the time the Tenney family lived here, and prior to their migration to Mexico, the family made several overland trips to the Salt Lake area. These trips were multi-purpose: visiting the relatives and working and marrying in the temple at Salt Lake City.

According to Mrs. Gardner forty or fifty people made those northward treks together. They apparently followed Beale's road to the Mormon road, on to Lee's Ferry where they crossed the Colorado River. (There was no bridge across the Colorado River until 1930 W.W.S.) The wagons were light weight and not the heavy type used in the westward movement. They were drawn by mules and horses, not Oxen.

The wagons were loaded so heavily with hay for the animals, that the children could not sit upright for some days. Grass across the vast stretches of desert land could not be depended upon for feeding the animals so essential to human survival. Two barrels of emergency water were carried--one for the animals and one for the occupants, unless the animals needed that water. The animals came first. They also had to have a supply of rock salt.

If water was scarce, Mrs. Tenney gave her children a small wooden chip that had been moistened in the water to hold in their mouths to somewhat control their thirst for water.

At night the wagons were placed in a circle with a fire in the center and a night guard. In the morning the families gathered around the fire for prayers to thank God for the safety of the night, to ask for safety during the day and to bless the food of which they were about to partake.

During the long, hot days, Mrs. Gardner recalls that the children often lived in fear of renegade Indians and outlaws. The occasional roadside graves added to their terror. In reminiscing, she said that all the people who died in route had not died

violently but among the children a worse fate could not have been imagined than dying and being left alone in a roadside grave.

The Lee's Ferry that operated to help people across the Colorado was not the four wagon flat-boat that Mrs. Gardner recalls. After the river was reached she remembers delays in finding a place for the wagons to go down and also get out; a wait for the melting snow water to run down.

The stay at the Colorado River was atleast for a week. The women and children were taken across first on a small flat boat held by guide ropes. This was a busy time for the women who washed clothes and put them out on the river bank to dry. Children were bathed and heads shampooed. Frijole beans were cooked and whole wheat bread made with starter yeast was baked in the dutch ovens (big iron pots on legs). It was an important time for the women to prepare for the last lap of the journey northward.

Meanwhile the men on the south banks of the roaring Colorado took the wheels off the wagons and brought them over one at a time. The mules refused to swim so were pulled across with their halters alongside the boat. Some boat loads would contain wheels, wagon tongues and boxes taken from the wagons.

One incident that Mrs. Gardner recalls was a wagon which floated off the boat and downstream. After much struggle the men were able to stop it which was no small feat in the dangerous rapids of the river.

Mrs. Gardner remembers in a later trip that there was a small settlement at Lee's Ferry. The trading post, there, had a few things to sell or trade, such as: dried peaches, sweet corn, squash and popcorn.

The travelers went on northward with the men trying to supplement their diet with an occasional deer, antelope, dove, squirrel or rabbit.

Eliza Ann Tenney probably hadn't heard much about conservation of natural resources but she insisted that no stick of wood be wasted in the camp fire. Precious wood must be saved for other travelers who were to come in the future.

As the group went on more rivers were to be forded. Two spans of horses were used for every river crossing as a safety measure. The men and boys had from the beginning to the end of the trip the constant job of building new roads or rebuilding the existing ones.

The return trip was much the same with the exception of a new additon from Utah's orchards-apples. Apples were everywhere possible, including the pockets of every child. Some apples were put away to share with the St. Johns neighbors on reaching home.

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Eliza Udall Tenney had two daughters, Olive who married Roy McFate and Phoebe. Eliza is buried in the Thatcher cemetery along with Anna Sariah Eagar Tenney and Hettie Adams Tenney, the first and third wife of Ammon M. Tenney. W.W. S.