

Searching for an LDS Ancestor in the Index to Public Works Account Books

An invaluable but not well-known research tool at the Church History Library is an index to the men who labored on the Church's Public Works projects from 1850 to 1893. The index was compiled by Church archivist Ronald G. Watt.

The information below regarding the history of the Public Works is quoted from Watt's index:

"The Public Works was established on January 26, 1850, when the First Presidency met with Apostles George A. Smith, Ezra T. Benson, Bishop Newel K. Whitney, and Daniel H. Wells, to discuss constructing the Salt Lake Temple and other large public structures in Salt Lake City. During that meeting Brigham Young appointed Daniel H. Wells as the superintendent and Bishop Whitney as the clerk to receive and disburse the funds. Also, Truman O. Angell was appointed architect, Norton Jacobs, foreman of joiners; Samuel Ensign, foreman of carpenters; Alonzo H. Raleigh, foreman of masons; and Reynolds Cahoon, foreman of tithing hands. It was agreed to pay skilled workmen \$2.50 per day and architects \$3.00 per day. By the end of April the Public Works recruited workmen and began work on a storehouse. The entire Public Works project developed slowly. The building of a carpenters' shop in 1851 was succeeded by a paint shop, machine shop, and lumber yard in 1852; a blacksmith shop, line kiln, plasterers and stone cutters shops in 1853; and a foundry in 1854.

One of the first major projects by the "public hands" began in 1852 with the construction of the wall around the temple block, made of adobe brick. The Public Works' adobe brick yard became the source for adobes used in the construction of most of the houses in Salt Lake. During the decade of the 1850s the workmen constructed other buildings in the city: Social Hall, print shop, Brigham Young homes, Endowment House, "Old" Tabernacle, Tithing storehouse, sugar factory, and helped with the construction of many houses throughout the city.

The carpenters spent most of their time on the larger structures, but they also made bookcases, coffins, tables, picture frames, wash boards, bathing tubs, stretching frames, crutches for Nathan Davis, a wheelbarrow, and a violin for Jonathan Grimshaw. The blacksmiths built a small furnace. Edward Tullidge in his history of Salt lake City says, "Their furnace invented for the occasion, they made by hollowing out below the tool iron, filling in with sand, then placing layer after layer of charcoal and cast iron; they used an old Pennsylvania wagon skein as a spout to carry the molten iron into the ladle, which was made of old fashioned wagon hub bands." With the furnace, which they later moved to the foundry, the workmen made horseshoes, stove backs, bullet molds, cultivator teeth, and other articles.

From 1852 to 1854 time books reveal eleven different categories of trades: carpenters, masons, blacksmiths, plasterers, machinists, painters, quarrymen, mason tenders, lumbermen, millwrights, and sawyers. The pay for the workmen varied according to their skill with the millwrights being the highest paid at \$5.00 a day, and the mason tenders and apprentices, the lowest paid, receiving the least at \$1.50 or \$2.00 a day. Most men worked seasonally only spending a few days a year for the Public Works and only a handful working the whole year. For example, Lorenzo Brown, carpenter, worked only fourteen days for the Public Works in 1854. On the other hand, a few such as Miles Romney, the foreman of the carpenters, worked over 200 days a year. The Public Works positions helped men provide a living for their families and acted as a transitional job for many of the English artisans until they could adapt to conditions in Utah. James Campbell Livingston's story is an example how this employment benefited him. Livingston, a Scottish immigrant, worked at the quarry for \$2.00 a day and the clerks credited him for the time that he worked. The Public Works did not pay him a salary, but instead he purchased items from the tithing store, drawing from his credit. He purchased food, brooms, washboards, cloth, shoes and picks. He also bought books, a few tickets for plays held at the Social Hall, paid taxes, and even paid fees for naturalization papers.

By 1855 the Public Works were a veritable hive of activity with men working on the temple foundation, others in the foundry, stone cutters shaping stones for the temple wall, painters, joiners, machinists and other workmen taking their part in building various items. Yet the primary project was construction of the Salt lake Temple.

In 1857 the Utah War forced the closure of the Public Works. Church leadership sent some of the workmen and their machines to various places throughout Utah. After the Utah War a scaled-down Public Works built the "New" Tabernacle and its organ on Temple Square and continued to work on the Temple. The number of Public Works employees working on the Salt Lake Temple and other projects fluctuated throughout the years due to railroad construction. With the completion of the Temple in 1893 Public Works employees left the employ of the Church and either went into private business or became farmers. Throughout this entire period of time, 1850-1893, the clerks continued to record all those who were paid for their work."

The index for this important reference source lists the workmen's names alphabetically, volume and page in which the names appear, date of employment, and general comments. The date of employment is the first recorded instance in each of the different types of volumes in which the specific workman's name appears. Therefore, this index is not a comprehensive listing of every date or the exact time span that the workman labored. The researcher will have to carefully examine the corresponding volumes on microfilm in order to find every instance or the exact time span the specific individual worked.

The index can be used in several ways to help augment and/or document an LDS ancestor's life history. One researcher recently used it to verify the arrival date of his ancestor into Salt Lake Valley. The ancestor stated in a very brief autobiographical

sketch that he started working for the Public Works the day after he arrived in Salt Lake; however, he didn't mention either the date he arrived or the company in which he emigrated. The researcher, looking for the ancestor's entry in the Public Works index, found the man first listed in a time book entry dated 2 October 1854. That date was consistent with what the researcher had estimated from other record sources and was acceptable documentation to justify submitting the ancestor's name to the Mormon Pioneer Overland Travel database, where he had previously been overlooked and unrecorded.

(Information contributed by Jay G. Burrup, Archivist and Information Specialist, LDS Church History Library, Salt Lake City, Utah. If you have questions about this source, you can contact the Church History Library at 801-240-2272 or send an e-mail to churchhistorylibrary@ldschurch.org)