

Ogden Chapter of Sons of the Utah Pioneers



SUP #42

John Henry Weber
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Weber River and Weber County bear the name of John Henry Weber who was born in Altona, which was then part of Denmark and now a borough of Hamburg, Germany, in 1779 and came to Ste Genevieve, Missouri, America about 1807 where he was hired by the U.S. army ordinance department to keep the records at the government owned lead mines.

Weber became acquainted with William Henry Ashley and Andrew Henry who conducted the beaver trade in the drainage of the Upper Missouri. He joined a Rocky Mountain Fur Company expedition which departed St. Louis, Missouri in the spring of 1822. Other trappers in this group included: Jim Bridger, David Jackson, Jedediah Smith, Thomas Fitzpatrick, Hugh Glass, James Clyman, Danial T. Potts and Milton Sublette.

In 1823 a party of trappers was sent up the Yellowstone River with Weber at its head. This became the first party of American trappers to cross the continental divide.

Upon reaching the mouth of the Yellowstone River, the company divided into two independent brigades, with Weber serving in a leadership position. During the summer of 1824, Weber's brigade crossed South Pass and the Green River Valley and descended into the Bear River region in time for a fall hunt. As winter approached, the company journeyed to Bear Lake, then to the Bear River's northern bend and finally south into what is today Utah's Cache Valley. The brigade spent the winter of 1824-25 on Cub Creek near present-day Cove, Utah.

While in Cache Valley, the group discussed the possible course and ultimate outlet of the Bear River. According to his own account, the young Jim Bridger was selected to settle the question by floating down the river. For many years Bridger was credited for the discovery of the Great Salt Lake. After returning to the Midwest in the 1830's Weber related to a friend in Iowa that his discovery of the Great Salt Lake was a great boon to him and his men as salt was plentiful around the border of the lake and prior to that discovery they had had to use gunpowder on their meat, principally buffalo. ("Interesting Personalities", Salt Lake Tribune newspaper, July 4, 1897). More recent evidence suggests, however that Canadian-American Etienne Provost and his trapping party, working out of Taos in Mexican territory, visited the southern edge of the inland sea earlier in the same winter.

The following spring, Weber's brigade traveled throughout extreme southeastern Idaho and northern Utah. A portion of the brigade, under the leadership of Johnson Gardner, confronted Peter Skene Ogden, the leader of the British owned Hudson's Bay Company's Snake Country

Expedition near present-day Mountain Green, Utah. Gardner insisted that they were in United States territory. Ogden countered that the area in contention was under joint occupation. During the incident, Gardner was able to lure a number of men, many of them Canadian Iroquois, away from their British employer by offering higher prices for their furs. The reduction in force led Ogden to retrace his steps back to "Flathead House" near Flathead Lake in modern Montana. That summer, Weber and his brigade were at the first rendezvous held in Sweetwater County, Wyoming, near present McKinnon, just north of the Utah border.

Weber's remaining mountain years are less well documented; however, he spent the winter of 1825-26 in the Salt Lake Valley after Ashley's men were forced by severe winter weather to move their winter quarters from Cache Valley. It appears that Utah's Weber River was christened, during this winter camp. This Weber place-naming gave rise to the present names of Utah's Weber Canyon, Weber County and Weber State University.

Weber spent the remainder of his life in the American Midwest, first returning to Ste. Genevieve, Missouri and his former position, as recorder with the U.S. government, lead mines. In 1833, Weber was the assistant superintendent of U.S. government lead mines in Galena, Illinois, and served briefly, as superintendent, until his retirement in 1840. Weber moved to Bellevue, Jackson County, Iowa, where he died by suicide in February, 1859.

The name Weber County was made official on Jan. 26, 1851 by the Utah Territorial Legislature. There is in Bellevue, Iowa each summer a mountain man rendezvous, called John Henry Weber Rendezvous.

The proper pronunciation of Weber's surname, *Weeber or Webber*, has been debated. In the American East and Midwest, where Weber spent most of his life, the name is pronounced as Webber. This is substantiated by Warren Angus Ferris' map of the fur trade era in which he gives the name of the Weber River as "Webber's Fork." However, references by other fur trappers, such as Osborne Russell and Daniel Potts, give credence to the long vowel sound. The long vowel pronunciation is used in all Utah place names. Weber's own family descendants use the traditional Midwest pronunciation of Webber.

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