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Site Context and History of the Orson B. Adams Homestead and Surrounding Area for the Historic American Landscapes Survey

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**SITE CONTEXT AND HISTORY OF THE ORSON B. ADAMS
HOMESTEAD AND SURROUNDING AREA FOR THE
HISTORIC AMERICAN LANDSCAPES SURVEY**

by

Paul Drake

**Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree**

of

DEPARTMENT HONORS

in

Landscape Architecture and Environmental Planning

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**UTAH STATE UNIVERSITY
Logan, UT**

2005

HISTORIC AMERICAN LANDSCAPES SURVEY

HISTORICAL INFORMATION

ORSON B. ADAMS FARMSTEAD
HARRISBURG, UTAH

Prepared by
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Utah State University
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Spring 2005

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FOREWARD



Orson Bennett Adams

In 1862, Orson B. Adams settled in Harrisburg, Utah. He and his family were part of a movement by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, also known as the Mormons, to create a self-sufficient colony in the west. The Mormon settlers were “called” to establish agricultural towns throughout southern Utah and west to the Pacific and grow crops such as grapes and cotton.

The Adams’ acquired a plot of land south of Quail Creek, southwest of the town center of Harrisburg. They constructed a ditch that diverted water from the creek to irrigate their crops. Soon, however, many of the other settlers became dissatisfied with the location of the town, and convinced their leaders to allow them to move north where they felt it would be easier to irrigate. Most of the residents moved and took their water rights with them. Within the next few years, they had almost completely diverted the flow of Leeds Creek to serve the needs of the new town.

Orson Adams and his family were able to remain in Harrisburg because they could continue to draw water from Quail Creek. Orson owned the home until his death in 1901 when he willed it to his daughter, who subsequently sold it to Hyrum Leany. It changed hands several times in a short period of time before it was finally purchased by William Emmett in 1910. Emmett and his family continued to cultivate the land until 1947 when it was abandoned.

Recently, the Bureau of Land Management purchased the property with the intent of restoring it and creating an interpretive center. This study is part of a report that will be submitted to the Historic American Landscapes Survey (HALS), intended to provide natural and cultural context to the site as well as describe the surrounding influences that affected the settlement. It will also offer an annotated chronology, explaining the property’s ownership and describing major periods of development.

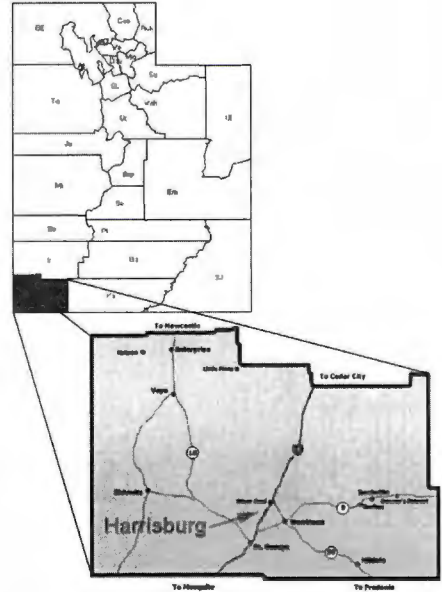
PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. HISTORICAL CONTEXT

NATURAL:

The area considered in the study is a two hundred acre parcel where the old town of Harrisburg once stood. It is located in central Washington County, Utah, about three miles southwest of Leeds, directly west of Interstate 15. Particular attention was paid to the lot, owned by Orson Adams.

Harrisburg was settled in 1861 on the flood plain where Leeds Creek joins Quail Creek, located in the valley between White (or Silver) Reef and the Harrisburg Bench. Leeds Creek runs southwest, roughly following the northwest edge of White Reef before intersecting Quail Creek, which runs southeast through the Harrisburg Bench on its way to the Virgin River. The valley is capped to the northwest by the cliffs of Red Reef, which frame the majestic backdrop of the Pine Valley Mountains. Orson B. Adams claimed a piece of land on the Harrisburg Flat, on the south bank of Quail Creek.

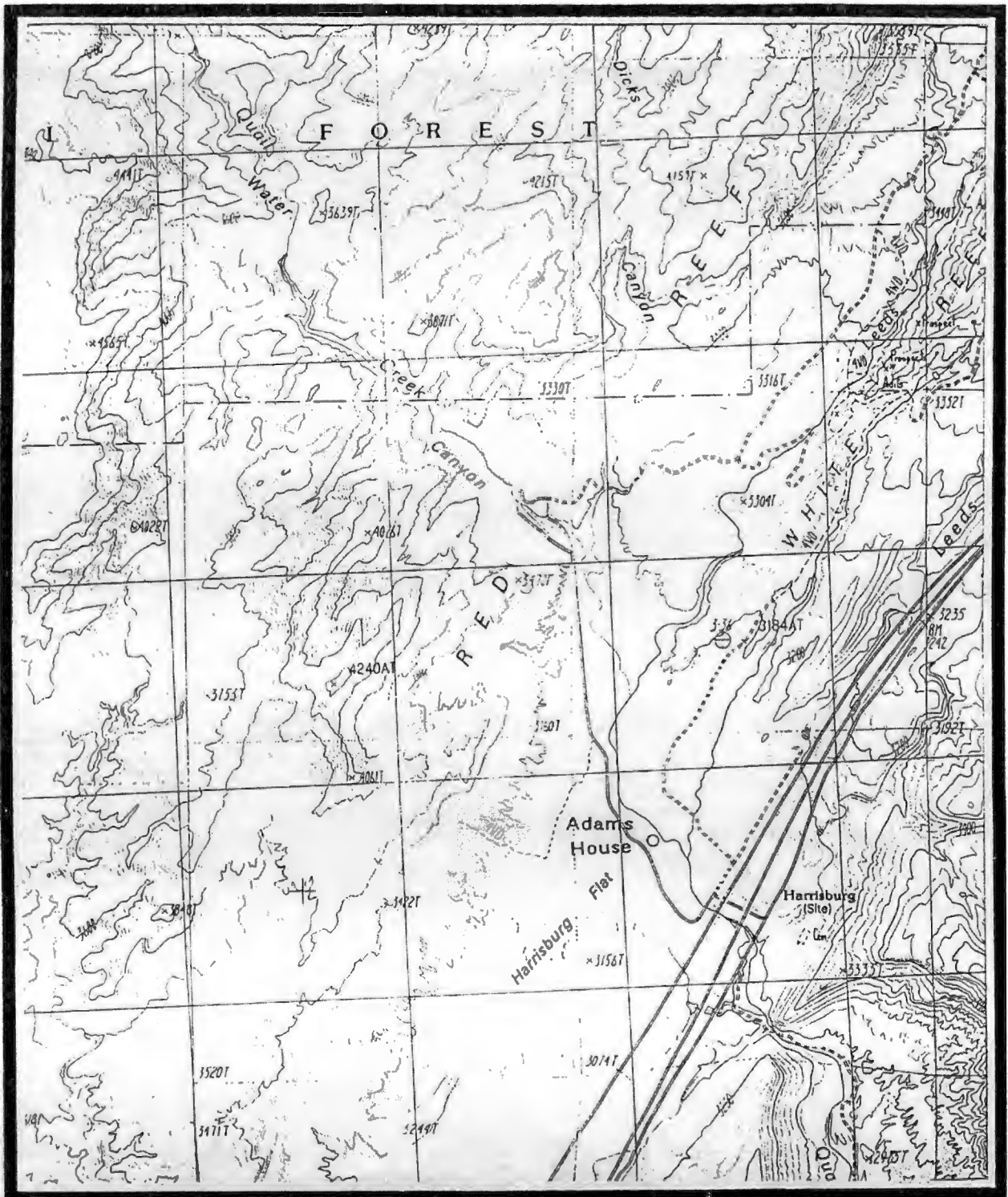


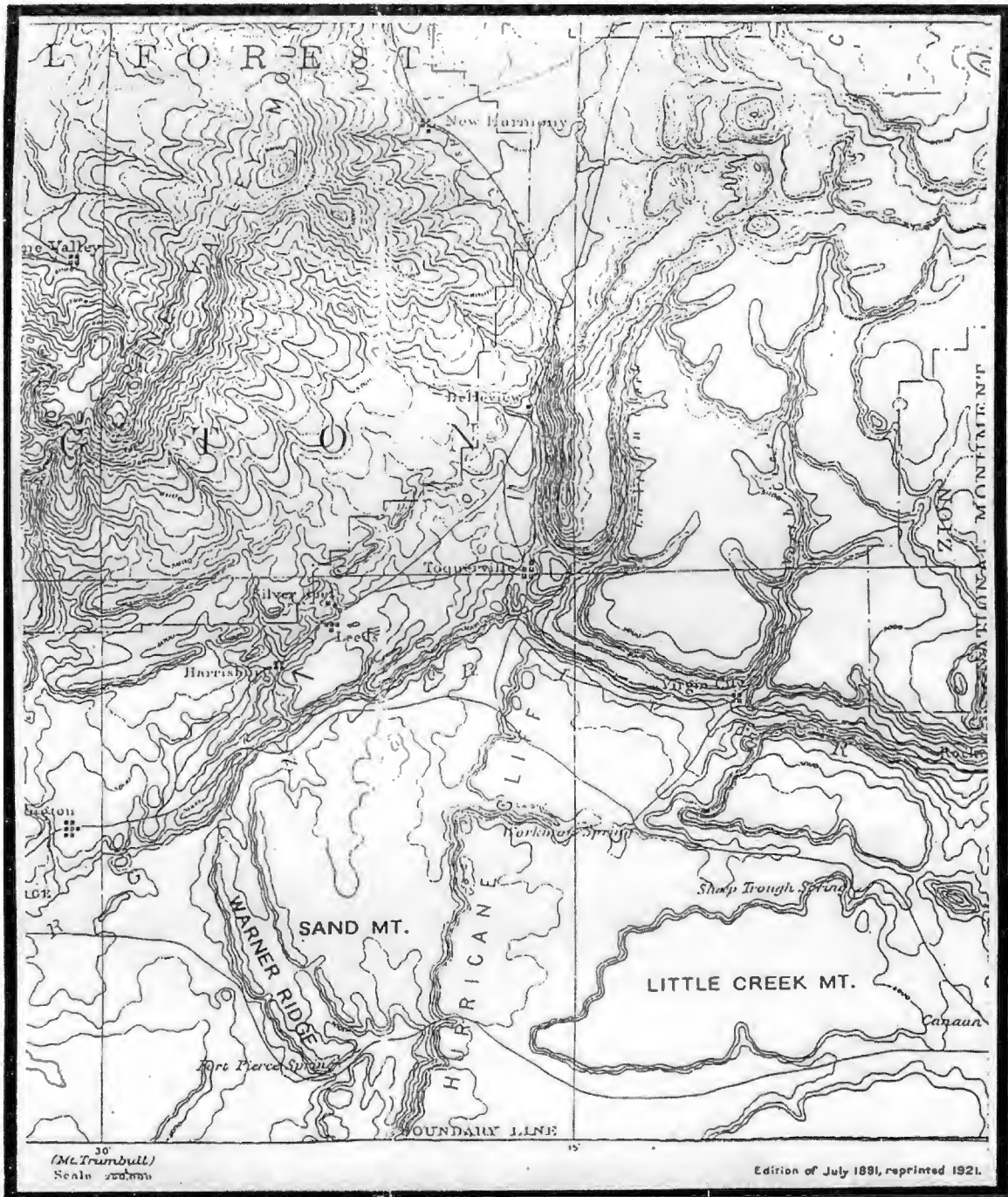
Geology played a major role in how the settlers were able to utilize the land. Those, such as Orson Adams, who built on the south side of Quail Creek found it easier to divert water from the stream for their crops. However, those who built their homes on the north side had to divert water from Leeds Creek, which proved to be much more difficult. The soil that made up the flood plain on which Harrisburg was settled was strong enough to support construction but was too porous to hold water efficiently. Thus, the long channel the settlers constructed from Leeds Creek did not provide as much water as they had predicted.

The sandstone from the surrounding hills, however, provided excellent building material used in local masonry. Several houses in Harrisburg, including that of the Adams family, were built from the red and white stone in the area. The stone used for the Adams' home was most likely taken from the Springdale Sandstone¹. The terrace on which Orson Adams built his home consists of Quaternary stream alluvial terrace deposits, probably deposited during the late Pleistocene and early Holocene periods².

1. Kardas, S. Ph.D. and E. Larabee, Ph.D., Sept. 2001, p. 5

2. Kardas, S. Ph.D. and E. Larabee, Ph.D., Sept. 2001, p. 5





USGS "St. George Sheet" Scale 1:250,000
 "Triangulation and Topography by the Powell Survey, Edition of July 1891,
 reprinted 1921

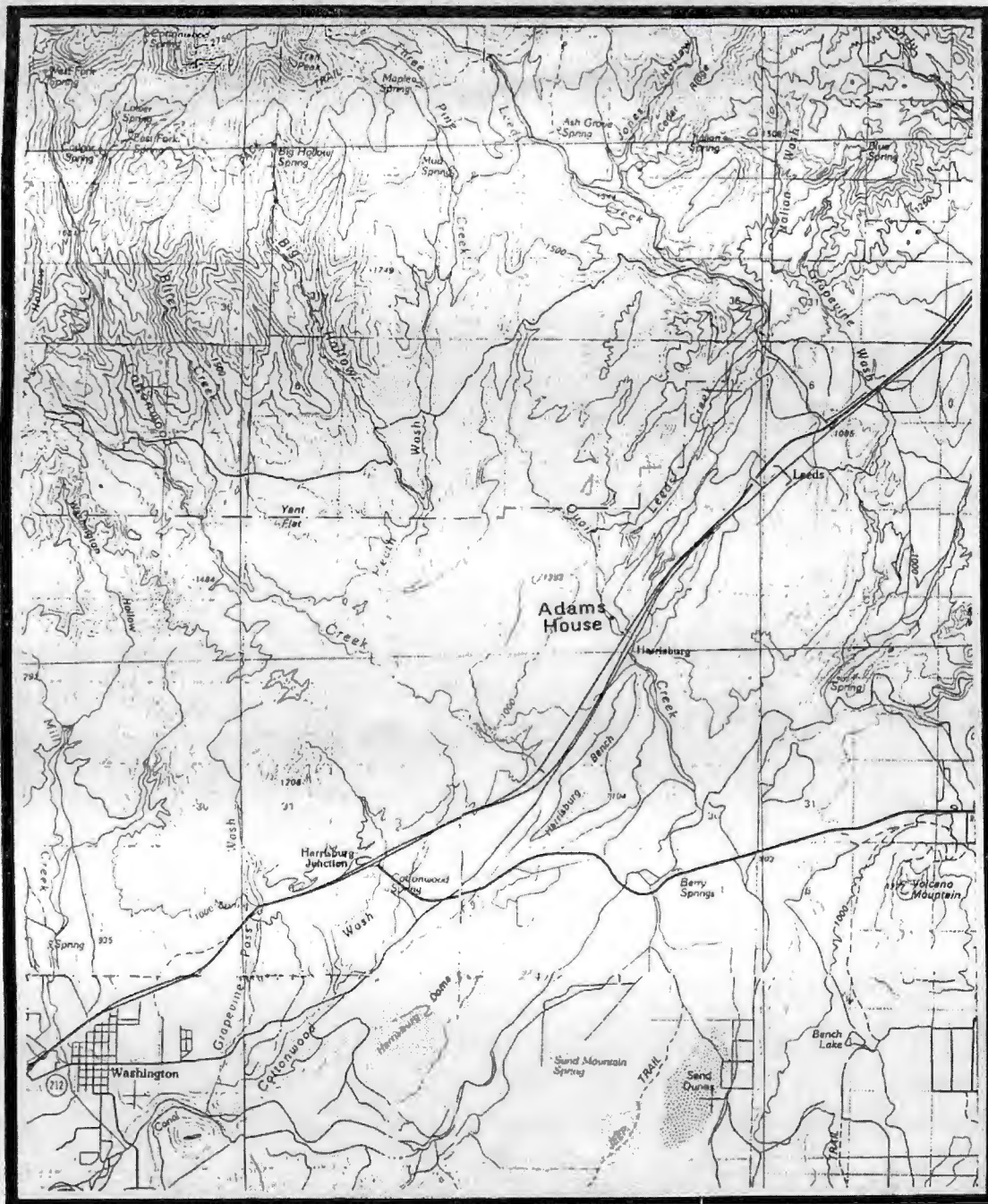


Figure 2 USGS "St George Utah – Arizona 1980, 30x60 Minute Series, Metric Scale 1: 100,000.

USGS "St George Utah – Arizona 1980, 30 x 60 Minute Series, Metric Scale 1:100,000

INFLUENCES:

The history of Harrisburg is strongly tied to the Mormon colonization of the Intermountain West. Members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, commonly called “Mormons”, looking for relief from religious persecution, arrived in the Salt Lake Valley in 1847 and established what they considered to be “Zion”.

The strain of the Civil War had a strong effect on the Mormon settlements out west, and the church leaders were determined to create a self-sufficient colony. Therefore, in the mid 1800s, the Mormons started establishing a series of farming towns from southern Utah to San Bernardino, California, planning a “corridor” to the Pacific Ocean. The church “called” members to establish these agricultural communities and to grow climate-sensitive crops such as grapes and cotton. Their attempts resulted in several settlements south, along the mountains, wherever they were able to divert water and cultivate the land.

The people who originally settled Harrisburg were led by a man named Moses Harris, a Mormon settler who was among those ordered by Brigham Young, in response to a threat by the Federal Government, to abandon the settlement of San Bernardino, California. They sold their land and moved back to Utah to assist with the agricultural settlements. Later, other families were called by their leaders to join the settlements. Since they were among the first settlers, they were able to select the best sites for their farms, leaving others with those plots that were less desirable or to start new settlements of their own³.



John Kemple

John Kemple, a prospector that wintered in the Orson Adams home in 1866, discovered silver in the nearby hills around June 1874. This led to the establishment of the Silver Reef Mine, which brought a lot of business to the area. It was the opinion of one of our sources that “the Lord put the silver there to help the Mormon settlements survive”⁴. In fact, settlers were able to profit from the silver rush by selling their goods to the miners. Wilma Cox Beal wrote, “Most of the original homes had wine cellars because wine selling was the main cash crop during the time of the Silver Reef mining. Everyone in town had a large grape vineyard”. Farmers in the area also grew

“cantaloupes, strawberries, tomatoes, beet seed, cane, alfalfa, onions, radishes, apricots, peaches, and cherries”⁵.

3. Proctor, Paul Dean. *Silver, Sinners and Saints*. p. 1

4. Proctor, Paul Dean. *Silver, Sinners and Saints*. p.31

5. Beal, Wilma Cox. *Leeds Historical Events...* p. 2

CULTURAL:

The study site and the surrounding area contain evidence of habitation by multiple cultures over the last two thousand years. Before the Mormon pioneers entered the area, it was inhabited by the Virgin Anasazi and the Southern Paiute. In fact, after the white men came to settle the land, they continued to interact with the native Paiute Indians. The ancient inhabitants lived around the Red Cliffs area where they grew corn and squash, and there are still traces where, to reduce travel distance, they dug finger and toeholds in the rocks⁶. The BLM still maintains a site, in the cliffs of the Red Reef, which contains the remnants of the Anasazi settlement. The Virgin Anasazi apparently left the area by the twelfth century, but the Southern Paiute can still be found throughout southern Utah⁷.



In 1859, Moses Harris moved his family from the Mormon colony of San Bernadino, California to Washington County where Quail Creek joins the Virgin River, creating the settlement called Harrisville. Soon, other families came to join them, but the colony was soon abandoned due to difficulty with irrigation and a tragic fire⁸. They returned to Harrisville with nine other families in 1860, but a year later, in the spring of 1861, they moved upstream to the intersection of Leeds and Quail Creeks to establish the town of Harrisburg. In the spring of 1862, other prominent families including those of William Leany, Priddy Meeks, Orson Adams, and others joined the settlement. Throughout the year, others continued to move into the area such as Willard G. McMullin, the stonemason that reportedly constructed the Orson B. Adams home and, later, the Wells Fargo building in Silver Reef⁹. Many of those original settlers of Harrisburg were rough pioneers. In fact, seven of the more prominent men in the town, including Orson Adams, had served in the Mormon Battalion during the Mexican War. One of the theories of what caused the fledgling settlement to fail was that there were too many leaders and too few followers¹⁰.

6. Mariger, Marietta M. *Saga of Three Towns*. p. 7

7. BLM. "Adam's House Charette Summary..."

8. Mariger, Marietta M. *Saga of Three Towns*. p. 7

9. Kardas, S. Ph.D. and E. Larabee, Ph.D., Sept. 2001, p. 5

10. Mariger, Marietta M. *Saga of Three Towns*. p. 10



Picture of Old Harrisburg from a hill near the cemetery looking northwest

Many of the settlers started becoming dissatisfied with their claims in Harrisburg. They believed that it would be easier to divert the water, for irrigation purposes, to an area three miles to the north. The residents requested that their leader, Erastus Snow, an Apostle for the church, allow them to move the settlement. By 1867, the Mormons had started to abandon the town of Harrisburg and move northeast to settle Leeds. They traded their land and water rights in the old settlement of Harrisburg for new claims at Leeds. With the shift of population and the growing demand on water upstream, Leeds creek was diverted almost entirely to serve the people of the new settlement, leaving fields in Harrisburg dry. "The community of Harrisburg, largely evacuated during the late 1860s and 1870s, was finally abandoned during the 1890s, when the school and church/meeting house were closed. However, the Adams house, due to its unique location and reliance on Quail Creek instead of Leeds Creek, continued to operate until the 1940s.



Erastus Snow

Orson Adams owned the home in Harrisburg until his death in 1901 when he willed it to his daughter, Susanna A. Harris. Within five months, it was sold to Hiram Leany who then sold it to William Newton, and finally in 1910, it was sold to William Emmett, a known bootlegger, whose family was the last to inhabit

the home. They stayed in Harrisburg until soon after William's death in 1944, and the house was abandoned¹¹. Its continued inhabitance is credited for the overall preservation of the home today.



Orson Adams Homestead

11. Kardas, S. Ph.D. and E. Larabee, Ph.D., Sept. 2001, p. 17

B. PHYSICAL HISTORY OF THE LANDSCAPE:

1. ANNOTATED CHRONOLOGY:

a. Periods of Landscape Development:

1. 1861- Pioneers, led by Moses Harris settle the area around the confluence of Leeds and Quail Creeks
2. 1862 – Orson B. Adams moves his family to Harrisburg and establishes a farmstead on the south bank of Quail Creek on the terrace of Harrisburg Flat.
3. 1862-1901 – During this period, Orson Adams and his family built their home, constructed an irrigation ditch, that diverted water from Quail Creek to the farmstead, terraced the land on the southwest edge of the lower north field, and built rock retaining walls at the east edge of the lower north field and the upper field and along the road running along the front of the house. They also plowed and irrigated a field in the upper north portion of the site. In the lower, south field, they constructed fences and access roads.
4. 1901-1910 – Land changes hands multiple times without any significant alterations.
5. 1910 – William Emmett purchases land.
6. 1910-1944 - Although Emmett did not make any major alterations to the site, he continued to cultivate the land. He grew corn, melons, and cantaloupe in the upper north field and concord grapes on the terraces and east of the house. Fruit trees such as peaches, pears and apricots were grown amongst the grapes, and almonds were grown on the east bank of the ditch. Maud Emmett, William’s wife, grew a “kitchen garden” directly behind the home¹². After William died in 1944, Maud leased the lower pasture to Stanley Fuller who kept cattle on it¹³.
7. 1947 – Homestead was abandoned¹⁴.
8. 2001 – Site was acquired by the Bureau of Land Management and studies were undertaken for its preservation and restoration.

12. Emmett, Idonna. Phone Interview with Michael Timmons

13. Emmett, Vaunda. Phone Interview with Michael Timmons

14. Emmett, Idonna. Phone Interview with Michael Timmons

b. Landscape Shapers/Creators:

Orson Bennet Adams, the main shaper of the site, moved to Harrisburg with his wife in 1862, having been called by his church leaders to assist in the establishment of the small farming town. According to Census data, he was 47 years old at the time¹⁵. He had served, along with several other prominent Mormon settlers, during the Mexican War in a group known as the “Mormon Battalion” and was also instrumental in the establishment of Parowan, Utah in 1851¹⁶.

Willard Glover McMullin, the stone mason of the settlement, most likely constructed, or at least assisted in the construction of, the Adams home around 1863 to 1865¹⁷. It was habitable by 1866, when John Kemple wintered with the Adams’.

Orson Adams continued to cultivate the land, manipulating it into a productive farmstead. He stayed in Harrisburg, at the site, until he moved in with his daughter and son-in-law who lived in Leeds. After his death in 1901, he willed the home over to his daughter Susanna Harris, who did nothing to change the land, but sold it soon thereafter¹⁸.

William M. Emmett, the father of the last family to occupy the site, bought the land in 1910. He was born in St. George, Utah on January 10, 1878. He moved to Arizona for several years before moving back to Utah between 1906 and 1910 with his second wife, Katie “Maude” Dodge Emmett. William and his family were the last to stay in Harrisburg. He farmed the old Adams farmstead and, on the side, had a bootlegging operation and served as a tooth extractionist for the residents of Leeds. According to Cannon Huntsman, a former resident of Leeds, Emmett had served some time in the Utah State Penitentiary for bootlegging. He lived in Harrisburg until his death in 1944.

15. Kardas, S. Ph.D. and E. Larabee, Ph.D., Sept. 2001, p. 11

16. Kardas, S. Ph.D. and E. Larabee, Ph.D., Sept. 2001, p. 11

17. Kardas, S. Ph.D. and E. Larabee, Ph.D., Sept. 2001, pp. 12-13

18. Kardas, S. Ph.D. and E. Larabee, Ph.D., Sept. 2001, p. 16

c. Owners/Managers/Associated Groups:

1862 - Orson Bennett Adams
1901 – Susanna A. Harris
1903 – Hyrum Leany
1903 – William Newton
1910 - William Emmett
1944-2001 – Unknown
2001 – Bureau of Land Management

2. HISTORICAL SUMMARY:

In 1862, Orson Bennet Adams moved his family to Harrisburg, settling on the terrace on the Harrisburg Flat, south of Quail Creek. Between 1863 and 1865, the Adams home was constructed, probably with the assistance of the local stone mason, Willard Glover McMullin. Over the next several years, Orson and his family manipulated the landscape into a productive farmstead, constructing an irrigation ditch to divert water from Quail Creek to the site. They built terraces and retaining walls to maximize useful farmland as well as fences and access roads.

Orson willed the land to his daughter, Susanna Smith Harris, after his death in 1901. Soon afterward, she sold it to Hyrum Leany who sold it to William Newton. In 1910, Newton sold the land to William Emmett, who continued to cultivate it until his death in 1944. The home was then abandoned in 1947. The land changed hands multiple times between then and when the Bureau of Land Management purchased it in 2001.



Orson B. Adams House (taken in 1987)

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