

PIONEER CEMETERY

First used: 1851

Address: 190-200 West State

Present owners: Bud Nielson/Cooltec/Mr. Auto Restoration

Lehi's earliest cemetery (150-200 West State) is presently unmarked. The "Cooltec/Mr. Auto Restoration" building and Bud Nielson's home and taxidermy shop occupy the site which was dedicated as a burial ground in February 1851. John Griggs White, a seventy-five-year-old pioneer who made the arduous trek across the plains the previous year, was the first to die in our community. At that time it was merely a small fort at Sulphur Springs.

On the day of White's death carpenter David Savage, who owned a set of tools, constructed a coffin from the deceased man's wagon box. The women of the group lined the casket with their choicest material and dressed the body in the best available burial clothes. The corpse was then loaded in a wagon and transported several miles northward to high ground on a windswept bluff on the west bank of Dry Creek. This was across the stream from the location where some of Lehi's pioneers first settled the previous fall.

White's grave, likely dug with the wooden spades of the day, lay deep in the crusted sand just north of the State Road (present day Highway 89) which had been constructed through the area in 1850. The graveyard, like all lands in town at the time, was government owned. But once homestead parcels were given out, the cemetery site became part of Thomas R. Jones's property. Jones soon deeded the burial grounds to the city.

Since Lehi cemetery records prior to 1895 have been lost, no documentation for the pioneer cemetery exists. A ratio-comparison with American Fork's pioneer graveyard records (1852-68) which show eighty-five burials, suggests Lehi's old burial ground held 100-110 graves. In 1871 the Utah Southern Railroad surveyed a line through the pioneer cemetery. It was also evident that the State Road needed widening. So city fathers decided to relocate the cemetery. Alderman Israel Evans and Sexton George W. Thurmond

supervised the surveying of a new cemetery at the north end of what is now Fourth East. Apparently some, if not most, of the bodies in the old cemetery were disinterred at that time and reburied in a common grave at the new site. Many families had moved away, some did not want their dead relocated, and other graves (including that of John G. White), could not be found.

The remaining graves in the pioneer cemetery fell into such neglect that old-timers remembered it as a “big weed patch.” Though the 1913 *History of Lehi* noted there was “a movement on foot to care for them and also to erect suitable monuments,” nothing was done until 1919. At that time the city had the site cleaned up and erected a fence around it. On 29 June 1950, during the Lehi Centennial Celebration, the local chapter of the Daughters of Utah Pioneers placed a stone monument with plaque on the site.

Within five years it became apparent that the cemetery marker would have to be moved. Vehicles entering and leaving Denzil Turner’s Tire Shop, which had been built on the site of the old graveyard, had repeatedly bumped the monument. City officials were sympathetic with the DUP concerns and eventually assisted them in obtaining a small triangular piece of property one block east. In the fall of 1958 the monument was being moved to the new site by members of the Lehi National Guard when it collapsed into a pile of rock and mortar. Undaunted, the CUP women had the marker rebuilt and later obtained the city’s cooperation in establishing Roadside Park there.

Periodically, old graves in the pioneer cemetery have been uncovered. In 1954, while constructing a cesspool near the monument, Den Turner uncovered the skeleton of an unknown red-haired woman. Bud Nielson found another in 1976 while installing the sewer line to his new home. The following year Don Harris, who owned Don’s Kar Kare in the former Den’s Tire Shop, unearthed another.