

The Barton Cabin Preservation and The Initial Development of the Bluff Fort Historic Site

When visiting the Bluff Fort Historic Site, one walks on ground made sacred by the trials, conviction, and faith of those who made great sacrifices to reach this place and make it their home. Visitors from near and very distant lands have commented on the special feeling they have felt here. The difficulties encountered by the pioneers, as they blazed their path to Bluff, are unmatched in the annals of pioneering history as are many of the trials faced in making a home in such a barren land.



The Bluff Fort Historic Site, 2022, West-Looking View



North-Looking View

This summary was written by Lamont Crabtree. The information was derived from recorded interviews of Corinne Roring in 2013, Graig Taylor in 2019, and Gary Guymon in 2019, records in the San Juan County Recorder's Office in Monticello, Utah, Lamont's journal, and input from Corinne Roring's children.

All photos are by Lamont Crabtree unless otherwise noted.
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The circumstances surrounding the preservation of the Barton cabin in Bluff, Utah, and what it has developed into is no doubt “providential” as Corinne Roring frequently put it. The coming together of key people at precisely the right time was more than happenstance or mere coincidence. This continues today with the volunteers who give of their time and talents to share the legacy of the San Juan pioneers.



Joseph Barton cabin prior to the preservation work, late 1980s

Key Participants in the Preservation of the Barton Cabin and the Initial Development of the Bluff Fort Historic Site



Gary Guymon
July 1991



Lamont Crabtree, Graig Taylor, Corinne Roring
Morning of April 6, 1998, as restoration work was about to begin

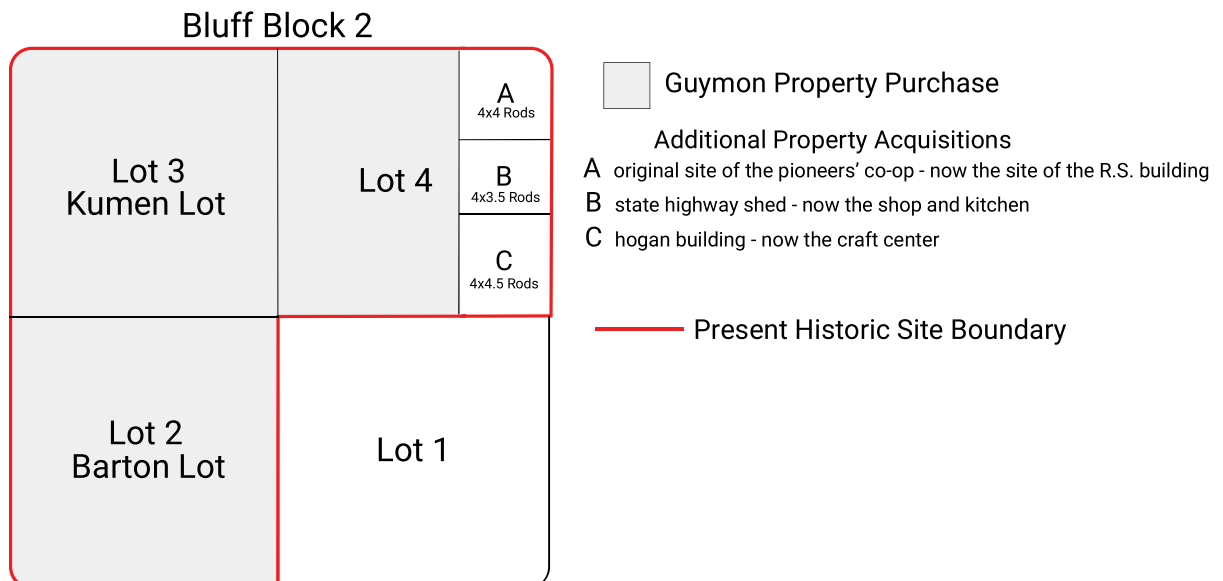
The Barton Cabin, Neglected and Left to Deteriorate – A Tragedy or a Blessings?

Considering the number of owners of the cabin during the first half of the 1900s, it is amazing that it was not torn down to make way for something new. As far as I have been able to determine, the cabin was left abandoned since the late 1940s. I recall that in the 1970s, the sod roof and walls of the south cabin rooms were still intact and in reasonably good condition. Those of us who knew of its historical significance were frustrated over the property's neglect. However, if the cabin property had been sold during this time, it likely would have been torn down and replaced by a home or business, and the opportunity to create the Bluff Fort Historic Site would have been lost.

Barton Cabin Ownership Record:

*Owners who lived in the Barton cabin

- 1880 – Pioneers began building cabins on the Bluff Fort block.
- *1884 – Pioneers moved onto designated town lots. Joseph Barton's lot was on the SW corner of the fort block.
- *1902 – Joseph Barton was issued a (homesteading) grant deed for his lot. Block 2, Lot 2
- *1919 – Morgan A. Barton (Joseph's son) acquired the property.
- *1921 – Joseph F. Barton reacquired the property.
- *1927 – Karl S. Barton (Joseph's oldest son) acquired the property. Joseph had died in 1926.
- 1927 – Julia Butt (Jens Nielson's daughter) acquired the property and immediately sold it.
- *1927 – Adelbert (Del) Raplee
- *1934 – Harriet Putman Raplee (Adelbert Raplee's wife) inherited the property at his passing.
- *1936 – David Putman Miller (Harriet Raplee's son) inherited the property at his mother's passing.
- *1940 – Frances Lillie Miller (David's wife) inherited the property at her husband's passing.
- 1948 – Albert E. Watkins acquired the property. Albert owned/operated the Watkins Gas Station in Provo, Utah.
- 1956 – The Carter Oil Co. purchased most of the block.
- 1963 – H. Von Watkins (son of Albert E. Watkins) purchased Lots 2, 3, and 2/3 of Lot 4.
- 1989 – Ernest C. Watkins inherited property at the passing of his brother H. Von Watkins.
- 1990 – Ervin R. Guymon purchased Lots 2, 3, and 2/3 of Lot 4 as well as the Cottonwood Canyon north of Bluff from E.C. Watkins.
- 1990 – Gary and Sharon Guymon purchased Lots 2, 3 and 2/3 of Lot 4 from Gary's father Ervin.
- 1997 – Letty Jones Foundation acquired Lot 2 (Barton cabin & the southwest corner of the block).
- 2000 – Letty Jones Foundation acquired Lot 3 (Kumen Jones corner) and 2/3 of Lot 4.
- 2006 – The Hole in the Rock Foundation was incorporated, and the property was transferred from the Letty Jones Foundation.



1975 - The Barton Cabin Pulled at Heart Strings

In 1975 several very unusual circumstances caused my parents and I (Lamont Crabtree) to seek lodging in Bluff, Utah, where we connected with Gene Foushee, then the proprietor of Recapture Lodge. Gene answered many of our questions about the pioneers and Bluff. Since that night, 47 plus years ago, I have been driven to search out and document the Hole-in-the-Rock Trail and all aspects of the pioneers' journey to Bluff. My great-grandparents James and Sarah Riley were Hole-in-the-Rock pioneers. Whenever my research brought me near Bluff, I spent time at the Barton cabin. It was all that was left of the original Bluff Fort. This was a very special place to me. The cabin pulled at my heartstrings. I soon learned that I was not alone in these feelings and interests.



Room on the left (southeast room of the cabin) prior to the roof's collapse. Eugene Crabtree standing in the back doorway, late 1970s



Corinne Roring photo

East breezeway entrance after the roof collapsed, May 1998



Inside the southwest room after the roof collapsed, 1980s



North-looking view of the southeast room after the roof collapsed, 1980s



Southwest room after the roof collapsed, 1980s



Northeast corner of the Barton cabin showing remnants of the kitchen addition. After purchasing the cabin, Gary Guymon cleared the tamarisk and sagebrush to minimize the fire hazard.

1990 - Gary Guymon – A Miracle Acquisition of the Barton Cabin

Blanding residents Gary and Sharon Guymon were both very interested in making sure that the Barton cabin was preserved. At the encouragement of Sharon, Gary researched out the owner, [Harrison] Von Watkins, who at that time was living in a rest home in Provo. Gary never had the opportunity to connect with Mr. Watkins.

In 1990 Gary attended a lecture on rock art at the Edge of the Cedars Museum in Blanding. During a break, a couple from St. George asked the presenter about the location of Bluff. The lecturer turned to Gary and asked him if he could answer the couple's questions. Gary then learned that he was talking with Ernest Watkins and his wife. Ernest had inherited the Barton cabin and Kumen Jones property from his brother Von. Gary gave them directions and said to them, "You don't want to just sell it to anybody. That's an important part of our history here in San Juan County." The couple then departed.

Gary was teaching at San Juan High School in Blanding at the time. Early the next morning, Gary needed to go to the high school. Being a Sunday, it was very unusual for Gary to go to the school, but he had some crucial tasks that had to be taken care of before Monday morning. As Gary approached the high school at sunrise, he noticed an RV on the corner south of the school with a couple who were looking at a map. It was the same couple he had met the day before. Gary once again asked them to not sell the property to just anyone because of its historical significance. Gary gave them more directions and connected them with his father, Ervin, who lived in Bluff. Ervin showed them their property.

Unbeknownst to Gary, when the Watkins put the property up for sale, both he and his father were bidding against each other. Upon learning this, Gary dropped out. His father purchased the property and then sold it to Gary and Sharon.

1991 - Lamont Crabtree Connected with Gary Guymon

In 1991, I met Gary Guymon at a Hole-in-the-Rock commemoration event. I was thrilled to learn that he had recently acquired the Barton cabin and wanted to preserve it. That summer I took Darrell Best, a contractor friend, to Bluff to brainstorm with Gary concerning the possible restoration of the cabin.

1993 - Graig Taylor Connected with Lamont Crabtree

In learning of my trail documenting and interpretive projects, Graig Taylor, a descendant of Hole-in-the-Rock pioneer George Hobbs, offered to assist. Gary Guymon also assisted with many trail marking and interpretive projects, which provided many opportunities to visit the Barton cabin and discuss Gary's vision for its preservation.

Graig Taylor and Lamont Crabtree Connected with Corinne Roring

A few years later, Graig Taylor and I connected with Corinne Roring, a descendant of Jens Nielson. At the time Corinne Roring was involved in the San Juan County Historical Commission. This commission keeps and collects historic photographs and documents pertaining to San Juan County's history. Corinne was keenly interested in and supportive of our trail efforts and allowed us to scan all of the Bluff photographs in the commission's holdings.

Corinne was also the trustee of the Letty Jones Heritage Foundation. This foundation was created to utilize the assets of Letty Jones, a Monticello resident, who wanted her assets to be used for educational, local heritage, and wildlife projects at her passing. As trustee, Corinne oversaw a number of historic and educational projects.

1997 - The Guymon's Transferred the Barton Cabin to the Letty Jones Heritage Foundation

For seven years Gary and Sharon continued to cover the bank loan payments to ensure that the Barton and Kumen Jones properties and historic dwellings were preserved. The Guymons hoped to renovate the Barton cabin and develop the historic site, but lack of funds hampered their dream. In November 1997 the Guymons sold the Barton cabin/Lot 2 to the Letty Jones Heritage Foundation. In doing so the Guymon's donated 1/3 of its value to the foundation. In addition to funds from the Letty Jones Heritage Foundation, Corinne generously utilized her personal funds throughout the fort's development.

Corinne had a keen interest in Bluff and its history. As a young girl, Corinne stood on the cliffs overlooking Bluff with her father as he expressed his wish that the old fort could be restored. Graig Taylor and I were the newcomers. Corinne's passion and dream for the site and Gary and Sharon Guymon's involvement in initially acquiring and preserving the cabin is what made it all possible.



Corinne with her husband John at the west entrance of the Barton cabin, March 22, 1998, two weeks prior to the beginning of the renovation work

1998 – The Barton Cabin Restoration / Preservation

On Monday, April 6, 1998, Corinne Roring, her grandson Craig Roring, Gary Guymon, Graig Taylor, Keith Munk, contractor Darrell Best, myself, and a few of our friends and family members went to work on the cabin. Seeing our activity, locals such as Gene Foushee came and helped throughout the week. We even had a local river guide show up. Before the end of the week, twenty-one people had helped with the project.



Corinne Roring Photo From left to right, Lamont Crabtree, Brad Best, Spencer Crabtree, Darrell Best, Patrick Haskins (red shirt)? Craig Roring



What appeared to be a small cellar near the kitchen and adjacent to the northeast corner of the cabin's back room had collapsed, causing the northeast corner of the cabin to sink. To correct this, the corner of the cabin was lifted up and the cellar/depression was backfilled.



At the northeast corner of the cabin was a framed kitchen, which was a later improvement. Due to its condition, it was removed. The kitchen had a cement floor that we covered with dirt. We also found a pipe for indoor water.



Keith Munk photo



Keith Munk photo

After removing two plus feet of dirt / debris from the collapsed sod roof and decades of blown sand, wood floors were revealed. Wood floors would have been a later improvement. The pioneers originally had dirt floors.



The original sod roof on the northeast cabin room was still mainly intact, but due to its condition, it was completely removed.



Covering new roof logs with straw and a rubber membrane

Construction of a New Roof over the Breezeway and North Room. Gary Guymon, with the assistance of Graig Taylor, spent days harvesting new cottonwood logs/limbs from Cottonwood Canyon north of Bluff. These logs/limbs, ranging in diameter from two to three inches, were placed adjacent to each other, spanning the distance between a center beam and an outer wall. After being anchored in place, the logs/limbs were covered with straw, a rubber membrane, and sheet metal that had been coated with tar. The sheet metal was then covered with two to three inches of soil. Hefting the soil onto the roof was accomplished with the help of Galen Headley (then the owner of the Cadillac Ranch RV Park in Bluff) and his backhoe.

Galen Headley's backhoe and skills also proved invaluable in raising the sunken corner of the back of the cabin and lifting the breezeway center beam while a supporting wall was stabilized.



Galen Headley



The remnants of the breezeway ceiling/roof and it's drooping center beam prior to its renovation Note the opening for a stove pipe to the left of the door opening.



The breezeway ceiling after the center beam had been fixed and new roof logs were in place

In six days, we removed the remaining sod roofs and the kitchen addition, cleared out two feet of debris and blown sand from the floors, shored up the walls, dug down to the cabin's stone foundation and back-filled it with gravel, and partially excavated and shored up the walls of the water well.



Several unexpected finds were unearthed during the project including the water well, wood floors, and foundations comprised of large sandstone rocks. To minimize future water damage to the bottom logs, dirt was removed from the sandstone foundation. The foundation was then backfilled with coarse gravel. Considering the number of log cabins the pioneers had to construct, hauling so many large stones and harvesting so many cottonwood logs would have been a monumental undertaking.



The remnants of the water well prior to its excavation



The well was partially restored using its original stones. For safety reasons, the well was only excavated down about 3 feet. Pioneer journal entries indicate that they obtained good water at 16 feet.

Restoration and Historic Site Development Coincided with Bluff Founders' Day

The date of April 6th to begin the restoration project was chosen based on the beginning of school spring break to accommodate the school students who came with us. However, looking back on it, what a fitting day to commence the work that would preserve and begin the Bluff Fort Historic Site. It was on or just prior to April 6, 1880, that most of the Hole-in-the-Rock pioneers arrived in the Bluff valley. Jens Nielson designated this date as the formal Bluff Founders' Day to coincide with the 50th anniversary of the organization of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. When we began the cabin renovation, I don't think any of us realized that we were commencing the project on Bluff's Founders' Day.



Craig Roring and Graig Taylor assisting Keith Munk in preparing a pancake breakfast for the volunteers. Keith Munk, a friend of Graig's from Logan, Utah, was famous for his scout camp, church events, and community breakfasts. A year earlier he served his pancake breakfast in Blanding in conjunction with the Salvation Knoll interpretive site dedication events.



From left to right, Keith Munk, Graig Taylor, Spencer Crabtree, Lamont Crabtree, and Corinne Roring.

Above - Corinne's photo taken at the end of a remarkable week of renovation work. Photograph on the left taken by Corinne at the Cadillac Ranch RV Park, where those of us from outside the area camped during the renovation project.

Prayer of Thanksgiving and Blessing

The following experience was recorded in my (Lamont Crabtree's) journal.

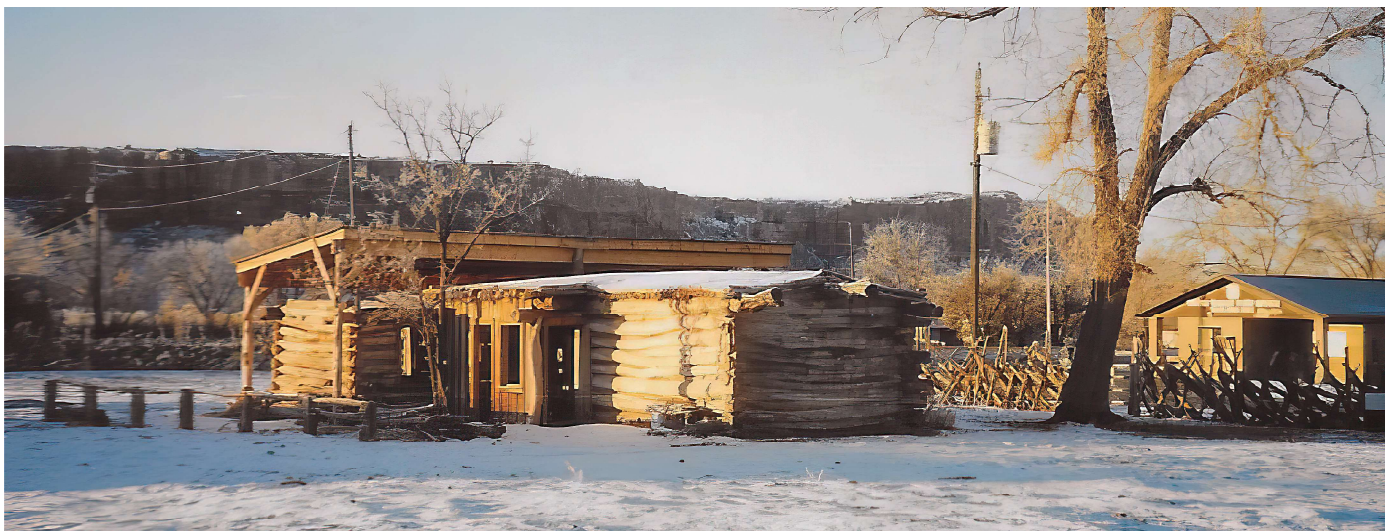
"Near the end of the week, the thought kept coming to me that it would take Divine intervention to keep it [the Barton cabin] from being burned or damaged by vandals and that a prayer would be appropriate. Before departing Bluff for our hometowns at 7:00 a.m. [Sunday morning April 12th], we gathered everyone [who was still in town] in the restored cabin room, where we knelt and offered a prayer. I will never forget this experience. I do not know what the future holds for this site, but I will always be grateful for the experience of feeling what I did every time I visited it and for the opportunity of seeing firsthand the humble homes of the San Juan pioneers and the experience of working on the cabin with my son Spencer and good friends."



In one week the cabin went through an amazing transformation considering the condition it was in before we started.



Why are the logs of the Barton cabin the color they are today? As seen in these images, the old cottonwood logs had a very light brownish-gray color. Years after the renovation of the cabin, a paint company donated a barrel of wood preservative. We were unaware, until it was applied, that the preservative contained a dark stain that was quickly absorbed by the dry logs. Thus, we ended up with a better preserved but darker-colored cabin.



First winter following the renovation work. Note the pioneer-style riprap fence in the background. This was one of Corinne's fist additions. Gene Foushee photo



The Crew: 1 Craig Roring, 2 ?, 3 ?, 4 ?, 5 Graig Taylor, 6 ?, 7 Gary Guymon, 8 Patrick Haskins, 9 Corinne Roring, 10 ?, 11 ?, 12 Darrel Best, 13 Lamont Crabtree, 14 Spencer Crabtree, 15 Brad Best. Missing from the photo: Bengte Evenson, Gene Foushee, Gene Headley, Keith Munk (who was taking the photo), river runner, and Kristin Taylor. Numbers 3, 4, 10, & 11 were members of a family who spent their vacation helping, names unknown.

Corinne Roring – Weed Removal, Cleanup, and Ongoing Maintenance

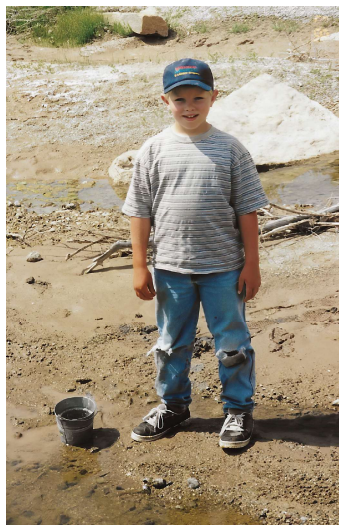
Clearing tamarisks, sagebrush, and weeds from the property was a never-ending task for Corinne that began upon her acquiring the property. Corinne hired Galen Headley with his backhoe and men to clear the brush and tamarisk from the entire lot and haul them away. Galen hauled away many truckloads from the site. Corinne and other volunteers gathered the rest of the debris and weeds and burned them. This made the cabin more accessible for the crew that came in April.

Upon the departure of the volunteers in April, Corinne had the monumental task of removing large mounds of old sod, roof logs, and the removed kitchen walls, as well as large mounds of dirt and debris removed from cabin rooms and foundations. Corinne also had the ongoing task of removing weeds that continually flourished on the barren ground.



A few months following the renovation work, Corinne's grandson Craig Roring spent part of his 8th birthday collecting wildflower seeds and planting them on the Barton cabin roof. Gary Guymon assisted by hand carrying dirt up a ladder in a bucket. Young Craig, who was from Orem, spent many weeks each year assisting his grandmother Corinne.

Corinne Roring Photos



Acquisition of the Kumen Jones Corner/Lot 3 and the Formation of the Hole-in-the-Rock Foundation

In January 2000, three years after the Barton cabin purchase, Gary and Sharon Guyman sold the Kumen Jones corner/Lot 3 to the Letty Jones Heritage Foundation. Once again the Guyman's donated one third of its value.

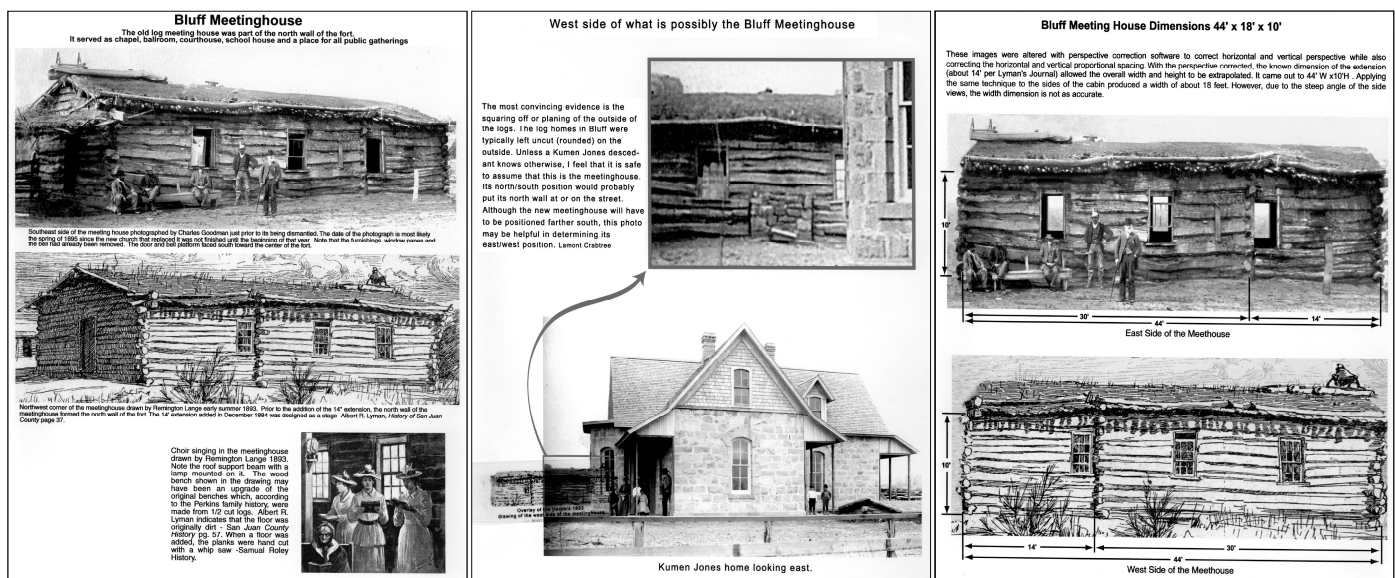
In 2006 The Hole-in-the-Rock Foundation was incorporated, and the property was transferred from the Letty Jones Heritage Foundation to the Hole-in-the-Rock Foundation in 2007. Corinne Roring was the new foundation's president. Early board members included Mike Roring, Graig Taylor, LaMar Helquist, LaRue and Karl Barton, Cleal Bradford, and Lamont Crabtree.

The Log Meetinghouse

The reconstruction of the log meetinghouse was another significant "right person at just the right time" event. About one and a half years following the Barton cabin preservation, Graig Taylor, Hole-in-the-Rock Foundation treasurer, had secured enough funds for the reconstruction of the log meetinghouse. Using old photographs and histories, we were able to estimate its size and determine its features and position relative to the Kumen Jones home.

Wanting to make it as authentic as possible required cottonwood logs. Concerning this, Corinne Roring recorded, "This proved to be a bigger job than we had anticipated. Where could we find the cottonwood logs ...? Gary Guyman suggested using dead cottonwoods from the old irrigation ditch near Blanding, but heavy timber equipment and expertise were necessary to move them. David Kimmerle (a great-great-grandson of Bishop Jens Nielson) was prepared for the undertaking. He cut, sawed, and hauled the heavy logs to Bluff. The next challenge was building with crooked logs. A Canadian old-timer, who just happened to be visiting the area, knew cabin construction."

The Canadian who came to the area and connected with Corinne Roring at just the right time was Ray Wrigget. Ray knew how to construct a large log structure and also knew pioneer construction techniques. Joe Hurst, the general contractor for the project, and his crew did an amazing job. Ray advised and assisted on all aspects of the construction. Not long after the completion of the meetinghouse, Ray moved on. Years later Joe Hurst and his crew once again did a remarkable job in constructing a replica of the pioneers' stone co-op store.



The above document (created in 1999) summarizes how the meetinghouse dimensions and its position were determined from old photographs, drawings, and historic references to the length of an extension that was added to the meetinghouse in the early 1890s.

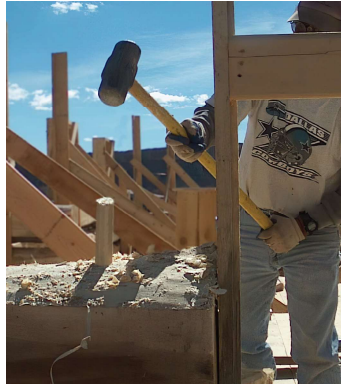
Log Meetinghouse Replica Construction



David Kimmerle harvesting and shaping cottonwood logs for the meetinghouse. Finding enough cottonwoods was a major challenge.



Ray Wrigget and Joe Hurst's crew securing logs with dowels (wood stakes) as the pioneers did



From left to right: Harrison Carter, Robert James, Ray Wrigget, and Eddie Kee



Ray Wrigget, Brian Hawkins, and Harrison Carter



Harrison Carter, Ray Wrigget, and Robert James



Ray working on the finishing touches



Contractor Joe Hurst and Ray Wrigget

Whenever a log does not span from corner to corner due to a window /door opening or because the log is not long enough, it must be secured to the log below it. In modern day cabin construction, this is accomplished with steel rods. Ray followed the pioneers' method of drilling a hole through adjoining logs and driving a dowel (wood stake) through the hole to secure the logs in place. (See top right images.) This method can be seen throughout the Barton cabin rooms. This process of drilling and driving a stake was repeated about 200 times during the construction of the log meetinghouse.

Early Key Participants

Gary and Sharon Guymon

Without Gary and Sharon's desire and sacrifice to secure the property, the Barton cabin would likely no longer exist, and there would be no Bluff Fort Historic Site. Their foresight and sacrifice made it possible. In looking at the documents transferring the property ownership, their desire to preserve the site is very evident. They contractually stipulated that the structures be rehabilitated and that nothing would be done on the property "that would be incompatible with the historic or architectural character of the site...."

Gary worked on the cabin restoration and even harvested the logs for the new sod roof from his own property. I have never met anyone who could work as hard as Gary. It would take at least three men to match his work pace. Gary has also assisted with trail research, interpretive sign installations on the trail, and reenactment filming.



Corinne Roring

From the day she obtained the Barton cabin and throughout the rest of her life, Corinne dedicated herself to the development of the Bluff Fort Historic Site. During its initial years, she staffed it by herself and at times recruited volunteers from Blanding and Monticello. She spent countless hours and made an untold number of trips between her home in Monticello and Bluff. She worked tirelessly promoting the fort and coordinating volunteers and contractors. She would remind all of how the circumstances of each project were providential and that "When the time is right, it will happen." The construction of the co-op replica/visitors center was her crown jewel project, the culmination of her dream.

Thanks to Corinne's personal donations and funds from the Letty Jones Heritage Foundation, she was able to acquire additional property and make numerous improvements. Her personal touches in the fort, to name just a few, include improvements to the Kumen Jones ruin, the riprap fence, and the procurement of the state highway property and building/shed. She turned a portion of this building into the "Cowboy Cabin," which until 2022 provided on-site lodging for volunteers. It is now used as the fort's office. The rest of the building is now utilized as a workshop and a concession kitchen.

Some of her other touches include the flagstone paths, restoring the Relief Society building and acquiring the property that it sits on, the benches in the meetinghouse, and some of the furnishings in the co-op. As we enjoy the soft-serve ice cream available at the fort, we can thank Corinne, for that was a feature she insisted on. For many decades Corinne had the foresight to collect and save the stones from the original co-op. These stones now cover the exterior of the co-op replica/visitors center.

Corinne's right-hand man was her son Mike Roring. He made countless trips from his home in Orem to Bluff to assist. Anytime there was a large project involving heavy equipment, Mike took care of it. Mike is currently serving as the foundation's vice president. Mike is the longest serving board member and continues to play a key role in the ongoing success of the foundation and historic site.



Corinne in front of the Barton cabin near the end of the renovation work, April 1998



Graig, Corinne, and Mike Roring at the ground breaking for the stone monument



Corinne at the sales counter in the co-op, November 2013

Graig Taylor

Graig Taylor had a great appreciation for the Hole-in-the-Rock pioneers. He helped with trail marking and interpretive signs on the trail and covered much of their cost.

Continuing to develop the Bluff Fort Historic required significant funds to purchase property and pay for future projects, some of which were very costly. Graig and his cousin Drew Major made generous personal contributions via the Esther Foundation. Graig, who at the time was partially blind, joked many times that he would take his tin cup and white cane and solicit donations. He obtained generous donations from the George S. and Dolores Doré Eccles Foundation, the James and Beverley Sorenson Foundation, and The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints Foundation, among others, as well as many contributions from descendants. These donations made additional property procurements possible as well as the addition of the log meetinghouse, stone monument, John Taylor statue, the co-op store/visitors center, etc. Graig served on the board as the foundation's treasurer for many years.

Graig's eyesight challenge never stopped him from personally working on numerous projects, including many of the log cabins.

We were not far into the fort's development when Graig's good friend LaMar Helquist, great-grandson of Jens Nielson, joined the team and became a valuable contributor, working beside Graig on every project. He served for many years as the foundation's vice president. Following Corinne's passing, he agreed to serve as president for one year prior to retiring from serving on the board.



Graig Taylor and LaMar Helquist



LaMar Helquist touching up chinking

Gene Foushee

In 1998 without being asked, Gene Foushee worked throughout the week on the cabin restoration. As we were finishing the work, Gene made a makeshift time capsule out of a quart glass jar, and in it he placed a paper with the names of those who had worked on the cabin. He then tucked the jar above the ceiling logs, just inside the door of the main/preserved cabin room.

Gene was a friend to anyone who had the pleasure of meeting him. He renovated several of the original stone pioneer homes in Bluff and is credited with revitalizing Bluff when it was nearly a ghost town. He also discovered a previously forgotten section of the pioneer's trail down the Twist.

In a letter Gene sent to the Hole-in-the-Rock Foundation on October 11, 2006, he asked the board members to consider constructing a performance area that would be covered by a high roof, adjacent to the Kumen Jones ruin. He stated, "I would volunteer my time and work liberally on such a project...." This illustrates Gene's interest and willingness to help.



Gene pointing out a feature on the Twist



The Foushees treating the HIR board members/volunteers to dinner on the Comb. Left to right: Mary Foushee, Corinne Roring, Grant Taylor, Cleal & Nancy Bradford, Graig Taylor, LaRue Barton, Karl Barton, and Gene Foushee. Missing from the image is Lamont Crabtree, who was taking the photo.

Karl and LaRue Barton

LaRue and Karl Barton's involvement began at the time of the monument/site dedication in 2005. In 2007 Karl felt impressed to purchase Jen Nielson's home that was kitty-corner to the fort site. At about that same time, the hogan-shaped building (now the craft center) was acquired. This building became the site's first visitors center. Karl, descendant of Joseph Barton, and LaRue, descendant of Jens Nielson, took on the task of being at the site as much as possible. For years LaRue operated the visitors center, greeting visitors and sharing stories.

LaRue and Karl both served on the foundation's board. LaRue's talents and support continue to this day. The sale of LaRue's handiwork and that of many other women has greatly offset operating expenses. The amount of time LaRue has spent volunteering at the Bluff Fort site and supporting its operations with her crafts is amazing. Karl and LaRue also made an in-kind donation of property in Monticello to the foundation.



LaRue Barton Kirkham with some of her handiwork

Lamont Crabtree

I, like so many others, recognize that what initially connected me with the pioneers' trail and the Barton cabin was not happenstance. I am grateful for the opportunity to be involved in historical research, the foundation's first web page, brochures/maps, newsletters, videos, displays, and interpretive signage. Some of my children's service projects can still be seen at the fort and on the trail. I continue to work on interpretive projects for the fort and the trail.



Lamont Crabtree, Bishop Harold David Burton, and Graig Taylor

Additional Volunteers

This document is far from a complete history. It is an overview of how the site got started. There are numerous others, such as Cleal Bradford who gave of his time and talents and was instrumental in additional property procurements. Ron McDonald helped with research and interpretive projects. Lynn Stevens' work resulted in a Federal Scenic Byways matching grant for the co-op/visitors center. Grant (Graig's brother) and Nina Taylor have also been substantial contributors. Besides the intense manual labor of building new cabins and other projects such as the audio tours, Grant and his wife Nina prepared fabulous meals for the volunteers. Lynn, Grant, and Nina continue to be valuable contributors to the foundation and historic site. Lynn is currently serving as the foundation's president and Grant is serving on the board of directors. Skilled contractor Vance Sealy did the site's masonry and rock work. There have also been numerous fort directors, missionaries, local volunteers, and board members. Without them the site could not function. Hopefully, each will record and share his/her own story and experiences pertaining to the fort.

Friendships

One of the great blessings of being involved in the Bluff Fort Historic Site and trail projects has been the opportunity to become acquainted with so many wonderful people who have a shared interest in the Hole-in-the-Rock pioneers.

Volunteer Endeavor

A key to the site's success has been the volunteer effort by the people involved. Other than contractors and accountants when they were needed, all, including board members, have volunteered their time and covered their own transportation and lodging expenses. Each one who has or will yet volunteer/serve at the Bluff Fort Historic Site makes a difference.

I cannot help but think the pioneers would be pleased that their faith, conviction, and hard work has not been forgotten.

Lamont Crabtree
February 2024