

John Colter of the epic Lewis and Clark expedition was the first white man to enter Teton Valley on a return trip to the western wilderness in 1808. At that time Native Americans referred to the basin as “broad valley.” It was also called Tee-Win-At or Trois Tetons and was later known, for about a quarter of a century, as Pierre’s Hole.

Soon after Colter crossed into the valley over Teton Pass, the first of many skirmishes fought here between Indians, whites and their Indian allies erupted. While camped on a flat between Teton and Leigh creeks, Colter and a village of about 800 Crow Indians were attacked by a war party of 1,500 Blackfeet. Colter’s rifle was a decisive factor and the Blackfeet fled, but not before he was wounded in the leg with an arrow. The incident was later referred to as the “Battle of the Flats.”

Numerous tribes traversed and often clashed in the area in search of game. Among these were the Teton or Lakota Sioux, Crow Indians, Blackfeet, Nez Perce, Flatheads, Bannock and most predominantly the Wind River band of the Shoshone, which was the tribe of Sacagawea. Native Americans traveled from as far away as northern Utah to hunt and trade with other tribes.

After the battle Colter traveled north and was the first to discover Yellowstone. About six months following the fight, he ventured into Blackfoot territory where he was discovered by Indians who recognized him as their adversary with the rifle. Colter was forced to strip naked and run for his life while the Indians threw spears at him. With some luck he outran them and eventually found his way to a camp of white traders. This great explorer of the west later died at his farm near New Haven in Franklin County, Missouri.

French-Canadian trappers began arriving in the valley in about 1818. Trappers called any valley a “hole,” and this area was called Pierre’s Hole after an Iroquois Indian trapper named Vieux Pierre. While searching for beaver Pierre found the valley in 1818 and reported its existence to the Hudson Bay Company. This began the valley’s era of trappers and trappers’ rendezvous.

Because Pierre’s Hole was centrally located to trapping areas, it became a favored summer rendezvous for trappers in the northwest region. Trappers brought plenty of alcohol to a rendezvous in part to barter with the Indians. Beads, calicoes and bright colored cloth were other items traded. The beginning of a rendezvous was marked by drinking, gambling, games and debauchery.

In 1832, it was estimated that about 1,000 Indians and trappers were camped in Pierre’s Hole with a main encampment southwest of Driggs. New York magnate John Jacob Astor’s American Fur Company and its rival the Rocky Mountain Fur Company, founded by famed trappers James Bridger, Jedediah Smith and William Sublette, maintained camps here at this time. A group of free traders and camps of Nez Perce and Flatheads, friendly to whites, were also living in the valley.

This year another battle with the Blackfeet called “The Battle of Pierre’s Hole” was fought. A group of about 42 men separated from the main encampment on an exploring expedition. While this group was camped nearby on the eastern side of the valley, they observed a caravan of Blackfeet traveling into the valley on a trail leading to Jackson Hole. Two members of the expedition party who had suffered at the hands of the Blackfeet in the past, an Iroquois and a Flathead Indian, were sent to greet the Blackfoot messenger.

According to accounts of the incident the messenger gave a sign of peace, but the Flathead Indian shot him. The Blackfeet immediately began to fortify themselves by digging holes and stacking fallen timber around them. Mud from the holes was used to shore up the fortifications. While the Indians readied themselves, the group of trappers sent for reinforcements.

The battle lasted all day, and in the evening the men, women and children of the tribe fled leaving most of their gear. In the end about 20 of the 200 Blackfeet were killed. Three whites were killed, eight badly wounded. Ten Nez Perce and Flatheads were killed or mortally wounded. During the battle, the Blackfeet were heard exchanging insults with the Nez Perce and Flatheads.

By 1840, beaver were becoming scarce and the fur trade was losing importance in the American economy. A new wave of opportunists began sweeping the Rocky Mountains in search of gold. When precious metals were discovered in Montana in 1862, some prospectors found their way into the valley. While gold pans have been found in some local streams, efforts were relatively unsuccessful.

After the early trapping companies left, there were still some sporadic trappers who would visit the area. Richard Leigh, also known as “Beaver Dick,” was one of the most notable. He was referred to by this nickname because of his beaver trapping skills and because he had two large front teeth. Hiram C. Lapham, considered to be the valley’s first permanent settler, met Beaver Dick when he arrived on his first visit with his brother in 1882.

Lapham, his wife and children and his brother settled at the north end of the valley on June 1, 1882. They came west from southeastern Kansas to Burley, Idaho, and then to Teton Valley. Lapham wrote, “Being broke, as tenderfeet usually are, and as I had taught school in Kansas, was glad to accept the school at Albion during the winter of 1878-1879. This was my first introduction to the Mormons, and must say that they were very kind to me. In 1881 we went up Snake River to where Plano is now, and afterwards located there, but as there was no hay to be had, and wanting to raise stock, we moved to Teton Basin in 1882.”

These first sporadic settlers arrived before a wave of Mormon settlers in 1889. In the summer of 1882, Robert Benbrook and Sam Hill, their teenage “wives” and Chris Sorenson, a companion, built cabins just southwest of the Driggs town site at what was called the point of willows. These teenage women were allegedly “stolen wives” from the Bear Lake Valley. A posse chased Benbrook and Hill to Eagle Rock, now Idaho Falls, and lost track of them.

In 1883 half a dozen more families moved to the area. Many chose to build cabins on Teton Creek near Driggs. These dwellings were crude log cabins with earthen floors and roofs covered with poles, brush and earth. Prior to 1888, the nearest town post office was in Rexburg.

After 1888, most of the settlers were Mormons from Utah and from other parts of Idaho. A glowing report about the valley from Oscar Young at Salt Lake motivated Mathoni Pratt and Thomas Wilson to investigate in 1888. Residents of Teton City warned them that Teton Valley was only “...a rendezvous for horse thieves and outlaws,” but they continued on.

Acting on reports from Pratt and Wilson, B.W. Driggs arrived the same season for an inspection.

Isaac Waddell, Driggs' law partner, then became interested and told his neighbor Henry Wallace about Teton Valley. Later Wallace would plat and donate land for the Driggs town site.

Don C. Driggs, brother of B.W., Pratt and Wilson staked off claims in the valley. B.S. Driggs, Waddell and Wallace, E.B. Edelfsen and D.C. Driggs also claimed land for ranches. Reports from these early Mormon settlers began a larger migration.

A large colony of Mormons traveled north to Driggs from Salt Lake in 1889. "This wagon train of emigrants lined up in front of the temple block and started March 18 for a journey of nearly 400 miles. The party consisted of Thomas R. Wilson, Don C. Driggs, Leland M. Driggs, David Hilton, James Hilton, "Bish" Burt, Solomon Angel, Howard A. Wallace, Ebenezer Beesley, William M. Waddell and Angus M. Lambert. George S. Young joined the party and James T. Wilson."

Upon arriving they found few inhabitants, and they made their first homesteads near the swamps where they could cut wild hay. Land was first taken up in the Driggs vicinity. From 1888 to 1890 about 300 families migrated to the area. Before canals could be dug, cattle and sheep ranching was the primary occupation.

Sawmills began springing up along local waterways, canals were built and people started breaking ground for farms. However, farming was impractical for some time because the nearest railroad shipping point was 75 miles away at Market Point, or what is now known as Roberts. Produce was not easily hauled this distance, but cattle could be easily driven. Farming did not become profitable until the railroad reached St. Anthony.

In 1893 Samuel Kunz established the valley's first cheese factory. In 1895 a cheese factory was established in Driggs. The dairy business continued to grow and in 1926 when B.W. Driggs wrote "History of Teton Valley Idaho" there were six cheese factories and a large amount of cream and butter exported.

The name that was originally suggested for Driggs was Aline. The first LDS Ward organized in the valley was called the Aline Ward. When B.W. Driggs petitioned the postal department in Washington, D.C., for a post office located in the Driggs vicinity, the department named the post office "Driggs" because there were so many names of Driggs on the petition. The first post office was established in 1894.

Prior to the dedication of the Driggs town site, buildings and businesses were erected on the west side of Main Street, on the D.C. Driggs homestead, and south of Little Avenue on the L.M. Driggs homestead on the east side of Main Street. On December 21, 1901, Henry and Elen Harper Wallace of Salt Lake City, whose son Howard was one of the first settlers, donated 160 acres of land for the Driggs town site. Most of the streets were named after members of the Wallace family.

The Village of Driggs was incorporated May 23, 1910, by petition to the Fremont County Board of County Commissioners. D.C. Driggs, J.D. Killpack Jr., H.L. Crandall, J.H. Fuller, and A.C. Miner were the first board of trustees. B.W. Driggs was the village attorney.

The *Teton Valley News* published its first edition April 15, 1909. Some excerpts read: “There is a sugar famine in Victor. One sack arrived the other night. The hotels were limited to \$1.00 worth and private families to 25 cents worth. Hay for sale = \$5.00 to \$7.00 per ton - S.E. of Victor. Hogs are bringing 4 ½ to 6 ½ cents on foot. Population of Teton Valley 3,500.” An excerpt from September 28, 1911, states that there were 21 students enrolled at the Driggs High School.

In 1912, the Oregon Short Line Railroad entered the valley. With the arrival of tourists and an expedient way of shipping, the town prospered. After the arrival of the railroad, the Winger Building, a structure of cut stone where Corner Drug is now located, was built. The upper story was used for the high school and later for the district court. The bottom level was always used as a drug store.

E. Beesley, who was a noted fiddler in the valley, and Charles Carr, a local carpenter, built a two story building at the corner of Little and Main for a dance hall at this time. As an inducement for him to build on the town site, the land was donated to him. A dance hall operated in the top story and the bottom level was used for business. This is currently the Key Bank building.

In “History of Teton Valley Idaho,” B.W. Driggs noted that music was always an important part of life in the valley. “The most beloved music of Teton Valley was undoubtedly its dance music. There was a dance somewhere every week.”

On January 26, 1915, Teton County was separated from Madison County by an act of legislature. Driggs was made the permanent county seat at the general election in 1916. Courthouse built when? American Legion building?

In the early years of its settlement, before there were doctors, midwives played a critical role. They often traveled long distances in dangerous weather and were often paid with food or produce. They were trained by the LDS Relief Society.

One memorable doctor who practiced in Driggs from 1906 to 1915 was Dr. Ora Keith, an unmarried woman physician. She would make house calls with a team of horses, even during a blizzard. In her honor, many people named their children Ora or Keith.

The first Teton Valley Hospital, sponsored by the City of Driggs and built with Works Progress Administration funds, was dedicated on May 9, 1939. Dr. O.D. Hoffman, the first physician at the hospital, explained that before the hospital opened house calls were made in a covered sleigh with a stove inside.

WHEN DID THE RAILROAD LEAVE? WHAT HAPPENED THEN? PEA PICKING in 1920s, migrant workers, pea pickers revolt. THE DEPRESSION in the Valley. WWI, WWII, GRAND TARGHEE, BEGINNING OF TOURISM BASED ECONOMY.....