

IRRIGATION

Water was critical for the success of Utah pioneer families and their farms. As early as 1850, Brigham Young spoke at meetings about the need for irrigation for the area west of the Jordan River. In addition to many individual wells, the settlers cooperated in the creation of an irrigation ditch to pull water from the river.

Dug by hand with picks and shovels, the Beckstead Ditch first carried water to this area in June 1859. The ditch was graded so that gravity helped bring water from the Jordan River. Beginning at about 12600 South in what is today Riverton, the river water moved through the ditch in a northwest direction to the South Jordan fields. A spirit level, in which a bubble of air moved inside a small tube of liquid, guided the digging and grade of the ditches to carry water through the farms.

Local families built and maintained the early irrigation ditches and canals. The Beckstead Ditch was followed by a larger canal called the South Jordan Canal, dug between 1870 and 1875, a portion of which passes through the west end of the Holt property. In 1880 the Utah and Salt Lake Canal Company was formed, and by 1884, pumps and canals also brought water north from Utah Lake.

Farmers drew water from the canal through weirs. A weir is a board or other obstruction placed in a stream or ditch to raise the water and divert it into a millrace or irrigation ditch. The size of the weir can determine the amount of water flowing through it, so each farm can draw its share of the irrigation water. Canal weirs were raised and lowered with a removable wheel. Members of the local communities often serve on the committees governing the water distribution.



Painting by Greg Newbold



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