

# Spanish Fork celebration of July 24 has long tradition

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**T**he roots of the Spanish Fork Fiesta Days celebration go back to a July 14, 1892 mass meeting held in Spanish Fork in which a committee was appointed to consider the advisability of celebrating the 24th. It was unanimously decided to have a grand celebration with a procession.

On July 21, 1892 the Spanish Fork *Sun* editorialized: "Every citizen in this, our fair city, should lay aside, for one day, their toils and cares and throw in their mite to make this coming 24th a day long to be remembered in Spanish Fork, that it may be an object lesson to the young of the hardships, suffering and heroism of that noble band, who traversed the mighty wilderness and located their homes in these then uninviting valleys, over which the half-starved Indians wandered and coyotes sent up their unremitting howl."

The article went on to list the procession participants: a banner bearer; pioneers; and Utah, represented by a young lady riding a white horse, escorted by two gentlemen, one on each side, riding black horses and carrying a banner. Miss Emma Creer was selected as the young lady and she was to choose her own escorts.

Also included were representatives of the Mormon Battalion, the bishopric, High Priesthood, Aaronic Priesthood and Relief Society. They were followed by a handcart company, bicycle brigade, the civil authorities, female



Courtesy photo

**FIESTA ROYALTY:** Hanna Marie Carson Farley reigned as queen with Phyllis Hughes (left) and June Jones Ashton (right) as attendants in 1947.

suffrage leaders, and a beautiful car selected by the Primary Association.

These were followed by the educational department and representatives of the nationalities found in Spanish Fork at the time: England, Scotland, Wales, Ireland, Denmark, Norway, Sweden,

Germany, Iceland and the Indians. Then came the trades: carders, spinners, weavers, tailors, adobe cutters, carpenters, painters and paper hangers, plasterers, tanners, wheelwrights and blacksmiths,

# Fiesta

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harness makers, shoemakers, foundries, the press, etc.

Winding up the procession was a representation of business houses followed by the general citizenry. Some things haven't changed much since 1892; everyone seems to love a parade.

So you may ask, what does the name "Fiesta Days" have to do with a small community in Utah whose founding fathers came from Wales, Denmark, Iceland, Germany and Scotland? Long before those hardy settlers arrived in the area, two Franciscan friars, Fray Silvestre de Escalante and Fray Francisco Atansio Dominguez, and their company passed through Spanish Fork Canyon — September 23, 1776, to be exact. Father Escalante recorded in his journal that the area was "the fairest of all new Spain."

However, it wasn't until 1945 that the 24th of July celebration received the name of Spanish Fiesta, which has since evolved to Fiesta Days. The war was over, and the town wanted to have a unique identification for its celebration of the 24th of July, something to distinguish it from other city events in the state. An essay contest was held to name the

celebration.

June Jones Ashton, then 14 or 15 years old, won the contest and its \$5 prize money by suggesting the name of Spanish Fiesta to honor the early Franciscan friar explorers. Jones was also honored as the first Spanish Fiesta queen, chosen because of her riding ability and appearance on her mount. Angie Holdaway, grand-daughter of Ashton is serving as an attendant in the Heber City royalty. They have been invited to ride in the Fiesta Day parade.

That year, 1945, two parades were organized in honor of the occasion: a miniature parade sponsored by the LDS Church organizations held at 10:30 a.m. and a "mammoth parade" sponsored by the Diamond Fork Horse Club at 6 p.m.

The mammoth parade, chaired by Blaine Swenson, included 56 floats, 150 horses, and five musical groups. Most of the floats were horse drawn to cut down on the use of gasoline, which was still being rationed due to the war. The parade was led by six Spanish dons on horseback. Music was furnished by the Spanish Fork and Payson bands, Ralph Migliaccio's band with bathing beauties, Mexican labor camp musicians sponsored by Utah-Idaho Sugar Co., and pioneer musicians.

This year the grand parade

boasts over 200 entries, one of them the 23rd Army Band. Events celebrating July 24th span an entire week instead of two days. It

has become a more secular, rather than religious, celebration in respects, but the spirit of the tradition lingers.