

# Pioneer leaves legacy of music

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Tall grass waving in the wind, meadow lands full of wild asters and sunflowers, and a creek of clear sparkling water, its banks fringed on both sides with tall trees — this is not what visitors to the Springville of today encounter when they enter the city. But it is the sight that greeted the first pioneers who entered the area on Sept. 18, 1850. The small band of pioneers, led by Captain Aaron Johnson, had just completed the arduous journey from Council Bluffs, Iowa, arriving in Salt Lake City on Sept. 2, 1850.

Frederick Weight and his family were not with the first group of pioneers that settled Springville, but they were not far behind. After his own long and trying journey from England, he arrived in Springville on Nov. 3, 1856.

Weight was born in Gloucestershire, England in 1828 and from a very early age had a recognized gift for music. When he was 3 years old, he played tunes on an old wooden flute. The flute can be seen at the Springville Daughters of the Utah Pioneers Museum and is considered to be around 250 years old.

At the infant school he attended in Cheltenham, England from the time he was 5 until he was 8, he learned singing as well as reading, writing and arithmetic. He was the lead singer at the school.

At the tender age of 10, he began work as a mason tender, then, in succession, he worked

as an errand boy for a doctor, a general laborer for a gentleman, and then found a job at the iron works where his father worked.

At the iron works he learned to operate the machinery that would contribute to his ability to build musical instruments.

As he was growing up, Weight attended concerts and practiced music with his brothers. Frederick played the bass violin and his three brothers each played an instrument to fill out the other three parts — treble, alto and tenor. His two sisters sang with them, and they performed together at small private concerts, music meetings and public concerts.

This was a typical day for the young lad during this period of his life (as recorded in his journal): "I would work 10 hours every day and practice from two to three hours. I arose at 4 a.m. and practiced for two hours, then went to my work at 6 a.m., practiced 30 minutes at noon, leaving just 30 minutes in which to eat my dinner. Then I went back to work until 5:30 p.m., and after returning home, I ate my supper, fixed to go to my music meetings, to which I walked four miles — four miles there, and four miles back, twice weekly — making a distance of 16 miles every week of walking after having worked 10 hours each day at the factory.

"I kept this up for three or four years, carrying my violincello under my arm

all the way there and back." (The next time all you would-be musicians feel like whining about how much time you are asked to practice for music lessons, think of Frederick.)

Somewhere in this rigorous schedule, he found time to



Courtesy photo

**Music legacy:** Frederick Weight brought many talents to Utah Valley, among them the ability to make fine instruments and perform music. His influence has been strong in leaving behind his legacy of music and well-crafted musical instruments.

make an organ, which he sold to acquire money for his passage to America.

Weight had perfect pitch, which made it easy for him to tune his instruments, many of which he made himself. He made his own glue and chose special wood to make his instruments.

While living in Utah, Weight made three organs, four violins, one guitar (and a case for it), one string bass, one cello and two dulcimers. Several of these instruments are currently housed in the Daughters of the Utah Pioneers Museum in Springville.

Weight did far more than make musical instruments during his time in Utah.

After arriving in the United

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Journal photo by Rosemarie Howard

**Lasting memories:** Flutes were a strong influence in Weight's life. On the left is a flute he made; on the right is the one he played when he was only 3 years old.



Courtesy photo

**A man for all seasons:** Weight, shown here with a bear he shot, was a true pioneer in his ability to do what needed and bring joy through his music to all those around him.

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States, Weight spent two years in St. Louis, Mo., working at numerous odd jobs to scrape together the funds necessary to make the journey West. Even here, his talents were recognized, and he was asked to organize a church choir.

In 1852, he finally had enough funds to attempt the journey, and Weight, his young wife and newborn child set out to cross the plains. This entry from his autobiography shows the contrast of emotions they must have experienced on that journey:

"I had a sick wife and baby to take care of besides taking my turn at standing guard. I had to cook and wash for my wife, my baby and myself and do camp duties and everything, as my wife was unable to do anything.

"She had no milk for her baby, making it necessary to feed him on cow's milk from a bottle, which was a great trial as we had no cow of our own. I went around camp every morning to get milk for him.

We held meetings on Sundays and laid over to rest. Sometimes we had a little dance in the evenings when things went well. This was the first time I had ever seen a Cotillion danced in all my life, but I soon learned to dance them and also other dances."

When they arrived in Salt Lake City, his wife died, leaving him with a 6-month old baby to care for.

While in Salt Lake City, he performed with the Tabernacle Choir under the direction of James Smithies. He was also a

member of the old Nauvoo Brass Band and played his cello in the Ballou Pioneer orchestra. But he also worked on the wall around Temple Square to pay for his food and a roof over his head.

About his musical service in Springville, he wrote, "I was appointed choir leader of the Springville branch in the same month [I arrived], which office I have held for 25 years. I have sung thousands and thousands of hymns and tunes and taught them to others. I have attended thousands of funerals and have sung hymns and anthems to hundreds of them."

**"Every man has some gift of God — Grandpa's was music. It showed in every part of him, for it lived in his soul."**

— May W. Johnson,  
granddaughter

His granddaughter, May W. Johnson, said, "I remember him as the 'old chorister' ... and he was affectionately known in town as the 'old chorister.'"

And his music lives on in those who knew him.

Johnson wrote of her grandfather, "Every man has some gift of God — Grandpa's was music. It showed in every part of him, for it lived in his soul. Everyone loved the way he played the organ. He seemed to be commissioned and inspired. Although the organ is silent and his voice is still, his music lingers with us as if it were his will. Through the windows of music, we shall continue to see the beauties of an art Grandpa loved. It lives in the scattering of musical talent among his descendants."

In spite of the rigors and hardness of the pioneer life, Weight found the time to magnify and share his musical talents — and to leave a heritage that has not been forgotten. □