

Way We Were

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What's in a name?

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The "modern" era for Deer Valley began in December 1981 when the Deer Valley Ski Resort opened. The resort is unquestionably one of the ski industry's premier properties. But what of the valley's history pre-1981? How did the name originate and what other names were associated with Deer Valley?

There are three theories as to the naming of Deer Valley. The first dates to the Utah War (1858 - 1859) when federal troops occupied Utah Territory. This territory – also called the "Great Basin" – encompassed what would eventually become all or part of nine western states and included water rights to the Colorado River. The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo ending the Mexican–American War in 1848 gave the United States much of the southwest and west, including what would become the Utah Territory.

In 1846 Brigham Young and his followers fled Illinois after suffering violent persecution, intending to establish a territory in which they could live free of such religious bigotry. They chose the Great Basin area and began their migration. Among other things, an encounter along their journey with legendary mountain man Jim Bridger, who told them more about the Salt Lake Valley, solidified their plans.

Upon arriving in 1847, they established a provisional government. After the area transferred into US hands in 1848, the Mormon settlers petitioned for formal recognition as the "State of Deseret." The government refused. The creation of the Utah Territory (1850) was politically motivated in part to derail Mormon efforts to establish Deseret. As a conciliatory measure, Congress appointed Brigham Young governor of the new territory.

Tempers simmered between Utah settlers and US authorities, reaching a flash point in 1857 when President James Buchanan dispatched US forces under the command of General Albert S. Johnson to occupy the Territory. The Utah War had begun.

One of Johnson's scouting parties moved through this area, encountering a herd of deer. They noted "Deer Valley" on their maps. The Utah War ended in June 1858. Though considered a "bloodless" war, 150 casualties occurred.

Theory number two also involves armed conflict and deer: the Black Hawk War (1865-1872). The Black Hawk War (1865 to 1872) witnessed armed conflict between Native Americans (primarily the Ute tribe) and the Mormon militia (Nauvoo Legion), and eventually federal troops. On reconnaissance mission, Mormon cavalry soldier Private William Reynolds noted a large herd of deer in this area. He, too, named it "Deer Valley."

Theory number three is local legend involving "dears" of the two-legged variety. Besides mining, prostitution was another important (though illegal) local business. It was primarily concentrated at the bottom of Main Street and up Heber Avenue (today's Deer Valley Drive). When the mood struck, miners would visit their "does" in "Dear Valley."

Future articles will discuss the history of two Deer Valleys – upper and lower.

For further exploration of "Deer Valley," consider joining the Park City Historical Society and Museum hike on Sunday, August 14. The hike is free to museum members. Please call the museum for more information (435-649-7457).



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Credit: Park City Historical Society and Museum, Ivers Photograph Collection

Caption: A section of Deer Valley known as "Frog Valley" in its pre-development days.