



News Release

Fishlake National Forest



For Immediate Release

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THE JOURNEY OF A GOLD MOUNTAIN MINER

Fishlake National Forest volunteers and a forest employee recently purchased a granite tombstone to mark forever a grave in the Joseph cemetery of one of this area's most well-known miners, Brigham Daniel Darger. The original wooden marker had long since rotted away, and the exact location of the grave had actually been "misplaced" due to a clerical error. But on February 19, 2005 the new headstone was dedicated in the presence of fifty of Darger's descendents in a simple ceremony presided over by Bob Leonard, Fishlake archaeologist.

The early life of Brigham Daniel Darger lies largely in the shadows of the past. What we know for certain is that he was born into a family of modest means in Salt Lake City on June 15, 1862. His birth occurred during the presidency of Abraham Lincoln and his childhood was spent during the onslaught of the Civil War. When he was but three years of age and living in Spanish Fork, conflict came close to home when a Ute Warrior named Blackhawk rose up to drive the Saints from Utah.

For the next 27 years, there are many gaps in the life of Brig Darger. When we again hear of him, Brig is a single, 30 year-old-miner on Gold Mountain in south central Utah. In 1894 he staked the "Silver King" claim in Spring Gulch. Between 1894 and 1896 the property had several tunnels, mine dumps, an assay shop, a boarding house and a large two-story cabin. Brig employed as many as ten miners at any one time.

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Gold Mountain Miner 2-2-2-2-2-2-2

In 1896 a very pretty young girl caught his attention. Although she was engaged to another miner in the next camp, Brig captured her affections. Her name was Pansy Permelia Brown and she was 13 years younger than he. On March 17, 1897 they were married in the Manti Temple and their wedding photo is the first known portrait of either person. Brig was about 5'7", had curly black hair and a handlebar mustache. Pansy was 5'2" with thick brown hair.

The couple purchased a small farm in Joseph 15 miles south of Richfield. After Pansy started to have babies she stayed on the farm and tended the livestock, gardens and orchards. Each summer when the snow cleared Brig made the 16 mile-trip to the Silver King Mine. Discouragingly long hours produced only meager profits because of low grade ores and high overhead costs. On more than one occasion, Pansy's peach money put food on the table.

Times were also hard in other ways. Soon after their marriage Brig walked into a pocket of carbon dioxide in one of his tunnels which made him prone to seizures. On one occasion when he was cooking a meal for his crew, Brig collapsed onto the stove and burned out his left eye.

Sorrow continued for the Dargers. They lost a 4 ½ year old girl and 14-month old boy to diphtheria in 1905. In 1916 they lost an infant child shortly after his birth. And just a few years later, two of their older sons were killed in automobile accidents.

Near the end of his life Brig and his family moved to Los Angeles where he became increasingly despondent because he never found the elusive bonanza at the Silver King. A philosopher once said, "As a rule, adversity reveals genius and prosperity hides it." This statement seems oddly applicable to the life and times of this miner from Gold Mountain. When Brig died just a few months before the 1932 election of Franklin Roosevelt, one can only imagine that his eulogy would have included the most priceless thing that a man could hope for: the love and respect of his wife and children.

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Today, the old Silver King Mine is still there in Spring Gulch. Mining operations ceased in the late 1980's and the old two-story cabin was to be destroyed, when two unlikely heroes came forth to save the mine and its history. Steve Winslow, Fishlake National Forest Beaver Ranger District, persuaded management to remove the modern renovations and to let the historic structure of the 1890's remain standing.

Several years later, Max Reid, Fishlake Public Lands Staff Officer, sponsored a national volunteer crew working under the Passport in Time (PIT) program to open the area of the historic mine for access from the nearby Paiute ATV Trail. PIT volunteers and a Forest Service crew cleaned up the area surrounding the mine and built a ¼ mile interpretive trail around the site. The old cabin, stabilized by Brig's family a few years before, was in very good shape. (The mine itself remains closed due to safety concerns.)

When PIT volunteers and forest employees became aware that Brig's gravesite was no longer marked and that it wasn't even identifiable, they were motivated to correct history. Working with local historian Cleo Utley, Leonard was able to locate Brig's missing grave and the PIT crew collected donations to buy a tombstone. When the site was dedicated on February 19, 2005 descendants of Brig's from as far away as Las Vegas were in attendance. One hundred years and many tragedies and triumphs later, the story of Brigham Darger and his Silver King Mine had come to a close.

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PHOTO CUTLINES

DEDICATION—Descendants of Brig Darger gather on February 19, 2005 to dedicate the new headstone marking forever his gravesite. The monument was provided from the donations gathered by Forest Service volunteers.

HEADSTONE—Items that Brig Darger might have used are displayed with the new headstone marking his grave.

WEDDING PHOTO—Brig and Pansy Darger on their wedding day. (Photo used by permission of Joe Mason.)

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