

- Thomas Jefferson Thurston

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In 1848 Thomas J. Thurston was called by Brigham Young to help explore Cache Valley. Later he settled his family in Centerville where he farmed eighty acres of land.

Thomas Jefferson Thurston of Centerville, Davis County was the first known white man to recognize and evaluate the possibilities of settling in Morgan Valley. In 1852, he and his two sons were cutting logs in the mountains east of Centerville. Upon reaching the summit they looked down upon the beautiful valley to the east. The valley at that time was known as Weber Valley and later changed to Morgan. The little well-watered and well-wooded valley was in strong contrast with the hot, dry and almost barren Salt Lake Valley. Thurston felt that he must explore it, and finally persuaded two of his friends, William Porter and J. B. Nobel, to go with him. They camped in the valley for three days. It looked like paradise to them, with plenty of fish and game. The only great obstacle preventing the colonization of the valley was its inaccessibility. Entirely surrounded by mountains, there was only one narrow canyon entrance through which the Weber River flowed. The river had cut a gorge at each end of the canyon, forming natural barriers to the area.

Thurston would not give up his dream to settle the lush valley. He talked of it constantly with his friends. Finally in 1855 he was successful in persuading Charles S. Peterson, two of his sons, George and Andrew, and a son-in-law, Roswell Stevens, to attempt making an entry route into the higher valley through lower Weber Canyon. The small group of men were strengthened by the help of several others, Jedediah Morgan Grant provided three men with teams to assist in the difficult project. Using the most primitive tools consisting of shovels, picks, crowbars, and small plows they found the going exceedingly difficult. Devil's Gate, with its towering walls, had deterred travelers from using this route for many years.

These stalwart pioneers persevered and were finally successful in completing a crude, though passable, road into the valley. Thurston and his family chose to settle at the future town site of Milton. Originally it was called Thurstonville, then Morganville and finally Milton. Here Thurston built one of the finest farms in Morgan County. His descendants still own part of the original farmland. Here they welcomed other settlers into the area. Cabins were built close together as a fortification against the Indians. For a short period of time this was known as Thurston's Fort. Later Thurston moved to St. George where he spent his final years. He died in 1885 and is buried in St. George.

Thurston, Thomas (5:6)