

## **First White Men in Utah**

For long centuries, Utah, lying mostly in the Great Basin, was a mysterious wilderness, known only to savages and wild beasts that haunted its valleys, weird canyons or desolate deserts. The Spanish were settling California but were afraid Russia or England was trying to take it away from them. They needed an overland route from Monterey, California to Santa Fe, New Mexico to secure a defense of California.

### **Dominguez-Escalante Expedition (1776 - 1777)**

The first expedition to Utah by White men was organized with the purpose of finding the most direct route from Monterey, California to Santa Fe, New Mexico. Father Escalante, a Catholic Priest had been dreaming of a mission to the Indians for years, so when he was asked to go he considered it his golden opportunity. Father Dominguez was officially Escalante's superior, but actually he was a faithful follower of the more domineering Escalante. Ten persons including the two Fathers made up the company.

It was midsummer, July 29, 1776, shortly after our country declared its independence from Great Britain that the little band left Santa Fe, and two months later, September 21, when they crossed the divide and made their way down Spanish Fork Canyon, and caught a vision of the fertile Utah Valleys. Two days later they were on the shores of Utah Lake. Father Escalante described in his most remarkable journal very vivid and accurate information concerning Utah and its possibilities. They spent three days with the Indians at Utah Lake. The Fathers befriended the Indians and through an interpreter they succeeded in preaching salvation to them, converting many. The Indians declared that the Fathers must come and live among them and that the Spaniards might have all the land they wished to settle and build their houses upon. When they returned to Santa Fe the American Revolution had begun as a result of the July 4th signing of the Declaration of Independence. Since Spain joined the side of the colonists they had to wait to return and start colonies in Utah which they never did.

### **The Old Spanish Trail**

Although Father Dominguez and Father Escalante never did reach Monterey, California, other explorers and traders used part of their route as they traveled from Santa Fe to Los Angeles. This road or trail entered Utah near Moab, reached central Utah and turned south again. It exited Utah near St. George. It was named the "Old Spanish Trail."