

THE LAST VISIT

On July 12, 1887, President Wilford Woodruff made his last visit to his friends *William* and Rachel Atkin and their family at Atkinville, Washington County, Utah. This visit took place just before Wilford would become the Fourth President of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints. Atkinville had become a “second home” to Wilford for two reasons: (1) its **isolation** and (2) its recreation. During the era of Mormon polygamy, Wilford (alias Lewis Allen) came to Atkinville to avoid the authorities and also to enjoy the hunting and fishing on the man-made boating lake, which William had stocked with fish (chubs) from the virgin river, and also to enjoy Rachel’s great hospitality and cooking. So close was their friendship and frequent were the visits that William added a stone room to his house to be used by Wilford. Hence the room became known as the Wilford room. Wilford, his wife and children often stayed with the Atkin’s at this beautiful spot. At Rachel’s request, the subject of polygamy was never discussed in the Atkin home.

In this painting are woven stories of Atkinville. Little Nellie, whom Wilford affectionately referred to as “the Lady of the Lake,” is seen running toward Wilford. Rachel is nearby, and Mae is in her garden. Joseph is taking care of the sheep. Hyrum is standing near Wilford. John (Dack) has the wheelbarrow of watermelons, while the rest of the children are in the field. If you look closely you can see the Bloomington Broom factory in the background. William is waving to his dear friend. Over the next few years these two pioneers would write over 60 personal letters to each other.

William Atkin and Rachel Thompson joined the Mormon Church in Rutlandshire, England in 1852 & 1850, respectively. They married on December 18, 1854 and immigrated, traveling by ship, to America, where they settled in Pennsylvania. The young couple lived there for over four years. They joined the 8 Handcart Company and walked to the Salt Lake Valley, arriving on November 1859. They lived in Salt Lake City until 1868, when William was called to Dixie to work as a mason on the St. George Tabernacle and Temple. They settled Atkinville in 1877, where William began the ranching business, which has been passed on to succeeding generations. The Atkins moved to St. George in 1890, where William served as a temple worker until his death in 1900. Rachel followed him in death in 1903. Atkinville continued as a one-family village until circa 1905. Since that time, Atkinville has remained on the official maps of the area. Sun River Development has now transformed Atkinville into a beautiful residential development, including a championship golf course.

This painting is the culmination of the dream and efforts of J. Ralph Atkin, a greatgrandson of William and Rachel, combined with the artistic talents of the worldrenowned local artist, Roland Lee. The concept, research and painting took over four years to bring to canvas. (October 1998)