

by Guy Rocha, former Nevada State Archivist



That's right, Mormon Station in Carson Valley, Utah Territory, was renamed Genoa in 1855 not 1856! An excellent master's thesis written by Albert R. Page at Brigham Young University, entitled "Orson Hyde and the Carson Valley Mission, 1855-1857," set the record straight in 1970. Once again, the source of the error is the venerated *History of Nevada*, edited by long-time journalist Myron Angel and published by the well-established firm of Thomas Thompson & Albert West in Oakland, California in 1881. Virtually every Nevada history book since Thompson and West's publication has repeated the mistake.

Anyone who consults *History of Nevada* should read respected author David Myrick's excellent introduction to the 1958 edition to understand how the first history of Nevada came to be. In 1880, Thompson & West hired the equivalent of an army of editors, writers, and clerical staff to research, write, and publish the *History of Nevada* over a sixteen month period.

It was a tremendous undertaking fraught with logistical challenges. So much so that Angel after taking over the editorial duties from Col. Frank Gilbert and faced with the daunting task of editing the accumulated information, wrote that "[a] mass of material had been gathered by different parties from many sources, often conflicting, contradictory and irrelevant" Thompson and West, in praising the work of some of the contributors, went on to note, "[o]f those of our employees who proved themselves incompetent or recreant to the trust, and whose work required entire revision and rewriting, the less said the better."

Despite all of Angel's diligent double-checking of facts and copy-editing, errors crept into the history text. Myrick mentioned a number of them in the 1958 introduction. I identify many more inaccuracies in this and other myth-busting columns.

Angel claimed that Orson Hyde, Carson County's probate judge and one of the twelve apostles of the LDS Church, surveyed Mormon Station, made a town plat, and named the community Genoa in the spring of 1856. On the other hand, a letter dated September 30, 1855 from Hyde to church president and territorial governor Brigham Young announced that Genoa had been recently named:

They voted [on September 20] however for the very place which my mind was fixed as the most suitable place for the county seat. Consequently I am satisfied, and the people are satisfied, and I am relieved of the responsibility; and conscientiously confirmed and honored the vote of the people. It is named "Genoa," after the birthplace of Columbus, him who discovered this glorious land.

Hyde does not take credit for the naming of Genoa, although he is generally credited by others including Mormon Station founder John Reese in his memoirs (1884). Myrtle Stevens Hyde wrote in her biography *Orson Hyde The Olive Branch of Israel* (2000), "Orson surveyed the streets of Genoa....This gave him the distinction of naming the first town and laying out the first streets in what would later become the state of Nevada."

One uncorroborated story suggests that the location was named Genoa because of its similar appearance to Genoa, Italy's harbor and mountainous backdrop. While there appears to be some mystery surrounding the origin of the name, thanks to the good work of Albert Page we know that Genoa was named in 1855, and not in 1856. In the end, Page in writing his thesis had access to Orson Hyde's letters to Brigham Young housed in the LDS Church Archives in Salt Lake City. Myron Angel and his staff, ninety years earlier, were not as fortunate.

Photo: Nevada Historical Society; Orson Hyde (1805-1878) One of the Twelve Apostles of the Mormon Church, Hyde established the first official local government in Nevada in 1855, when Nevada was still part of Utah Territory.

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