

Name: Isaac Benjamin  
Born: 1803 Oct 20 Richmond New York  
Parents: Albert & Nancy Lord Baka. a  
Pioneer? Yes  
Spouse: Meribah Morison in 1823 / ~~Anna~~ Anna Tyler in 1834  
Married: 1823 1st - 1834 2nd  
Died: May 1881

ISAAC BEHUNIN

And The Naming of Zion Canyon

by J. L. Crawford

Some thoughts for a talk to be given at the Behunin Reunion at Rockville, Utah, September 11, 1998.

I am not going to tell you much about Isaac Behunin, the man, because I don't know very much about him. Most of what I know, or what I think I know, comes from the writings of Angus Woodbury and H. L. Reid. What they knew probably came from talking with one or more of Isaac's sons. At least this may be true of Angus Woodbury. A little information has come from new book has more about the man than I already knew. I will leave it to him or someone else to elucidate on the person while I try to describe the area, and the situation, into which Isaac came.

A good way to learn history is to read historical novels, provided the authors have done adequate research and are honest. In such cases writers have to put thoughts in the minds of the characters and words in their mouths. And I suspect that those two writers already mentioned were guilty of a little of that. According to Fenton [Moss], Isaac was a private man. So would he have communicated his thoughts to his neighbors? It appears, from the best sources we have that he had no formal education and couldn't read. However, that wouldn't have kept him from memorizing what others read to him and, being a religious man, he probably could quote many passages from the bible.

Both Woodbury and Reid have him reminiscing as he sat outside his cabin, looking at the imposing peaks towering above and thinking of those marvelous temples God had created, and was reminded of Isaiah 2:2:

"And it shall come to pass in the last days,  
that the mountain of the LORD'S house shall be  
established in the top of the mountains, and all  
nations shall flow unto it."

Zion isn't mentioned in that verse, but it is in the following one, but neither writer mentions the third verse which reads:

"And many people shall go and say, Come ye,  
and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD,  
to the house of the God of Jacob and he will  
teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his  
paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law,  
and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem."

So there we have "Zion" mentioned. You all know the story as it is told--that he felt these were God's temples, "Temples not built with hands," and here was his sanctuary where he was safe from his enemies so this must be "Zion." But the real Zion is up north where they are building a temple, so this is "Little Zion."

He must have communicated it to someone since that became the name which everyone in the nearby communities accepted.

Isaac Behunin may have been illiterate, but when the most "literate" men who ever wrote about Zion Canyon referred to him as the "the fierce Mormon zealot" he probably hit the nail on the head. Fierce he was in defense of his religion or he wouldn't have survived all those trials the Mormons went through. So call him a zealot if you like, however that term suggests fanaticism. But who knows? Anyhow, Clarence Dutton, who coined the term "Fierce Mormon Zealot" is said to have read everything he could get his hands on and that certainly included the Bible since he takes words from 2 Corinthians 5:1 which read in part " . . .an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens."

Fenton Moss, in his new book, points out that Isaac didn't worship those peaks that towered over his little farm, but he did consider them God's creations. And this reminds me of the time a reporter from Channel 2 came from Salt Lake City and did a little feature on Zion. It appeared to me that he was trying to get me to say these mountains are living things which we worship. I was a disappointment to him since I wouldn't say that, although, like Isaac, I have a feeling of reverence when I am among those lofty peaks. He had better luck with Clifford Jake the following day. This little series was run along with the news for three nights, and the third night they really hit the jackpot when a lady from Springdale, a newcomer to the area, admitted that the mountains were alive and that she communicated with them.

So much for the anthropomorphism of the rocks. What brought Isaac Behunin into this secluded spot? He settled first at Northrop, but moved to Springdale after the flood of January, 1862. The William Black family had moved there a while before. Isaac is said to have taken a look at the canyon on the suggestion of young Joseph Black. Taking a look and getting wagons and farm equipment up there were not the same thing, and here we will have to guess what Isaac was thinking. Was it just seclusion, or did he think the flat sandy bottom land would be easier to farm than the clay-laden soil of Springdale? Certainly getting the water out of the river and onto the land would be easier here than in any other place along the river.

To understand why the upper canyon was attractive and why it was so hard to get there, one needs to know a little geology. If you examine the foothills around Rockville, and especially Springdale, you will see most are composed of slump material, that is sand rock which has crumbled as it fell from the Cliffs. Many massive slips have occurred in the distant past. The most recent one is the "Sentinel Landslide" which dammed the river, creating a lake in the upper reaches of the canyon. It isn't known how long the lake existed, but long enough to deposit a lot of sand and clay, mostly sand, on the floor of the canyon. Eventually the river found its way over the earthen dam and in time the lake in the upper reaches of the canyon. It isn't known how long the lake existed, but long enough to deposit a lot of sand and clay, mostly sand, on the floor of the canyon. Eventually the river found its way over the earthen dam and in time the lake was drained dry. What you see today when you drive up the canyon is a very narrow canyon bottom for about a mile above the river bridge. When you get to the Court of the Patriarchs the canyon rides and presents a relatively flat bottom all the way to the Temple Of Sinawava. What an attractive place to live and farm, but how to get machinery there?

It is reported that Hyrum Morris, of Shunesburg, with a yoke of oxen, took a rear wagon axle and wheels, with a plow lashed on, up the south end of the Sand Bench (that great mass of slump material which dammed the canyon) and into Birch Creek. I don't know what he was doing there, he didn't stay. neither do I know how a yoke of oxen could get up the south end of the bench, not to mention pulling a load too. It is now a hard climb for a human. On the opposite side of the canyon, high above the road, you may still find fragments of an old road still in evidence. Once a road was built, it was always on the east side of the river and it must have been relocated several times. I have seen signs of the one high on the hill, but I remember the road as being lower down, but well above the river. It passed just above what is called Echo Rock. There is a picture taken by C. R. Savage in 1870, showing a buckboard on a road at just about river level, the location being near the Court of the Patriarchs. Maintaining the road was a problem as floods came not only down the river, but they also came down the hillsides in all the gullies.

Isaac's seclusion didn't last. He soon had two neighbors, William Heap and John Rolf, and I suppose there was room enough for all, although Rolf had two wives so he had to have two cabins. Other residents of Springdale and Rockville may have

farmed in Zion Canyon during this period, as they did after the three settlers had moved away, but Behunin, Heap and Rolf are all who actually lived there. Even so, reference is often made to the town of Zion, which was a branch of the Rockville Ward. I suppose you can call four households, with three heads of households a town. During the Blackhawk War the residents of Zion moved to Rockville on the orders of Brigham Young. Men continued to work the Zion Farms in groups until hostilities were over.

Isaac Behunin sold out to William Heap for 200 bushels of corn in 1872. Why he left isn't clear. It may have been because of age; he was about 68. It may have been because the river was eating away at his land, or he may have seen greener pastures elsewhere. He moved to Mt. Carmel where he and his wife rest, and where an elaborate monument has been erected to his memory.

Two years after Isaac left the Canyon, Rockville joined the United Order. Both Heap and Rolf moved to Rockville, signing their properties over to the corporation. The arrangement lasted only about a year, but those two Zion residents didn't reclaim the Zion property. Instead, they moved to Bear Lake and later to Star Valley, Wyoming. A few farmers in Springdale and Rockville continued to cultivate the Zion Canyon farms until after the turn of the century. In an aerial photograph, taken about 1923, one can see an orchard near the present site of the lodge. I remember a few straggling fruit trees in my time, but there is no sign of them now.

We can be thankful for Isaac Behunin and we wish we had a picture of him, and of his Zion cabin. Perhaps we should be thankful for the treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo which brought this part of the world into the United States. Remember that a group of Spaniards went through the area in 1776, promising the natives they would return and establish missions and presidios, which they intended to do. Had that happened, instead of Zion National Park it may have become HERNANDO'S HIDEAWAY.

## ISAAC BEHUNIN'S BAPTISM

### Isaac Behunin's Baptism:

Family tradition tells us that Isaac was baptized by Zera Pulsipher. I have read Zera's journals to see if there is any reference to who he baptized and didn't find any. However, when Zera and his family joined the Church, he very well could have baptized Isaac because of the close proximity to where he lived and his travels. Zera and his family lived in Spafford, Onondago, County, New York and then "moved 20 miles to Fabius" both of which are less than 100 miles from Richland, New York where Isaac was living. After Zera was baptized, he was left in charge of the Church and "he traveled and preached extensively through the Eastern States and Canada." Zera's history states that he baptized Wilford Woodruff. The most detailed story of Zera's early conversion to the Church is told by his wife, Mary Brown Pulsipher.

Zera and Mary were married August 1815 in Vermont. The following is her story:

We lived in Pennsylvania seven years. Did a great deal of hard work there, then left and moved to Onondaga Co. New York. There we heard the gospel preached for the first time by the Latter-day Saints. We went forth and were baptized in the year 1832 by Jared Carter. He baptized about twenty in that place. Then ordained my husband Zerah Pulsipher, and left him to preside over the church. He baptized more there. We stayed there about two years then moved twenty miles to Fabius. Then we all moved to Kirtland, Ohio. Stayed there four years. Zerah was ordained there one of the first seven presidents by the hands of Joseph Smith, the Prophet.

He helped build the Kirtland Temple. Got his endowments in it, then we were driven from the place with the rest of the Saints. We started in July 15th with a large Kirtland camp for Missouri. We all got there in the fall and went to Daviess County. My husband was one of the council that led the camp. We stayed in that place for one month; then we were driven from there by the mob. Then we went to Far West and stayed there through the winter. Then we had to go again. We started in March for Illinois. We stopped twenty-five miles from Nauvoo, in Bear Creek Woods.

The winter we were in Far West, Missouri, we had to part with our good old mother, Elizabeth Pulsipher. She was sick one week, and then died. The Day before she died, she lay looking up. I said, "Mother, what do you see?" She said, "Oh don't you see that light?" I looked but could not see any. The next day she saw it again over her bed. She said, "That is a light to light me through the dark folly of death." Then she feel asleep without a struggle or groan. I think she was eight-five years old.

We stayed in Bear Creek Woods. The First Presidency had gotten out of prison and out of Missouri. The Saints had begun to settle Nauvoo. They sent for us to move there. We went there and stayed, I think, five years. My youngest child, Fidelia, was born there. She was a very smart promising child, but we could not keep her only four years and three months. We were two years in going to Salt Lake. We lived there fourteen years and enjoyed great blessings there. We helped cultivate the barren desert and made it blossom like the rose. My husband was one of the city council most of the time we were there.

We were called to go to Dixie, 300 miles South and help cultivate another barren desert. We moved to Hebron and lived ten years. We have enjoyed great blessings, lived in peace, none to molest or make afraid, although we have had to part with some of our dear friends here.

Zera died January 1, 1872 at the age of 84 and Mary Ann died 7 May 1886 at age 88. Both are buried at Hebron, Washington County, Utah.

## Isaac Behunin Pioneer

---

Plaque A: (Front) ISAAC BEHUNIN EARLY MORMON PIONEER In memory of Isaac Behunin Mormon Pioneer Early Utah Settler credited with naming of Zion Canyon Isaac Behunin was born Oct. 20, 1803 in Richland, New York to Albert and Nancy Lord Bohana (Bohannon). He was involved in the thrust westward, frontierism and the religious revival of early America. In addition to being a farmer, he helped build the Erie Canal as well as other canals during the "Canal Craze" of the 1800s. He married Meribah Morton in 1823 and joined the Mormon Church in 1833. Shortly thereafter, he moved to Kirtland, Ohio to join the main body of the church. Meribah died in Kirtland, leaving Isaac three small boys to raise; Philo, Isaac M. and William. He married Elmina Tyler in 1834, and over the following 19 years they had nine more children. He knew the Prophet Joseph Smith and at times served as one of his body guards. He helped build the Kirtland and Nauvoo Temples. In 1840 he was ordained an Elder and later a Seventy and High Priest. He served a short mission to Iowa. He and his family suffered the losses, hardships and persecutions of the "driving of the saints" through Ohio, Missouri, Illinois and Iowa from 1833 until 1850 when he migrated to Utah. Plaque A: (Front) Isaac Behunin Memorial Committee List of names Plaque C: (South side) ISAAC BEHUNIN GAVE ZION CANYON ITS NAME Isaac was one of the early settlers in the Upper Virgin River Area. He settled at Northrup at the forks of the Virgin River in December 1861 with two other settlers. They lived in close proximity to a large clan of friendly Perrusit Indians with whom they learned to converse. He and his family lived in their wagon and a made-shift shelter while it rained for more than a month. The Virgin River became a raging torrent and washed away much of the farmable soil. In January, after the flood, he moved further up Zion Creek Fork, built a home, farmed and was one of the first settlers of Springdale. In the summer of 1863, he and his sons built a cabin, cleared some land and farmed in Zion Canyon near the present site of the lodge. They also maintained their home and farm in Springdale, where they spent the winter months. Isaac is credited with giving Zion Canyon its name, when in the presence of friends and the grandeur of the canyon, he said, "A man can worship God among these great cathedrals as well as he can in any man-made church; this is Zion." He was called "a fierce Mormon zealot" by the explorer, Clarence Dutton. In 1872 Isaac sold his farm in the canyon to William Heaps for 200 bushels of corn and moved to Long Valley. He died in May 1881 at age 78 and was buried in Mt. Carmel Cemetery. Plaque D: ISAAC BEHUNIN FIRST SETTLER OF EPHRAIM, UTAH Isaac and his family were sent to Provo within a few days after arriving in Salt Lake City in September 1850. His ten children were listed in the 1851 Utah Census as Philo, age 22; Isaac M., 18; William, 16; Andrew, 15; Alma, 13; Nancy, 10; Stephen, 7; Hyrum, 5; Elijah, 3; and Almina, 6 months. In 1852



Isaac moved to Sanpete County and was the first settler in Ephraim. He and his family lived alone on Pine Creek in a dugout during the winter of 1852. They farmed 40 acres of ground during the summer of 1853 and then were forced to Manti because of Indian trouble. Isaac and his sons served in the Sanpete Militia. They helped build "The Little Fort" and later, a larger fort in Ephraim. "Behunin's Ditch" ran kitty-corner through the little fort. Isaac and his sons also helped to build the small and the large fort in Manti. Isaac's son William was killed by Indians while serving a mission at Elk Mountain near Moab. His sons Isaac Morton, Stephen Mosiah and Elijah Cutler became well known early pioneers in Sanpete, Emery and Wayne Counties. Isaac lived in Sanpete County until 1861 when he was called to the "Cotton Mission in Southern Utah.

## Site Information

---

Location: S Hwy. 89  
MT. CARMEL  
KANE County

Grounds of Mt. Carmel School/Church, center of Mt. Carmel

## Marker Information

# MARKER TO HONOR ZION PIONEER

**Associated Press**

**Published: Sept. 14, 1993 12:00 a.m.**

A monument honoring Isaac Behunin, the pioneer who named southwestern Utah's Zion Canyon, will be dedicated Oct. 2.

The pyramid-shape granite memorial will be unveiled at Mount Carmel, said Fenton Moss, vice president of the Isaac Behunin Memorial Committee. The monument will contain three plaques detailing Behunin's life.

Behunin came to Northrup, now a ghost town in the Upper Virgin River area, in December 1861. In January 1862, he moved farther up Zion Creek Fork, built a home, farmed and was one of the first settlers of Springdale.

In the summer of 1863, he and his sons built a cabin, cleared some land and farmed in Zion Canyon near the present site of the Zion Lodge.

Behunin is credited with giving Zion Canyon its name when he remarked, "A man can worship God among these great cathedrals as well as he can in any man-made church. This is Zion."

In 1872, Behunin sold his farm in the canyon to William Heaps for 200 bushels of corn and moved to Long Valley.

He died May 1881 at age 78 and was buried in the Mount Carmel cemetery.