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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

This is part of an occasional series by the Sanpete County Travel and Utah Heritage Highway 89 Alliance on the people and places along U.S. Highway 89.

CLARION-CELEBRATING A LITTLE HISTORY

Casino Star Theatre Foundation

A little known episode in the history of Gunnison Valley will be celebrated on its 100th anniversary on September 10, 2011. Exactly 100 years ago on that day, a small group of Jewish settlers arrived in Gunnison, Utah to begin their short-lived experiment as would-be farmers in a village they named Clarion, out west of Centerfield on the high bench by Otten's dairy farm.

Ultimately, about 200 Jewish emigrants from Russia, then living in tenements in Brooklyn and Philadelphia, joined leader Benjamin Brown, who had attended a farming school in Pennsylvania to prepare him for his Back to the Soil movement. What he learned in Pennsylvania, however, where the land is lush and green and laced with rivers, hardly prepared his group for the dry, hilly, gravelly desert land. Although their Mormon neighbors helped with planting, irrigating, and threshing, they were unable to meet the payments on their land, and most left the area after five years.

Descendants of this unlikely group of Utahans' have visited over the years to explore their roots, many visiting Allen Frandsen while he was still farming there, and more recently, the Ottens'. Foundations of the original homes remain, and a few of the houses, which have been moved elsewhere in the valley, are still standing.

Several groups of Clarion descendants are expected among the visitors on September 10, along with others associated with the IJ and Jeanne Wagner Jewish Community Center in Salt Lake City. They will arrive at Gunnison City Park about 11 a.m. Gunnison Stake will host a lunch at the Stake Center at noon, followed by original musical numbers based on stories and oral histories from Clarion natives which will be presented by singers from Gunnison High School at the Casino Star Theatre at 1:30 p.m.

Then the visitors, and whoever else wants to join them, will travel the few miles to Clarion to walk the ground to see the Jewish graves and foundations, as well as the difficult terrain they tried to farm. A few strictly Orthodox Jews, who obey the rule against traveling by vehicle on the Sabbath (which for Jews is Saturday) will arrive in Gunnison on Friday and make a "pilgrim trek"—on foot—to Clarion.

The final event before boarding buses for return to Salt Lake City is a Sanpete Barbecue Turkey dinner hosted by Gunnison City at the new City Hall. Marinated turkey cutlets will be donated by Moroni Feed, a company established by none other than Benjamin Brown, the leader of the Clarion group. Brown's Utah Poultry Association also gave rise to the entire Intermountain Farmers Association chain.



Allen Frandsen of Centerfield and Liz Rosenberg of New Jersey, whose mother was born in Clarion, share stories by the historic Jewish graveyard.

For additional information, check out *The Other 49-ers*, *Back to the Soil*, and other books on Sanpete history. You might also talk to older residents of Gunnison Valley. For details on the centennial celebration, please call local contact Diana Spencer at 435-979-2798.