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Mormon pioneer remembered

By [Larry Weist](#)

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On a cold, cloudy morning under a threatening sky, 40 descendants and friends of Isaac Decker gathered Nov. 11 in Salt Lake City Cemetery to rededicate his grave and unveil a new headstone to the early Mormon pioneer whose first wife and two of his daughters became polygamous wives in the Young family.

Decker was born Nov. 29, 1799, at Taghkanic, Columbia County, N.Y.. He married Harriet Page Wheeler and they settled in 1820 in Phelps, Ontario County, N.Y., and had their first three children there: Lucy, Charles and Harriet. Although Phelps is only a few miles from the Hill Cumorah, birthplace of the LDS Church Restoration, there are no records connecting the Deckers with church founder Joseph Smith and his associates during those years.

Stevens Call Nelson, a great-great-grandson of Decker, dressed in period costume, gave a short life history of Decker. Richard B. "Andy" Anderson, a great-great-great-grandson, arranged the proceedings and gave the dedicatory prayer.

Anderson said the Decker family moved in 1827 to Freedom, Cattaraugus County, some 100 miles west, where Clara and Fanny were born. Here they were neighbors to Warren Cowdery, who presided over the local Latter-day Saints. When Cowdery took his flock to Kirtland, Ohio, in 1836, the Deckers joined the exodus and settled in New Portage, Ohio, although there is no record that they then were church members.

Apparently the Deckers joined the church in New Portage, Anderson said. Subsequently, they moved to Franklin, Ohio, where the fairly well-to-do Decker gave all of the family's assets to Joseph Smith in a vain attempt to save the Kirtland Safety Society, an unchartered bank founded by Smith. The failure of the bank caused great consternation among the Saints, with a large number leaving the church and speaking out against Smith.

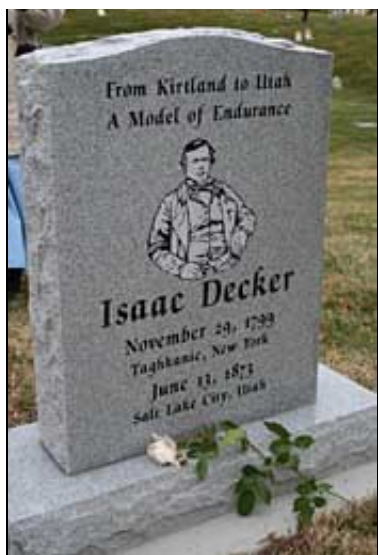
The newly impoverished Deckers stayed true to the faith, and, with the help of friend and neighbor Lorenzo Dow Young, Brigham Young's brother, they moved in 1837 to Missouri. "They bore a share in all Zion's trials and persecutions there and were eventually driven out, penniless, again, with the homeless Saints, settling in Winchester, Scott County, Ill., where Isaac Perry, their last child, was born in 1840," Anderson said.

By 1843, Isaac and Harriet had separated, most likely because of poverty,



Richard B. "Andy" Anderson, a great-great-great-grandson of Mormon pioneer Isaac Decker, speaks at the rededication of Decker's grave.

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A new headstone was placed at the grave.

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Anderson said, and Harriet became Lorenzo Dow Young's first polygamous wife. "There are competing stories on why they separated, and a story that comes from Orson Whitney said the split was amicable," Anderson said. "One story that comes down through the family is that when Joseph Smith asked Isaac for a contribution to the bank and he gave everything he had, Joseph told him not to tell anyone, including Harriet.

"Later, when Harriet found out about the practice of polygamy, she brought a teenage girl to Isaac and said she should be his second wife. She found out about the family's impoverishment when Isaac said he couldn't afford a second wife," Anderson said. "It's a plausible story, given Harriet's personality. There is evidence that she was grossly embarrassed by her father's lack of material success, and when it looked like her husband was going to be a failure, too, after being well off, she went next door and married Young." As Mrs. Lorenzo Dow Young, Harriet became the senior member of the first group of three white

women to arrive in Utah.

Decker stayed in the East, taking care of church business until he came to Utah in 1850. He prospered as a rancher in West Jordan and later settled in the Heber Valley and took five plural wives. He died in 1873 and was buried in the Salt Lake City Cemetery the next day. If his grave was marked then, the marker did not survive, Anderson said.

Anderson has a Web site, freepages.history.rootsweb.com/~timbaloo, that offers more information on the Deckers and other family lines.

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