Preface

Castle Valley is my home. Like thousands of other people who say that, I wasn’t born there. But my children were, and their father, and their grandmother, and assorted aunts, uncles, and cousins. We still have relatives living there, and even though we have been gone for a while, we still come back to visit. Everyone’s warmth and friendliness, the realization that we can always be ourselves because there’s no point in trying to fool anyone, always remind us that we belong in Castle Valley.

It’s hard to be honest about a place where one lives, to show it with all its defects and wrinkles and still reveal why it’s so special. I have done my best. There are stories I would have liked to put in but didn’t. Like the one about widow Isabella Birch Bryner, wrapped in quilts against the chill, riding an open flatcar to Salt Lake City to file on the land that became the Price townsite. Lynn Fausett even painted the scene in the mural in Price City Hall. But because Price became a town in 1892 and the 1900 census shows highly respectable Isabella with a two-year-old child, I don’t understand the whole story. Was the child adopted? When did Isabella become a widow? Was she a plural wife? Did the townsite filing take place after the town was officially created? Why the rush—who was her competition? Why did local historian Ernest Horsley, who knew all the people involved, write that her father filed on the land for the townsite? I don’t know the answers to these questions, and history has to make sense, or there’s no point in writing it. If someone else knows the answers, please let me know.

The stories included here serve a purpose: to show Castle Valley’s distinctiveness and, at the same time, how it reflected, shaped, or reacted to much of American history. This approach seems to fit a prevailing pattern which I just discovered while trying to select textbooks for next semester’s classes. In the same afternoon I read David Hollinger’s exhortation to globalize American history and “to speak to a nonprofessional public,” and Joseph Amato’s tribute to “local historians [who] provide a passionate attachment to concrete places.”1 I hope this book reflects both those ambitions to some extent. If I left out your favorite tale, write it down, honestly and factually. The Carbon County Journal is still in publication. The Emery County Archives is collecting all the local and personal histories it can get. Allan Kent Powell, a native of Huntington, now edits the Utah Historical Quarterly. Philip F. Notarianni, whose two grandfathers mined at Sunnyside,
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heads the Utah State Historical Society. Now is a great time for Castle Valley history.

This book has been in the making for over twenty-five years. Regrettably, many of the people who helped me have passed away and can no longer be adequately thanked. To others, I owe such a large debt that a mere acknowledgment will never repay it. Furthermore, I have not kept a consistent record of all of those who aided me. The list of those involved would be too long to set down here anyway, and I want you to read the book, not the preface. But you know who you are—and I hope you will find mention of your families, friends, bosses, neighbors, co-workers, and Castle Valley predecessors in this book, some of whose reminiscences have lain in my files so long I can’t remember where I got them.

However, I must mention my deepest gratitude to my husband, Bob, and my children, Darcy and Dashiell. Without you, I would never have called Castle Valley home.