The Significance of the Frontier, 1870–1882

_The whole region was essentially a territory primeval and . . . a railroad project under such conditions was fraught with the utmost difficulty. Returns on investment were, because of the sparsely settled region, very problematical to say the least._

—Arthur Ridgeway, Denver and Rio Grande Railroad

W_hat was the significance of a primeval frontier?_ Frederick Jackson Turner, the seminal western historian, decided the very existence of an American frontier, progressively “civilized,” created our national democracy. He imagined an orderly parade of types striding westward from the Appalachians, bringing “the process of civilization, marching single file . . . the Indian, the fur trader and hunter, the cattle raiser, the pioneer farmer.”

Like so much else in Castle Valley, local facts did not quite fit the theoretical pattern. By the time Turner’s parade reached Utah’s last frontier, the cowboys had gotten somewhat out of line and came at roughly the same time as—if not a year or two before—the hunter and trapper. They rode over the Wasatch Plateau and down through the Book Cliffs, driving restless livestock literally to greener pastures.

By the mid-1800s, several small herds of mustangs, descended from those which had escaped from generations of Spanish and Mexican horse traders, roamed the Swell. The animals drank from the San Rafael, the Muddy, and the countless little washes and springs that bubbled up in their season. They foraged on bunch grasses and brush that grew in lush, shaded corners among the broken rocks. Shortly after the end of the Black Hawk War in 1872, ranchers moved their herds into Castle Valley. The men often stayed to capture more horses; some became settlers. In very short order the railroad followed, bringing American industry to what had so recently been “a territory primeval.”
Castle Valley’s white settlement began with independent herders around 1875, part of a long American tradition. Throughout the American West from 1866–1886, legendary cattle trails spread from Texas northward to the extending railroad end-of-track pushing ever westward. When trailering ended in the late nineteenth century, ranching operations had spread over the entire United States, following the ebb of native peoples and the diminishing grasses trampled underfoot by expanding white settlement. American cowboys used techniques drawn from throughout the globe, including Spanish transhumance: moving animals seasonally to different climate zones. Texas provided Utah with the word “cowboy” (rather than the “buckaroo” used in Nevada) and the acceptance of absentee owners in the raising of open-range cattle. Ideas from the British Isles (by way of the midwestern U.S.) included raising sheep as well as cattle, another common local practice.

Well-known stockmen from Sanpete County, familiar with all these ways, arrived in 1874 or 1875 as individual entrepreneurs. They included Leander Lemmon, James McHadden, Knuck Woodward, Bill Gentry, Alfred Starr, the Neatherys, and the Swasey brothers: Joe, Rod, Charlie, and Sid. Michael Molen—who had a town named after him—came with his herds about 1875. They drove their stock east, down the wooded canyons cut by flowing streams that usually dried up in gulches sprinkled with alkali (still called “Utah summer snow”). They moved from canyons cut by Huntington Creek all the way south to Ivie Creek and out onto the Castle Valley plain. In the north, the Whitmores trailed their herds down through the Book Cliffs to Grassy Trail Creek in 1878.

The Swaseys were reputedly the first to push their own horses up on the Swell. Their independent natures mirrored the romantic vision of the cowboy, so inaccurate for the other youths who rode the cattle drives as wage workers for big-time ranchers. Nonetheless, they certainly were young when they came: in 1875 Charles was twenty-four; Sid, twenty-two; Rod, sixteen, and Joe, fourteen—years-old. Their lives in Castle Valley, to some extent, fit American romance. For example, Sid and Charley bet seventy-five head of cattle that Sid’s handsome saddle horse couldn’t jump across a spectacular gorge in the San Rafael Swell. Here, the San Rafael River cuts down fifty-eight feet through the limestone, leaving a canyon about fourteen feet wide with sheer rock walls. Taking a long run, Sid made it, won the cows, and the spot has been called “Sid’s Leap” ever since. At home in the Swell, the Swaseys later gave other names to its striking features, including Joe’s Office (the San Rafael Knob), Sid’s Mountain, and the rock formation, Joe and His Dog.

The federal government, too, wished to explore this last frontier. After the Powell surveys of 1869 and 1871, two more government parties mapped the area. First came Lt. George M. Wheeler, commander of the Army’s western geographical surveys from 1871–1878, allegedly chasing
“the prewar glories and fame of Captain John C. Fremont.”14 His Wheeler Survey traversed Castle Valley in 1873 roughly along Gunnison’s route. Two members of his party noted some of the local coal-bearing strata.15 The second surveyor, A. D. Ferron, was a Utah man with a contract from the federal government. In July and August 1873, his party surveyed the far southern end of Castle Valley and, in three ways, left his name on the land.16 First, perhaps tired of the hot, lonely work, one of his team said, “If you will let us duck you in this creek, you can have it.”17 He did, and his name went on the map as “Ferron’s Creek” (later without the possessive “s”). A town founded on its banks in 1878 bears the same name, as well as nearby Ferron Mountain.18 After their efforts, claimants could rely on federal law to acquire Castle Valley lands—if they wanted to.

According to historian Frederick Jackson Turner, movement west was a crucial step in American history, and the “growth of nationalism and the evolution of American political institutions were dependent on the advance of the frontier.”19 Nonetheless, at the time, Washington ignored Wheeler’s work as a duplication of that of more well-connected surveyors John Wesley Powell and Clarence King. Ferron’s survey escaped official notice. Powell indeed had an impact, albeit a negative one in a nation still reeling from the devastation of the wide-spread Panic of 1873. Powell observed that a 160-acre farm, allowed under the 1862 Homestead Act, provided insufficient land to sustain a farming family throughout most of the arid West. “Powell had swept aside hopeful fantasies about the West,” wrote historian David Wrobel, and “his report helped spark a land reform movement . . . . In 1879 a Public Land Commission was created for the purpose of apportioning the remaining lands in a more rational manner.”20 More cynically, historian William Goetzmann suggested that Powell’s report pandered to western ranchers in Congress, making it less than “a straightforward scientific report.”21

All the same, the existence of federal surveys marked a clear intention to claim the wilds of Utah. Saints, needing new grazing for their expanding herds and homes for their growing number of children, took another look at Castle Valley. First, Sanpete Mormons formed cooperatives and hired men to manage their livestock. They began with the Northern Sanpete Cooperative Institution in 1867, formalized in 1871 with a constitution and registered brands.22 When the School of the Prophets initiated the United Order of Enoch in 1874 (mandating pooling resources, sharing labor, and eating together), Sanpete Mormons adopted this system for managing their herds.23 In 1875, they leased their sheep to responsible men rather than hire employees. Orange Seely became the first lessee, charged with herding “sheep for three years and pay[ing] to the different owners annually one and a half (1½) pounds of wool for each sheep and at the end of three years deliver (13) thirteen sheep for every eight received.”24 He or others also leased cattle and perhaps pigs, although these contracts have
not survived.

In the winter of 1875–1876, Seely and about a dozen other men from the Mount Pleasant and Fairview United Orders drove over 1,500 head of sheep and 1,400 head of horned stock and eight yoke of cattle (probably oxen) east over the Wasatch Plateau all the way to Castle Valley. Those with him included his younger brother, Justus Wellington II (Wink) Seely; their cousin, David Randolph Seely, and two Indian pig-herders named Aub (English name Joseph) and Piggy. Aaron Oman cut the road for the two ox-drawn wagons as the herds laboriously struggled fourteen days to cross the forty miles into Castle Valley.25

Most of the Sanpete United Order group wintered together in a 20 x 30-foot dugout built by the two Seely brothers about one mile west of present-day Castle Dale.26 David Seely, however, got separated from the group and spent winter in the open, taking “my bed and food with me on a pack mule, and camped where night overtook me.” By early spring, he cut a startling (and probably smelly) figure, having donned roughly-sewn flour sacks in place of his worn-out pants and a cap of coyote skin, an animal he had killed himself but probably had not had time to tan. As the snow started to thaw on the Wasatch Plateau, he decided he could get out, and, still without any of the rest of his party, “went by the Salina Canyon. . . . It took me three days to get home.” Coming down into the settlements, David self-consciously tried to avoid others, sending the sisters of his first host into gales of laughter and frightening his wife, who slammed the cabin door in his face. After an argument, she finally recognized David and let him in.27 He soon learned that the United Order was dissolving, as most Utah Orders did in 1875 (although some in Sanpete County endured a year or two longer).28 David Seely reminded the unraveling institution of his four-year herding contract, and was bought out with the excess unbranded animals, some “170 head of cattle, [and] 300 head of sheep,” which he figured “paid up for all the hardship.”29

Living on the land as Seely had, independent trappers also entered the area. A handful of memories descend to us, including a local historian’s note that “some time after 1877 and before the first settlers came, Nathan Galloway shipped furs on a raft down the Price River.” Alleged by some to be the first navigator of the Colorado River (although the historical record notes a complete voyage by him from Wyoming to the Needles only in 1896–1897), Galloway “built a large dugout near the present location of Wellington and used it as a storehouse for his furs and also as his headquarters.”30 Other known trappers included “James Bean, T. H. Auphand, W. Wilcox and Tom Creek,” who found a great variety of peltry, including “beaver, bear, fox, panther, bobcats, timber wolf, and mountain lions,” according to old-timers’ recollections recorded by a local schoolgirl.31

Independent ranchers arrived in Castle Valley simultaneously with the others. For example, around 1875 Samuel Gilson established his ranch on
Ivie Creek. Like so many others, as a boy of fourteen, Gilson had joined his brother in the 1849 California gold rush, then had tried ranching in Nevada, where they claimed an entire valley (named for themselves), with a Wells Fargo station. In 1871, the Gilson brothers decided to drive their herds for sale in Kansas and got as far as Utah’s Sevier Valley, just south of Sanpete, where they stayed until 1875. Like so many others, they then drove their stock east over the Wasatch Plateau, starting their new ranch on the Castle Valley side. Farther north, the adventurous Swaseys moved permanently to Castle Valley, as did cattlemen William Gentry and Alfred Starr. Leander Lemmon, Pete Grant, and Reuben Miller brought sheep in from California. Miller and his brothers, James and Melvin, subsequently founded the largest stock raising company in Castle Valley’s history. Lemmon meanwhile partnered with James McHadden to develop the area along Huntington Creek, each filing a claim on 160 recently-surveyed acres from the federal government and digging an irrigation ditch at the mouth of Huntington Canyon (known as the McHadden Ditch, although he subsequently left the area). Lemmon eventually prospered; by 1897 he had an elegant brick residence worth $3,500, which endured into the twenty-first century as “among the finest surviving examples of nineteenth-century . . . residential architecture.”

Stockmen came slightly later along the north side of the Price River. The two Whitmore brothers, James (or “Tobe”) and George, began running some of Castle Valley’s largest cattle herds in an area called Sunny-side in the Book Cliffs, giving their name to the canyon just above it. They originally hailed from Texas, and had grown up in Salt Lake City and then in southern Utah, immersed in their father’s cattle business. After he was killed by a Navajo raiding party near Pipe Springs, Arizona, early in 1866, their mother brought the family back to Salt Lake City. Trailing their animals eastward from Sanpete County in 1878–1879, they established the northern Castle Valley livestock industry.

Departing even further from historian Turner’s list of romantic western types, local industrial development also began in the mid-1870s. In the winter of 1875–1876, John Nelson and Abram Taylor wintered in the Wasatch Mountains northwest of Castle Valley to hold coal land for its claimants, giving the area the name Winter Quarters. In 1876, merchant Milan Packard of Springville, Utah County (north of Sanpete), organized the Pleasant Valley Coal Company together with some Sanpete and Utah County men. They hired others to cut a wagon road south of Springville and up Spanish Fork Canyon to the coal deposit and to survey a nearby townsite. George Matson, one of their employees, later remembered driving the mine’s No. 1 tunnel, loading the coal in sacks, and packing it out by mule to wagons for the trip to Springville where it sold for $4.00 or $5.00 a ton. The round trip took four days and could not be made in the winter (when coal was most needed) because of deep snow. In June 1877, fifteen other men hiked
north to Pleasant Valley from their new coal mine in Huntington Canyon and dug additional coal from No. 1. An early winter compelled them to stay until February 1878. All these transportation difficulties convinced Milan Packard to build a narrow gauge railroad in 1879, following the route of his wagon road. Lacking specie, Packard paid both sub-contractors and workmen with calico out of his store, hence his line got the name Calico Road. Officially called the Utah and Pleasant Valley Railroad, it stretched between Springville and Thistle Junction in Utah County, then ran in a series of switch-backs up to the Pleasant Valley town of Scofield, named for railroad president Charles W. Scofield. Spurs then led to the Winter Quarters mines. While his industrial enterprise fit well with greater America’s concurrent Industrial Revolution, it served notice that Castle Valley, despite its recent settlement, did not represent a typical western frontier.

Far away, the pace of life quickened with events that would soon come crashing over Castle Valley’s protective walls. In the 1870s and 1880s, John D. Rockefeller, the oil magnate, was inventing the trust, a corporate structure designed to control all aspects of an industry. He soon achieved true vertical integration in oil, meaning that he controlled every step of the industry, from wells, to transportation, to refining, to retailing. Soon, many other businessmen would try to copy his success in every branch of industry—including Castle Valley coal. Meanwhile, Congress floundered, scarred by the 1872 Credit Mobilier railroad scandal and the so-called Salary Grab Act of 1873. Resulting instability caused the national Panic of 1873, thoroughly discrediting the ruling Republican Party while stimulating the cooperative United Order of Enoch back in Utah. Belatedly seeking railroad reforms, Congress impaneled the Poland Committee, chaired by upright Representative Luke Poland of Vermont. His reforming zeal soon turned to other causes, including Mormon polygamy, sponsoring the act signed into law on June 23, 1874. The Poland Act, largely written by Utah’s Liberal Party founder Robert Baskin, strengthened federal authority over district courts, granted further powers to the U.S. marshal and U.S. attorney, established a new jury selection process designed to ensure non-Mormon as well as Mormon participation, and granted the right of appeal of any polygamy case to the U.S. Supreme Court. Thus began the effective enforcement of federal laws against the LDS Church.

Besides, Brigham Young, who had led the LDS Church into the far West, planted it deeply in Utah soil, and nurtured it for thirty years, was nearing the end of his life. He sent an exploratory party east from Sanpete County in the summer of 1877 to identify viable townsites near potential farmland. Its members, Elias Cox, Benjamin Jones, John Cox, Elam Cheney, and Jefferson Tidwell (who had married Sarah Seely), would later become Castle Valley settlers. When they returned to Sanpete, they “gave a splendid report of the country bordering the three streams in the upper valley, but suggested it would be hard to control the waters.” Putting this matter
in its best light, on August 22, 1877, Brigham Young issued his last settlement call in a document that read, in part: “There are numbers of brethren in Sanpete County, who have not an abundant supply of water for their land, who would, no doubt, be happy to remove to a valley where the water is abundant and the soil good. We should like to have at least fifty families locate in Castle Valley this fall.” Then, the printed document was apparently posted. Ever since, in friendly rivalry, two versions of the Sanpeteans’ response have been repeated on either side of the Wasatch Plateau. In Castle Valley, people claim that those who could read showed their religious devotion by going. Sanpete residents say that the literate saw Castle Valley as the destination and stayed put. One week after issuing this call, Brigham Young died. Again, settlers on either side of the Wasatch Plateau expressed divided opinions: either the Prophet’s earthly work was finally done (the Castle Valley version) or he had just made his most serious mistake and needed to be “called home” (the Sanpete view).

Despite this pronouncement, no one rushed to settle Castle Valley. A month later, the interim church government repeated the call. Church authorities selected Christian Grice Larsen, a Danish convert and former bishop of Spring City, to head the Castle Valley Mission, but, for a while, he stayed put. Instead, Orange Seely became Castle Valley’s first resident ecclesiastical leader. In November 1877, he dutifully led a party of men to scout the best townsites in the part of Castle Valley they knew best, along Cottonwood Creek. The men made preliminary homestead choices (relying on federal, not church law) and Erastus Curtis built a log cabin, the first in Castle Valley. His sons, Erastus, Jr. and William, spent the winter of 1877–1878 there while their father went back to Sanpete County for his two wives and other children and eight other men. Seely spent the winter in the old herders’ dugout with six other men, hunting and trapping a host of animals including thirteen wolves in a single night.

Another 1877 group of pioneering Saints led by preliminary explorers Elias Cox, Elam Cheney, Jr., and Benjamin Jones, simply picked up and moved. Bringing family members (some of them polygamous), they traveled northeast to Thistle, then down Soldier Canyon, cutting a new road east of the old Gunnison trail and across the Price River. As much as possible, they tried to follow the land’s contours, naming sites along their way: Sagebrush Bench, bumpy Washboard Flat, and Poison Spring Bench (for the horrible alkali water there). As they crested the last hills northeast of their chosen site on Huntington Creek, they saw below a flock of sheep tended by two lonely herders, Warren and Marion Brady (nineteen and twelve, respectively). As the boys dashed to the river to see who the settlers were, Rosannah Brady Jones, married to Cox’s nephew, was astonished to spot her two little brothers. Elam Cheney rode back to Fairview to lead more settlers, and the women brought their spinning wheels, knowing that they could get wool to spin. Like the other settlers before them, they strung
out along the creeks where they could get farms started instead of founding the traditional, organized town touted as the hallmark of LDS settlement in every other area.\textsuperscript{51}

To the south, on Cottonwood Creek, families arrived only in 1878, and late in the year at that. Wink Seely felt pressured to take up the land he had claimed for his homestead before another man settled it, so packed up his very pregnant wife and a special nurse to make the ten-day trip. After a week of jolting over the Wasatch Plateau, Anna Eliza Reynolds Seely went into labor a few days short of the settlement. Healthy little Clara, their first daughter and third child, was born in Cottonwood Canyon. Both mother and baby survived, and that December, Wink made a special trip to Salt Lake City to file a formal homestead application.\textsuperscript{52} His older brother, Orange, despite his initial leadership role, was one of the last to come that
fall. He may have tarried in Mount Pleasant to comfort his wife, Hanna Olson-son Seely, a Swedish immigrant. Like many other European converts, she had already crossed an ocean and most of a continent, learned a new language and adapted to a new culture and religion, which may have seemed like quite enough. By 1878, they had nine children and a lovely home, two city lots and nine acres of farmland which she hated to leave. In October Hanna had a trying, two-week journey across the Wasatch Plateau and when she arrived in Castle Valley saw nothing but a straight stretch of road between Wink’s dugout and their own log home. She said, “Damn the man who would bring a woman to such a God forsaken country!” She had never sworn before. Likewise, Danish immigrant Ellen Anderson Miller, the wife of fellow Dane, Neils Peter Miller, was equally disillusioned. When Neils pulled up their wagon in front of his dugout on Cottonwood Creek in the summer of 1878, Ellen moaned, “Has it now come to this, that I have to live under the ground?” Neils rose to the occasion and by Christmas of 1879 they had the largest house in the area—15 x 21 feet (with a dirt floor)—and consequently hosted many local dances.

To sustain their farms, settlers inaugurated irrigation systems on Castle Valley’s thin perennial waterways. Men began the Huntington North Ditch in 1877, followed by the Avery Ditch that later reached the new town of Lawrence. Another ditch tapped Ferron Creek beginning in 1878. Its handful of founders—Larsens, Pettersons, Taylors, and Wrigleys—had arrived in November 1877, grew a little wheat, and were joined by others in 1878. That fall, all of the women went home to Sanpete except Ann Singleton Wrigley. She was a plural wife, and decided she would rather stay in Castle Valley with her small children (the oldest, Clara, aged five) than go back with her husband to fetch his other wife. He (and his other wife) returned with a group the following spring. The men tried to cut an irrigation ditch, but had only one plow, a pick, and two shovels. They jerry-rigged a new plow from a forked cedar stump weighed down with a big rock pulled by two oxen. The wind blew steadily; animal feed grew two long miles up the canyon; their ditch silted in and had to be re-dug; the only local material they could find for a dam was prickly pears. Ellen Larsen, the wife of J. F. Larsen, remembered regularly collecting buckets full of fish trapped in the canal’s muddy pools and sodden debris after the annual spring flood.

Meanwhile, Jefferson Tidwell, belatedly following Brigham Young’s call, led his oldest son, William Jefferson, and fourteen others to an area along the Price River in 1879. They dug cellars for shelter from summer’s relentless heat and raised some grain. Although some wanted to call this new place Jefferson, either Tidwell or his wife, Sarah Seely Tidwell, recommended that it be named Wellington, after her brother, also known as Wink. In the fall, the community stored the harvest for the next spring’s planting, dammed the river preliminary to irrigation work, and went home to Sanpete County for the winter. The following spring, much of their hard
Jefferson Tidwell and Sarah Seely Tidwell, founders of Wellington, named the town after Sarah’s brother, Justus Wellington (Wink) Seely. Courtesy of Western Mining and Railroad Museum.
work washed away in the annual flood—just as the men had predicted after their 1876 reconnoitering expedition.60

While all these people struggled to establish themselves, residents sought a federal mail route—their first overt governmental action, prompted more by painful isolation than an attempt at American democracy. The Post Office granted their petition in 1878, establishing a star mail route along the Gunnison Trail from Salina, Utah, to Ouray, Colorado. At that time, Wilsonville was the only so-called settlement on the 250-mile trail through Castle Valley. It owed its establishment largely to two sizable families who had chosen the same area: the Wilson brothers (George, Nick, Chris, Davis, Silas, and Sylvester, who became the mail carrier) and the Swaseys (Charles Swasey, Sr. and his siblings Rodney, Joseph, Frank, Dudley, Lena, and Hannah Rose).61 Settlers scattered farther west along Huntington and Cottonwood Creeks had to travel to Wilsonville to get their mail, a tiring and tedious process. The following year a committee petitioned the Post Office Department for another post office at what they called Castle Vale on Cottonwood Creek, about five miles west of Wilsonville. The government granted their petition effective June 1, 1879, but changed the name of the site to Castle Dale. Store-keeper John K. Reid became the first postmaster, but for almost five months he still had to go to Wilsonville and sort out the mail for his jurisdiction. A town started to cluster near his store, and the growing ascendancy of Castle Dale over Wilsonville led to the mail route’s rerouting. By 1880, the mail route, in addition to serving Wilsonville, wound through a series of new towns with post offices: at Ferron, then to previously established Castle Dale, then to Huntington, and on across the gullied, alkali miles to Blake, over on the Green River.62

Blake and many other Castle Valley towns had been settled in that general land rush of 1878. Always rather isolated from the rest of the settlements, it grew on the banks of the Green River at the site of the only significant ford for miles, in use since prehistoric times. Established initially under the leadership of Thomas Farrer, his sons, and a handful of others, the town had had a distinctive beginning. Farrer, allegedly of English landed gentry, was not motivated by the church call but instead “wanted to get as far away from civilization as possible and there is little doubt that Greenriver [as Blake was later known] in those days filled the bill; the only person here being Mr. Blake who used this crossing as a station on the mail route from Salina to La Sal [further southeast].”63 In 1879, J. T. Farrer opened a general store in Blake; a year later, Thomas Farrer became the postmaster. Others arrived, and in 1880, like every other Castle Valley community, seventeen of Blake’s citizens formed an informal group called the Blake City Water Ditch Company. They installed a brush and rock wing dam on the Green River, and paid each man who brought a team of either horses or oxen $2.50 a day for labor. Thus, the town hung on, until a brand new railroad would put it on the map of spreading commerce.64
Meanwhile, other Mormons had arrived farther north. Led by Caleb Rhoades, who had learned boyhood pioneering skills in the California gold rush, settlers outside the church call had come south down the Price River Canyon. After his California sojourn, Rhoades had worked as a prospector, trapper, and boarding house owner in a western Utah mining town, working there with his wife, the former Malinda Powell. Around 1875, Rhoades had returned unexpectedly from hunting and discovered his wife with Joseph Gammage, which eventually led to divorce. Malinda and Gammage then married and took Caleb’s three surviving children to live with them in distant Green River. Despite this, Caleb remained on good terms with his former brothers-in-law, Abraham Powell (Malinda’s younger brother) and Frederick Empire Grames, who had married Malinda’s sister. In the winter of 1877–1878, the forty-one-year-old Rhoades and nineteen-year-old Abraham Powell explored along the Price River, and Powell left behind a cabin he built when they went back to Salem, Utah County, that spring.

Meanwhile, bachelor James Davis Gay had arrived in January 1878, and became the only settler in Castle Valley’s northern reaches when Rhoades and Powell left. Powell never made it back to Castle Valley; he died after being maulled by a bear late in 1878. “In the early part of 1879 Caleb Rhodes [sic], Frederick Empire Grames, and Charles Grames left Salem and made their way over to the North West corner of what was then known as Castle Valley and made their abode on the Price river, arriving on the 21st day of January 1879,” reported Ernest Horsley, one of Rhoades’s later neighbors and friends.

Shortly thereafter, the Powells came. According to Horsley’s reckoning, March brought William Z. Warren, Robert A. Powell of Salem (another of Malinda’s brothers) and William Davis, among others. A Powell sister came, too: Martha Ellen Powell Grames, the wife of Frederick E. Grames, to join her husband. Another Grames brother, Alfred, came about the same time. John Amon Powell, who had been on the ill-fated bear hunt, came on April 1 with his wife, Sarah Jane Plumb Powell. “She was the first woman on the river,” wrote Horsley, “but Martha E. Grames who came June 6 always disputed this.” This tiny handful of individuals spread out along the Price River, each family finding a likely spot. As the earth began to thaw, they and others took the first step in founding a farming settlement—surveying irrigation ditches. Fred Grames, a talented jack-of-all-trades, made the level from a coal oil can with a small lamp chimney placed at each end to allow the surveyor to look over the top of the water, balanced on a tripod of cottonwood sticks. “[W]ith this instrument the Rhoades ditch (Pioneer No. 1) was surveyed for about two and a half miles,” wrote Ernest Horsley, as was “the Fred Grames ditch (Pioneer No. 2) for almost the same distance.” A touchy instrument, this home-made level could only be “used well when [the] wind [was] not blowing too hard . . .,” a rare day in the chilly Castle Valley springtime. In short, while these northern Castle Valley settlers all
belonged to the LDS Church, they acted like typical pioneer Americans, traveling with family, choosing sites by individual taste, not clustered in the confines of a typical Mormon town nor led by any ecclesiastical authorities. They thus added flexibility to what would become the most distinctive corner of a highly distinctive state.

In many ways, the individualistic nature of at least some Castle Valley settlements was hardly surprising, as all these tiny clusters of humanity lived virtually isolated from one another, forced apart by an inhospitable environment. People got on as best they could, while few others rushed to fill up the spaces between the far-flung dwellings. As if to underscore the residents’ isolation, the weather soon turned particularly nasty. The winters of 1877–1878 and 1878–1879 had been mild, allowing easy travel and town-building. Then drought and cold arrived. According to Ernest Horsley, in September 1879 the Price River got “so low [it] could be stepped over in many places.” Next came the grasshoppers. Ferron’s John Lemmon made a hurried trip to Manti to buy chickens to eat the ‘hoppers; by the time he got back, all the insects had left, gorged on the community’s crop. Livestock fared no better. Lemmon and John Duncan had earlier driven over 2,000 head of cattle from Sevier Valley. In the winter of 1879–1880, all of them died.

Others’ plans also foundered in Castle Valley’s climate swings. Along Cottonwood Creek, a new company of settlers had arrived in mid-1879, including the Jewkes family: Samuel and his sons and a daughter-in-law. Earlier that year, the Jewkes men “had formed a sort of united order copartnership before removing to Castle Valley,” and eagerly awaited parts for a grist mill being hauled over from Fountain Green, Sanpete County. The machinery had to be dismantled, which took time, and it was November before the struggling ox teams could cross the Wasatch Plateau, now under two feet of snow. These burr mills used horsepower for grinding, but only three “teams were able to pull the sweepstakes for the mill . . . [and they] were kept busy chopping grain, which was used for man and beast.” More ominously, as the winter progressed, the snow deepened throughout Utah.

During that terrible winter, the people remaining in Castle Valley felt absolutely cut off. Along Cottonwood Creek, “no one could be found to volunteer to haul Christmas goods, even at 10 cents a pound for freight from Manti.” Finally, four local merchants started out, abandoning their wagon on the east side of the Wasatch Plateau to struggle up Salina Canyon through eight-foot drifts. They bought goods and came back, leading three pack horses, one of which tumbled off a fifty-yard-high ledge spilling the group’s small keg of liquor. The men arduously dug out the horse, readjusted the pack, and then ate some of the liquor-sodden snow. Instead of revitalizing, it numbed them, so they force-marched on to their wagon and made it back to Castle Valley with Christmas treats and kerosene to light the chilly dwellings all along Cottonwood Creek.
Despite this brief holiday respite, the weather did not let up. As 1880 began, Castle Valley settlers began to run out of flour. Someone managed to get word of impending starvation back to Manti in late April, when, despite “deep snow and drifts, 6,500 pounds of flour were brought back [to Castle Valley] and distributed.” Even then, as a local history put it, “Hunger was not unknown.”79 Pioneers on Huntington Creek, probably using the road they had cut coming in from the north, raided the cache of grain and goods that other Saints had left on the Price River at Wellington. When the Tidwell party returned in the spring of 1880, after spending that horrible winter in Sanpete County, they not only found their dam washed out but their seed and other foodstuffs eaten. They scattered along the Price River, relying on hunting to eat. Fortunately, game remained plentiful in the nearby Book Cliffs to the north, so the men took a wagon up Whitmore Canyon and came back with one hundred twenty deer. Jefferson Tidwell hung them in his granary, and all the local settlers could help themselves.80

Hunters going out for food had to pick their way through a veritable boneyard. Cattleman Dan Parker, interviewed sixty years after the fact, recalled, “The winter of 1879 and 80 was a tough one. . . . I saw horses and cows standing up, dead, and frozen stiff as icicles.”81 The valleys of the Price River, Huntington, Cottonwood, Ferron, and Muddy creeks gave off the stench of death as the thawing carcasses of cattle and horses rotted in the sun.82 In newly-settled Lawrence, residents had had no feed for their livestock, so had turned them loose in the foothills. By spring, only one team and a heifer had survived.83 Still, hope returned. As one man remembered, “The next spring the grass came back so thick it would drag your stirrups.”84

The harsh winter had also weakened Castle Valley’s ties to Sanpete County. In real terms of travel time and difficulty, the distance “back home” had seemed greater than ever. Consequently, a three-man committee—Emanuel Bagley, Elias Cox, and John K. Reid—carried a petition with 316 signatures to the territorial legislature requesting the creation of Castle County. Opposing the measure, Warren Peacock arrived with a petition signed by twenty-six others. Supporting the majority, the territorial legislature granted Castle Valley political autonomy in 1880. Rejecting the requested name, however, the legislature opted for Emery County after the outgoing territorial governor, George W. Emery. Popular for his fair treatment of Mormons during his 1875–1880 tenure, this graduate of Dartmouth College and former law partner of Benjamin Butler (later a presidential candidate) was then in Washington, seeking re-appointment. Instead, Congress replaced Emery with Eli H. Murray, a man far more hostile to the Saints, in a move indicative of shifting national attitudes toward Utah.85

This shift resulted largely from the Reynolds case, billed by historian Edward Leo Lyman as “a turning point in the history of the territory.”86 The case had begun in 1874 when George Reynolds, Brigham Young’s
secretary, agreed to be the defendant in a test case intended by the Saints to overturn the 1862 Morrill Anti-Bigamy Act. Reynolds’s second wife willingly provided testimony convicting him. Although his first conviction was overturned on a technicality, the second case went to the Supreme Court. In January 1879, the unanimous decision firmly established polygamy as a federal offense. While Congress studied a host of anti-polygamy bills (none successful), and President Rutherford B. Hayes asked Congress to deny citizenship to Utah residents until they renounced plural marriage, privately federal officials offered leniency to the Saints if they would renounce this illegal practice. President Hayes, in particular, courted national support. He had won the presidency in the confused election of 1876, when the national electorate (including Utah Territory), fed up with Republican scandals, seemingly selected his Democratic opponent. An extra-constitutional committee shifted twenty disputed electoral votes, however, electing Hayes by a one-vote margin. In 1880, Hayes visited Utah on one of his several railroad tours designed to strengthen the presidential office. Although Governor Murray apparently sought to isolate the President from the Saints, even positive contact would have made little difference. Back in Washington, the political ball was already rolling. Once Hayes returned to Washington, he joined a growing number of federal officials who supported denying the right to vote, sit on juries, and hold office to polygamists and to those who supported the practice, meaning all members of the LDS Church. Under these circumstances, Castle Valley’s remoteness took on a new appeal.

These threatening circumstances prompted further formal organization for Utah’s last frontier. Completing Emery County’s creation, Utah’s legislature named Castle Dale as the county seat and appointed three men (also LDS leaders) as county selectmen, Elias Cox, Jasper Petersen and William Taylor, who, in turn, appointed other county officials until elections could take place the following August. That same month, LDS Apostles Erastus Snow, Brigham Young, Jr., Francis Lyman, and Sanpete Stake President Canute Peterson, came into Castle Valley. They rendezvoused at Wilsonville on August 23 and shortly thereafter held an LDS conference at Wink Seely’s homestead, choosing the same initial selectmen as bishops of the local wards. Privately, Lyman recorded his views of Castle Valley: “the more of such land a man possessed himself of, the poorer he would be.” He also objected to the scattered nature of the settlement on Cottonwood Creek, with every man “located upon his quarter section,” in accordance with U.S. homestead laws. But, in an open letter published in Salt Lake City’s Mormon newspaper, the Deseret News, Lyman wrote, “the grass that once was plentiful has vanished before the flocks and herds that have pastured in this region. Good water, good land, and fine climate are inviting the industrious husbandmen to come and make desirable homes for good Latter-day Saints.” After traversing Castle Valley and crossing the Green
River, Lyman wrote another open letter to the *Deseret News*. He recounted the counsel given the brethren along Cottonwood Creek that they gather in towns. This directive had resulted in the establishment of two town sites (originally called Lower and Upper Castle Dale) in place of their scattered farms. First, the authorities had approved the site of (Lower) Castle Dale, chosen by Orange Seely, the leading resident (who had just been released as bishop). Further upstream, they had told settlers to cluster on John Reid’s townsite, where Reid maintained the (Upper) Castle Dale post office in his store. But they named Reid’s town Orangeville, after Orange Seely, who lived downstream in Castle Dale, where the post office was not. (Yes, this arrangement is confusing, but it has lasted to the present.) Then Lyman recounted how he and his party went on to Green River City (Blake). Lyman noted “a large tract of country on each side of the river for miles up and down, covered with cottonwood forests and good land beside to make homes and farms for 100 men ‘chock full of a day’s work.’” He also mentioned “rich coal mines within 15 miles,” possibly the first LDS Church recognition of Book Cliffs coal, which would play such a significant role in the history of Castle Valley.

That coal certainly interested William Jackson Palmer, a Civil War veteran with strong commercial ambitions. In 1870, he had incorporated a new Colorado railroad, the Denver and Rio Grande Railway Company (D&RG). As its name suggested, it began at Denver and originally headed toward the Rio Grande River, thence to El Paso, with an eventual intention of reaching the Pacific. These plans faltered when a rival line, the irrepressible Atchison, Topeka, and Santa Fe (AT&SF or Santa Fe), won rights to the single passageway south through Raton Pass in 1878. Two months later, the AT&SF tried to strangle its rival on the westward path through Colorado’s Royal Gorge, but this time the Rio Grande won in the courts. This result freed Palmer’s line, feisty but financially troubled, to build westward, into Utah. This altercation also represented just a fraction of the struggle between giant, national corporations, particularly railroads, which would help shape transportation struggles in Castle Valley.

In short order, the Rio Grande was hiring all the men it could get to press on before railroad rivals drove it further toward the wall. It had to build quickly to secure coveted routes, so between the fall of 1879 and the spring of 1881, the railroad shipped thousands of laborers to its scattered grading camps strung along the newly-chosen route in Colorado and Utah. According to its construction manager, the Rio Grande was paying the highest wages ever offered for railroad work in Colorado. For a while, agents even advanced fares to workers, many of whom quickly deserted, causing losses of over $30,000 in 1880 alone. Negotiations with Utah Mormons led to a promise of 2,000 laborers for that fall, 300 of whom promised to bring their own teams. Among these was seventeen-year-old George Storrs, who persuaded his education-loving father that working on the D&RG in
Colorado offered a better future than study at Brigham Young Academy. Traveling with a friend, he drove his wagon through Castle Valley in 1880:

We went through Spanish Fork Canyon through what is now known as Colton, then through Emmas Park down to what is now Price. At that time there was one house in Price. There was no town of Helper, and no railroads through that country.95

He correctly assessed the empty landscape: in 1880 only 556 settlers lived along the entire Castle Valley corridor.96 Storrs, later a coal boss in the area (he would even have a town named for him), then jolted on to help lay the steel tentacles driving westward toward Utah’s last lonely region.

Other men also answered the call for men and teams. Contractors Joseph Smith Black and his brother, William, hired 75 teams with drivers to grade twenty-five miles of roadbed along the proposed route, initially intended to head up coal-bearing Salina Canyon to the west of Castle Valley. In the 1800s, railroads and coal were inextricably linked. Trains needed coal, especially where wood was scarce, such as across barren Castle Valley. Symbiotically, commercial coal development needed railroads, since coal sold by the ton, and vast quantities had to be moved to market to realize a profit. Therefore, the Rio Grande’s original route roughly followed the southern branch of the Old Spanish Trail, entering Castle Valley’s east side near the 39th parallel at Blake, on the Green River, and exiting the valley through Salina Canyon on the west, cutting through the tiny southern settlements.97 During the spring and summer of 1880, the Blacks’ men and teams cut fifteen miles of roadbed within Castle Valley itself, moving out of the valley to Thompson’s Springs, forty miles east of Green River, to continue working there as fall came. At the same time, in order to connect with the heart of Utah at Salt Lake City, the D&RG’s chief construction engineer, M. T. Burgess, surveyed an additional route north up Price Canyon, following the path the Rhoades Party had taken when it came south to colonize. Joseph Black went along with Burgess to survey the Price Canyon route while the teams he had hired worked tirelessly to the southwest.98

Suddenly, with their camps and teams moved and thousands of dollars of supplies on hand, the Blacks received word that the head office had decided to halt all construction. The front office was debating a change of route. Officials had just learned that the Union Pacific, through the Utah Central Railroad, was maneuvering to monopolize the valuable Winter Quarters coal deposits. The D&RG therefore hastily made overtures to Milan Packard and associates, founders of the Pleasant Valley Coal Company. Pleasant Valley coal, when tested by Rio Grande geologists, proved more accessible and of higher quality than the deposits in Salina Canyon. These northern coal beds were also on a direct line to the Salt Lake City market.
D&RG officials promptly contemplated rerouting their road. While corporate arrangements hung fire, further construction had to wait.

Consequently, in a December 1880 meeting at the mouth of Price Canyon, Chief Engineer Burgess reluctantly asked the Blacks to discharge all their teamsters. Stunned, the Blacks pointed out that they had just moved the work camps and had bought thousands of dollars of unused supplies. Without the railroad contract, they were ruined. Burgess sympathized but said their only appeal lay with the railroad’s chief officer, General Dodge, due in Salt Lake City the following day. Since some forty snowy miles lay between Price Canyon’s mouth and the nearest train connection to Salt Lake, there was no hope.

With everything at stake, Joseph Black decided to ride. While he drank a bracing cup of coffee, William saddled their best horse, Prince, for the long trip. They started up the intervening 7,500 foot pass, the road sometimes three to four feet deep in drifted snow. “It was bitter cold,” Black remembered. “At daybreak I gained the summit . . . 9 miles from the station.” Prince seemed to understand the urgency of his forced, all-night ride and he “flew over ravines, rocks, and hollows . . . [as] the cold morning almost pierced me to the marrow.” Still two miles short of the station, Black heard the whistle of the approaching train. Urging Prince to his utmost, they clattered in just as the train began pulling away. “The horse was as wet as he could be. I threw the lines to the proprietor . . . and said, ‘Take good care of Prince.’” Jumping on the very last of the cars, an exhausted Joseph Black rode on to Salt Lake City.

Black got his interview with General Dodge, who listened attentively and then referred him to another official, George Goss. Black demanded ten thousand dollars in damages for the broken contract, as well as the right to return to work with some of the teams. Goss noted that the railroad would not need to build on the grade for at least one year, and began to figure. The men both remained silent for half an hour, accompanied only by the scratch of Goss’s pencil. Finally, Goss raised his head and said, “’Mr. Black, you should not have it.’”

“’Well,’ said . . . [Black], ‘money is power; what will you do?’ He answered, ‘I will give you $9,994 and you can go back with 20 teams.’”

As Black soon learned, rather than pay damages which might make the railroad liable for payments every time it altered its route, Goss had changed the initial rate of pay. He raised the amount due for scraper work already performed from fifteen cents to twenty cents a yard and so on throughout the old contract. Goss also agreed to a payment of $3,000 for the immediate emergency, giving Black a check for that amount. Joseph Black quickly telegraphed his brother, William. Their fortunes were saved.

The two arranged to continue grading the railroad route at a much-reduced pace.
remained unclear. Railroad officials now seemed to favor turning the route northward, toward the larger towns along the Wasatch Front which would provide a healthy market for its services. In order to climb the heights out of Castle Valley, however, the railroad needed a local supply of coal, such as it had already located in Salina Canyon. Thus, grading slowly continued along the line toward Salina Canyon in southern Castle Valley, as railroad officials pondered where to build. Meanwhile, M. T. Burgess, who bore direct responsibility for the decision, teamed with a company geologist, Ellis Clark, Jr., who traveled along the Book Cliffs in an attempt to locate more convenient coal deposits near the Price River grade.

A few locals had preceded Clark and found what he was seeking. The first now known was Charles P. Johnson, who had originally built the first log cabin in Muddy (later the town of Emery) in 1879 and then moved north and helped dig the Price River Pioneer Ditch No. 2 alongside Fred Grames, John Amon Powell, and others. In March 1881, Johnson brought his family to northern Castle Valley and, in the words of Ernest Horsley, “dug the first coal at Castle Gate which he used to sharpen everyone’s boots with during [the] 1881–1882 RR construction. A man named Black took up the claim afterwards.” In fact, both the Black brothers, William and Joseph, acquired areas of the infant Castle Gate mine, as did engineers Mellen and Kerr. When geologist Clark encountered this known coal outcropping, he sent a long, technical description to D&RG President William Jackson Palmer incorporating pen-and-ink drawings of the coal horizons (vertical cross-sections). The best outcrops, he concluded, were at the junction of the Price River and Willow Creek, about eight miles north of the Rhoades party’s settlement. He added, “None of the coal beds are large, [this observation later proved inaccurate] but their value to this company depends upon their close location to the line of railroad at a point (the heavy Price River Grade) where extra locomotive power will be required.” He then recommended prompt purchase of the earlier locations for just under $5,000, “thus saving the additional ten dollars an acre which it will cost from the Government after the rails have been laid.”

While the railroad’s front office continued deliberating, peripatetic Samuel Gilson stepped in with his own route proposal. Although he still had a ranch on Ivie Creek, mining had never really left his blood. He had recently been exploring for minerals in the Uintah Basin, the valley northeast of the West Tavaputs Plateau, behind the Book Cliffs. In this remote area, he made the astounding discovery of an extremely rare hydrocarbon, then known only in Palestine, near the Dead Sea. As the Utah Land Board noted a few years later, “[I]t was mined by the Arabs and carried on the backs of camels, to the Suez Canal, whence it was shipped to all parts of the world . . . [to be used for] Asphaltum carriage varnishes . . . [bringing] about $160. per ton, in our markets.” This brittle, black, tarry-looking substance had a brilliant luster, softened with the heat of the body, and
stuck easily. Water-insoluble, it could only be removed by liberal application of coal oil. With typical bravado, Gilson called the stuff “gilsonite” and actively sought railroad access to tap this rare substance. As Gilson well knew, only two major canyons cut through the Book Cliffs. Rivaling the passageway down the Price River Canyon used by the Rhoades party and now under active consideration by the railroad was the Soldier Canyon trail that Huntington settlers had taken. If the railroad could be diverted up Soldier Canyon, it would pass much closer to Gilson’s discoveries, allowing him easier access to the markets of Utah, Colorado, and beyond. Gilson consequently made up a story about the prohibitive steepness of the Price River grade to lure the line his way. Burgess, ignorant of Gilson’s true motives, studied the terrain and disagreed.

By the end of 1881, Burgess was forced to make a final recommendation about the proposed railroad route. Choosing the Price River Canyon in his final report, he concurrently voiced his own misgivings about the earlier plan to follow the Old Spanish Trail across southern Castle Valley to Salina Canyon. Fewer than 800 people resided along that route, he noted, and most of the country was “barren and unsettled. . . . East of Castle Valley Junction [now Price],” he added, only 150 resided at Blake City (now Green River). How many customers—and how much freight—could the railroad attract in this sparsely-populated region?

Even after receiving his considered decision, corporate headquarters dallied. Their apparent indecisiveness had other, stronger roots: competition with other carriers, the sort of contest which had destroyed the Rio Grande’s original building plans in Colorado. This time the major opponent was the Union Pacific; the major target, the Pleasant Valley mines. Believing that the Castle Gate area offered only a small coal field, the Rio Grande needed to acquire more fuel for its locomotives. The Union Pacific, which already held a small mine in Pleasant Valley, could potentially stymie acquisitions there if it knew the Rio Grande’s final choice of route. Consequently, Rio Grande officials acted quickly and quietly to sew up Pleasant Valley coal lands. This purchase required a new corporation in keeping with Utah territorial law, which stipulated that all incorporators must be Utah residents. Consequently, Colorado resident and Rio Grande President William Jackson Palmer rounded up some Utah friends and paid their expenses to acquire the Utah and Pleasant Valley Railroad and its associated mines. As soon as they could, some other Rio Grande-affiliated officials formed new Utah corporations, the Denver and Rio Grande Western Railway Company (the Western or the D&RGW) and the Rio Grande Western Construction Company, the latter with a built-in life of twenty years. Soon, the railroad was secretly running the Winter Quarters coal mines, which remained under the public ownership of the Pleasant Valley Coal Company (PVCC), now owned by Palmer’s Utah friends. The railroad legally cemented its ownership on June 14, 1882, when the Pleasant Valley
properties fell under foreclosure and were immediately snapped up by the Rio Grande Western Construction Company (not the railroad, an interesting wrinkle with important legal ramifications later on). Only then did the Rio Grande publicly announce its final railroad route decision—the Price River Canyon—which would allow it easy access to the “newly-acquired” Pleasant Valley mines. Officials finally abandoned the more southerly route along the Old Spanish Trail, losing an investment worth some $217,470, including not only the railroad grade but several stone structures such as a lime kiln constructed to provide building materials. The magnitude of this investment created the false hope, expressed as late as 1898, that “some day, no doubt in the not very distant future, [southern] Castle valley will be the main thoroughfare across the continent.” It never was.

While railroad building commenced toward Castle Valley from both ends of the route, most folks along the newly-selected right-of-way enjoyed the prospect of connection with the outside world. At least one recent settler in northern Castle Valley, however, seemed to find most contact disagreeable. He was Teancum Pratt, a son of the late Parley P. Pratt and thoroughly devout Mormon, who kept the only known local diary (not reminiscences) of his day. He had arrived at the mouth of Gordon Creek in mid-1880, but found the area occupied by “hunters, trappers & bachelors & raveheads & did not welcome any settler. So I had a very tough time of it & had to leave that location & moved up to what is now Helper, at that time a lonely wilderness & commenced anew in 1881.” At Helper, Pratt complained, “The Price River was unfortunate in getting its first settlers. They were not of the honest kind who will pull together and sacrifice for each other.” He nonetheless settled in with his two wives, Anne Eliza Mead and Sarah Elizabeth Ewell, concurrent with the arrival of railroad grading crews. To protect his farm from acquisition by the railroad, Pratt promptly filed homestead papers on his Helper property in October 1881. He was closely followed by his wives’ families: Sarah Mead, the mother of his first wife, and Francis M. Ewell, who, with the rest of his family, had homesteaded just south of Pratt, initially giving his name to a town that would later become Spring Glen.

Like everyone else in Castle Valley, Pratt worried about water for his farm. On June 8, 1882, Pratt worked on his “levee hoping to finish it before any heavy rains come, so it will catch the floods.” Farming was exhausting, and the whole family pitched in: “Sister Mead & Amanda planted some white beans & finished planting corn. . . . I also finished plowing & took the plow home to Ewells. Today was [second wife] Sarahs birthday she forgot it till night. She is 22 years old.” A few days later, men carrying their blankets passed through Pratt’s homestead, heading north from Colorado. They were part of a growing number of transients complaining of “hard times in the mining camps . . . general[ly] hungry wanting to buy provisions,” of which Pratt had little to sell. “The children were hungry & so were we
all,” he added, although his successful hunting brought some meat. In July 1882, the desperate Pratt left his farm in his ox-drawn wagon, seeking cash employment on the railroad. He found no work. As Pratt glumly headed down the steep Price River Canyon, he saw the sky suddenly darken and a tempest begin, with “such thunder [as] I never heard before, it was a continual roar for I should think over half an hour.” The river rose in moments to a raging “flood that carried away thousands of ties for the D.&R.G.R.R. Co. The oldest flood marks of the river banks were buried” and all the brand new railroad bridges washed away. When the flood subsided, Pratt tried to ford the river where the bridges had stood. At the second ford, “my cattle shied off down the stream & I lost control of them in the flood . . . & to save my self I plunged in & swam to shore.” Luckily, he was able to scramble back on the wagon to draw out the tongue bolt, “thus liberating the oxen and saving their lives.” The exhausted man and beasts spent that night with an old Irish miner at the new Castle Gate coal mine near Price Canyon’s mouth. When they reached home, Pratt was delighted to find that the levee around his garden had held, even though the flood reached the very top, but he lost: “one wheel, a chain, 1 sack salt, my molds for my gun with some primer & powder & nine days time on the trip.”121 His families still went hungry.

The Rio Grande not only lost bridges, ties, and a prepared railroad grade in that great flood, it faced economic disaster. A year earlier, the
Colorado line had deferred a dividend payment, and in August 1882 it reorganized under conditions very favorable to Utah, shifting the whole system’s axis “to an east-west position,” according to the railroad’s leading historian. Abandoning its original drive to New Mexico and the Pacific, Rio Grande owners now depended on Utah riches to recoup the fortunes of the entire system. Consequently, the railroad began, even before its completion, to seek wealth along the Castle Valley corridor. It thus quickly transformed the area into what historian Carlos Schwantes called a “wage-workers’ frontier.” This concept, for him, “was a child of the steel rail.” Claimed Schwantes, “Pioneer residents of the classic West [whatever that was] probably remained unaware of the wageworkers’ frontier, or were at least untroubled by it.” Not so in Castle Valley. Industry, embodied by the D&RGW, inundated the area just as the first, struggling settlements took hold, putting development on fast-forward and compressing the time needed for significant, historical change.

With the coming of the Western, northern Castle Valley prospered. Struggling farmers no longer had to rely on scratching out a living in alkaline soil. The influx of railroad pay, much of it passing through the hands of the Black brothers, immediately shifted northern Castle Valley from barter to a cash economy. Prices soared. “Oats sold for five dollars and wheat for three dollars per hundred pounds. Onions found a ready cash market at ten cents, and cabbage 8 cents a pounds [sic], eggs 30 cents a dozen, butter 40 cents, potatoes 5 cents and carrots 3 ½ cents a pound,” all in cold, hard coin. Greater Utah eagerly anticipated similar economic blessings when a completed D&RGW would offer some allegedly stiff competition to the monopolistic Union Pacific. With mutually rosy expectations of dropping prices for Utah residents and eager customers for the railroad, construction continued.

Spurred by accelerating change, the LDS Church decided to cement more firmly Castle Valley to the realm of the faithful. Consequently, in August 1882, Apostles Erastus Snow and John Henry Smith traveled southward, spending the first night with Pratt’s father-in-law, Francis Ewell. Pratt piously recorded that he “felt greatly encouraged & strengthened by the visit,” after hearing Snow praise “the climate & country & [he] spoke of its facilities showing that we have a very good land to make homes in. . . . He gave much good counsel,” Pratt added, “& promised to have a ward organized & to send us some missionary settlers & a bishop.” Snow and Smith then moved down the Price River to the area occupied by the Powells, Grameses, Rhoades, and others. The Apostles pointed out the best future townsite (officially established as Price in 1892), which would also be the optimum terminus of the irrigation ditch residents were still doggedly digging. (The importance of this work had multiplied since the drought of the month previous, when water was so scarce that Gordon Creek ran dry and its settlers had to bring water from Caleb Rhoades’s brackish spring.)
authorities chose high ground to keep the new town from floods, but the

*The Significance of the Frontier, 1870–1882*

authorities chose high ground to keep the new town from floods, but the
townsite consequently lay a long way from the nearest canal. Residents had
to haul Price River water by the bucketful to store in home-side barrels for

*culinary and agricultural uses. When it was first dumped in, the muddy wa-
ter took time to settle, but the process could be speeded by adding prickly

pears. Ignoring any inconveniences, Snow further prophesied “that the
town established there would become the largest in this section and would
be the metropolis of eastern Utah.””

Arriving at the southern Emery County settlements, the Apostles re-
sponded warmly to those who had conscientiously maintained church ties.
At a meeting in the old bowery on the Wink Seely residence, Snow and
Smith partially organized the Emery Stake of Zion, a larger, umbrella or-
ganization designed to encompass several wards. They set aside Christian G.

*Larsen as president, Orange Seely as first counselor, and Rasmus Justesen as
second counselor. Snow also named two wards (the equivalent of parishes)
along Cottonwood Creek at Orangeville and Castle Dale. The Apostles also
organized the women. They set apart Anne Ungerman Larsen, a childless
plural wife of the stake president, to head the Relief Society, the LDS orga-
nization for women. In addition, Stake officials also oversaw wards (or po-
tential wards) at Huntington, Ferron, and Price. The following November
20, Stake President Larsen and his counselors visited the Price area and for-
mally organized its ward with George Frandsen as bishop. Frandsen shortly
had to return to Mount Pleasant, from which he had just been called, leav-
ing his counselors to oversee the welfare of some 215 hardy souls, the entire
population in the Price area by December 31, 1882. In the next couple of
years, Stake officials formed two other wards at Emery (originally Muddy
Creek) and Molen.

Commerci...
ten percent of the total expense, no wonder the area craved a railroad. Like the rest of rapidly industrializing America, however, Castle Valley residents had no idea of the many, varied changes it would bring.