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Cowboys and Industry, 1890–1899

When No. 2 [engine] pulled out [from Castle Gate] for Helper, the paymaster and deputy crossed over the tracks to the Wasatch company’s store . . . and were just about to carry the treasure [sacks of gold and silver] up . . . to the P. V. Coal company’s offices, when a rough looking individual, evidently “Butch” Cassidy, stepped in front of Mr. Carpenter [the paymaster] and exclaimed, “drop them sacks and hold up your hands.”

—Eastern Utah Advocate, 22 April 1897

Historian Walter Nugent claimed, “The transformation of America from the frontier rural society of the eighteenth and nineteenth century to the metropolitan society of the twentieth was the major change in American history.” Castle Valley, too, made this all-American change, but modern industry crowded in side-by-side with vestiges of the old frontier. The area reached its glory days in the late nineteenth century, as residents tamed the land, formed lasting institutions, and made a comfortable living from farming, stockraising, mines, and railroads. Growing prosperity also attracted outlaws, among them Butch Cassidy, whose mine payroll robbery was the largest haul in Castle Valley history. Meanwhile, other law-abiding, hard-working souls pursued less glamorous options.

One of these was Teancum Pratt. He discovered the money-making “probability of my place being made the R.R. Division point” while he was still in prison and worried that he was “only partially secure in my land or have only secured part of it.” In fact, the imprisoned Pratt proved up, and his father-in-law, Frances Ewell, patented adjacent land on September 2, 1890. They were thus in the enviable position described by nineteenth-century economist Henry George to obtain the unearned increment on rising land values when railroads crossed their land. On August 7, 1891, the local paper reported, “Messrs Pratt and Ewell of Helper, were in town
Tuesday. They say that the surveyors are laying off side tracks and yards for the railroad division at that place. With proper handling a good town can be made there.”

Fanny Ewell, Teancum’s mother-in-law, actually earned her additional income by taking in boarders both during railroad construction and in 1890–1891 when the track was being standard-gauged.

The D&RGW had decided to move its division point—the official crew rest stop between sections of the line—west from Green River. It began by constructing a fifteen-stall roundhouse of sandstone from nearby ledges, allegedly “the best building stone in the territory.” In 1892, the Salt Lake Tribune reported the addition of “a new depot, with reading-room for the employees, and minor buildings,” the origins of the new town of Helper, named after the engines added there to haul heavy trains up the steep Price Canyon.

Standard-gauging of the entire Rio Grande system meant that tracks were being widened from their original three-foot narrow gauge to the standard four feet eight-and-a-half inches. This change allowed railroad cars to be shunted to other lines throughout the country. The Western justified spending $60,000 on this shift by capturing a part of the Denver-to-Ogden trade that used to go on the Union Pacific.

Making Helper the new division point put the union station of the eastern and western sections of the Rio Grande system squarely on Castle Valley’s north-south axis, although Green River, far to the east, shrank proportionately.

Much of the financing for the Rio Grande Western’s unprecedented development came from coal. Utah’s production had first topped 300,000 tons in 1890, and by 1892 the Western’s Pleasant Valley Coal Company (PVCC), combining Winter Quarters and Castle Gate tonnage, produced almost two-thirds of the coal mined in Utah Territory. The Winter Quarters mine in Pleasant Valley dated back to the old days of Milan Packard and his Calico Road; Castle Gate mine development had progressed rapidly since geologist Ellis Clark noted the high-quality coal at the mouth of Price Canyon. The town of Castle Gate, named after a towering rock formation just up the canyon, had been established near the mines in 1887 by the PVCC, arm of the D&RGW. By 1890, the Castle Gate mines employed about 150 men who lived in company houses, shopped at the company-owned Wasatch Store, and needed a school for their children. Some worked at eighty beehive-shaped coke ovens, used to reduce coal through controlled burning to coke, a coal derivative demanded by smelters all over the West.

Nineteenth century coal mines normally offered only seasonal, winter-time employment. Castle Gate, however, because of the coke ovens, employed miners year-round. Coke pulling—a hard, sweaty job—remained the same for decades, as described by a later worker: “The ovens were connected on the outside with a straight brick wall,” wrote Paul Turner, and inside each looked like a beehive ten feet high and ten across. A train ran across the top of the ovens to dump eight tons of coal into each oven through a small round opening in the top. The heat inside the oven immediately ignited it.
At the front of each oven was an opening about the size of two kitchen cabinet doors. These were bricked up for the coal inside to be burned and taken down when the coke [reduced to five tons] was ready.” A road ran in front of the ovens, its other edge bounded by the top of a ten-foot-high rock wall, below which stretched another set of tracks, parallel to the bank of coke ovens. When the coke had burned, it had to be pulled and loaded into the waiting railroad cars on the track opposite the ovens. To do this, the operator unbricked the door, sprayed the hot coke with water for ten minutes (using a twelve foot pipe), hooked the steaming coke with a beaver tail paddle (its handle also twelve feet long) and dragged the coke, load by load, out to the road. Then he had to shovel the hot coke into a wheelbarrow, wheel it across the road, up a plank to the top of the railroad car (sticking up about three feet above the level of the road), and dump it in. Practiced men could pull two ovens a day. Fifteen-year-old Turner, pulling coke as a summer job with his fourteen-year-old brother, remembered “we lost the wheelbarrow into the half-filled railroad car and spent twenty minutes getting it out of the still hot coke inside; . . . I got the hair above my forehead singed badly by getting too close to that hot oven; . . . I don’t remember ever working that hard and sweating that much in the fifty years since then.”

Coke-making relied on coal, hand-dug from the earth in dangerous conditions. According to long-time mining man A. Philip Cederlof, a miner’s...
job went something like this: first, he would put on warm clothes (coal mines are consistently cold and often wet), take up his lunchbucket and head to the mine portal. From there, he walked (or sometimes rode a man trip—a line of cars pulled by a horse, mule, or later, an engine) hundreds of yards—even miles—down the mine tunnel to his assigned room at the face, where a vein of coal lay exposed. He may have carried a few sharpened picks to put with others in his locked box inside his coal-walled room. Earlier, he had shored up the roof with wooden poles, each with another small wedge of wood jammed in between its top and the mine ceiling. If the roof started to cave in, the poles would twist, the wedges would shoot out, and he would run for his life. Seeing everything in place, the miner started work. A patient, burly man might undercut the coal “by hand with a pick. The miner would lie on his side [in the coal dust] . . . and pick away at the coal, until by the time he was finished, his hands were nearly frozen to the pick handle.” Many a miner, frustrated with this slow, laborious work, would instead try “shooting off the solid.” Using a hand auger, he drilled holes (as few as possible), filled them with black powder “sweetened up in many cases with dynamite,” then inserted “squibs . . . little waxed paper affairs, with a little powder twisted up inside.” He lit them and ran. (Later, a separate shot firer did this one job all along the face. As Cederlof noted, “There was a heavy turn-over in shot firers.”) After the smoke cleared, the miner returned, aided only by his cap’s flickering light, originally “an oil can with a spout and wick.” Later came the carbide lamp—still an open flame—and then the safety measure of routing fresh air through the mines to ventilate the black dust and smoke.\(^\text{12}\)

The miner then began hand-loading the loosened coal into a mine cart, using a “scoop shovel [or] coal fork; we had big, wide coal forks,” remembered James Gardner, who shoveled it up by the hour, breaking up too-large lumps with his pick.\(^\text{13}\) The cars “had to be ‘chinked’ up. They couldn’t afford to let a car go out that didn’t carry all it would hold.” The miner put his tag on the car so he would get credit for the coal once it was outside and weighed. Running on a track the miner had previously laid himself, the cars were pulled by a mule whose driver got around to all the rooms as best he could. “Often the men pushed the cars out of the room if the mule driver wasn’t handy. The mules were kept in underground barns and once in the mine, they didn’t come out until they were hauled out.” Steam hoists hauled loaded cars up steep underground slopes.\(^\text{14}\)

Once the car left the mine, a company checkweighman weighed the coal, checked the tag, and noted which miner got paid for its contents, deducting some weight (up to one-third) for the rock inevitably mixed in. The coal was then dumped on a conveyor belt headed for the top of a tipple, a huge, multi-storied warehouse-like structure. As it flowed on the belt past the boney-pickers, (usually boys), they would pick out the rock, or boney. The tipple’s multiple, floor-sized shaking screens then sorted the coal into
lump (largest), nut (medium), and slack (almost dust) through a series of holes of decreasing size, a process which covered the whole coal camp in a fine mist of dust. (Today, more sizes have been defined.) Cederlof added, “There was no workman’s compensation. If a man got hurt, he had to sue—or take what he was offered. When business was rushing, the mine worked on Sundays and on all but the major holidays. Shopping was done at the company store and ‘scrip’ was extensively used.”

Castle Gate, with its mine tunnels and bank of ovens, was something of a showplace and went well beyond these primitive mining methods. As territorial mine inspector Robert Forrester noted in his 1892 report, “Altogether this is a mine in which no expense is spared to provide for the safety of the workers, and methods are in daily use here [i.e., coal dust dampened and all explosives fired electrically], which are not found in any other part of the mining world.” These innovations, keeping the coal dust down to help prevent black lung (the dust was not then thought to be explosive) and firing all shots by electric charges while the men were out of the mine, were truly technological advances of which Castle Valley could be proud. (Later came the addition of a fireboss, a certified expert who had to supervise the shooting and declare the mine safe before the miners could go in, as well as trouble-shoot inside the mine. Firebosses, for example, burned out pockets of flammable methane gas.) These improvements, however, had only come as the result of an explosion in 1890, in which three men lost their lives.

This commercial development of Castle Valley’s fine, thick coal seams, allowed potential coal production to outstrip the available workforce. The 1890 census counted only 5,076 people in all of Castle Valley, most of whom, even if they worked the mines in the winter, went back to their farms when spring came. The LDS Church again promoted the area in an 1890 article, stressing “towns and villages . . . [with] the appearance of comfort and prosperity.” Then came the hook: “More settlers, however, are needed and anyone in need of a home who is not afraid to face the hardships and dangers of a new country will be made hartily [sic] welcome by the people of Castle Valley.” The juxtaposition of “comfort and prosperity” with “hardships and dangers” may have been truthful, but it was hardly calculated to attract many takers.

Local communities, therefore, grew mostly through natural increase. In a very practical sense, Castle Valley population growth depended on reliable nursing and the successful birthing of children. The southern communities had weathered their most serious setback in the fall of 1886, when the “black canker” (diphtheria) hit southern towns. An epidemic swept through the area, killing twenty-seven people in Huntington alone, thirteen dying between Christmas and New Year’s Day. Molen, about halfway between Huntington and Muddy Creek, also suffered severely, and the John Duncan family lost four children within hours of each other. Under
the pressure of mounting deaths, the Warren Peacocks had to lay their two little girls in a single grave. Coffin-maker Hans C. Hansen planed rough lumber by hand and made white cloth covers, fighting frustration as well as grief when no more fabric was to be had. All over, women nursed the sick. In Huntington, Sally Wimmer, Mary Jane Hill, “Aunt Jane” Woodward, and Mary E. Westover entered house after house. When disease won out, Esther Grange and Adelia McElprang arrived to wash and lay out the dead and measure them for burial clothes. Before returning home, they had to sequester themselves in some unheated shed or outbuilding, wash thoroughly and change clothes in an attempt to prevent the spread of disease—all in the freezing temperatures of a Castle Valley winter. Huntington’s Peter Johnson and his son, James Peter, worked with several other men making coffins literally night and day, despite the loss of the family’s youngest child, Ulalia. The disease reoccurred for the next several years, but never with such fatal consequences as that first, awful winter.

People also needed their teeth fixed. Orange Seely first pulled aching teeth, just because no one else would do it. Dr. Paul Christensen, Castle Dale’s first trained dentist, arrived in 1894 and relieved him of this duty. Christensen practiced dentistry for forty-four years, despite local residents’ frequent inability to pay. In 1901, for example, Christensen complained that people should not think less of his dental abilities just because he also did carpentry and fixed clocks and watches to make a living. As the population increased, other dentists eventually arrived, some riding a circuit. For example, in 1908, Dr. I. S. Kirkwood placed a notice in the paper that he would soon be visiting all Emery County towns: “I was so busy and rushed with work that I was unable to meet my previous appointments.”

With so many young pioneer families in the area, midwives also remained in demand. Mary Davis Biddlecomb fulfilled that role from Wilsonville to the head of Ferron Canyon. As the wage earner for her family, she charged $2.50 for a confinement case, tending the mother and baby for ten days; $5 if she did all the housework, too. Of course, if people could not pay, she worked for nothing, also providing what they needed. In this way, she safely delivered an estimated 450 to 500 babies and lost a total of four patients. Orangeville’s Sophia Lewis Jewkes practiced homeopathic medicine, and once rode all the way to Ferron in a lumber wagon to care for patients there. Ferron residents also received help from Eliza Lake Stringham of Molen. She used sagebrush to make tea to bathe frozen feet; milkweed for dropsy, spring tonic, and a blood purifier; wormwood tea for tonic, and “humbug oil” on everything from a bee sting to a diphtheria-swollen throat. In Castle Dale, Annie Catherine Rasmussen (“Grandmother Rasmussen”), a Danish convert who arrived in 1879, utilized her own knowledge of local herbs and bushes and her no-nonsense personality to treat the sick. By the time she died in 1946 at the age of 102, she had aided countless patients and assisted with a total of 464 births, for the first twenty-five years without
the aid of a doctor. The LDS Church also assisted local women with midwifery training. In 1905, famed doctor Ellis Shipp, a polygamous wife sent East for medical training by Brigham Young, arrived in Huntington to provide a three-month course. The Relief Society paid the fees of those who wished to attend; students had to buy their own books. Huntington’s Margaret Ellen Black Rowley, or Maggie, convinced her husband to let her use some of the money from his wheat sale. Although nineteen women started, only eight finished the course, including Maggie Rowley. They sometimes studied together in each others’ homes, and, at the end of the course, took a wagon together to Price and then the train to Salt Lake City. After three days of tests by the State Board of Examiners on Obstetrics (which all of them passed), they returned to a skeptical county where women objected to midwives who had received theoretical training but had no real practice. When Roselle Brinkerhoff went into labor, the usual midwife, Aunt Jane Woodward, was not in town. Rowley, accompanied by two other Huntington graduates for moral support, went to tend the birth. “During the hard labor Sis. Brinkerhoff kept saying, ‘Oh, Maggie, I didn’t want you a bit, not a bit, but keep it up, you are doing fine.’” After this success, Rowley continued with her midwifery practice, including delivering a neighbor’s baby while in labor with her own tenth child.

Castle Valley also attracted immigrants, a story replicated all over America. The overall population in the continental United States grew
from over thirty-nine million in 1870, to over fifty million in 1880, to almost sixty-three million in 1890, an additional twenty-three million people in just twenty years, or over a million a year. Of these, the population of the foreign-born increased from five-and-a-half million to over six-and-a-half million to over nine million during the same period. Some, like Grandmother Rasmussen, were LDS converts. Plenty of others came from the British Isles. Soon, however, industrial work gangs from far-flung nations would change the rural complexion of Castle Valley.

Growth also prompted administrative readjustments. In 1892, the Emery County Court approved the official organization of Price Town. James (Tobe) Whitmore became the first Price town president. Then, Price tried to get the county seat away from Castle Dale. This drive failed, and Castle Dale confirmed its legal preeminence by building a fine brick courthouse at a cost of about $5,000. The sessions of the Seventh Judicial District Court met there for years. Early in 1894, the northern section responded with petitions to carve a new county out of northern Emery County. Canvassers visited the towns of Wellington, Price, Spring Glen, Helper, and Castle Gate, Scofield and Winter Quarters (at Pleasant Valley), and Minnie Maud (up Nine Mile Canyon in the Book Cliffs), getting almost unanimous signatures. In February, the Territorial Legislature approved the petition and Carbon County was born, named for its leading resource, coal. Helper put up a good fight, but Price became the county seat. This first major political split along the Castle Valley corridor brought some distress to southerly, truncated Emery County, since it lost population and considerable tax revenues based on railroad mileage, businesses, and livestock herds then proliferating to the north.

This county division also institutionalized a rural-urban split. In the industrializing northern portion, residents sometimes characterized their more southern neighbors as backward “hayseeds.” Southerners fought back, in part, with music. In 1895, Thomas L. Hardee, a Welshman, organized a choral group from Huntington and Cleveland. They challenged the Scofield Welsh Singers at the 1896 singing competition, known as Eisteddfod in Wales. Working with a group of mixed ethnicity, but principally Danes, Professor Hardee practiced a number of selections until the June competition, when his determined Castle Valley Choir traveled up in the mountains of Pleasant Valley and camped out under the trees. When the Scofield Welsh Choir and the largely Danish Castle Valley Choir went head to head on the stage set up in the D&RGW roundhouse, the judges chose the lowlanders. As reported by a local historian, “The cheering was long and loud, not only from the ‘hayseeds’ but the people of Scofield as well.” In the following program, triumphant Hannah M. Johnson sang “There Is No Hayseed In My Hair,” and brought down the house. The Castle Valley Choir entered another Eisteddfod in 1898 in Salt Lake City, where they won no awards, but earned the honor of singing at the General Conference of the LDS Church.
Although most immigrants to Castle Valley came from humble origins, at least one new local resident exemplified a significant new trend in America’s industrialization: an unusually heavy reliance on foreign capital. Like much of the American West, Castle Valley had attracted a member of the English nobility. In the late 1880s, Lord Lewis A. Scott Elliot, an aristocrat apparently invited to leave England, bought from an unnamed trapper his squatter’s rights to a dugout at Big Springs, one mile south of the D&RGW tracks and about twelve miles east of the strung-out settlement of Wellington. Tapping his family’s wealth, Elliot next acquired uncounted head of horses and cattle, an estimated 30,000 head of sheep, and acreage that provided thousands of tons of hay. He left the dugout for a fourteen-room rambling house, where he reportedly brought his wife and lavishly entertained the foreign visitors that occasionally visited the ranch. For his guests’ amusement, according to local report, “he had live grouse and quail shipped in and turned loose in the sage brush to provide his guests with suitable hunting.” For additional targets, he also introduced rabbits, widely regarded as pests because they ate desperately-needed crops. “There are those still living who can forgive Lord Elliott everything but that,” the report continued. Fortunately, either his guests’ marksmanship or Castle Valley’s persistently inhospitable climate made short work of the bunnies.

Like many of those already resident in Castle Valley, Lord Elliot soon realized that ranchers did not prosper nearly as quickly as coal developers. He filed for a coal certificate in April 1890, choosing 160 acres on lands essentially comprising his Big Springs Ranch. He also ran a barbed wire fence around his lands, and, in so doing, ran strands diagonally across a parcel still claimed by the nation. The federal government, offended at this fencing of its public domain, sued him in 1891. Since Utah was not yet a state, the case became complicated. Although the land in question technically belonged to the federal government, once Utah achieved statehood, it would become state land. In pondering their decision, the judges referred to “Vast tracts of public lands . . . fenced with barbed wire by wealthy cattle owners,” the essence of the West’s violent range wars. This was Castle Valley, however. The property was uncontested. Elliot won the right to keep his fence up, but he left his Big Springs Ranch in 1894, moving on to other climes and eventual paralysis in an elephant accident in Ceylon in 1906.

Plenty of other people stuck with ranching. For example, Scotsman Alexander McPherson and his nephew, Jim, moved their cattle herd into Woodside, northwest of Green River in the fall of 1885. They trailed the animals out the next spring, returning to winter their herds at the mouth of Florence Creek on the Green River a few years later. After Alexander drowned in the Green, Jim fenced their summer range and bred pure Hereford cattle, introducing the breed to the region. As John H. Pace recalled, after years of mixed-breed cattle he, too, turned to Herefords, “the best for the [se] ranges. . . . Herefords are better rustlers for feed [and] . . .
they stand the vagaries of the climate better.”39 The Whitmores, established in the Book Cliffs north of the Price River since 1879, combined cattle with banking. Tobe established Price’s First National Bank, while brother George started a bank in Nephi, Sanpete County.40 Both grazed their herds in Castle Valley, following an annual cycle. The animals wintered “down in Big Springs country [Lord Elliott’s ranch], this side of Sunnyside, and up in Clark’s Valley,” where the grass grew especially high. “As late as, oh I guess in the 1920’s,” Rolla West remembered, “on a wet year, I saw grass . . .[up to the] belly of a horse. Not thick grass, desert grass . . . a bunch here and there.” From there, he continued, “in the spring they’d trail them down Nine Mile and Myton and by Vernal [in the Unita Basin] up on the Diamond Mountain.” Originally they had trailed them “clear over to Cheyenne [Wyoming], the end of the [Union Pacific] Railroad. Then as the railroad moved west and trailing down to Rock Springs was the closest station, and they trailed them . . . [there to] ship them to the market.”41 Alternately, drovers pushed the cattle overland to Denver, where the agents for the pooled Castle Valley stock would receive their payment in gold. Their saddlebags bulged with this yearly income as they made the long ride back—a round trip which could take a man up to three months.42

This wealth, on the hoof and in the saddlebags, tempted the dishonest. Allegedly, the Whitmores came to Castle Valley in part because they “liked to be where there was plenty of action . . . clearing out the . . . bad men who had ruled before their coming.”43 Whether they sought it or not, the Whitmores certainly had trouble, particularly with Joe Walker. He claimed that the Whitmores owed him a long-standing debt contracted by their father, allegedly also Walker’s uncle, back in Texas. The Whitmores insisted that Walker was no relation and that they owed him nothing. Lingering nearby, Walker did odd jobs around Castle Valley, including a stint at the Huntington sawmill. He started raiding Whitmore stock, got into a shoot-em-up in Price in the summer of 1895, and finally joined up with outlaws camped out in the desert southeast of Castle Valley at the infamous Robber’s Roost.44 After that, he apparently spent some time as a hired hand on Jim McPherson’s ranch on the Green River (now a favorite river runner stop).45 In 1897, he again took a predatory interest in Whitmore horses. With the help of Clarence L. (“Gunplay”) Maxwell, another local troublemaker, Walker stole several head from the Whitmore stable and drove them south from Price into the rough lands of eastern Emery County. Maxwell apparently backed out of the deal, and may have even returned to Price to inform the Whitmores. Tobe joined the posse, headed by Carbon County Sheriff C. W. Allred. Further south, Emery County Sheriff Azariah Tuttle joined, not only to chase Walker, but to find George Lee, a son of John D. Lee, the Mountain Meadows Massacre scapegoat, said also to be a member of the Robber’s Roost gang. About fifty-five miles east of Orangeville, Tuttle was able to arrest Lee, sending him back to town under guard. Later, the
posse found Walker and both sides started shooting. Walker’s bullet caught
Tuttle in the right thigh, crippling him. While the others went for help,
Tuttle lay behind a big rock, suffering acutely as the sun climbed higher. In
that odd frontier camaraderie that exists in desolate places, Tuttle finally
asked Walker to bring him some water. The outlaw agreed, and Tuttle al-
lowed him to go. After thirty-six hours, the posse returned, but Tuttle re-
mained lame for life.46 Walker’s luck ran out in May 1898, after he beat up
the Whitmore foreman and Tobe’s son. This time, the posse found him and
a companion sleeping on the eastern side of the Green River and shot them
to death before they could rise. The posse returned with twenty-four “above
average” horses taken with the outlaws and divided up the $250 reward for
Joe Walker, earning $20.80 each.47

Far less attractive to outlaws, sheep also did well in Castle Valley’s tricky
climate. By 1890, one million sheep roamed Utah, including sizable herds
belonging to Sanpete County’s John H. Seely, brother of Castle Valley pio-
neers Orange and Wink Seely and Sarah Seely Tidwell.48 John Seely began in
the sheep business in 1885 when he took over management of the Sanpete
co-op herd (once ranged in Castle Valley) from his older brother, Orange.
By 1888, John had his own herd, and in 1890 he returned to California,
his birthplace, for purebred stock. (He had been born in San Bernardino
when the Seely family helped found the LDS colony there.) He bought 140
head of purebred Rambouillet sheep at Los Angeles and drove them back
to Utah. Subsequent California forays in 1892, 1898, and 1899 solidified
John H. Seely’s status as the introducer of purebred sheep to Utah and
the owner of the first Utah flock accepted for registration in the American
Rambouillet Record.49

Many Castle Valley sheepmen improved their stock through the Seely
bloodline. For example, as the paper reported, “John H. Seely sold 135
Rambouillet bucks to Crawford & Peacock of Emery; J. W. Seely sold thirty
head of the same kind of animals to Sam Singleton of Ferron,” and whole
herds of sheep changed hands up and down Castle Valley and over the Was-
satch Plateau.50 Breeding Rambouillet rams to common range ewes gave
superb results: an eventual weight increase of from 100 to 130 pounds,
and a finer clip which increased in average weight from 5.5 pounds in
1892 to 9.0 pounds by 1921.51 Wink Seely was among those who ran large
herds of sheep on the San Rafael Desert, many of them herded by Wink’s
son, William. Out there on the range, William occupied himself with read-
ing, and sought new books whenever he came into town to get supplies.
He decided that what he and other sheepmen needed was a desert lend-
ing library. William found a small, dry cave to store his books, and other
passing herders would borrow what they wanted and leave their own books
and magazines, amassing quite a variety. The location of this library has
been lost; it remains one of the more engaging mysteries along the Castle
Valley corridor.52
Herders practiced transhumance, still used today. In the spring, animals began foraging high in the mountains, fattening on thick grass. As autumn snows threatened, sheepherders drove their stock down on the desert. The seasonal shepherding cycle climaxed at the spring shearing. Lucy Hansen Nielsen remembered the cluster of camp houses and the thousands of sheep sheared at the desert corral southeast of Molen, her home town. “During sheepshearing spring work, the herds were shorn on their way from the east winter locations to the west mountains [the Wasatch Plateau] summer range,” she recalled. “The big wool sacks were deeper than a man was tall. It hung in a frame, open at the top so a man could jump down into it. As fleece was tossed into it, the man would press it into the corners at the bottom and then . . . stomp them tight until the bag was full. It was then released from the frame, carefully laid on the ground, the top was sewn together and then rolled to where it would be loaded on to the wagon.” The men worked all day except for the midday break, alternately standing and stooping, bending and kneeling, all the time turning each sheep and clipping off its fleece with hand shears. Meanwhile, aided by a special gang of men brought in to feed the crowds, the women built big wood fires and cooked. The shearers ate in shifts, nearly all day long, “Water for the kitchen and drinking was hauled in a wagon with three fifty gallon wood barrels every day,” she added. The dishes never seemed to get done. Buyers came down from Price, and then the “big sacks of tightly stomped wool were loaded on covered wagons like bales of hay and hauled to Price to the railroad.”

Sheepmen built another shearing corral next to the railroad at Mounds, about twenty miles east of Price along the D&RGW line. Most of the year, the waterless site remained unoccupied. At shearing time, a railroad employee and his wife took up residence, supplied with water from a huge tank-car pulled up to the siding. The shearing corral, funded by stockholders including Wallace Lowry, was a big barn-like structure where clippers hung from rotating metal shafts which ran the length of the building. Professional sheep-shearers removed the fleeces, released the sheep into an outside pen, and sent the wool along a conveyor belt to the wool sacks. The wool-tromper still manually performed his work, but then the filled sacks, each branded with the owner’s mark, went by machine to the warehouse or directly into the railroad cars. Over one hundred thousand sheep sometimes passed through the Mounds corral in the two months of sheep-shearing season.

The sheep industry also connected Castle Valley permanently with global markets. Local wool prices responded to the wool clip in Australia and New Zealand; sales could be made to Boston, to St. Louis, to Kansas City, to Denver. Castle Valley sheepmen tied together ranching activities from Nevada to Montana to California. President Cleveland’s Dingley Tariff protected wool, allowing the price to rise until the 1920s. Hired herders—who
often became owners—came from Argentina, Mexico, and, especially the Pyrenees, from predominately Basque, but also Spanish and French stock. Many of the men, as well as the sheep, came along the Castle Valley corridor from California, driving prize flocks for hundreds of miles. Their names rang with European rhythms: Moynier, Dusserre, Jeanselme, Neugier, Eselle, Ramband, Leautaud, Lavigne. Some later owners started out as herder-partners of Wallace Lowry, including Auguste Aubert, William Etchebaine, Pierre Etchevery, the Mecham brothers, A. E. Pace, Dan Oman, J. C. Jensen, Edward Christiansen, and a host of others. Old-timers interviewed in 1940 remembered that “Felix Dusserre’s father started in 1892 to raise sheep and brought 12,000 head here from California in 1896.” One also
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mentioned, “Pete Moynier started to work as a herder in 1898 and in 1903 he bought a 1,000 head of sheep.” It could have been earlier: “in 1894, Neugier, Eselle, Ramband and others trailed their herds from Bakersfield [California] to Price, a distance of more than seven hundred miles.”

No matter. By 1900 the sheep had arrived by the thousands.

Running cattle and sheep in the same isolated area caused predictable conflicts. Sheep, if not properly managed, will eat grass right down to the roots, leaving nothing on which cattle can graze. Much of the land used by both beasts then belonged to the United States, and could be claimed by any stockman who used it. According to an old-timer, cowmen down at Buckhorn Draw, east of Castle Dale, conscientiously pushed their animals through the area in fall and winter to save the good grass for spring. Then came “a tramp sheep outfit with about three thousand head . . . on their way to the lower desert. They stayed in the canyon, where they had no herding to do, and moved along slowly, cleaning out all the feed.”

Sheepmen were the invaders, to be treated accordingly. Although Castle Valley experienced only a handful of the grisly incidents of America’s range wars, local killings extended into the early 1900s. Then, “Winn Thompson, a cattleman from Green River, called the [Wallace] Lowry home at three o’clock one morning to say that some drunken cow hands had found two [sheep] herders on the range,” reported son Walker Lowry. The cowboys had “bound them securely with ropes, locked them inside a log cabin, and gleefully burned the cabin to the ground.”

Wallace Lowry rushed to Green River to protect his foreign-born herders from further violence. Green River citizens, strongly anti-sheep, released the guilty cowhands, reasoning that “the boys were drunk and didn’t know what they were doing.”

While violence sought personal targets, a faltering economy could hurt everyone at once. Like the rest of America, all of Castle Valley suffered as the Panic of 1893 began in February with the failure of the Philadelphia & Reading Railroad. Investors dumped over a million of its shares in only seven hours, bankrupting the line. Then, the National Cordage Company (the rope trust) failed. The Panic snowballed. Banks called in loans and balked at giving new ones. Businesses, lacking capital, closed their doors. Workers thrown out of their jobs bought fewer and fewer consumer goods, weakening other industries. Farmers could not ship their harvests nor purchase the materials and machinery they needed for the next season. The price of silver collapsed. Railroads that had freighted goods and ore went under. The Erie, the Northern Pacific, the Santa Fe, and the once-mighty Union Pacific all went bankrupt—a total of sixty-five railroads across the nation. The whole Rio Grande system remained remarkably healthy except for the fall of the Rio Grande Southern. But it was an exception. Right and left, people demanded gold for their stocks, bonds, and greenbacks, causing a drain on the U.S. Treasury. Thanks to the Sherman Silver Purchase Act of
1890, the federal government would buy silver (with gold) but not coin it. Everywhere, suddenly, any investment meant gold, and there was simply not enough to be had. While Congress myopically fiddled with the tariff, on April 22, 1893, the national gold reserve fell to below $100,000,000, long considered the rock-bottom amount necessary to shore up America’s confidence in her currency. By the end of the year, an estimated three million people were out of work.63

The Panic soon reached most Castle Valley residents. Only Caleb Rhoades had gold. Rhoades claimed he could pay the national debt in 1893 if only he could get permission to work his Uinta Basin mine, on the Ute reservation. The Utes threatened to kill anyone who came on their land except Rhoades, who, like his father before him, had maintained a privileged relationship. Although Rhoades returned on occasion with his saddlebags full of gold dust and nuggets, the reservation stayed closed. Most of Rhoades’s heavy gold stayed where it was.64 Much more typically, in January 1893, Teancum Pratt complained of the expense of maintaining two separate households, in compliance with the Edmunds-Tucker Act. His second wife, Sarah, in Salt Lake City, with “her children in school & my children numbering 13 living, robust, hearty souls & eat & wear; so my only course must be to live by faith.”65 By June, he had moved Sarah back to Castle Valley over Annie’s objections.66 His Helper property was of little assistance. Although he held “700 lots, have only sold some 30 yet . . . [as] cash is hard to get.”67

Complaints like Pratt’s mushroomed throughout the country. Congress met in special session and repealed the Sherman Silver Purchase Act with a law effective November 1. The economy did not recover. In Massillon, Ohio, the next spring, visionary Jacob Coxey began assembling an army of the unemployed to march on Washington, D.C., to demand that the federal government provide public works jobs for the hungry workers. Out in California, Charles Kelley recruited his own Industrial Army of 600 men, including not-yet-famous Jack London and William “Big Bill” Haywood. From Los Angeles came 800 men more, all determined to join with Coxey by riding the railroads East, sure that the lines would help them. Sometimes conductors let them ride; more often, railroad owners refused, afraid, like the rest of the elite, of the “dangerous classes.” Then, these industrial armies snuck aboard anyway, some of the men assuming precarious positions under the cars, truly riding the rails. Some 1,200 men reached Utah Territory on April 13; six days later, another newly-recruited company of the unemployed joined them in Salt Lake City, where five soup kitchens had opened the previous December to feed the hungry. In towns and cities all across the nation, equally disillusioned citizens offered them free food, free shelter, and frequent encouragement. To continue their trip, when the Union Pacific balked, a company of the Industrial Army stole a UP train at Lehi, Utah, and drove it eastward.68
Henry Mathis watched the men pass through Price on the Western and summarized their fate: “When they got to Washington, they were treated very coolly. The officials simply told them to ‘Keep off the Grass.’” For that, Coxey was arrested and jailed, his followers scattered by mounted police. A sympathetic legislator read Coxey’s “Address of Protest” to Congress, demanding the right of all citizens to petition for the redress of grievances. It continued, “Up these steps the lobbyists of trusts and corporations have passed unchallenged on their way to committee rooms, access to which we, the representatives of the toiling wealth-producers, have been denied.”

His views on the power of lobbyists had long been recognized by the LDS Church, perpetually seeking statehood. They would soon press the advantages secured by their own use of a railroad lobby to a successful conclusion.

In the meantime, not all of Coxey’s Army made it as far as the nation’s capital. They dropped out along the way, as energy and enthusiasm flagged. When the California recruits reached Castle Valley, a few stayed in Price, including a brickmason named Mr. Simon. He built two houses for polygamist John Amon Powell, who got the money to pay him by selling some cows. Henry Mathis swapped two cows to the owner of the brickyard between Spring Glen and Helper, getting enough bricks to build himself a home on Price townsite. Simon worked so fast that Mathis joined with a Mr. Schuler, his hired man, to keep up with mixing mortar and throwing up bricks. As Mathis remembered, “Schuler and I were able to keep the mason going, but I had to work very hard and push Schuler up some. I got Old Man [Frantz] Grundvig from Wellington to do the carpenter work.” Mathis set up all night tending a fire to dry out the interior plaster in the freezing weather, although “it was not entirely successful as part of the plaster fell off and had to be replastered. However, we . . . spent our first winter in town.” This outcome delighted his new wife, Sarah Macfarlane Mathis, whom he had married after the death in childbirth of Mary DeFriez Mathis in 1891. Sarah had felt lonely and discouraged out on the farm, and the move to town, with new neighbors and activities, cheered her. Luckily, too, the farm provided wheat, pigs, and a cow, with hay enough to cover the store bill, his only assets “to pull through the Democratic Grover Cleveland administration. These were hard times. We had plenty of bread, milk, meat and potatoes to eat, but groceries were almost out of the question.”

Other towns, also cash-poor but more remote from the bustle of railroad entrepot or division point, lacked the same pervasive cash economy and sometimes-skilled drifters that came to Price and Helper. Consequently, citizens continued in the LDS cooperative movement, largely abandoned in the rest of Utah. For example, Wellington development flowered in 1892 with construction of a meeting house, largely done by donation “as there was very little money in circulation. Fred Hansen, being one of the very few men [along with Lehi Jessen] who had a job which paid cash,
contributed the money to purchase doors and windows.” The meeting house’s milled lumber was hauled all the way from the Seely Mill at Gordon Creek, not far from Pratt’s homestead at Helper. At the same time, a cooperative store was set up in the home of E. E. Branch which lasted until 1899—right through the Panic. Huntingdon established its own two-room cooperative store the same year as Wellington’s. One of the most successful cooperative efforts, the Huntington Flour Mill, began when local residents formed a nominal corporation in 1893. It was reorganized in 1895, with the Panic still in effect. Mill construction began a year later. Originally powered by a small steam engine provided by Bishop Charles Pulsipher, the mill shortly sported a Pelton undershot wheel eight feet in diameter which was set six feet into the ground in Huntington Creek to increase the force of water flowing under it. People came from all over Castle Valley to use it, those from a distance initially enjoying a two-to-three-day camping trip while they waited for their grain to be milled. As fall progressed, the ditch would become clogged with leaves, and in winter the shallow creek froze up, halting milling entirely. Despite these deficiencies, in 1898 the mill produced fifty barrels of flour and continued in operation for almost a century.

Castle Valley women also shared the cooperative impulse and started a silk industry. As far back as 1866, President Brigham Young had directed Mormon missionaries in France to obtain mulberry seed, resulting in over 100,000 trees spread throughout the territory. Silkworm eggs had been introduced, and one young man was set aside as a special “silk missionary” to teach processing techniques. Three decades later, in 1896, sericulture reached Castle Valley. Lucy Hansen Nielsen remembered when her mother, Mary L. M. Hansen, “acquired some silkworms. It was funny to see the long lumber table covered with worms. Screen wire formed an edging all around. Newspapers covered the bottom of the cage. The worms ate the tender green leaves of mulberry trees . . . [hurrying] like chickens . . . to the fresh leaves from the skeletons of the leaves fed the day before.” Her task, “to feed the crawling, hungry livestock” resulted in smelly worms about four inches long that had originally hatched from eggs about one-eighth-inch across. “Square pieces of paper then was twisted into cone shaped scoops and laid before the worms which crawled into them and with a movement of the head waving from side to side they built a round, oblong cocoon [sic].” At Huntington, Bishop Peter Johnson brought mulberry trees from Salt Lake City and Miss Pearl Daily arrived for a six-month stay to teach sericulture. As a local historian explained, “Miss Daily taught our women how to gather the cocoons, dip them in hot water, find the end of the silken thread, unwind it onto spools. . . . Then the process of spinning and weaving silken fabrics followed. . . . done at Salt Lake City under the direction of . . . [the] superintendent of the silk industry project.” Although Chris Anderson (known as Blind Chris, to differentiate him from others of the same
name) assumed local leadership of the silk project when Daily returned to Salt Lake City, the industry failed in Huntington just as it had long before in the rest of Utah. The trees, still remaining in the late 1940s, were its last legacy.77

Some of the cooperative efforts served more than one purpose, as was certainly true of the Emery Stake Academy: a sectarian institution with religious as well as educational priorities. At the urging of LDS President Wilford Woodruff, a committee met in 1889 to plan a Mormon school at Castle Dale. Justus Wellington (Wink) Seely became president of the Emery Stake Board of Education; local women raised funds by donating a chicken or its cash equivalent. On February 12, 1890, the school opened with twenty-one students. By 1892, the principal, Alexander Jameson, earned a yearly salary of $750, but in 1893–1894 he and all the school teachers had to serve as voluntary LDS missionaries, due to the national Panic. In its grip, the Academy had to close for two years. It reopened in 1896 and by 1899 offered courses to eighty-five pupils housed in a brand new three-story brick building, a structure first discussed ten years earlier.78

By the time the Emery Stake Academy reopened, a whole kaleidoscope of changes had transformed Utah. The most significant events culminated with statehood in 1896. According to Joseph Rawlins, elected Utah’s nonvoting delegate to the House of Representatives in 1892, his troubles in promoting statehood started in the House Committee on Territories headed by friendly Gen. Joseph Wheeler of Alabama, a former Confederate. Wheeler and Rawlins each submitted a Utah Statehood bill, but that of Rawlins contained more liberal land provisions and was adopted in committee. When President Cleveland, spurred by the Panic, called a special session to consider repeal of the Sherman Silver Purchase Act, Rawlins brought the statehood bill to the House. Republicans began a vicious, anti-Mormon filibuster. Rawlins countered their arguments, saying that “deplorable atrocities, such as the Mountain Meadows Massacre, had been committed in the past, [but] I asserted that the present generation of Utahns was not accountable for them. As well blame the Senator from Wyoming for the massacre of Chinamen at Rock Springs.” He then assured his listeners that polygamy, another of the sticking points, had been abandoned. “The House immediately passed the Bill,” wrote Rawlins, “and then it went to the Senate.”79

There, the bill stalled into 1894. Rawlins speculated that promises that Utah would become Republican (it eventually did) brought the bill to a vote.80 However, there was more to this story: Utah’s lobbyists had secretly been hard at work behind the scenes. Three key men, identified in a later memo only as “Clara, Tobias, and Clio” (probably James Clarkson, Isaac Trumbo, and Hiram B. Clawson, respectively) had met with a long list of Congressmen, brokering votes for other pressing issues in trade for Utah statehood support. The end result, the Utah Enabling Act, became law on July 16, 1894, allowing the creation of a Utah state constitutional convention
but delaying statehood itself to 1896.\textsuperscript{81} When the Enabling Act finally passed, Clarkson sent LDS Church President Woodruff a 33-page, typed letter outlining years of dedicated lobbying, the people involved, and the many debts incurred. Brigham Young’s son-in-law, Hiram Clawson, the much-trusted original superintendent of ZCMI and former manager of Young’s private business, added his own memo. Clarkson closed with the recognition that the statehood fight had made Utah’s resources “known to all the intelligent people of the republic . . . and this information will bring to you speedily and in vast volume the capital necessary to develop your natural wealth.”\textsuperscript{82} Clawson put the matter more bluntly: “All men in public affairs keep books. They render no service without expecting return.”\textsuperscript{83}

Statehood was finally only a constitution away. In November 1894, voters selected 107 delegates to the state constitutional convention, representing a cross-section of Utah’s males. They met on March 4, 1895, to begin their work. With the national economy still reeling, men competed for the convention’s salaried secretarial and clerical positions. Delegates passionately advocated either side of some of the most controversial issues: woman suffrage (it passed), and the formation of corporations, balancing growth and development with fear of trusts.\textsuperscript{84} This concern was well-placed. In 1895, Big Business had triumphed when the Supreme Court found that E. C. Knight and Company, which refined ninety percent of America’s sugar, was not a trust because it only manufactured, but did not sell, the sugar.\textsuperscript{85} Consequently, businesses could continue their free-wheeling operations virtually unmolested—although Utah tried, in its constitution, to restrain them.\textsuperscript{86}

Utah’s constitutional delegates addressed other thorny issues. They created a new court system, eliminating the Mormon-dominated probate courts and supported non-sectarian education for Utah’s booming school-age population. High schools, however, lacked state funding until 1906. Labor won minimal protection. Private property rights to existing water infrastructure were confirmed, and prohibition, a potentially divisive issue, was tabled. In May, the delegates signed the lengthy document, each with his own pen—a ready-made momento. In November 1895, Utah approved the constitution by better than four-to-one. On January 4, 1896, President Cleveland signed the Utah statehood proclamation, and celebrations erupted all over the new state.\textsuperscript{87}

Castle Valley joined in. Ernest Horsley reported that when the statehood proclamation came over the wires at 10 a.m., church bells tolled, men shouted “Hurrah” and fired their guns in the air, and “the old wagon thimble cannon [was] loaded to capacity and bang she went.” The band played patriotic tunes. That night, the community met for a big party at the meeting house “that lasted until morning. Some rejoiced too much and had to be kicked out.”\textsuperscript{88} LDS Church property, previously consigned to trustees-in-trust to protect it from the federal government under the
Edmunds-Tucker Act, was transferred back to local bishops. In November, Utah’s voters, including women, elected new state officials and chose Democrat/Populist William Jennings Bryan over Republican William McKinley for U.S. President by a vote of over two-to-one. Their choice made little difference, however, as McKinley swept into office, heading a pro-business regime.

As the economy recovered, locals opened their own coal mines along the well-known veins in the heights surrounding Castle Valley. Throughout the late 1890s, Utah’s State Coal Mine Inspector noted a number of small mines stringing south to north along the Wasatch Plateau, swinging east along the Book Cliffs, and ending just north of Green River, where Thomas Farrer had an opening. In the Pleasant Valley area, side-by-side with larger developments, other small mines proliferated. By the late 1890s, demand for coke, in particular, had soared. Coking coal, sold to smelters throughout the West, made more money than any other sort, and the PVCC held a virtual monopoly. All of it was roasted in huge ovens erected at Castle Gate. Hundreds of men gathered there, some to work on the railroad or to mine coal, others to tend the coke ovens. Castle Gate alone almost doubled its tonnage between 1896–1897, making it the largest mine in the state. In 1897, the PVCC experienced its first, brief industrial disturbance. A walkout at the new Sunnyside developments elicited a short notice in the Castle Valley paper: “The coal miners’ strike will not be a failure in one respect,” it said. “It furnishes fresh material on which to blame the delay in the return of prosperity.”

The local economy had rapidly sprouted national links, and, across America, statistics remained grim. Unemployment registered fifteen percent in 1897, dropping to a still-disturbing ten percent by 1899. Among the other farmers turned mine developers was Helper’s Teancum Pratt. Ever struggling to make ends meet, he had finally achieved some prosperity with his coal mine in Sowbelly Canyon above Helper. He entered the business in 1895, reporting, “We have been talking up the coal business in the ward. We are subject to heavy extortion by [the] R.R. Co & so learning that the Sowbelly canon was vacant I lost no time but took my last money . . . to file on some claims.” Four brothers-in-law helped him. By 1896, they had developed the mine and were selling coal in town. Pratt finally bought out the others in 1897–1898 and “made a good living with the mine.” Specifically, he received permission from the railroad superintendent to supply new company houses in Helper with coal. He made enough money to send “4 of my children to Provo academy & one daughter Helen Grace for the whole school year.” By October 1899, he noted, “my business is now swelled beyond my capacity.” He hired a neighbor to drive the coal wagon and went to Castle Gate to learn more coal-mining techniques: “how to use a bar for prying off coal & how to make effectual crank for machine also how to undermine it seem like fun almost.” But by early December the
ever-pious Pratt admitted, “We are not very good church attenders these days, it being so far & us being so unkempt.”

Pratt’s dilemma of balancing capitalism with religion reverberated to the very top of his church. In the Panic of 1893, Apostle Heber J. Grant had secured eastern credit that carried Utah’s two main banks, Zion’s and the State Bank of Utah, through the ensuing, long-lasting depression. But by 1896, LDS President Woodruff privately lamented, “Unless the Lord opens the way in a marvelous manner, it looks as though we should never pay our debts.” Practical economic adjustment, not divine providence, provided the solution. In the 1890s, the previously-communal LDS Church and its leaders either originated or invested in a number of capitalistic industries, including the Utah Sugar Company (later Utah-Idaho Sugar Company) and the Intermountain Salt Company, later consolidated with the Inland Crystal Salt Company. The salt company ran a subsidiary, the pleasure-palace Saltair Pavilion, under private, non-Mormon sub-contractors. Saltair even stayed open on Sundays and served liquor, but it made money. As historian Leonard Arrington noted, one of the significant differences between these later enterprises and earlier efforts to “build the kingdom of Zion” was their for-profit nature, which could even supersede established religious values such as abstinence and Sunday closings.

As the LDS Church took tentative steps to allow a small measure of American capitalism into the rest of well-regulated Utah, Castle Valley bore the full brunt of unbridled, capitalistic skullduggery. Industry—in the form of a growing monopoly—became ever more entrenched in this barely-settled region. First, at Pleasant Valley, the PVCC monopolized all the commercial mines after Union Pacific permanently closed down there in 1897. It already owned Castle Gate, with its first-class safety measures and glowing banks of coke ovens. Then came the battle for Sunnyside, which solidified the industrial future of the Castle Valley corridor.

Out in the eastern Book Cliffs in Whitmore Canyon, the Western, through geologist Robert Forrester, competed with Salt Lake entrepreneur George T. Holladay, his Tidwell associates, and a host of others to secure the best coking coal in Utah. First Forrester tried unsuccessfully to bribe Holladay to give up his extensive Sunnyside claims, which he had disingenuously filed with Tidwell under the lenient federal law governing hard rock mining as far back as 1890. Then the Rio Grande tried threats. Going to the Salt Lake office to complain, Holladay was wooed away with a free railroad pass to the West Coast where he could ship out for the Klondike gold rush of 1897–1898. He got only as far as Portland when he realized his mistake and rushed back to Castle Valley into a Sunnyside gunfight with another would-be coal developer, Robert Kirker. Holladay later testified, “Kirker and his men came out of the cabin I had built and swore and cursed me,” firing warning shots over the unarmed Holladay’s head. “I tried to get my father’s Winchester away from him,” he added with certain
braggadocio, and “jumped off my horse and they all ran into the house like rats into a hole.” He then confronted Kirker with a legal suit for forcible entry, filed by the Holladay Coal Company—a fascinating association uniting devout Saints from Tidwell-Seely clan, anti-Mormon lobbyist Robert N. Baskin and fellow Liberals, and Holladay’s immediate family members. In 1899, Utah’s Supreme Court Judge Henry H. Rolapp (later a Castle Valley coal developer) granted Holladay “the highest form of possession” and the legal maximum acreage under the strict federal coal land laws: 640 acres. Unfortunately, this award constituted a much reduced amount from the area Holladay had actually claimed and was insufficient for a commercial mine. After winning this limited claim to Utah’s richest coal land, Holladay agreed to sell his parcel to the Rio Grande system for an alleged $22,000. The railroad now had a complete monopoly not only on rail transportation through Castle Valley, but on all its commercial mines.

Even before it officially acquired Sunnyside, the railroad’s mines were rich, and everybody knew it. Hardened drifters, looking for the main chance, crossed Castle Valley on the Outlaw Trail, described by sometime Price mayor Rolla West. It started in Montana or Wyoming, coming south through the Ute reservation in the Unita Basin then through “Nine Mile [Canyon] and over to Price and down to Green River, and [to] the Robber’s Roost stops down from Green River and on southeast across the river at Hite
in the early days.” Riding through the sparsely-settled area, outlaws sometimes rounded up unbranded calves (or “slicks”) or rustled cattle whose brands could be altered with a running iron, building bankrolls through economies of scale in stolen beef. “I understand they got $10 a head, but they had a lot of cattle,” recalled West. “And then they got to robbing trains and robbing banks . . . [because] there was more money in it.”

Butch Cassidy (formerly Robert Leroy Parker of Circleville, Utah) soon staged one of the most daring robberies in the American West. Accounts differ as to where he spent the winter of 1896–1897, but all agree that he was one of two men who met the Castle Gate payroll train that Wednesday in April 1897. The 12 o’clock train, the paper noted, had delivered the payroll to Castle Gate: “two sacks of silver, one of $1,000, one of $860, one sack of gold containing $7,000, and a satchel holding the rolls and checks for another thousand dollars, in all $9,860.” E. L. Carpenter, the paymaster, and a deputy clerk picked up the money-filled baggage and carried it about fifty yards to the steps of the company store while the train pulled out and about one hundred men stood around, waiting for their pay. In an instant, a “rough looking individual” shoved a gun in Carpenter’s face and demanded the sacks. Eyewitnesses described the outlaws: “one about 25 years of age and the other as middle age. The younger man wore a black hat, blue coat, and goggles, while the man who held Mr. Carpenter up had on a light slouch hat, denham [sic] overalls and brown coat. Both men were sun-browned and appeared more like cowboys or common hoboes than desperate highwaymen.”

But the guns showed their intentions. Carpenter dropped his sacks and raised his hands, while deputy clerk T. W. Lewis dashed into the company store with one sack of silver, alerting other company men whose shots went wild. The two robbers slung the bags of gold and silver coin over their saddles, mounted up and bolted, firing shots overhead, pausing at the south end of Castle Gate just long enough to cut the telegraph wires. They soon dropped the heavy silver but kept the gold, heading up Gordon Creek to mislead the posse, swinging abruptly south to Cleveland, then to Black Dragon Canyon in the San Rafael Swell and on to Robber’s Roost.

Paymaster Carpenter, in a new industrial twist, hopped a locomotive and went steaming down the tracks toward Price, where Castle Valley’s first telephone line had been installed just the year before. Strung out for thirty-five miles south of Price, it reached one phone each in Huntington, Castle Dale, Emery, and Ferron. Carpenter got a call through before the outlaws, coming out on the road in Emery County, cut the wires. Carbon’s Sheriff Gus Donant, and Emery’s Sheriff Azariah Tuttle, with a good description of the robbers and their horses, organized posses and rode after them. Down on the Swell, men from Castle Dale and Huntington mistook each other for the outlaws and started shooting; luckily, the only casualty was a gray mare. A week after the heist, the paper opined that the outlaws “are now as safe
Imagine a much larger crowd of miners, standing in front of this Castle Gate store, waiting for their pay, the day that Butch Cassidy and his Robbers Roost gang stole the payroll. This photo was taken about the time of the robbery. Courtesy of Western Mining and Railroad Museum.

as though they had been swallowed up by the earth and thus the Carpenter holdup will probably end.” And so it did, except that the following July, a special officer of the PVCC demanded that Carbon County’s Board of Commissioners remove Donant for his incompetence in failing to capture the robbers. Utah Fuel lawyer Mark Braffet supported the sheriff, but Donant was nonetheless defeated in the subsequent election.

After this heist and get-away, fears of outlaw activity flourished throughout Castle Valley. In March 1898, rumors spread that outlaws from the Robber’s Roost, recently seen around Price, were planning to steal the $30,000 Ute annuity coming in on the D&RGW. The Ninth Cavalry—the famed Buffalo Soldiers—rode down from the Basin and met the train first in Helper, then again at Price, and escorted the Indian agent with the payroll safely back to the fort. While viewed locally as an asset, these African-American soldiers faced special problems of prejudice in the larger society, exemplified by the then-recent 1896 Supreme Court decision in Plessy v. Ferguson that made “separate but equal” (really, inherently unequal) the law of the land.

Despite stiffening racial prejudice elsewhere, all of Price turned out a month later to honor two companies of the Ninth Cavalry who rode down from Ft. Duchesne to ship out on the D&RGW after the U.S. battleship Maine blew up and sank in Havana Harbor. Cuba belonged to Spain, and
Congress had just declared the Spanish-American War. The new state of Utah not only lost the Buffalo Soldiers but also filled her volunteer quota, including four men recruited at Price. Back East, young Theodore Roosevelt resigned his government post (as Under-Secretary of the Navy) to assemble his Rough Riders to fight in Cuba. On May 1, U.S. Commodore George Dewey crushed the Spanish fleet in the Philippines, prying America’s new Pacific colony from Spanish hands. People celebrated Dewey’s conquest with sheet music, prose, poetry, and a new holiday on May 1. Rivaling the Dewey fervor, people lionized the voyage of the great battleship Oregon around Cape Horn to join the Cuban conflict. Its commander, former Confederate General Joseph “Fighting Joe” Wheeler (also former House member and friend of Utah’s Joseph Rawlins), forgot where he was for a moment, yelling, “We’ve got the damn Yankees on the run!” After 113 days of fighting on Pacific and Caribbean fronts, the Spanish-American War was over. The D&RGW, hauling war-bound freight and troops, made more money than ever. Castle Valley towns like Price and Huntington even postponed beloved Pioneer Day celebrations until July 25 to hold the Maine Martyr Memorial services on July 24. In December, after the war ended, the post commander, headed out for Ft. Duchesne, presented the Price district school with an American flag.  

This patriotic interlude hardly stopped business as usual for local lawbreakers. On May 28, 1898, Gunplay Maxwell and an accomplice held up the Springville Bank, located in Utah County to the north of Castle Valley. They botched their get-away and the posse quickly caught them. While awaiting trial, Maxwell turned his famous ingenuity to making a mock pistol out of a match box, soap, twine, and tinfoil. He planned to scare the deputy who brought his meals and thus make an escape. Another prisoner spilled the plan to Sheriff George Storrs, now a much-esteemed peace officer. (Storrs had begun his career as a seventeen-year-old railroad grader for the D&RG in Colorado, passing through northern Castle Valley when only one house stood on the flat.) Thus frustrated, Maxwell turned to writing. He penned a book, now lost, illustrated with his own sketches, denying any association with the Robber’s Roost gang and airing grievances about officials who allegedly owed him for protecting their gilsonite claims. At Maxwell’s trial, Tobe Whitmore swore to seeing over $1,600 in gold taken from Maxwell, the proceeds of the robbery. Sheriff Storrs testified that Maxwell had confessed. The defense produced no witnesses, but objected to the jury of only eight men, the entire panel selected for the term by jury commissioners. The under-sized jury found Maxwell guilty and the judge sentenced him to eighteen years in the state penitentiary. Maxwell appealed, and a subsequent U.S. Supreme Court decision upheld the legality of a felony conviction brought by only eight men. Maxwell, having exhausted his legal remedies, then tried a prison break with a real weapon he constructed “with only an iron bedstead and a box of matches as his material.” Wardens
confiscated his unfinished mini-cannon, which worked as well as a standard rifle when they tried detonating it. After this, Maxwell stayed put—for a while.

Despite these law-and-order successes, an 1898 history apologetically noted that “The San Rafael mountains [sic—Swell] have long been regarded as a safe retreat for thieves and outlaws, and Emery county has been shunned because of the existence of the famous ‘Robber’s Roost’” (in fact, located in more southerly Wayne County). In Price, the *Eastern Utah Advocate* reported at the end of December 1899 that “There is every indication that the Robber’s Roosters have resumed business at the old stand. Stock is again missing from the range, and there are suspicious characters in the bad lands.” The Castle Valley corridor had earned a new, unsavory reputation, based on its gunmen rather than its geography. Soon, these men would get mixed up in its major industry: coal.