Roller Coaster, 1920–1929

There was much drinking in those days. . . . It was smart to out-wit prohibition officers, smart to be wild and woolly, to attend “Speak-Easies” where one could purchase drinks, dance, and have a “ball”. . . . I had thought [this behavior] would never get started in Emery County. I was wrong. These practices seep outward from the centers of the populated areas into the most remote corners.¹

—EVA WESTOVER CONOVER, FARM WIFE AND STATE LEGISLATOR

For many, the 1920s was a roller coaster ride, some of which felt distinctly uncomfortable. Historian Robert Wiebe claimed that World War I made America “tough and plural . . . [facing the] unfamiliarity of new relationships and the ambiguity of new principles.”² Everywhere, people felt drawn to new ideas and modern lifestyles. Expectations rose for the “good life,” and many plunged headlong into a round of fun sparked by movies, spread by automobiles, and spiked with bathtub gin. At the same time, a gathering depression in both mining and farming drove Castle Valley residents first to private organizations, then to the federal government for desperately needed aid.

Initially, Castle Valley rode the tail end of wartime prosperity. For example, in 1921, the Utah Oil Refining Company accidentally struck carbon dioxide gas in the Farnham anticline a few miles east of Wellington and helium in the Woodside anticline. Fresh from the military use of “lighter-than-air” balloons, the U.S. government created a local Helium Reserve to conserve the non-explosive gas. Never used for warfare, the carbon dioxide eventually was loaded into cartridges to shoot down coal. It also supplied Wellington’s long-lived dry ice plant (useful for all sorts of applications, even making home-made root beer or fog for stage productions), in lieu of the tremendous power normally required, such as the Dry Ice Corporation of America used to take from Niagara Falls.³
Farming did even better, including “patches of onions that netted the owners $1,000 an acre,” crowed the 1920 New West Magazine. Harvests boomed in sugar beets, cherries, alfalfa, sweet clover, potatoes, and other lucrative crops. This prosperity nonetheless had a tenuous natural basis. As a county agricultural agent noted, ten-inch precipitation, “low humidity and strong wind movement” meant that the “practice of farming during the summer and working in the mines in the winter has [of necessity] existed since the beginning.” Farmer-miners joined recent immigrants in a total of “eighteen mining camps running full time, with an output annually of 5,000,000 tons of bituminous coal” and became some of the “more than 5,000 miners.”

Job opportunities grew as more mines opened and old ones expanded. For example, Lion Coal Company merged with Wattis Coal in 1919 to further develop mining along the Carbon-Emery County border. Kinney Coal Company at Scofield was poised to open as the New West article went to press. Another new mine, called variously Little Standard or the McLean Mine, also opened in 1919 in Spring Canyon. Older developments also thrived: U.S. Fuel, now encompassing Hiawatha, Mohrland, and Black Hawk, had just produced over one million tons of coal, the only company besides Utah Fuel ever to do so. Latuda, in Spring Canyon, in 1920 drove a new 2,200-foot rock tunnel from the tipple into the coal seam, which lessened the grade, increased production, but still allowed an innovative method for generating electricity. The coal-filled cars of the mine trip, as they dropped down the canyon, generated enough power to run a new large, powerful electric substation, added in 1921. At the same time, in another rocky canyon over forty miles east along the Book Cliffs, the Columbia Steel Corporation developed a new mine in 1919. In 1921, it began shipping coal over a spur of the Sunnyside railway, and a year later opened an accompanying town, named—of course—Columbia.

As production increased, the price of coal began to drop: from $3.35 per ton in 1921; to $3.14 in 1922; to $2.89 in 1923; to $2.69 in 1924; to $2.53 by 1928; and to $2.47 as the Stock Market buckled a year later. In 1919–1921, domestic copper production dropped by 54 percent, slashing demand for coke. Utah’s grand jury later uncovered coal operators’ resultant price-fixing when, in coordination, they raised coal prices from $9.50 to $10.00 a ton. It indicted Frank N. Cameron of Utah Fuel; Frederick N. Sweet of Standard, Sweets, and others; Moroni Heiner of United States Fuel; Jesse W. Knight of Knight Fuel Company (which owned Storrs); and J. H. Tonkin, general manager of Kenilworth’s Independent Coal and Coke.

Nationwide, the economy faltered late in 1920. A lot of Americans ignored the sectional downturn that affected largely textiles, farming, and mining, (consequently devastating Castle Valley). Elsewhere, people were having too much fun. Part of the impetus came from Prohibition, adopted nationwide thanks to the Eighteenth Amendment and the accompanying
Volstead Act. Everywhere, bootleggers proliferated. In Castle Valley, they brewed or distilled the “good stuff” in sheep camps, basements, orchards, and old pioneer dugouts. The popular Wilstead Resort, halfway between Huntington and Castle Dale, attracted Saturday night dance crowds who “only had to walk along the road between the long rows of parked cars, and someone would come up to you and ask if you were looking for a drink.”

Out on the San Rafael Swell, Moonshine Tanks Canyon earned its name from local whiskey makers who would use the water from the sandstone holes to make their product, posting a guard at the top of the nearest ledge where the country could be viewed for miles. They sold their hundred proof to bootleggers, who would color it with boiled coffee, “dilute it 50 to 100 percent, and sell it for $1 a flat pint (12 ounces) or $4 a gallon. A pint was strong enough to get your mind off your troubles,” wrote Castle Dale’s Owen McClenahan. Some Castle Valley residents who had never before tried beer or liquor tried it then; for others, particularly immigrants, alcohol had always been part of their lives. Although American temperance reformers had high expectations, in 1924 Castle Gate’s T. L. Burridge summed up the common attitude in his diary: “Jack had some very good moonshine and I think it did our cold a world of good. Still we are breaking the law when we drink even though it is given to us, but [it] is mighty hard to live up strictly to a law that you are not in sympathy with.” This noble experiment finally died an ignoble death in 1933, after stimulating organized crime and new roles for women, for whom clandestine speak-easies had become daring new retreats.

In part, the enactment of the Twentieth Amendment—Woman Suffrage—in 1919, had also altered women’s roles. Nineteen-twenties women moved in larger circles than their forbears and had new experiences. For example, Eva Conover spent her senior year of high school in Provo in 1926–1927, leaving a quiet farming town where girls did not drink and returning to find that many did. While she refused to drink alcohol, she did love “the Jazz music that kept one’s feet tapping, those fads in dances, the flee-hop, the Charleston, the fox-trot, the two-step, and always the waltz. . . . I remember watching, before I was old enough to dance, the ‘Shimmie’, and ‘The Rag’. They were something else!” Others expressed their modernity by moving away from home, such as Alda Vee Lambson Alger, who left her home in Circleville, Paiute County, to teach at Consumers coal camp in 1926. “I think that everyone was horrified that I wanted to come to Carbon County, but I did,” she recalled, “because it was metropolitan.”

Perhaps the greatest influence of all was the movies. Women copied the stars, bobbing their hair, raising hemlines all the way to the knee, becoming the ultimate “flapper,” a cartoon creation of Salt Lake native John Held, Jr. While the technical, mechanical ability to make moving pictures had surfaced in the 1880s and 1890s, the idea of a theatrical narrative matured (in the U.S.) with The Great Train Robbery in 1903, and the first feature-length
film aired in 1912. World War I had severely hampered European competition since celluloid (the basic material for film) and high explosives required the same ingredients, giving America the global lead in film. Locally, by 1908, beloved “Uncle” Bert Martin and his wife, Mae, started bringing silent films to the valley every two weeks. They charged twenty-five cents for adults and ten cents for children. Martin originally arrived with a hand-cranked projector and showed one twelve-minute reel at a time. As an elderly man, he was still making the rounds in the 1930s, showing films for two nights at the Finn Hall in Clear Creek, then traveling down to Castle Gate for another two-night stand. Everyone went; one former Helper child billed movie night as “a big event.” Building on Martin’s success, Price businessmen opened the first newly constructed motion picture theater in 1911. By 1913, Price had two theaters, the Isis and the Eko. The latter had contracted with the Orpheum Theater circuit, which promised “talking pictures [with the aid of accompanying phonographs], acquired at a cost of $75,000 for ninety days.” A year or two later, Abraham Greenhalgh bought the old Killpack store building in Ferron where his family’s orchestra played for dances. When few people came, the Greenhalghs turned the large hall into a movie theater. People crowded in once a week on “show night,” getting “a glimpse of the outside world, breaking down the barrier that had isolated the community,” later reported a local historian. When a second theater failed, the Greenhalghs took it over, too, but the over-expanded business faltered. After that, the LDS Church committee sponsored motion pictures at the chapel to maintain that link to the world outside, as it later did in the ward meetinghouses at Castle Dale, Emery, Huntington, and Cleveland. By the 1920s, Ferron could boast the presence of the Star Theater, which, in 1930, showed the first “talkies” in Emery County. Other Castle Valley towns had their own movie palaces: the Bonita Theater in Huntington; the Rex Theater in Castle Dale; and the Gem Theater in Green River. In Helper, movies aired in the Liberty Theater, then patrons folded up their chairs, rolled up the protective floor canvas, and the dancing began (at least until the Strand Theater opened in 1922). In the basement of the Strand, storekeeper Harry Eda showed silent Japanese movies, and provided a stage for occasional traveling Kabuki theater groups, pool, and gambling. At Kenilworth, the company offered free silent movies every Thursday night and another ten-cent show on Sunday afternoon. Castle Gate, too, offered “Dances on Saturday night. The picture shows weren’t talking . . . you’d read underneath what they were saying,” remembered Walter Borla, the child of Italian immigrants. At Standardville, Nedra Monroe Richardson and Kay Leavitt also remembered the silents, with piano accompaniment first provided by Mrs. Harmond from Price, and later by town resident Mrs. Beebe.

This lighthearted, multi-ethnic entertainment contrasted with a growing post-war national perception that dangerous immigrant hordes were
Roller Coaster, 1920–1929

As the door swung shut, foreigners still kept coming to Castle Valley: South Slavs, driven out of their homeland as Italy got their villages by treaty after the war; Japanese, who had originally followed the fad of seeking work in the modern land of America. For example, seventeen-year-old Masaki Okura had left his native village in 1904, and sent money back to Japan ever since, creating favorable press with his illusion of easy prosperity. His cousin, Kosuye Tsugawa Okura, had been married to him by proxy although she was only four when he left and did not remember him. Masaki returned to claim his bride when she was nineteen. “The day I went to the station to go after him I said to my family, ‘I will be back in a little while.’ Everybody was laughing at me because . . . officially I was [already] an Okura.” She never lived with her natal family again. Masaki had told Kosuye he was a railroad section foreman (which he had been in Wyoming) but, months later, upon arrival in the U.S., he brought her straight to the better-paying Kenilworth coal mines. “I felt so degraded to be lowered that low from being raised in such a high [samurai] class,” recalled Kosuye. “I cried every day . . . [for] a year.” To help meet expenses, she started cooking for the bachelors in the “Jap” boarding house. That November, the company doctor delivered her first daughter whom she named Utah, the only English word she knew.

American nativists, caught up in pseudo-scientific racism, wanted no such “inferior races” breeding on their shores. Consequently, in 1921, Congress established a quota system, limiting new arrivals to three percent of the total number emigrating from each European nation based on the 1910 census. Already-established Asian restrictions remained untouched; the Western Hemisphere was excluded. According to historian John Higham, “the law of 1921 proved in the long run the most important turning-point in American immigration policy.” Its hallmarks—the quota system favoring northern Europe and its sharp limitations generally—allegedly insured that “in a generation the foreign-born would cease to be a major factor in American history.” He may have overestimated the new law’s impact; nonetheless, its stringency very nearly had tragic results for the Bikakis family who arrived from Crete in 1921. Nick Bikakis recalled that his father, already working in America, had sent for him, his sister, and their mother to come join him. When they got to Ellis Island, they had to wait almost a month while their papers were processed. By then, “the immigration quota had closed and they were going to send us back to Greece.” Luckily, another Utah-bound traveler had gotten through and informed their father of their imminent deportation. Through Stylian Staes, he got in touch with a U.S. senator who interceded with immigration officials. A week later, the family was reunited in Castle Valley. As far as Congress was concerned, however, the 1921 law still admitted too many “undesirables,” so it passed a revision in 1924. The new act set a two percent limit based on the 1890 census until a survey of “national origins” of all previous immigrants could
serve as the basis for parceling out a total quota of 150,000 by 1927 (actually implemented in 1929). The Japanese, like the Chinese in 1884, were completely excluded.35

Unions welcomed immigration restriction because it signaled the end of imported foreign strike-breakers. The new immigration laws, coupled with the prolonged economic downturn, created an explosive labor situation. When in 1922 Castle Valley mine owners cut workers’ pay by thirty percent (also lowering the cost of coal camp housing and mining supplies by fifteen percent), the imbalance in favor of the company was all too obvious.36 When the UMWA walked out nationwide, still partially organized Utah went, too.37 The Strike of 1922 had begun.

Different camps had different experiences. At Winter Quarters, company man Stanley Harvey remembered how the “head guard,” Sam Dorrity, rode horseback down to Scofield, attracting gunfire from striking miners. “They [the strikers] were shooting low [to avoid a fatality] it looked like,” Harvey later recalled. Dorrity survived, but his horse died.38 Two strikers were also wounded, one shot thorough the lungs with a bullet in the back, and the other through the right shoulder. Often, Scofield teachers kept children in after school and made them lie on the floor to protect them from the shooting.39 The companies continued bringing in strikebreakers from other states and counties, including Huntington and Castle Dale. “Sometimes they would bring them in over the hill on saddle horses from . . . Sanpete,” Harvey remembered. “It was an awful job trying to break them into mining coal because they didn’t know a thing about it.”40

When companies needed still more miners, they turned to a previously almost untapped population: African Americans. As Howard Browne, Sr. recalled, “In 1922 or 1923 . . . they started bringing people from down South to come in here to break strikes. And that’s the main reason why most of the blacks (including my stepfather) got in Carbon County.”41 By the 1920s, the South seemed a good place to leave. As blacks there became better educated and more articulate, many whites tried to keep them from advancing with highly discriminatory Jim Crow laws, often backed by violence. Thus, they made ideal recruits for Castle Valley coal operators, who had run out of other pliant populations to import. During the strike, Browne’s family went to Rains. “There were about twenty blacks living there, working in the mine. There were ten or fifteen black people living in Helper . . . Latuda . . . Castle Gate . . . Kenilworth; and another twenty or thirty living and working in . . . Hiawatha. “42 Unknowingly, the African Americans had moved into camp quarters recently emptied by threats and violence.

In camp after camp, company men had evicted the striking miners and their families from corporate property. Sometimes men in the boarding houses lacked even the time to pack their clothing.43 At Sunnyside, while company guards prepared to throw a woman in labor out into the street, the company doctor, Andrew Dowd, stood on her porch with a shotgun and
threatened to shoot any guard who entered. All up and down the Castle Valley corridor, evicted families settled where they could. Some farmer-miners went home to Emery County. The UMWA provided displaced members with tents shipped in from Wyoming, fostering colonies of strike towns, often just outside the coal camps. At remote Hiawatha, every day the town marshal, William Steckleman, rode his horse down to the strike camp to escort one or two people into town so they could buy necessities and pick up the mail for all of those on strike. When one of the women in the tent camp became seriously ill, Steckleman approached the company doctor for help. He refused to come to the strike camp, but the superintendent agreed to send his car to fetch her if his chauffeur would drive. The chauffeur assented. Consequently, with the armed Steckleman in the front seat, they brought the patient to the company hospital, where she recovered.

At Sunnyside, those evicted included Albert Vogrenic and Anna Marolt Tolich, then striking miners’ children. Vogrenic, born in Sunnyside in 1916, particularly recalled the “great big wire fence across the bottom end of town there, and us kids used to get up on the fence and throw rocks at the scabs.” One night when they climbed the fence, the company’s searchlight swung across and lit them up and guards shot at them. Tolich remembered their tent with a hard-packed dirt floor. She also described the machine gun stationed on a hill above the mine entrance, and the National Guard with their guns: “It was quite a harassment . . . [although] they didn’t hurt anybody.” Most warmly, she remembered the United Mine Workers’ organizer, Frank Bonacci, who “helped to put the union in.”

Bonacci’s family suffered severely when the strike began at Kenilworth. Frank Bonacci was run out of town, and mine guards moved his family to a run-down, old house at its outskirts without water or electricity. Guards kept them prisoner, denying them food. “Several days later Ann Dolinski defied the guard and walked to the house,” wrote Helen Papanikolas. “The younger children could not keep down the omelet she brought after their long hunger. The oldest child, Marion Lupo, said, ‘My mother was never the same after this experience. She was silent and withdrawn.’” Bonacci and his brother moved down to their married sister’s farm in Spring Glen. The company set up a searchlight that raked the little community all night long. “I’d go to bed every night with fear and worry,” recalled their niece, Filomena Fazzio Bonacci. “The searchlight put fear in us. [We thought] they knew everything that was going on down here. They could tell who was here and who wasn’t here.”

Plenty of others came to Spring Glen, the only heavily ethnic farming village in Castle Valley. The family of John Kosec, driven from Mohrland when the strike started, moved to a 12 x 15–foot tent there, one of dozens stretching clear to the railroad tracks. “Wherever they could find a place, there was a tent,” said Francis Dupin Vouk, remembering the sight in front of her father’s store, where plenty of strikers lived on credit (some
of which they never repaid). A few others made money working for Martin Millarich across the street, putting up a brick building called Millarich Hall that replaced the old wooden building standing since 1907. Millarich had run a tavern there until Prohibition. After that, he turned to bottling soda water and, some said, selling bootleg out the back. Fellow Austrian Leonard Mahorich did the carpentry work on the new building to earn his living.51 Other families helped out on local farms, such as the one shared by Dominic Conca, Virginio Marzo, and John and Camillo Manina. “The men, the kids, they’d come up and give you a hand and take vegetables,” remembered Jack Marzo, Virginio’s son. A lot of strikers also worked on the highway from Helper to Castle Gate, using teams with scrapers, and digging the road by hand.52

Invariably, with typical American xenophobia, officials blamed a particular ethnic group for the strike. In 1903–1904, Italians had been targeted. In Kenilworth, the blame shifted to Greeks in 1910 and stayed there through 1922. This pattern of always finding a new scapegoat replicated the American dislike of the newest foreign arrivals, and the Greeks had come in great numbers only since 1900. (For that matter, so had the Japanese, but they remained too few in number—and too disinclined to strike—to constitute as much of a “menace.”) As historian Helen Papanikolas explained, the Greeks “asking for army exemption during the war [World War I], their refusal to attend Americanization classes, their sending large amounts of money to Greece, and their bootleg and assault charges” made them special targets of the newspapers and the American Legion.53 In response, they banded more closely together to confront growing prejudice. In the early 1900s, the Greeks had formed Pan Hellenic Unions, admitting all their countrymen. During the 1922 strike, the old organizations foundered as men separated into new groups based on their Greek provinces of origin. Almost all also joined one of the national lodges: the American Hellenic Educational Progress Association (AHEPA), founded in 1922 to foster assimilation, and the more conservative Greek American Progressive Association (GAPA), established a year later, which emphasized the preservation of Greek culture.54 The first death in the 1922 strike was also a Greek. On May 14, 1922, striker John Tenas (Htenakis) died from a bullet fired by deputy sheriff Lorenzo H. Young from Huntington. The unarmed Tenas, strikers claimed, had been shot in the back, but Young said he had shot in self-defense. At Tenas’s funeral, the Price band marched in procession with seven hundred Greeks following his casket, many waving small blue-and-white Greek flags.55

Friction increased. Strikers consistently picketed the entrances to coal camps and along the Utah Railway, the artery bringing strikebreakers to the more remote mines. Sporadic shooting erupted: twice at Kenilworth and once at Standardville, with no injuries. Dynamite was often the weapon of choice in America’s labor wars, and Castle Valley had plenty of it, for shooting
down coal in the mines, or for heralding the beginning of a celebration like Dewey Day, Independence Day, or July 24th. But no one ever used it in a strike. Instead, men loaded their rifles, seeking specific, not general, targets. On June 14 some strikers prepared for a confrontation when word came of a group of about twenty Colorado men riding to Standardville in a single car on the Utah Railway. When the unionized train crew learned the passengers’ identities, they refused to budge, stranding the “scab train” at Castle Gate. So, R. J. Vaughan, former Union Pacific engineer and new Utah Railway superintendent, decided to drive the train. Standardville’s Arthur P. Webb, county deputy and company guard, agreed to be the fireman, shoveling coal into the engine box to keep up a head of steam. H. E. Lewis, general manager of the Standard Coal Company, and a number of other armed guards rode with them. “My dad rode the train in the cab,” later recalled Wilhelmina Steckleman Holdaway (or Stecky). “But when they went through the tunnel at Martin, and came out. . . . these men [striking miners] were up on the hill. My dad looked up there and said he didn’t see anyone . . . [but] of course, they were behind bushes. And then he looked to see if there was any on the other side of the track and just then the shots were fired and Mr. Webb was killed.” The strikers told it differently. As always, they said, they were picketing along the track to let the
men on the train know they were taking jobs of striking miners. According to their attorney, Sam King, “[W]hen the train left the tunnel . . . a number [tried] approaching the train on the track and in the open. . . . [F]iring at once started from the train . . . [and] judging by the number of shots fired from the train, the strikebreakers must have been armed.” 58 One Greek striker was shot in the arm and later arrested. He escaped from custody, although fourteen other Greeks and one Italian were later identified by H. E. Lewis as the perpetrators—in fact, some had been present and some had not. Prejudicial news articles followed. After quick local trials, initial defendants received long sentences. Subsequent trials were later moved to Castle Dale, and dragged on into 1924. 59 Union miner Vito Bonacci put the whole incident more bluntly: “when this train . . . came through the tunnel, somebody shot him [Webb] . . . . That’s when the soldiers came down.” 60 Governor Mabey had ordered in the Utah National Guard to patrol the coal fields.

Guards fanned out to the coal camps, Scofield, and Helper. About three hundred local miners were rounded up and those found with weapons disarmed; three-man patrols prevented street meetings; sentries guarded all the roads to and from Helper, and machine guns threatened strikers’ tent camps from the heights. When Margaret Marzo Ariotti and her siblings left their Spring Glen farm to attend St. Anthony’s Catholic Church in Helper, oncoming soldiers frightened them so they hid in the sagebrush by the canal. They watched wide-eyed as the soldiers stabbed the wet ground with their bayonets, probing for buried guns. 61 Eight-year-old Elizabeth Jackson Ciochette, living in Kenilworth, remembered the “guard at the entrance of town, and people had to have a pass coming and going. . . . The curfew was ten o’clock at night and every light had to be put out, except the search lights. If the lights were not out at curfew, guards would rap on the door with their gun butts. . . . if arms were found, they were confiscated.” 62 Charlie Saccomanno, also eight, took his dog with him when he went with his father and uncle to peddle produce from their Spring Glen farm. “As you would enter Kenilworth,” he remembered, “a guard would pull the ropes to open the gate. Once we got in, they would check our wagon for any guns or artillery we might be trying to smuggle in. . . . One day I was sitting along side of the road when one officer was riding up on his horse. My dog started to bark at him; the officer took out his gun and shot my dog. I went home, got a shovel, and buried the dog.” 63

In August, the UMWA called off the strike as, back East, John L. Lewis forged a settlement. Utah mine owners restored the wage scale prevalent before the thirty percent reduction. Companies refused to recognize the union. As Charlie Saccomanno summarized, “Soon after the strike ended, the men went back to Kenilworth. Some to their homes and to their jobs, some to find out that someone else was living in their homes and working at their jobs.” 64 Some of those who replaced blacklisted strikers had left
their farms only in desperation as nature seemingly turned against them. For example, alfalfa and clover, the staple crops since before World War I, repeatedly suffered from the perennial local problem of insufficient water plus a severe infestation of the alfalfa weevil. In Ferron, Cliff Snow managed to combat the insect pests with a machine he made from old binder parts that beat the insects off the high alfalfa onto a canvas. Then the bugs were dumped out in a pile and burned. But in the 1920s, alfalfa prices went into a slide, and by the mid-1930s, farmers no longer grew it as a cash crop. Likewise, the 1920s saw a decrease in apple trees, home-made butter, and honey production. Consequently, some families chose the coal camp life, and the company assigned them houses vacated during the strike. Those arriving in Kenilworth in 1922 included Calvin Jewkes from Orangeville, who began as a teen-aged miner and went on to a long career in the company store. This talented musician and singer became leader of the Cal Jewkes Orchestra, the “Music Venders,” arguably the best dance band in Castle Valley. He also played trombone in other orchestras, joined a quartet which sang at the Price Theater’s intermissions, and by the end of his life had sung for over 2,500 funerals and in a lot of other places. Another new Kenilworth resident, Wilford Coleman Burton, came with his wife, Coila Otten Burton, and their baby, Jeannette, following his brothers into the camp. As another daughter put it, they had to move because “their farm was unable to provide enough due to depressed times.”

As Castle Valley’s economy tottered, some people tried to made a living in business. For example, John Skerl, Sr., a Slovenian immigrant who had first mined coal at Sunnyside then gone into cattle with the Millarich brothers during World War I, found his herd destroyed by a freak freeze. Then, prices dropped. Cattle he had bought at $75 a head he sold for $25 a head. He lost the farm, moved to Spring Glen, and went to work for Frank Dolinsky at a pool hall there until the Strike of 1922 undercut that business, too. In 1924, Skerl partnered with Italian James Rolando in what became Helper’s Mutual Furniture and Hardware, but not without a long struggle. (Nonetheless, their enterprise lasted for over seventy years.) In short, as the economy rose and fell (and fell some more), hard times shuffled the population up and down the Castle Valley corridor.

More affluent businessmen also took a gamble. Frederick Sweet pioneered the development of a new mining district on Gordon Creek, just south of Spring Canyon. His timely purchase of a block of land just pre-dated the new federal Mineral Leasing Act of 1920, which mandated that coal deposits could never again be sold to private owners. After 1920, only the surface lands above them could be bought. Coal mining rights had to be leased from the federal government, putting money into the national coffers rather than into private, corporate pockets. On his recent coal land acquisition, Sweet founded two new developments: the town and mine of Sweets in 1921, and the nearby National mine and town. At about the same
time, Arthur E. Gibson opened his own mine in Gordon Creek Canyon, soon to be known as Consumers for the parent Consumers Mutual Coal Company. George A. Storrs secured a lease on land that became the Gordon Creek Mine and planned a town he called Coal City. In 1924, the new National Railroad, under President F. A. Sweet and Vice President George A. Storrs, began serving all these developments. Storrs also put his own assets into a would-be utopian project just four miles from Spring Canyon. On the advice of John Pettit, the new state coal mine inspector, he had approached brothers Shekry [Shekra] and Jim [Nedje] Sheya, Syro-Lebanese immigrants, about the purchase of their grazing land which covered a potentially lucrative coal vein. The Sheyas had followed ‘Brahim (Abraham) Howa, Utah’s earliest Syro-Lebanese settler, into Castle Valley. Howa had come to Carbon County around 1896, originally peddling carpets and jewelry. He had settled down and tried both mining and farming, a pattern emulated by the Sheyas who had become substantial landowners by the time Storrs contacted them. Eventually, Jim bought out his brother and he and George Storrs incorporated Cedar Mesa Farms and stocked it with cattle and sheep. The farm company also legally owned eighty acres of coal land, and Storrs began a long, frustrating attempt to get financing for a railroad to tap the area and to develop a new mine.

Storrs planned a grand future for his holdings. Through his newly-established Great Western Coal Company, Storrs sought to build a railroad spur, the National Coal Railway, to connect his development with that of Fred Sweet. As expenses mounted, Storrs borrowed money where he could. “I have even taken the shoes off my feet and given them to teamsters on the [railroad] grade in order to keep the teams going,” wrote Storrs later. Storrs himself drove scraper teams, “plow teams, and put on a blacksmith’s apron and shod horses,” doing “any and everything I could think of to keep this company going.” Saddled with incompetent bookkeepers, rising expenses, and a mine unready for production, Storrs continued sinking a great deal of his own and borrowed money into the venture, holding fast to his utopian vision of employee profit-sharing: a town where each miner would own his own land, “a little spot of ground on which to raise his vegetables during the slack period in the mine industry,” where “every miner . . . [would] become a stockholder with us.” He wanted to “build a town that would be a credit to other American coal camps . . . for the betterment of humanity in connection with the coal industry inasmuch as we thought it would prevent at all times coal strikes or coal mine troubles such as have been the menace to the coal mining industry in the United States.” To this end, he established Coal City next to the proposed mine. After a great many other deals fell through, Storrs went to Hollywood, where his daughter, Beulah Storrs Lewis, had joined Hollywood’s Universal Film Company in 1916, and made several appearances in the serialized episodes of Graft. “I . . . went to see Charlie Chaplin, whom I knew personally,” wrote Storrs,
but his bad luck held. “Charlie’s interest was for the proposition but his manager was not.”

Storrs’s choice of Charlie Chaplin as a potential investor was no idle whim, but based on the sound realization of the star’s incredible wealth. As America’s star system matured, actors’ incomes grew phenomenally. Charlie Chaplin, who had begun at $150 per week in 1913, went to a second studio in 1915 for $1,250 per week. The following year, he signed with a new studio for $10,000 a week with a $150,000 signing bonus. By the time Storrs contacted him, Chaplin was worth millions. The film industry was becoming Big Business: by 1920 studios routinely owned their own theaters to showcase the films of their stars. At least one Castle Valley native achieved modest success: Castle Dale’s Artimus Ward (Art) Acord. He had begun show business in Buffalo Bill’s Wild West Show in 1898 and reigned as World’s Champion Cowboy from 1912–1914. After service in World War I, Acord went to Hollywood, making movies there and in Mexico, South America, and England before his death in 1931. He saw movies make the transition to talkies, in 1927, and the addition of newsreels—beginning with Fox Movietone News—as millions paid their quarter every weekend to see the latest show.

George Storrs’s dogged quest for funding ultimately brought a touch of all-American “ballyhoo” to Castle Valley. According to 1920s journalist Frederick Lewis Allen, “ballyhoo” erupted when “millions of men and women turned their attention, their talk, and their emotional interest upon a series of tremendous trifles—a heavyweight boxing-match, a murder trial, a new automobile model, a transatlantic flight.” Castle Valley shared in this tendency, never more so than when heavyweight boxing champion Jack Dempsey came to Storrs’s Coal City. Here is how that happened. Discouraged and headed home from Hollywood after his failure to interest Chaplin, Storrs encountered Jack Dempsey and his manager, Jack Kearns, traveling on the same train. Dempsey knew something about mining, having worked in the mines at Cripple Creek in his youth. Storrs’s project piqued his interest, and he sent his brother, Bernard, to view Storrs’s property. After a good look around, Bernard advised his brother to invest. A contract was duly signed, making Jack Dempsey the president of the Great Western Coal Company and Kearns the secretary-treasurer. Planning to raise more development money from his wealthy friends, in 1923 Dempsey moved his training camp to Coal City (sometimes referred to as Dempsey City) where he trained in the fields and in the basement of the Andreini store, one of three cinder block buildings amidst the tiny cluster of frame houses that constituted the town. While locals touted the little coal camp as “Coal City with a punch behind it,” miners preferred to live near their work at National, Consumers, or Sweets, and Dempsey’s rich friends failed to donate. Then came the Gibbons-Dempsey fight in Montana. Jack left to train. “After that,” recalled Storrs, “notwithstanding the fact that they had absolute control, they
paid no attention to this proposition. Again we were left to hold the sack.”

Storrs managed to buy back his stock, and wound up selling his nascent railroad to the Utah Railway Company in 1926 for over half a million dollars. Dempsey, of course, went on to his momentous loss to Gene Tunney that same year in front of over 130,000 spectators who had paid a total of almost two million dollars to see the fight. A year later, 145,000 people (roughly six times the population of all of Castle Valley) brought in gate receipts of $2,600,000 in a Chicago amphitheater so huge that many in the outermost seats did not know who had won when the fight ended. Tunney did, aided by the infamous thirteen-second “long count” in the seventh round, which allowed him to regain his feet and go on to vanquish Dempsey.

As Allen claimed, Castle Valley, like the rest of the country, also had a love affair with cars. The 1920s was the car’s heyday, as numbers grew nationwide: from eight thousand in 1900 to over eight million in 1920 to almost twenty-three million—one for every five Americans—in 1930. In 1914, for the first time, the country manufactured more cars than wagons and carriages. Consequently, Price’s John Redd, among many others, switched from running a livery stable to managing Redd Motors. Just after World War I, Redd bought a Franklin and chauffeured those who paid for the ride, including Rolla West and his fiancée to Helper and back for $5.00. “A man couldn’t treat his girl to anything nicer than that!” West said.

Henry Ford’s innovative assembly line pushed down the $850 price of a 1908 Ford Model T to $585 for a Ford roadster in 1926. Eighteen-year-old coal miner Clifford Smith had already put down $265 toward the roadster when a mine accident blew out his right eye and, before he recuperated, his father died. When he requested a refund, the Ford Garage owner told him, “No, I can’t do that, for we have already ordered the car, and you have already paid more than the official down payment.” Then, Smith explained that he did not want the county to have to bury his dad. “So he gave me all the money back,” Smith recalled.

Local residents started getting their own cars in larger numbers around 1923 or 1924, although for many, like Smith, cars remained a luxury. Automotive infrastructure had to keep pace. For example, Arthur W. Horsley, Price Mayor in 1916–1917, established the town’s first street and traffic ordinances and backed a “camping ground for automobile tourists” at the old freighting grounds. Tourist traffic increased, particularly after 1921, when the Pikes Peak Ocean-to-Ocean Highway was routed through Castle Valley, running west from Green River to Price, then south down the face of the Wasatch Plateau and again west over Salina Pass. Out-of-the-way roads remained terrible, however. In 1924, Mrs. Elsie Huntsman, schoolteacher at Kiz, tried to drive to Price and the car in which she was riding overturned in the bottom of a flooded wash. She drowned.

To serve the public, garages, service stations, and transportation lines sprung up all over. Would-be coal developer George Miller opened Hun-
Every day, Wellington’s Bill Norton drove his town’s older children to Price to attend high school. Children from more distant coal camps had to take weekly buses and board in Price at their own expense. Courtesy of Western Mining and Railroad Museum.

Washington’s first garage in 1917. Competing auto lines tried serving remote camps. Guthiel-Broecker originally served Emery County, beginning in 1915, but by the 1940s, Parley P. Johnson had that contract. Star routes to the coal camps remained contracted out: later the Arrow Stage Line (or Arrow Auto Line), served Hiawatha, Wattis, the Sunnyside district, Wellington, and National, at least until 1918, when the state public utilities commission granted exclusive rights to Huey and Bell of Price, the pioneers of the route, ousting the competing Star Line. In 1926, Mohrland bought a school bus to transport students to North Emery High School in Huntington, and children from all the other coal camps rode the bus to Price, where they boarded during the week at their own expense. The Millerton Dairy also became motorized. For years, it supplied milk to the U.S. Fuel camps on the Black Hawk vein. The dairy, some four miles outside Hiawatha, had begun under the Miller brothers and eventually came under the administration of Reuben G. Miller, Emery Stake president and active polygamist. As former Mohrland resident Max Finley remembered, “Milk from the company dairy located at Miller Creek was delivered in glass bottles. It would arrive on the doorstep before dawn and with luck, in the wintertime, would be brought in before it froze solid and pushed the paper lid off the top and made the cream available to the family cat.”

Others turned to trucks to make a living. Maude Marsing, who with her husband, Orson, and family ranched 3,000 acres on Miller Creek, remembered buying a 1927 Chevrolet truck that allowed them to make two or
three trips to Price daily rather than one with the wagon. “We never enjoyed any other truck as much,” she later recalled—and certainly not for its accessories, because it had none. In the mid-1920s, Luke Cormani also turned to his truck when his hours got cut on the D&RGW. “I had this brand new Rio truck that my dad bought and I bid for the mail.” He got the contract to drive the stage from Helper to Latuda at the top of Spring Canyon, stopping at each mine on the way. “I went every day when the train came here [to Helper] and would bring the meat and everything for the stores in Spring Canyon.” Loading up the truck and driving the route took about two or three hours a day, “Made about $250 a month. . . . That was big money.”

Cormani’s reliance on his truck as the railroad reduced his hours mirrored the reality of American transportation. Cars and trucks made tough competition for the railroads. Trains became longer and heavier, going from an average freight train of thirty-seven cars weighing 1,443 tons in 1920, to an average of forty-five cars weighing 1,750 tons six years later. Railroads consolidated, and, by 1928, the United States had about eight hundred lines, down from over six thousand a few years earlier. Upgrading technologically, locomotives switched to diesel, cutting down the demand for coal, a decision that reverberated through the Castle Valley mines. Furthermore, the car had immediate environmental consequences. By about 1930, so many motorized residents had turned their horses loose that Carbon County hired John Prince to round up all the wild bands foraging in farmers’ fields and gardens—up to two hundred at Sunnyside alone. Although Joe Swasey, still erect and barrel chested, mourned the destruction of the desert horses that had primed his long livestock career, the day of horse-drawn transportation was over.

As more and more people got cars, they found new uses for their vehicles. For example, Castle Valley baseball fans would drive up to one of the many diamonds sprinkled throughout the area to watch the game from their cars, since most had no grandstand. At sunset, they turned on their headlights to light the field. Everyone played baseball—boys and girls (usually on separate teams), miners and farmers, immigrants and native-born. Ferron’s Irma Petersen Snow remembered her after-school baseball games: “That was one of the most important things in my life. I hardly even ate. Whoever was early got to pitch. We played in the street.” Nationally, baseball’s roots went back to the eastern U.S. in the 1850s and 1860s, where the Cincinnati Red Stockings emerged as the first professional team in 1869. The game had arrived in Castle Valley by 1895, when the pious Teancum Pratt complained, “Helper is a baseball center [as it still remains;] the towns above & below come here to play match games on Sundays, & my children are in some danger of breaking the sabbath.” A year later, the Orangeville baseball team posed for a formal photograph sporting new uniforms. Ernest Horsley described Price’s celebrations for July 4 and 24, 1899, with “baseball, [a] new game, included.” After the turn-of-the century
proliferation of commercial mines and company towns, a “coal camp league” developed. Each of the companies hired men, ostensibly as miners, who could swing a bat, pitch a strike, or heave a ball in from mid-field. “The miners . . . started it,” remembered Joe Myers, the son of Austrian immigrants. “They wanted a ball club. And it originally started from importing ball players . . . We had [Hall-of-Famers] Heinie Manush, played with the Washington Senators . . . We had China Brown and we had Mike Kreevish . . . and Carl Mays.”

Legendary local player Frank Zaccaria, a Helper native, later signed with Ty Cobb to play for the minor league San Francisco Seals. He spent five years on this farm team for the New York Yankees before accepting a job (really to play ball) for Utah Copper Company in the state’s Industrial League. In the 1930s, too, a woman’s league flourished. Millie Vogrenic Babcock and Frances Day Vogrenic played on the King Koal women’s team. At the same time, Carbon County organized junior and senior softball leagues, all of which created a foundation for a passion that would last well into the twenty-first century.

Helper’s Luke Cormani moved abruptly from waterboy to substitute catcher in 1915, “because the catcher got hurt,” he recalled. “We played all over. . . . Kenilworth had a ball club, Hiawatha, Mohrland, Castle Gate, Price, even down at Castle Dale we used to go down and play occasionally” although they were not in the league. Harry Conover pitched for the Ferron team, and became its manager for years after he stopped playing. Mohrland, despite being located in Emery County, won the Carbon County league championship in 1915 and therefore got to play the Chicago White Sox in an exhibition game in Price. The contest attracted an estimated 10,000 spectators—from a valley with fewer than 20,000 total residents. The White Sox won 17–1.

Nationally, the whole baseball world was rocked four years later when the much-favored Chicago White Sox lost to the Cincinnati Reds in the 1919 World Series. The Sox, originally favored 3–to-1, saw the odds shift to favor the Reds 8–to-5 before the eight-game series ended. Cruelly underpaid by tight-fisted Charles Comiskey, eight White Sox players had allegedly agreed to throw the series for $10,000 apiece. Reduced payoffs, an attempted double-cross, and crucial miscommunications enriched only the gamblers in the end. In a 1921 trial, all the players were acquitted when key records disappeared. Regardless of this outcome, the tough new commissioner, Judge Kenisaw Mountain Landis, banned all eight men from baseball for life. Forever after, they were known as the Chicago Black Sox.

“The only thing they could do was organize a team and barnstorm throughout the country,” Myers remembered. He had the opportunity to see them play the Sunnyside team. The Black Sox won, 2–0. “We had [other] teams coming through,” Myers remembered. “We had the colored Jefferson Giants from Chicago; Kansas City Monarchs; . . . the House of David came through here. And then the Hollywood Bloomer Girls . . . [and the ] Tokyo Giants, from Tokyo, came and played.”
All over Castle Valley, children, too, played baseball. Heated rivalries developed between coal camps, such as that between Hiawatha and Mohrland. “I was mascot for these [Mohrland] guys in 1927 and 26,” remembered Remo Spigarelli, who chased balls during games, took care of balls and bats and gloves for the players, and helped collect the used baseballs (bought by the company) when they became too scarred for league use. Somehow, he remembered, “we had a lot of friction tapes come out of the mine” which were used to wrap and rewrap the used balls to keep them playable for sand-lot games. At Sunnyside, Joe Myers also caught baseball fever, especially after he went into a game as a pinch hitter and hit a double, giving Sunnyside the win. The ecstatic crowd, as always, showered the field with money. “I took my ball cap and went out picking up those dollars all over here and there. Fifty cent pieces and dollars—there was no paper money then, it was silver dollars. I got 75 bucks!” He was fourteen-years-old. He went home and dumped it on the kitchen table and told his mother he wanted to be a professional ball player. She told him to go into the mine like his father; she would not take his money. But it was 1926, and the mines were only working one day a week, so he went to California, enrolled in high school, and played ball. He made all-city in Los Angeles and was scouted by Rogers Hornsby of the Chicago Cubs. He also played winter league throughout his high school years, rubbing shoulders with Hornsby, Babe Ruth, Charlie Gehringer (called the “Mechanical Man,” because of his consistency at second base), and other major leaguers. Each of the movie studios had a team and so did several companies. “One time, in LA, I had 17 uniforms in my locker,” recalled Myers. “Played a different team every night.” Among them, he played for Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, “for Joe E. Brown. . . . [He] was part owner of the Pittsburgh Pirates. . . . And then he’d get us in pictures. Joe E. Brown made The Big Leaguer, Diamond Dust . . . we went out there in uniform and we’d just play catch . . . and they’d give us $10 an hour.” The great Negro League pitcher, Satchel Paige, came down and played “winter league, for Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer. I played with him about two months,” remembered Myers. “Satchel would have been in the big leagues years before [Jackie] Robinson ever was” had the major leagues not been segregated. All the big names came to California. “They’d stay maybe two months. I know when Babe Ruth was down there, he stayed three . . . and he got in shape. Played for the White King soap company.”

Much as all this 1920s hoopla helped unite Castle Valley’s diverse people, shared tragedy did sometimes even more. For example, when in 1923 Castle Gate’s Japanese miners learned that a great earthquake had just leveled much of their homeland, the whole town gathered for a benefit concert and dance with all profits earmarked for Japanese earthquake relief. A year later, all the Castle Gate miners suffered when the local economy slowed and the company cut forces, concentrating its workforce in the No. 2 mine. Ann Slavensky Spensko remembered March 8, when “We heard
the big shots . . . go off and we thought it was the boys, just shooting dynamite.” Then she saw a man running down the hill from No. 2. “He was all black and torn ‘cause he was outside in the fan house and he said, ‘The mine blew up.’” Residents rushed to the portal. In Price, Greek immigrant Tony Kontgas heard about the explosion and ran to get the Greek priest. “I told him what I learned, and he got hold of a Greek who owned a Cadillac. He was a politico; nobody else could afford such a car. And we drove up to Castle Gate.” There, they saw a huge mass of debris piled hundreds of feet across the wash, blasted there by the explosion. “Women were standing by the entrance screaming, yelling, hollering, crying,” recalled Kontgas. “I watched the fire departments from both Price and Helper come and pull out their fire hoses and try to pump water into the mine. But that was just an absolute waste of time; it didn’t do any good at all.” Meanwhile, up at Winter Quarters, safety crew chief Stanley Harvey gathered his men, joining others from Clear Creek and the Kinney Mine. They piled their heavy rescue gear into a boxcar and climbed in for the hurtling ride down ice-filled Price Canyon as the D&RGW passenger train waited at Colton to give them the track. Wearing their helmets and carrying their forty-pound breathing apparatuses on their backs, they struggled over the debris into the black, smoky mine, looking for survivors. As they tired, the Standardville team spelled them. George Wilson, Standardville’s captain, had his nose clip knocked off by a struggling teammate whose safety helmet leaked. Wilson, stranded in the gassy mine for five long minutes, became the first corpse laid out in a makeshift morgue. People outside hoped for survivors, like at the well-remembered Winter Quarters disaster. But as rescuers spoke in hushed voices of that sight in the tunnels of the two steel motors (coal cutting machines) torn and twisted by the blast, everyone realized that all 171 miners had died. Twelve of them came from Emery County; others from other parts of Castle Valley, Utah, the nation, and the world. The final total listed 74 American-born miners, 49 Greeks, 22 Italians, 8 Japanese, 7 English, 6 Austrians, 2 Scots, 2 African Americans, and one Belgian. Women without family in the mine worked on the outside boiling water, sterilizing doctors’ instruments, collecting blankets, cooking over open fires, heating milk for babies, and manually operating respirators for hours in unsuccessful attempts to revive gassed miners. Salt Lake members of the Utah Salvation Army and Red Cross rushed down on the train to help to feed and console the living. They advised mothers, wives, and sisters of the deceased not to view the bodies that were already identified, since “it would be better for them to remember their loved ones as they had last seen them,” noted the night watchman, T. L. Burridge. Some insisted, including the mother of Ann Slavensky Spensko. Mother and daughter went to identify the dead boy. His “gray coffin was opened and he had blood running through his nose, and he must have fell in water, ‘cause he was white around his face, and the rest
117 was . . . you know,” Ann remembered. He was eighteen.117 One man was “all in pieces but his wife was able to identify him by one of his toes.” Another, who had lost his father in the Scofield explosion in 1900, had to be buried without his head. When it was located a day later, the grave was reopened so he could be interred intact.118 As rescue teams worked toward the back of the gas-laden mine, they often had to make three or four rest stops on the way out, each time checking their heavy, cumbersome breathing apparatus and oxygen gauges. Once a hissing, whistling noise frightened Harvey, and he stopped to check for leaks in his crew’s apparatus. He found nothing. Shortly thereafter, “we found a body that had been blown into an empty mine car . . . [It] was badly swollen, and was giving off gas around the mouth, making a hissing sound.” In the flickering light of their safety lamps, the rescue work “was spooky to say the least,” he added.119 By Wednesday, March 12, Castle Gate’s Doctor McDermid forbade any further viewing of the bodies except for identification purposes. “The order was necessary,” Burridge wrote, “for the sanitary protection of those of us who were still left alive.”120

The emotional fallout continued. Anton Dupin, a Croatian immigrant who spoke English with a slight southern accent, having learned it from African-American coworkers back East, had worked in the coal before opening a Spring Glen store. He wanted to help out with his delivery truck, so
“he went up to the mine and picked up all the bodies there and took them to the amusement hall,” remembered his daughter, Frances Dupin Vouk. “[H]e knew a lot of the men and a lot of them were hurt just real bad. After that he was sick. It was the first time my dad had ever been ill.” From Sunnyside, Slovenian immigrants and brothers-in-law Joe Bon and John Tolich also went to help with the rescue work. John’s wife, Anna Marolt Tolich, remembered, “When they came home neither one said a word. . . . they were so moved emotionally.” Tony Kontgas returned with the Greek priest to assist in the burials. “We opened up this one casket a little, but we couldn’t tell what it was. We knew it was a human being. . . . That’s how badly many of the bodies were burned. We just hoped we were burying the right individuals—I mean, Greek.”

Opening the mine again also cost quite a struggle. As Burridge explained, the “fires had to be fought and put out before the work of getting out the men” could continue. Fighting fire “in a coal mine is slow and dangerous. Fresh air cannot be drawn into the places where these fires are for fresh air feeds the fire with oxygen and makes them impossible to handle. The fire itself is all the time giving [sic] off the deadly gas known as after damp but [which] is mainly Carbon-dioxide and Carbon-monoxide.” The best timbermen were called from other camps to shore up tunnel roofs so rescue teams and later, miners, could enter safely. Dave Parmley, Sunnyside foreman, again asked Bon and Tolich to help out in retimbering Castle Gate. They agreed to go, so moved their families to the devastated camp. It was hard, recalled Anna Tolich, for “the men working in the mine. Many times the odor of the human remains” lingered. “It took quite a while to ventilate the air . . . [but] gradually the men started working again.”

In the close-knit communities along the Castle Valley corridor, everybody suffered. For weeks thereafter in Castle Gate, no church meetings were held; fraternal lodges remained closed; no one frequented the amusement hall even when all the bodies had been buried in distant hometowns or in the newly-expanded graveyard in Willow Canyon, to the east. The tremendous loss of life also led to new mine safety measures, replicating the Winter Quarters explosion of 1900. While Winter Quarters had started with an explosion of giant powder (dynamite) which suspended coal dust in the air, resulting in a series of explosions, the “Castle Gate mine explosion appeared to have been caused by methane gas being ignited by an open flame and then propagated through the mine by coal dust being raise in suspension,” wrote Harvey. Now, instead of sprinkling the mine with water to settle the coal dust, begun after the 1900 disaster, mines started rock-dusting, and Utah passed a law mandating “the use of electric cap lamps to prevent ignition by open flames of gas or coal dust in suspension.” At the cost of over 170 lives, Castle Valley coal mining had become a little bit safer. Utah’s Governor Mabey authorized a relief fund collection and established a committee to administer it. Under the direction of
one of Utah’s earliest social workers, relief payments lasted for the next twelve years. Concurrently, some divisive ideas also oozed down the Castle Valley corridor. Some six months after the Castle Gate mine explosion, some strangers drove into Helper in three or four cars, lit a 10 x 15–foot cross on a hill east of town, and drove away as it flamed. Joe Barboglio’s daughter, not quite six-years-old, knew it meant “that there were people who hated us, and all the other foreign born families.” The Ku Klux Klan had arrived. Founded to suppress African Americans in the post-Civil War South, it had been resuscitated to terrorize foreigners as well in America’s post-World War I xenophobia. In Utah since 1921, the Klan now descended on the state’s most ethnic enclave. Founded to suppress African Americans in the post-Civil War South, it had been resuscitated to terrorize foreigners as well in America’s post-World War I xenophobia. In Utah since 1921, the Klan now descended on the state’s most ethnic enclave. It swayed the 1924 elections, influencing the defeat of incumbent Carbon County Attorney Henry Ruggeri, of Italian descent, by reputed Klansman, Oliver K. Clay. One of Helper’s Greek residents, Stan John Diamanti, was not impressed: “[I]f you had any problems in those days there were always neighbors and the town behind you. . . . [T]he Italians, Slavs, Czechs, and everybody else banded together.” Within a year, an elaborate spy system linking Greeks, Italians, Slavs, and Irish Catholics revealed the identities of Klansmen. Lawyer LeRoy McGee’s ethnic clients rapidly found another attorney after Price residents recognized him in an open-air Salt Lake Konklave (Klan meeting). The Klan, moribund, went underground and officially disbanded in 1930. But in 1925, the Klan still burned crosses on Castle Valley hills—at the Blue Cut between Price and Helper, up in Pleasant Valley where Elvie Hurskainen Stevens, the daughter of Finnish immigrants, remembered a cross “way up on the corner of the Scofield Cemetery, clear to the top . . . burning like everything.” Its opposition answered with enigmatic, flaming circles. In this tense atmosphere, on June 15, 1925, African-American miner Robert Marshall allegedly shot and killed Castle Gate’s popular night watchman and Klan member, J. Milton (“Milt”) Burns. Marshall seized Burns’s gun and fled, pursued unsuccessfully by a posse of forty men. Three days later, Marshall returned to the shack that he had shared with another black miner, who reported Marshall’s presence to camp officials, maybe hoping for the $250 reward for Marshall’s arrest and conviction. But Marshall never went to trial. Camp officials captured Marshall and set off toward the Price City jail in a three-car caravan. They passed the sheriff, headed out of town, as a crowd gathered at the courthouse in front of the jail. Two fourteen-year-old boys, Francis Prince and his friend, Tom Shield, headed out on horseback to check Prince family cattle, saw other cars near the underpass west of Price. Their occupants were yelling, “They got the nigger! They got the nigger!” The boys knew exactly what that meant, so they followed the cars to town. Meanwhile, a deputy had left Marshall alone in the car surrounded by an angry mob when he stepped into the courthouse. By the time he exited the building, Marshall was gone. As a procession now estimated at 100 ve-
hicles started down the road east toward Wellington, the boys tied up their horses and got a ride “to the hanging tree east of Price,” as Prince’s daughter later wrote. “They were walking across the railroad tracks toward the trees when they were greeted with cries of ‘There he goes!’ Forty feet from them, Marshall’s body rose in the air. . . . Francis watched the rope tighten around the man’s neck until the neck was only inches around.” Almost ten minutes later deputies arrived at the hanging tree and cut Marshall down. When he was found to be still living, the mob wrested Marshall from the deputies, slung the noose over his head, and jerked him up again several times until he died of a broken neck. An unknown photographer took pictures of the hanging body and several shots of the crowd which were soon reprinted as a packet of postcards (a common practice for “exciting events” of that day).

The Price Sun reported the lynching, noting that members of the lynch mob hardly fit the usual image of a disorderly crowd of violent strangers. Instead, many locally prominent people attended and “participation in the affair seemed to be a matter of boasting.” District Attorney Fred Keller and County Attorney Oliver Clay swore out arrest warrants for eleven men. Under pressure from Utah Governor George Dern and State Attorney General Harvey Cluff, Keller and Clay reluctantly withdrew the eleven arrest warrants as the county impaneled a grand jury on June 30. The eleven men were released on bail. When none of the 125 grand jury witnesses could remember any of the lynchers, the accused were permanently freed on August 11.

The event left an ugly mark on Castle Valley. After watching Marshall swing, Tom Shield decided he had had enough and went home. Francis Prince had to go on to check on his family’s cattle, but spent a fearful night in the mountain cabin at Mud Water. As he tried to sleep, the “Negroes hung from the walls, the rafters, and all over the cabin. They swung up, cried out, and strangled. They writhed in torment in the cabin darkness. The boy turned from one side to another as Robert Marshall was repeatedly lynched throughout the night.” Castle Valley, too, felt the nightmare for a long, long time. A 1998 Day of Reconciliation, spearheaded by former Kenilworth resident Matt Gilmour, a high school student at the time of the lynching, prompted a spectrum of reactions. People of diverse races and backgrounds variously viewed the event as a healing gesture, an attack on racism, rewriting history, or pandering to political correctness. In 1925, Carbon County’s 100–150 African Americans had taken up a collection to bury Marshall but they had lacked the money for a marker. The 1998 event culminated in the addition of a headstone to his grave, donated by Caucasian Bernie Morris of Price’s Morris Monuments and unveiled by him and African-American Pastor France Davis of Salt Lake City’s Calvary Baptist Church. It reads, “Robert Marshall: Lynched June 18, 1925, A Victim of Intolerance. May God Forgive.”
Community spirit had foundered on the rock of race. Marshall was lynched because he was black. In its only lynching, Castle Valley regrettable fit the American mainstream. Booker T. Washington’s Tuskegee Institute, a training school for African-Americans, kept national lynching records beginning in 1882, a year after the school opened. For over eighty years it published yearly tallies. After 1886, when seventy-four blacks and sixty-four whites were lynched, black lynchings consistently outnumbered every other group. Tensions heightened after World War I when black veterans, having fought in the trenches side-by-side with their white compatriots, refused to accept an inferior status back home. Thousands joined the Great Migration, one of the largest voluntary population movements in American history, that took blacks out of the South and into northern cities. There they joined New York’s Universal Negro Improvement Association (founded in 1917); wrote prose and poetry in the Harlem Renaissance, and created the era’s signature music: jazz. Their visible creativity spawned a violent backlash, and in 1924 and 1925 only blacks were lynched, Robert Marshall among them. Not until 1952 did the United States have a year without a lynching; they occurred sporadically for over a decade after that.

Furthermore, African Americans had always been few in number along the Castle Valley corridor. For example, when the state coal mine inspector first reported nationalities of miners in 1905, he listed 14 Negroes among over 1,700 men. By 1910, they numbered 10 among 3,422; by 1916, 34 of over 3,700 miners. The census reported only 1,400 blacks in all of Utah in 1920, dropping to 1,100 in 1930 in a total state population of about half a million. Not only did African Americans represent the smallest local ethnic or racial group, they had almost all arrived as strikebreakers in 1922–1923. Even then, coal company managers had assigned them the worst accommodations. In Mohrland, for example, the Italians lived closest to the center of town, near the railroad yard and mine tipple. “Above this came the Greek boardinghouse, then Jap town with its lovely flower and vegetable gardens built along the stream bed, and finally colored town just below the mine portal,” remembered superintendent’s son, Nevin Wetzel. With this arrangement, only black and Japanese children could not go home during school lunch break; the walk up the canyon to their homes was over a mile—too far, too steep, and too slippery to manage. “In 1927,” Wetzel continued, “some of the black coal miners there had families and children, with a reputation as good miners, uncomplaining about poor working conditions or bad treatment by the company. However, bitter strife would frequently occur within this group, and by 1930 all blacks had left Mohrland.”

Other immigrants were far too plentiful to make effective targets, although numerous negative stereotypes pocked Castle Valley—every camp had its “Jap Town,” “Wop Town,” and people commonly referred to “black Dagoes,” “square-headed Bohunks,” and “greasy Greeks.” Nonetheless,
living in tiny coal camps, sharing holidays and activities, and risking death or maiming in a mine explosion, created a strong sense of community, particularly among the young. Iris Mangum Potts, a mechanic’s daughter, remembered her childhood in Spring Canyon and her Italian neighbors: “on New Year’s we would always go down to the Anselmos. . . . We had our food . . . and then we [little kids] would go to bed [on the floor]. . . . [W]hether they was Italian, Greek, Mexican, Japs, it didn’t make any difference, we all slept there.” She summed up the general coal camp outlook, “We never realized there was anything different until we came to Price and outside people started to tell us we had foreign elements.”

Castle Gate, the incubator for events that led to the lynching, had its own expression of solidarity in a 1926 commemoration of the March 1924 explosion. The local paper reported, “Largest Crowd Mining Town Has Ever Seen Attends Services.” Castle Gate’s amusement hall, the former morgue, could hold 900 persons but attendees still had to be turned away. Representatives of churches, welfare associations, lodges, and civic and military associations all participated, including Heber J. Grant, president of the LDS Church. The Knights of Pythias had raised $25,000 throughout the U.S. for care of widows and children and for the children’s education, three of whom had already benefited from the fund. Afterwards, participants formed a procession to the cemetery and decorated each and every grave.

Other camps had their activities, thanks to the welfare fund to which each working miner contributed an obligatory dollar a month (taken out of his pay by the company). The fund paid for company picnics, for dances, for a town band (or two), and an orchestra. Coal camps also had their football teams, if not level playing fields. For example, for one July 4th match, Clear Creek won the toss and made its opponent, Winter Quarters, “face the incline.” Clear Creek won, five goals to two. Within a few years, however, Winter Quarters faded. This grandfather of all the Castle Valley coal mines closed in 1928.

Winter Quarters’s demise showed the silent, icy spread of the 1920s mining depression. Like the downturn in agriculture, it seemed somehow hidden from a public caught up in wild music, rising stock prices, bootleg whiskey, movies, and fast cars. For a while, active residents made their own energetic fun, such as the “Balanced Rock Gang”—a group of young men who made it a challenge to climb Helper’s trademark rock formation. They made the dangerous climb first in May 1929, later installing a flagpole with a flag that blew off, and was replaced, and blew off, and was superseded by a fifty-five-gallon victory drum that lasted into the twenty-first century (with a few mishaps) that may soon be replaced once more. Then, suddenly, the fun stopped. On October 24, 1929, the bottom dropped out of the stock market. Wall Street rocked as stockholders dumped over twelve million shares that day. Leading bankers pooled their assets to keep the
crash from becoming absolute, but even they could offer only a brief bump on the way to the bottom. Five days later, on October 29, a sixteen-million share day, marked the beginning of the end. So-called securities provided nothing of the kind as stock prices tumbled for three-and-a-half years.\textsuperscript{157} Republican President Hoover did what he thought best to manage a supposedly temporary downturn, asking business for voluntary adjustments. Utah’s Republican Senator Reed Smoot, head of the Senate Finance Committee and also pro-business, saddled the country with the highest protective tariff in American history, oblivious of America’s involvement in the global economy. His masterpiece, the Smoot-Hawley Tariff, created such international backlash that it deepened the Depression world-wide. In the spring of 1931, the European banking system collapsed. At home, more than 2,000 banks failed that year.\textsuperscript{158} Economically, the rest of America started to look like Castle Valley.