Energy Crisis, 1980–2004

We are as close to the frontier as you can get in the United States. We have the San Rafael and not too many people know about it but more are finding out. The secret is out. But we’ll do what we can to save as much as we can for those of us who still live here. It will be interesting to see what the next hundred years bring.¹

—Kent R. Petersen, former Emery County commissioner

In 1994, Kent Petersen, Ferron native, Army veteran, and former Utah Power and Light (UP&L) environmental engineer noted, “When I was traveling the world I always knew Emery County was one place the air was still clean. But that was because nobody lived there.”² He was right. As Castle Valley got sucked into the vortex of international price wars and market fluctuations, the energy industry on which it traditionally depended entered a new period of volatility. By the twenty-first century, farming the valley’s alkaline soil no longer offered an adequate living, and ranching suffered from increasing environmental pressures. The federal government no longer concerned itself with aiding farmers and relocating displaced miners (as it had during the Great Depression), and the flood of cash brought in by the uranium boom was long gone. Without a new economic base, what would happen to Castle Valley?

Like riding a mechanical bull, remaining residents tried to stay astride as the economy bucked and heaved. Increasingly mechanized coal companies needed fewer and fewer miners, and repeated energy company mergers guaranteed that distant corporate officers knew far more about the contents of local coal veins than about the people and traditions of Castle Valley. As always, the first priority for community health remained jobs. Trying to forestall employment cutbacks, when the UMWA labor contract ran out in 1977, the union staged its longest strike in recent memory: 111 days. Men stayed out of work, previously stay-at-home wives sought jobs to
support the family, and tensions between union and non-union members’ children flared on school playgrounds. Louis Pestotnik, then the local UMWA secretary-treasurer, remembered, “If it’s handled right, that’s [the strike is] the only weapon that the miner has.” Recognizing a growing split between union leadership and the rank and file, he added, “Now you take this last [1977] strike. . . . The miners was the ones that got the contract. If they would’ve ratified that [original] contract, like the leadership wanted them to, they’ve lost more than what they did lose.”

The miners held out, but the growing weakness of the UMWA added to local uncertainty.

Much of that uncertainty also stemmed from confusion over who, exactly, owned the mines. Even front office employees sometimes lost track as the dizzying pace of far away corporate mergers surged during the late twentieth century. International energy companies, in particular, started diversifying in Castle Valley coal lands. For example, Plateau Mining (a subsidiary of Getty Oil Company and later of United Nuclear) bought Wattis in 1967. In 1971, the Diamantis sold Plateau their mine in Hardscrabble Canyon, west of Helper, which brothers George and John G. had first leased in 1916 and incorporated (with John’s sons) as the Hardscrabble Coal Company in the 1930s and renamed the Carbon Fuel Company when Rains sold out in the 1950s. In 1968, North American Coal Company (part of McCullough Oil Company) bought Kenilworth, also acquiring Castle Gate in 1974. North American then began working both mines through the Castle Gate entrance.

The old LDS mines also went through a series of owners. In 1938, the LDS Church had acquired well-known coal land surrounding the old ghost town of Connellsville, at the head of Huntington Canyon, and had added acreage originally prospected by “Uncle” Jesse Knight during the Progressive Era. Worked as a Welfare Project, this church-owned Deseret Mine closed from 1941–1946 due to plentiful jobs elsewhere in the wartime boom. After the war, it reopened under direction of Shirl McArthur, who supervised the building of a reservoir, acquisition of two other nearby mines, and the purchase of up-to-date machinery. Also stimulated by the immediate post-war boom, in 1945 Cyrus Wilberg bought an old wagon mine that had been idle for most of the 1930s and operated it with his son until 1966, when they offered it to Peabody Coal Company. Peabody had first come to the area in 1961, when McArthur put together Castle Valley Mining Company and contracted with Peabody to mine local coal for sale to the Nevada Power Company. There, the coal was used to generate electricity, an obvious need in a state where the Las Vegas lights glowed ever brighter, but water power, the usual energy source, was in conspicuously short supply. By 1967–1968, Wilberg coal also flowed to Nevada under contract with Peabody.

The suitability of local coal for generating electricity inspired a brand new construction effort that brought a host of jobs to Castle Valley. UP&L
decided to build electricity-generating plants at the source of the coal, and move the power, rather than the mineral, over the miles to distant markets. Therefore, in 1969 and 1970 UP&L started buying coal from Peabody's Wilberg mine. By this time, the LDS Church, faced with increasing safety restrictions, was ready to sell the Deseret Mine. UP&L bought it. This deal freed McArthur to organize the American Coal Company in 1971 to mine coal for UP&L, and American established its offices in the renovated North Emery High School building on Huntington’s main street. UP&L was thus well supplied with coal when the Huntington Plant came on-line in 1974, with an additional unit added in 1977. In 1979, however, a policy disagreement led UP&L to force the sale of American Coal’s contract mining rights to Savage Brothers of American Fork. Savage then organized the Emery Mining Corporation, which consolidated the coal contracts of all five coal mines supplying UP&L’s Castle Valley plants: Deseret, Beehive, Little Dove (known as Des-Bee-Dove), Deer Creek, and Wilberg. By 1980, Emery Mining Corporation, employing approximately 1,600 people, supplied both plants (including the Hunter Plant, completed in 1983). For a time, the energy industry seemed the salvation of Castle Valley.

But this new industry proved a mixed blessing, providing needed jobs but insistently demanding much of Castle Valley’s precious water. The electricity-generating process utilized steam for power and a water cooling system. Knowing this, in 1969, even before publicly announcing its intent to build the generating plants, UP&L had purchased a total of six thousand water shares in the consolidated irrigation companies serving Orangeville, Castle Dale, Huntington, and Cleveland, adding another six thousand acre-feet from Joe’s Valley Reservoir. This water had been stored thanks to the 1956 federal Colorado River Storage Act, which included authorization for the large reservoir in Joe’s Valley on the Wasatch Plateau as part of the Upper Colorado Reclamation Project. As drought had gripped Emery County, farmers long divided into separate water districts had finally agreed to form the Emery County Water Conservancy District in 1961, headed by O. Eugene Johansen of Castle Dale. Looking on the positive side, at the 1963 groundbreaking of the Joe’s Valley Reservoir, a dignitary had noted the dam’s benefits not only included irrigation water, but potential earnings for Emery County residents, one-third of whom then made less than $3,000 per year. These construction jobs successfully reduced outmigration, which had reached almost thirty percent between 1950–1960.

As the plants came on line, they required still more water, but brought unprecedented prosperity. The entire Emery County Project, completed in the 1970s, included not only the Joe’s Valley Reservoir and recreation area, but canals, a road alignment, and Huntington Lake. The projects indeed provided seasonal construction work and training for numbers of Emery County men, who thus spent at least part of every year at home in Castle Valley. They worked on the Millsite Reservoir, begun six years after the Joe’s
Valley groundbreaking. This new project was sponsored by federal, state, and local entities: the Soil Conservation Service, the Forest Service, the Utah Power and Water Board, the Utah Department of Fish and Game, Ferron City, and the Ferron Reservoir and Canal Company. The Huntington Plant, a new employer nine miles northwest of the town of Huntington at the mouth of the canyon, got its additional water from Ferron Canal and Reservoir Company and from Electric Lake, created by a dam on Huntington Creek. Its sister Hunter Plant, three miles south of Castle Dale, used additional water from a thirteen-mile pipeline to Millsite Reservoir west of Ferron.9

For a few years after all this development, once-poor Emery County boasted the highest per capita income in Utah. Increased wealth permitted long-desired improvements, such as a new piped-in culinary water system demanded by some serious housewives of Lawrence, Bernice S. Culloms and Utanah Wilson. Such grass-roots activism prompted the formation of the North Emery Water Users Association, which, in turn, negotiated with the Farm Home Administration for a ninety-two-mile-long pipeline running east from Huntington, the longest single culinary water system in Utah. It connected to Lawrence, Cleveland, and Elmo, and ended the practice of hauling water and dumping it in family cisterns, which had continued for ninety years.10 At Huntington, the old airport, opened in 1945, acquired improvements including a resurfaced runway, taxi-way, fuel tank, and administration building. For the Hunter Plant dedication, over a dozen private aircraft sat tightly packed on the freshly-finished parking ramp.11 At Emery, in 1975, Consolidated Coal Company (Consol) bought the old Ira Browning Mine, the town’s main employer. Browning had sold it in about 1920 to E. H. Duzett, who had leased it to his sons-in-law before selling it to Kemmerer Coal Company, Consol’s predecessor. The new population attracted to Castle Valley’s far southern settlement also demanded new recreation, so Scott Christiansen built a motocross track and organized two major annual events, which draw participants from as far away as Helper.12

The overall impact of this energy development was tremendous. According to local historian Montell Seely, this major shift in water use “began the change of Emery County from agricultural to industrial, but water continued to be its lifeblood.”13

In one of Castle Valley’s many trade-offs, this water reallocation led to the slow death of bedrock rural traditions. In 1980, long-time stockraiser LaVora Kofford noted the realities of local change when she wrote, “Many families still own horses for pleasure and recreation, and there may be a few families who are still making profit on the livestock industry, but as they old saying goes, ‘All good things must end.’”14 As the economics changed, Orangeville native Roger D. Curtis reminisced about the great “summer ride”: “The sense of community was never more strongly felt than on that great, looked-forward-to event. . . . Here was the opportunity to get away from hot farm work and spend four or five days driving the cattle from the
lower ranges to the upper ranges and brand the calves which had been born since the cows left the valley for the mountain pastures. And to sit around the camp fire at night and listen to the tales of the older men of life in a more distant past than ours.”

On the other hand, perhaps this shift to an industrial economic base also helped mute the impact of the Sagebrush Rebellion in Castle Valley. In the 1970s, this widespread western movement sought to transfer public lands from federal to state control, where elected officials would be more responsive to local constituencies. The rebellion began when Congress passed the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976, the organic act for the Bureau of Land Management (BLM). The law gave the federal government more control of land management, while, as a compromise, allowing ranchers a moratorium on grazing fees and granting them mandatory ten-year grazing permits. As ranchers across the West howled, the Assistant Secretary of the Interior declared, if the Sagebrush Rebels succeeded, “You could kiss goodbye millions of acres of our best hunting, fishing, and hiking territory, because it would soon be fenced and posted with ‘no trespassing,’ ‘private property—keep out.’” The fight continued in Congress with the Public Range Lands Improvement Act of 1978, which did little to raise the cheap fees western stockraisers paid for federal grazing permits, and worked against those who did not have access to public lands. As federal reform efforts slowed to a glacial creep and long-standing relationships remained largely intact, the Sagebrush Rebellion died.

But this tighter link with international corporations brought ever more violent shifts to Castle Valley’s economy. By the late 1970s Castle Valley was locked into what oil historian Daniel Yergin called “the hydrocarbon civilization” of America and the world. Painful changes in the national and international economy ever more rapidly impacted small towns everywhere as the global information age matured, and Castle Valley proved no exception. For example, as the nation entered the deepest recession since the Great Depression late in 1980, the Price newspaper warned of nationwide coal mine takeovers by major oil, steel, and utility companies, particularly since, due to extensive federal environmental regulations, independent mining companies could no longer compete economically. Citing the Wall Street Journal, the article mentioned widespread concerns that the oil companies would try to manipulate the coal market, quoting a 1979 Tennessee Valley Authority report “that said the oil companies ‘exercise sufficient power in the (fuel) markets to be able to hamper interfuel competition.’”

Nonetheless, local coal production kept expanding as it had since 1972, and in 1981, a development district spokesman claimed the area had finally learned to manage the energy boom. A year later, the layoffs began. In April, Huntington’s Emery Mining Corporation laid off 200 workers.
In June, Price River Coal and U.S. Steel at Sunnyside announced a two-week “idle time” period in addition to their two-week summer vacation. By December, layoffs at Consolidated Coal Company near Emery reached over 180 as the mine closed for “an indefinite period.” In 1982, Horse Canyon mine closed. Addressing the deteriorating economic situation, the Carbon County planner tied layoffs to problems in the steel industry, to low oil prices that discouraged conversion to coal, and to the Clean Air Act which required scrubbers on all coal-fired electricity plants rather than limiting the amount of sulfur a plant could emit. “There is no competitive advantage to [Castle Valley’s] low sulfur coal as a result,” he concluded. To combat the downturn, Carbon and Emery Counties had developed cooperative agreements for mutual support, in essence codifying a century-old tradition. Meanwhile, in 1981, the U.S. completely deregulated the oil industry, and, in 1982, the national economy headed for its most severe depths since the Great Depression. By July 1983, the newspaper shrieked, “Jobless flee coal country.” Part of the distress began in the previous April, when far north of Castle Valley, a winter-soaked hillside slipped, blocking a creek that drowned the old town of Thistle and cut off rail and highway connections from the valley over Soldier Summit to the Wasatch Front for several months. Losses were placed at between $200 and $337 million, and Thistle was never rebuilt. Subsequently, Castle Valley unemployment rose to over twenty percent, and coal operators and the UMWA bickered over the root cause. Don Ross, president of the Utah Coal Operators Association, blamed reduced demand for coal on slowing conversions from oil-fired to coal-fired electric plants, and the end of sales to the Japanese, who had briefly purchased U.S. coal when faced with an Australian miners’ strike. UMWA District 22 president Mike Delpiaz countered, “It was the oil companies buying up all the coal mines. . . . All of a sudden it was the end of the road, and roads just don’t stop that quick.”

In many respects, both were right. Oil, not coal, had become the foundation of world energy production. As producing nations in and out of OPEC jockeyed for position and oil companies entered an era of hostile takeovers, the industry became a free-for-all of buyers and sellers competing in a glutted market. Oil production also fell more and more under the control of nation-states as colonialism evaporated in the late twentieth century and newly established indigenous regimes nationalized private, corporate holdings. Thus losing direct access to many international supplies, long-lived oil giants often had to reinvent themselves as integrated energy companies, suffer buy-outs, or give way to simple energy brokers who had no involvement with actually pumping or refining oil. In addition, the United States increasingly entered wars to protect actual or potential oil supplies, including the Gulf War, the invasion of Afghanistan, and the war in Iraq under father and son Presidents Bush, schooled in the oil industry.
Meanwhile, the great, international energy scramble brought another potential extractive industry in Castle Valley. In 1980–1981, the Carter and Nixon administrations had not only urged conversion from oil to coal, they had promoted a synfuels (synthetic fuels) program to convert kerogen, found in oil shale, into low grade petroleum. According to a national study, “The world’s richest known shale deposits are located in the Green River formation, a 17,000–square-mile area where Colorado, Utah, and Wyoming intersect; the Green River, one of the principal tributaries of the Colorado, flows through this area.”

Their extraction promised an antidote to an industry poised at a precipice on the “oil mountain,” where supplies might decline abruptly, gutting oil companies and idling the thousands of machines and factories built to run on oil. A Texas company began prospecting in Whitmore Canyon, dangling promises that a local synfuels refinery would eventually produce up to 125,000 barrels a day, employ 2,000 residents during construction and some 1,000–1,200 thereafter. Castle Valley entrepreneurs had long exploited the asphaltum beds in Whitmore Canyon, filing on locations in 1907, that had, by 1912, promised “extensive development.”

Some of this gooey substance was used to pave streets and highways, and developers built an aerial tramway to haul it from the face two miles down to what was then a “good wagon road.” Ownership changed hands in the 1930s, and by the 1940s teenage boys, such as Paul Turner, supplemented the handful of men employed there during the summer, when the canyon (and rockpile) wasn’t too frozen to work. Turner described jackhammering rock at the face so it fit into a crusher, then watching it move by conveyor belt to one of several large metal bins, hung every three hundred feet along the gravity tram. These loaded buckets, weighing over half a ton each, traveled some eight miles down to the discharge using solely the power of gravity, the weight of the loaded buckets lifting empty buckets back up to the rock face in one continuous loop. At the discharge site, dump trucks large enough to hold one bucketful waited to haul the coarsely crushed rocks to the mill. There, the rock was further smashed until reduced to the size of paving material. The whole process ended in 1948, and, by the twenty-first century, only a line of sagging buckets hung forlornly over the canyon. When the recession hit, all plans for synfuels development ceased. Hope flickered briefly for its renewal again in 1984 and 1985 before it fizzled.

The continuing sense of Castle Valley community endured, however, and, despite unsettling shifts, belied at least one national trend remarked by historian Thomas Michael Power. Viewing the period from 1980–1990, he aptly described new industrial techniques, which, “adopted worldwide, have increased supply potential, driving commodity prices down... [and raising coal] productivity... 7.3 percent per year over a decade [which] would reduce the direct labor content of coal by half.” As a consequence, he concluded, “miners are wary of setting down roots in a mining dependent town.” But not in Castle Valley, where a lot of people, like Kent Petersen,
were born with local roots and never quite severed them. Residents also continued to treasure reminders of the distinctive local past, even as economic changes cut into the local landscape. For example, when North American Coal closed down the venerable town of Castle Gate to make way for increased preparation plants, storage plants, loading facilities, and unit trains, most residents chose to buy their old coal camp houses and move them to a free lot in the newly established Castle Gate subdivision of nearby Spring Canyon, keeping the community together. A minority took a monetary payment. At the time, North American also promised to maintain the town cemetery with its many mine victims and planned to salvage the historic Wasatch Store where Butch Cassidy stole the payroll. The store was later torn down but, thanks to the considerable pull of Dr. J. Eldon Dorman, the staircase and front step—the immediate scene of the heist—were saved for display at Helper’s Western Mining and Railroad Museum. Likewise, another salvage effort targeted the Standardville bandstand. It had remained in place when the mines there closed in the 1950s, but it was slated for destruction when remaining town structures were razed two decades later. So, Ernie and Stella O’Green bought it and moved it to their Spring Glen orchard. In 1999, Rob Metzger of the Helper chapter of E Clampus Vitus accepted the O’Greens’ offer to move it to downtown Helper. Principal Tom Montoya of Helper Junior High offered his students for restorative work. Orlando Ochoa supervised construction of the cement foundation by Helper City workers. The old building thus got repositioned and restored in time for the Canyon Days Reunion in August 1999, an event when many former Spring Canyon residents get together to reminisce.

In the midst of modern economic uncertainties, some permanent social changes also bloomed. Women got more job opportunities in a floundering economy that needed their productivity. Utah had long recognized women’s contributions, although 1970 marked the first time that three women from the same area earned recognition as “Young Woman of the Year”: Sherril Burge, Janis Siggard, and Mary Helen Powell, all from Castle Valley. Even more atypically, Castle Valley women started mining coal. Although women had worked outside the mines during World War II, only in 1973 did the first women go underground, in West Virginia. A year later, five women entered Castle Valley’s mines. Many male miners objected to their presence, and the UMWA remained thoroughly unenthusiastic about female miners until 1983. Then, at the fifth national conference of Women Miners, UMWA president Richard Trumka finally denounced the old British belief that bad luck follows a woman down a mine: “You have brought us good luck, not bad luck. Courageously, you have destroyed myth after myth.” He also pledged to help stop sexual harassment and discrimination in what remained a highly male industry. By this time, fistsfuls of women worked in the Castle Valley mines: Shirley Haycock, the initial pioneer; followed by others including Ann Byerley, Fay Hall, Joy Huitt, Elnora Clark,
Carolyn Booker, and Judy Franco. In 1981, these last six women formed an organizing committee for female coal miners and affiliated with the nationally active Coal Employment Project, founded in 1977 in eastern Tennessee. By the 1980s, the percentage of women coal miners had increased nationally from .001 percent in 1973, to 11.4 percent in 1979, retreating to 8.7 percent in 1980 (still amounting to 3,600 women) due to layoffs of the least senior miners as the economy constricted. In 1985, the National Conference of Women Miners met in Price. Former state senator Frances Farley, whose three uncles were injured in the Missouri coal mines (two fatally), delivered one of the keynote speeches and chatted with the lady miners. Price’s Ann Byerley told Farley she chose mining after a divorce, leaving her with two children and a pile of unpaid bills. When she started in the mines in 1980, she reported, “there was more flippancy, rudeness, and downright harassment on the part of men toward women miners.” In 1983, as the downturn began, however, the younger men got laid off under mine seniority rights, and the miner’s average age rose from twenty-two to thirty. “Byerley finds men over 30 to be more respectful of women,” added Farley. To learn how to confront harassers, conference attendees heard from Sunnyside’s John Medina, formerly head of the Castle Valley chapter of SOCIO and now anti-discrimination director for the Utah State Industrial Commission. Other speakers addressed women’s achievements and their ongoing campaign for parental leave for family emergencies such as care of a seriously ill child. Inevitably, speakers such as the UMWA secretary-treasurer referred to the recent Wilberg Mine disaster, where miner Nanette Wheeler was among the twenty-seven killed, the only woman to die in the mine fire and the sixth killed underground in the nation.

The Wilberg Mine tragedy, still so much on people’s minds, had flared just six months earlier, on December 19, 1984. Then, fire had broken out 5,000 feet from the entrance and 1,800 feet below the surface. As the smoke thickened, trapped miners had struggled blindly through the darkening tunnels, shouldering breathing apparatus—when they could find them—and affixing the attached nose-clips. Kenneth Blake, wearing his safety equipment which provided one good hour of oxygen, headed for the mine opening. In the smoky darkness, he soon ran into three or four other miners, halted by the growing fire. Then Leroy (Tom) Hersh appeared out of the inky blackness. At sixty, the oldest of the trapped miners, Hersh “maybe knew something I didn’t” remembered Blake, who followed him into a dog-leg tunnel. Groping their way, the men got separated. Blake finally came through a mandoor (an exit provided for miners) into a current of fresh air and eventually emerged through the snow-covered portal. He was astonished to find that no one else had come out of the burning mine.

Twenty-seven people remained underground, trapped inside the Fifth Right section where the fire raged. Atypically, company men counted among them, because the crew was attempting to set a world’s record for tonnage
produced in twenty-four hours on longwall operation (a large, sophisticated cutting machine). As all of Castle Valley prayed for the miners’ welfare, Emery Mining officials alleged that those missing could have barricaded themselves in a safe haven underground. Hope slowly strangled as repeated rescue attempts failed to quell the fire and rescuers found only bodies, not survivors. The safe haven idea collapsed as fireballs shot from the mine portals, hampering rescue efforts. By December 23, all but two bodies had been located (which could only be removed a year later when the mine had cooled). The entire valley spent a grim Christmas. Many churches—Catholic, Greek Orthodox, and others—took up special collections for the families of the deceased. A huge community memorial ceremony on December
26 made front-page news as far away as Washington, D.C. Emery Mining sealed off all entryways to stifle the fire, and Castle Valley faced the numbing reality that its economy—already weakened in the 1981 recession—would soon hit bottom. Emery County’s workforce had already dropped from over 8,400 to 3,300; Wilberg employed fifty percent of those left, and the connected Deer Creek and Des-Bee-Dove mines employed thirty percent more. Official investigations of possible arson followed, conducted by the federal Mines Safety and Health Administration (MSHA), the Emery County Sheriff’s Office, and the FBI. In 1987, MSHA investigators finally pinpointed the source of the fire as an underground air compressor. Emery Mining officials revealed that no updated emergency training had been provided in years; no safety training included longwalls, and that the most recent evacuation and firefighting plan had been submitted in 1974 by its corporate predecessor, the Peabody Coal Company. While no criminal charges resulted, in 1990 a jury declared UP&L and Emery Mining negligent, and therefore responsible for the loss of twenty-seven lives. They became liable for millions of dollars in fines. By then, as with all former Castle Valley mine disasters, new federal regulations for fireproofing helped improve the safety of surviving miners. Meanwhile, in the weeks immediately following the tragedy, counselors aided residents dealing with grief. One remarked on an almost “visible cloud of gloom” over Castle Valley. “But,” he added, “people in the Carbon-Emery area have an ability to draw together in time of trouble and to support one another.”

The Wilberg Mine disaster also resulted in new MSHA regulations for a so-called two-entry system of mining, demanding a review of those mines which had only two entries into their workings. This new directive adversely affected the double-entry Kaiser mines at Sunnyside, which already had number of difficulties. In 1987, Kaiser declared Chapter 11 reorganizational bankruptcy, eventually laying off over 200 employees while it sought a new buyer for various properties. These included the Sunnyside mines, untapped coal leases, a longwall machine, its coal-washing plant at Wellington, and the Carbon County Railway, which it had acquired in 1984 and 1985 when it bought the Columbia (Horse Canyon) mines from U.S. Steel. After a year of complicated negotiations with other corporations and the bankruptcy court, in 1989, the Colorado-based Sunnyside Reclamation and Salvage Company beat out BP American (British Petroleum American) to acquire the bulk of this property. Only half the previous workforce was called back, but when the first eighty-car, 8,000-ton coal train left Sunnyside that March, the UMWA women’s auxiliary held a grand celebration and attached a festive banner to the train’s engine. As the *Sun Advocate* reported, the event “was a sign not only of rebirth to the mine, but to the entire East Carbon community.”

Even with the mines’ reopening, poverty still haunted the Sunnyside area, formally incorporated as East Carbon City in 1973. A San Diego
newspaper described streets containing boarded-up homes with weeds and desert plants in the yards, sometimes separated by broken-down autos and rusting mobile homes. But by 1993, it held one main attraction for that southern California city: it took some of San Diego’s trash. Since September 1992, rails that had previously carried coal trains allowed everything but hazardous and radioactive waste to be hauled hundreds of miles to a 2,400-acre waste dump with a projected 30–40 year lifespan opened just west of East Carbon City. The town’s mayor, Paul Clark, avidly cooperated with the East Carbon Development Corporation (ECDC), originally founded by a group of Utah businessmen, to woo trash from places as far away as Boston Harbor. Opposition coalesced into a group called CAN (Citizens Awareness Now), but, although they were able to force a referendum on the landfill, they could not stop it. While environmentalists complained that this waste hauling once again allowed richer communities to control more poverty-stricken areas, East Carbon received fifty cents a ton for garbage collected, accepted a minimum of 400 tons daily (especially from ten northern Utah towns), kept East Carbon High School open, and provided scholarships for the seventeen of its twenty-nine graduates in 1992 who went on for further education. By 1993, sixty percent of ECDC belonged to USPCI, Inc., a subsidiary of the Union Pacific Railroad. This acquisition was hardly surprising; by then, trains all over America hauled waste from New York to Illinois and Georgia, from Seattle to rural Oregon, from New Jersey to Virginia, and, of course, from San Diego to Sunnyside. By August 30, 1995, the ECDC landfill had accepted two million tons of trash.

Castle Valley concerns for its ecological future fit right in with America’s twenty-first century environmental debate. According to historian Daniel Yergin, the first global environmental awareness wave, born in America, concentrated on clean air and water. The second focused on stopping nuclear power, especially after the explosion of the Chernobyl reactor in the Soviet Ukraine in 1986. The third, he wrote, “concerns every environmental hazard from the depletion of the tropical rain forests to the disposal of waste products. . . . [A]t the top of the concerns are the consequences of hydrocarbon combustion—smog and air pollution, acid rain, global warming, ozone depletion.” Concern did not necessarily translate into improvement. When nations met in 1997 to forge the Kyoto protocol regarding global warming, not only did the United States not sign, the UMWA—concerned about members’ employment—came out publicly against it, claiming it would cost two million jobs.

By that time, lack of coal mining jobs preoccupied all of Castle Valley. In many ways, this uncertainty tightened when a host of major extractors converged on the area, in the frantic spate of mergers that accompanied oil deregulation and wildly fluctuating international events of the 1980s and 1990s. In 1980, for example, Tower Resources incorporated and began acquiring mines along the Book Cliffs north of Price and in Crandall Canyon.
A subsidiary of foreign-owned Andalex, by 1996 Tower had become “one of Utah’s top coal exporters,” according to Price’s Sun-Advocate, finding markets world-wide. Likewise, from 1980–1982 Coastal States Energy Corporation, a subsidiary of Getty Oil Company, developed the Skyline Mine above Scofield in a joint venture with Utah Fuel Company, covering a lease area of some 6,400 acres in Carbon and Emery Counties. The 1982 recession slowed construction, and when Texaco bought out Getty in 1984, Coastal States purchased Getty’s fifty percent. In 1993, Coastal States, now with its western headquarters in Salt Lake City, also acquired the old Soldier Creek Mine northeast of Wellington, originally located by William and Leonard Shield. By the mid-1980s a host of other major corporations had shifted back and forth through Castle Valley, including American Electric Power, Quaker State Oil Company, Atlantic Richfield Coal Company (ARCO), Continental Oil Company, and several more. Despite the arrival of all these giants, by 1998 Carbon County employment had declined. In short, Castle Valley’s mines increasingly belonged to fewer and fewer, and bigger and bigger, international energy or mining corporations. These companies cannibalized each other, mined more coal with machines, employed fewer miners, and gutted the coal veins as quickly as possible to shore up share prices and prevent hostile takeovers. By 1996, Utah coal production had reached an all-time high of almost twenty-eight million tons (as compared to the seemingly phenomenal output of over seven million tons just two decades earlier). Experts informed coal industry officials that a thirty-year supply remained underground throughout the state, one-third of which remained in Castle Valley. Optimists argued that up to sixty years of coal remained, but that estimate allegedly depended on the ability to “mine down to [a vein] four feet high and under cover 3,000 feet thick. That just won’t happen,” stated Coastal States executive Vernal Mortenson. Even considering Utah’s estimated 10.6 billion tons under the Wasatch Plateau, and the 3.93 billion tons in the Book Cliffs, given environmental, economic, and other factors, only 1.6 billion tons could be actually mined. Some major state reserves remained off-limits due to environmental laws, particularly the huge Kaiparowits deposit located inside the newly-created Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument. Within a single remaining lifetime, Castle Valley coal mines might close down for good.

With so much global uncertainty in oil and coal, the United States took a harder look at natural gas. By 1996, officials at UP&L (now acquired by PacifiCorp) worried that utility deregulation and a cheaper process using natural gas to burn coal would cripple them economically before their power plants reached their 2020 projected closing date. In the meantime, coal’s great competitor, natural gas—specifically coal bed methane—had been discovered in Castle Valley. As early as 1980, a Texas-based geophysical crew had surveyed the area around Kenilworth, using a ground vibrating technique previously employed in the known oil and gas fields in
Wyoming, Kansas, and California, among other places. Other companies had already partially mapped the huge Overthrust Belt, a geological feature formed by the long-ago collision of two giant land masses, driving one thousands of feet above the other. Described as “a 40 to 50-mile wide strip that snakes its way from Alaska to Mexico, through Canada, Idaho, Montana, Wyoming, Utah, Nevada, and Arizona,” its creation frequently left ancient surface rocks 5,000 to 10,000 feet below the present surface. As of 1980, parts of it were known to contain oil and gas deposits, but no one knew for sure about Castle Valley. Development of these deposits took on some of the air of a free-for-all, although, in 1982, Congress passed the Federal Oil and Gas Royalty Management Act requiring stringent record-keeping and cooperation with the states, and set sanctions for violations of royalty payment provisions, all under supervision of the Department of the Interior. Subsequent events, including problems with bidding procedures, lack of federal inspectors, and Interior Department non-cooperation suggest that these requirements have not adequately been met.

Development certainly boomed. In the 1960s, companies sank eighteen wells in Castle Valley, followed by a handful of others in the 1980s. At the time, in order to release the gas, water had to be removed from the coal, although water production decreased as gas production increased. A new process called reverse osmosis eventually allowed for salt removal, creating usable water out of Castle Valley’s notoriously alkaline subsoil. Further energy developments surged in the 1990s, as engineers refined coalbed methane gas extraction technology. Late in 1995, the U.S. Forest Service began considering new gas drilling applications from two outside corporations on the Manti National Forest. Down in the valley, residents debated the spacing of wells, their noise, and environmental impacts. In September 1995, one of Texaco’s exploratory gas wells four miles west of Orangeville caught fire, its flames leaping fifty feet into the air as the ground vibrated for several hundred feet around the well. An Orangeville resident went out the following night and saw “the flame [on] Horn Mountain . . . the whole mountainside flickering in a bright orange light.” The fire was doused the following day, and a company spokesman explained that flares sometimes occur when compressed-air drillers hit a natural gas pocket. Two weeks later, an editorial questioned the comfort of “living near a full-blown gas field. . . . Residents close to the wells tell horror stories of drilling taking place after dark and air releases coming from the wells in the middle of the night.”

Company officials tried to quiet their concerns. With their persuasion, by the end of 1996, Castle Valley housed “the single largest petroleum project ever in the history of Utah,” according to the Utah state geologist. Prospects and wells dotted the so-called Ferron (Sandstone) Fairway, eighty miles long and some ten to fifteen miles wide, stretching all along the Castle Valley corridor from Price to Ferron. The methane gas, embedded in
coal seams ten to forty feet thick, could potentially support 3,200 gas wells. Each well promised an economic life of twenty years, with an estimated thirty-year lifespan for the entire field. In 1996, River Gas and Texaco sunk wells; Anadarko Petroleum Corporation joined them by 1997, leasing extractive rights from the federal government and a host of private owners. Leases on state-held school trust land generated hundreds of thousands of dollars for Utah, beginning to rival the old coal lease funds. This increased valuation even led to unusual state litigation over coal land ownership by 2004.55 Echoing this renewed interest, in 2003 President George W. Bush’s administration began targeting much of the Intermountain West as a new sort of “American arsenal,” and instructed his agencies to expedite oil and natural gas drilling in such archaeologically sensitive areas as Nine Mile Canyon. Even before this recent incentive for energy companies, dozens of grasshopper wells rhythmically rocked all along the Huntington-Price road, and visitors to once-quiet landscapes like Pinnacle Peak could no longer escape the insidious whine and metallic thumps of continuously operating pumps.56

While the old, extractive, boom-and-bust cycle began again, Castle Valley officials sought economic alternatives. The area had become “Castle Country” on the state’s tourist maps, and, given its unique geology, paleontology, and history, residents more actively sought tourists. In 1997, the Advocate announced as front-page news: “Tourism rapidly becoming key driving economic force.” A recent meeting of the Colorado Plateau Forum (covering Utah, New Mexico, Arizona, and Colorado) had attracted participants like Emery County Commissioner Kent Petersen, who stated, “Whether we want it or not, we have tourism in the San Rafael Swell.” Carbon County Travel Bureau director Kathy Hanna added, “Tourism . . . gives us something besides energy production to rely on.”57 Thanks to impressive natural beauty and aggressive marketing, throughout Utah, tourism was booming. Between 1975–1985, income from tourism rose twenty-seven percent, then doubled between 1981–1986. In 1986 alone Utah earned almost two billion tourist dollars—over half the income generated by all the coal, oil, and uranium production that same year.58

Consequently, Castle Valley energetically pursued the tourist dollar. By the twenty-first century, a partial list of local events included the St. Patrick’s Day Parade, San Rafael Bike Festival, Nine Mile Canyon tours, Green River Friendship Cruise, Scofield Pleasant Valley Days, Wellington Pioneer Days and Rodeo, Greek Festival Days, Castle Valley Pageant, Price International Days, Ferron Peach Days, Green River Melon Days, Labor Day Parade (one of the few left in the nation), and the Electric Light Parade in Helper, now Utah’s “Christmas Town.”59 Virtually the whole valley got involved in one way or another. The Helper City Council and numerous citizen volunteers developed a River Parkway, eventually intended to connect with a non-motorized trail up Spring Canyon, formally dedicated in 1996. Unfortunately, due to restoration by the state’s Division of Oil, Gas, and Mining, the
canyon lost its old coal camp structures despite community protests and the publishing of a tour guide to these abandoned towns. At least Cyprus Plateau and its new partners, American Electric Power and Blackhawk Coal, donated to Carbon County twenty acres of Spring Canyon cliff face, called the Indian Rock Climbing Ledges, now the area’s only developed rock climbing site. Further west, to lure backpackers, mountain bikers, and equestrians, Manti Forest personnel created the Castle Valley Ridge Trail System stretching from Clear Creek to Huntington Canyon. They also prepared an Energy Loop Tour into Emery County, where the Hunter Plant gives tours. Golf lured people to the valley to play at the Millsite course just west of Ferron, or, for a while, on the five-hole course at East Carbon. In 1996, the Carbon County Club, just north of Price, expanded its golf course to eighteen holes, although the former owner retained trail rights, resulting in hundreds of sheep delaying golf carts on occasion. The Cleveland Lloyd Dinosaur Quarry Visitors’ Center continued upgrading, particularly after 1996, when an unprecedented burglary of real dinosaur bone (not casts) led to tightened security and other improvements. In 1997, after six years of planning, BLM officials, local landowners, the Carbon County Travel Bureau, and a host of local residents cooperated in building a Nine Mile Canyon recreation site with tourist facilities and road-side guides for those interested in historic buildings and prehistoric rock art. At the far southern reaches of Emery County, Goblin Valley State Park advertised sandstone goblins that everyone could climb, as well as a state-of-the-art photovoltaic system to provide electricity in the rangers’ cabins and heat water for the park restrooms. In 1996, Emery became the first Utah county with its own web page, brainchild of internet-savvy Wesley Curtis, local rural development specialist.60

This watermelon on wheels has helped publicize Green River’s Melon Days since the 1950s, a tribute not only to Castle Valley’s agrarian heritage, but to its continuing appeal. Courtesy of Emery County Archives.
But there was more to Castle Valley’s self-promotion than some slick, facile soft-sell. Its history held too much tragedy for that, and plenty of local people remembered the bad times, including stone mason Harry Liapis. For years, he dreamt of erecting grand monuments to commemorate local mine disasters. Liapis spoke with metal artist Gary Prazen, who had started as a skilled welder and moved on to create magnificent bronze statues. For example, Prazen’s first bronze, a statue of John Wayne as Rooster Cogburn, was the last artwork approved by Wayne before he died. By 1980, Prazen had established his own foundry and gallery in Spring Glen, where he eventually saw life-size bronzes through every step of the lost wax process. Liapis, who had built numerous local rock walls and a several-ton picnic table and benches by the Price underpass, had learned stone cutting from his Greek immigrant father. At one time, Castle Valley had numerous stonemasons, particularly among the Italian immigrants—men like John Biscardi, the Seppi brothers, and one-armed Ross Gigliotti, who, with his father Felice (or Franklin), had hauled rock down from the ledges on stoneboats. The Gigliottis used their stone at Martin (just north of Helper) to build a combined service station and general store, allegedly the first convenience store in the nation. But, by 1985, all the traditional ashlar masons were gone except for Liapis and another Greek immigrant’s son who had moved to Salt Lake City. Creating a work that still draws curious tourists, Liapis and Prazen collaborated on a monument erected in October 1987 near the mouth of Price Canyon along Highway 50 and 6, honoring those who died in the 1924 Castle Gate mine explosion. Attendees at the formal installation included an honor guard, friends and families of those killed in the explosion, and two members of the original rescue teams, Stanley Harvey and Thomas Hilton. Three weeks later, Liapis ceremoniously helped unveil another massive red sandstone and bronze plaque in Scofield recognizing those killed in the Winter Quarters mine disaster. On Price’s Main Street, Prazen unveiled their third and last collaboration honoring Castle Valley immigrants in 1989, a year after Liapis’s untimely death.61

Others who remembered past tragedies included Scofield’s Ann Helsten Carter, a descendant of one of the rescue workers at the Winter Quarters mine disaster. In February 1999, she remarked to her husband, Durwood (Woody) Carter that the following year would mark the disaster’s centennial. She suggested replacing the old wooden markers tottering over the victims’ graves, their painted-on names fading fast in the snows and sun of Scofield. They contacted Dr. Craig Fuller of the USHS, and, from there, a simply cemetery spruce-up mushroomed into a major international commemoration. Scofield neighbors Bill and Marilyn Nielsen put hundreds of miles on their new pickup, checking Colorado burial sites of victims; Paul and Linda Helsten arranged for the reprint of J. W. Dilley’s 1900 History of the Scofield Mine Disaster, originally written to raise money for families of the victims and long out of print. The two Castle Valley newspapers cooperated
in creating a thirty-two-page commemorative booklet which included a list of the ten worst mining accidents to date in Castle Valley: the first and worst at Winter Quarters, 1900; the second at Castle Gate in March 1924; five men killed at Rains in September 1924; twenty-five dead, including three rescue workers, at Standardville in February 1930; two months later, five men killed in a New Peerless explosion; eight dead at Kenilworth in March 1945; the following May, twenty-three killed at Utah Fuel’s Sunnyside mine; four men dead at Spring Canyon in January 1958; nine at Hardscrabble Mine, Spring Canyon, in December 1963, and the Wilberg Disaster of December 19, 1984, that killed twenty-seven miners. This continuing loss of life meant that many, many people locally and elsewhere could relate to the Winter Quarters story. Consequently, countless groups and individuals lent a hand in preparation and on May 1, 2000, an estimated 1,800 people flocked to the tiny town of Scofield. They heard descendants of the victims, historians, religious leaders, and the Consul General of Finland (flown in from Los Angeles) speak about the tragedy and its effects. Flags of all the nations of the dead fluttered in the wind. Visitors could view a photo exhibit and professional video, take tours of the mine area, and record their own oral histories and family stories. Major Utah newspapers reported the commemoration and the unprecedented turnout.

Castle Valley’s coal industry again made state news in 2003 and 2004, when workers at the Co-op Mine near Huntington struck over their right to unionize. Salt Lake Tribune reporters Mike Gorrell and Rhina Guidos broke the story on October 12, 2003, with the tale of Bill Estrada, who for a year had dug coal for less than $6 an hour. When he tried to organize a union, he claimed, the Co-op Mine fired him, allegedly for falsifying a safety inspection record. Around seventy other miners, mostly recently immigrated Hispanics, joined him on the picket line at the base of Huntington Canyon. They protested exploitative conditions, defective and dangerous machinery, lack of health-care benefits and training, and low wages. Backed by the faith-based Utah Jobs With Justice and the Disabled Rights Action Committee, in 2004 the protests spread to several others of the 160 businesses (worth an estimated $150 million) owned by the 1,200-member polygamous Kingston clan, Co-op’s owners. The polygamists themselves, an inbred group firmly repudiated by the LDS Church, were originally exposed by a 1998 indictment and subsequent conviction for incest of one of the patriarchs who forced a sixteen-year-old niece to become his fifteenth wife. In January 2004, another male family member was convicted of felony incest for similar behavior. As this book goes to press, the strike remains unresolved, but, once again, Castle Valley events highlight historic issues, this time of polygamy, of immigrants seeking better lives in the mines, and of union organizing.

Other issues also spurred Castle Valley controversy in the twenty-first century. An increasing influx of visitors catalyzed public debate about
competing land use and potential wilderness designation, a national preoccupation ever since the passage of the 1964 Wilderness Act. This legislation honored preexisting federal leasing and mining until 1983, but then restrictions tightened in an attempt to preserve, untouched, approximately four percent of the American land mass. Of course, what other people called wilderness has always been Castle Valley’s back yard. Many people still go Eastering, and most hunt, fish, hike, or camp in the nearby desert and mountains. In fact, by the late twentieth century, students got college credit for wilderness experiences. About 1980, the College of Eastern Utah developed a Wilderness Program as part of the regular curriculum, meshing classes in the sciences and humanities with faculty-supervised backpacking expeditions and river runs. Under drama professor Lee Johnson, the college eventually operated its own river running company, possibly the only arrangement of its kind in the nation. While students studied wilderness first-hand, the first Utah-sponsored Wilderness Bill failed in Congress in 1995. A flurry of others followed and failed. In response, in 1997, Emery County officials devised the idea of a Western Heritage Park to include a national conservation area on the San Rafael Swell and a national heritage area for towns along the Wasatch Plateau. Officials invited Carbon County to join them, to highlight local events and vistas, including:

...natural history and wildlife such as the big horn sheep management area being proposed on Sids Mountain; dinosaur sites such as the Cleveland Lloyd Dinosaur Quarry, the CEU Prehistoric Museum and the Museum of the San Rafael Swell; the Ancient Ones, Fremont Indian ruins and rock art sites; trails, such as the Walker Trail and Spanish Trail; cowboys, Sid’s Leap, Swasey Cabin and other outlaw and pioneer locations; and the nuclear age, which would include mining (uranium and coal) and power generation locations. Those sites could include Temple Mountain, local coal mines, and the three power plants.

Much of the impetus for Emery County’s continuing effort (with or without the rest of Castle Valley) grew from increasingly raucous debate over the future of the San Rafael Swell, one of a number of Utah areas under study for potential federal Wilderness designation. In early 2003, the Sierra Club’s widely-circulated magazine featured the Swell in its full-color cover story, stressing the damage done to nature by off-road vehicles. In response, a letter dated February 2003 appeared on the Emery County website, soliciting the public’s comments and ideas for continuing to pursue Heritage Area status after “three [unsuccessful] attempts to have Congress designate the County as a National Heritage area.”

Castle Valley’s current goal—to attract “heritage tourists,” identified by state officials as the number one spenders—mirrors a nationwide trend of
visiting historic places. According to historian John A. Jackle, the uses of a “romanticized past” included “bind[ing] the tourist closer to the national body politic,” teaching lessons to children, evoking heroism, and enshrining forebears and their lifeways. “Landmarks rooted in the past,” he wrote, “enabled tourists not only to locate themselves in space, but . . . in time, as well.”69 On the other hand, most recent studies of tourism point to its unintended consequences, described by historian Hal Rothman as a “devil’s bargain.” He cautioned that “places devolved into caricatures of their original identities, passing from . . . unique heritage . . . to colorful backdrop for . . . visitors [who] understood themselves to be” at the center of the tourist experience.70 Finally, business professor Patrick Long recently warned, “No one can or should presume to know the exact outcomes of tourism development; however, a community must continually focus on the degree to which it is willing to alter its character—its soul—to attract and satisfy visitor needs.”71

In 2003, eighty-nine-year-old rancher Owen Price, a veteran of the uranium boom, talked to journalists publicizing the Swell. He recalled his youth, when he rounded up wild horses where I-70 now bisects the Swell, and his mother’s admonition when he left the house: “You better be back home for Thanksgiving.” Lee Jeffs, a fourth-generation rancher on the Swell’s north end, lamented “the destruction of fences and grazing habitat by illegal use of all-terrain vehicles. . . . ‘I don’t think there’s much future for ranching out there,’ Jeffs said.”72

A different confrontation, this time between historic preservation and federal energy policy, spilled into national news in mid-2004. On May 24, the National Trust for Historic Preservation named Utah’s Nine Mile Canyon one of the eleven most endangered historic places in the entire nation. Identifying Nine Mile Canyon as “a world and national treasure,” Trust president Richard Moe called the canyon, “the world’s longest art gallery” for its astonishing expanse of native rock art. The National Trust noted that the canyon contained “more than 10,000 images . . . [as well as] many historic sites—including stagecoach stations, settlers’ cabins, ranches, and iron telegraph poles installed by the famed 19th-century Buffalo Soldiers—that stand as reminders of the area’s pioneer history.” Already impacted by tourism and recreation, the canyon now faces destruction from ongoing energy development. The race for increased oil and gas supplies “could transform the historic landscape into an industrial zone with heavy industrial trucks rumbling through the narrow canyons in close proximity to fragile Native American rock art. Currently proposed projects for energy development and exploration would result in tens of thousands of trips by these trucks, in addition to numerous wells being drilled.” The dust alone would radically erode fragile cultural remains. Consequently, the National Trust for Historic Preservation championed “raising public awareness, planning and increased program funding,” thereby bringing this fascinating rim of Castle Valley to new national attention.75
While new pressures for change loom over Castle Valley, those who call it home continue to carry its unique identity with them as a turtle carries its shell. In addition to being a concrete, physical place, by the turn of the twenty-first century, Castle Valley had become the psychological home of those who left. For example, the youngest judge ever named to the Utah bench, Sharon Peacock McCully, admitted in 1986, “When people ask me where I’m from, and it has been sixteen years since I’ve lived in Orangeville, I tell them I’m from Emery County. It seems like more of a place to be from than Salt Lake, you know.” She also reflected on the Wilberg Disaster, when, home for Christmas, she had seen the black smoke pouring out of the mine from her sister’s back window. “The whole town could have been holding hands, as far as the feeling that was there . . . [and] Carbon County was surely just as affected.” Edward Geary, long a resident of Provo, came back for a special lecture in his native Huntington and spoke of “we” and “us” as though he had never left. He observed that “nothing is long ago in Castle Valley. . . . We have homesteaders’ cabins in the shadow of giant power plants, empty chicken coops at the back of trailer courts, idle hay derricks standing on their long legs like gaunt giants beside highways busy with commuter traffic.” Surveying the economic scene, he added, “the Carbon County coal mines have always contributed largely to the economic well-being of Emery County. At first, [Emery County] people would spend part of the year in the coal camps and part at home on the farm. Later, they lived entirely in our communities and commuted to work, mostly to Hiawatha but some as far as Sunnyside . . . [still following] the seasonal rhythms of an agrarian way of life.” More recently, the traffic has reversed, as plenty of Carbon County residents work in the Emery County power plants. Paul Turner, a child of Sunnyside now resident in Richfield, wrote about a recent visit: “The houses are gone, as is the barn, the school house, the tipple, the bath house, the amusement hall, the tennis court, the depot, the store, and the post office. But the memories those of us who lived there have are as vivid and enduring as though Sunnyside was still alive.” Steven D. Bunnell, for decades resident in Spokane and Salt Lake City, even scripted audiocassettes of stories based, in part, on his Price childhood. Such tales included “The Birth of My Values” and “My One Real Adventure,” which described youthful shenanigans around the Bunnell garage and “borrowed” cars that would have caused a lot of trouble, had he ever been caught. He even offered fellow Castle Valley aficionados a newsletter. Finally, former Latuda teacher and school principal Mary Rynio thought about her childhood and youth in Castle Gate, Helper, and later life up Spring Canyon, where by the 1990s, nothing but ghosts remained. She closed her eyes, imagining “the tipple loading coal cars, dogs barking, people playing softball, children playing, lawns being mowed, mothers hanging laundry out.” Proud to have been part of “the good old days,” she added, “Thanks for the memories.” Now very much connected to the larger world, Castle Valley people feel its
changes, but remember who they are and what makes them a unique island in the mainstream. In the face of Castle Valley’s consistently uncertain future, its past sustains us all.