

CASTLE VALLEY

AMERICA

HARD LAND
HARD-WON HOME



Nancy J. Taniguchi

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To Darcy Anne Akiko—
Castle Valley native,
world traveler,
beloved daughter

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Contents

	Preface	VIII
	Introduction	1
I. CASTLE VALLEY CORRIDOR		
1	Passing Through, 1776–1869	7
2	The Significance of the Frontier, 1870–1882	28
3	The Railroad and the Raids, 1882–1890	53
4	Cowboys and Industry, 1890–1899	76
II. NEW PEOPLE, NEW WAYS		
5	Industrial Revolution, 1899–1905	105
6	Moving in Together, 1905–1909	125
7	Facing Off, 1910–1919	148
8	Roller Coaster, 1920–1929	173
III. CRISIS AND COMMUNITY		
9	Depression, 1930–1941	201
10	America’s Arsenal, 1941–1960	220
11	The Preservation Instinct, 1960–1980	242
12	Energy Crisis, 1980–2004	264
	Notes	286
	Index	347

Preface

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

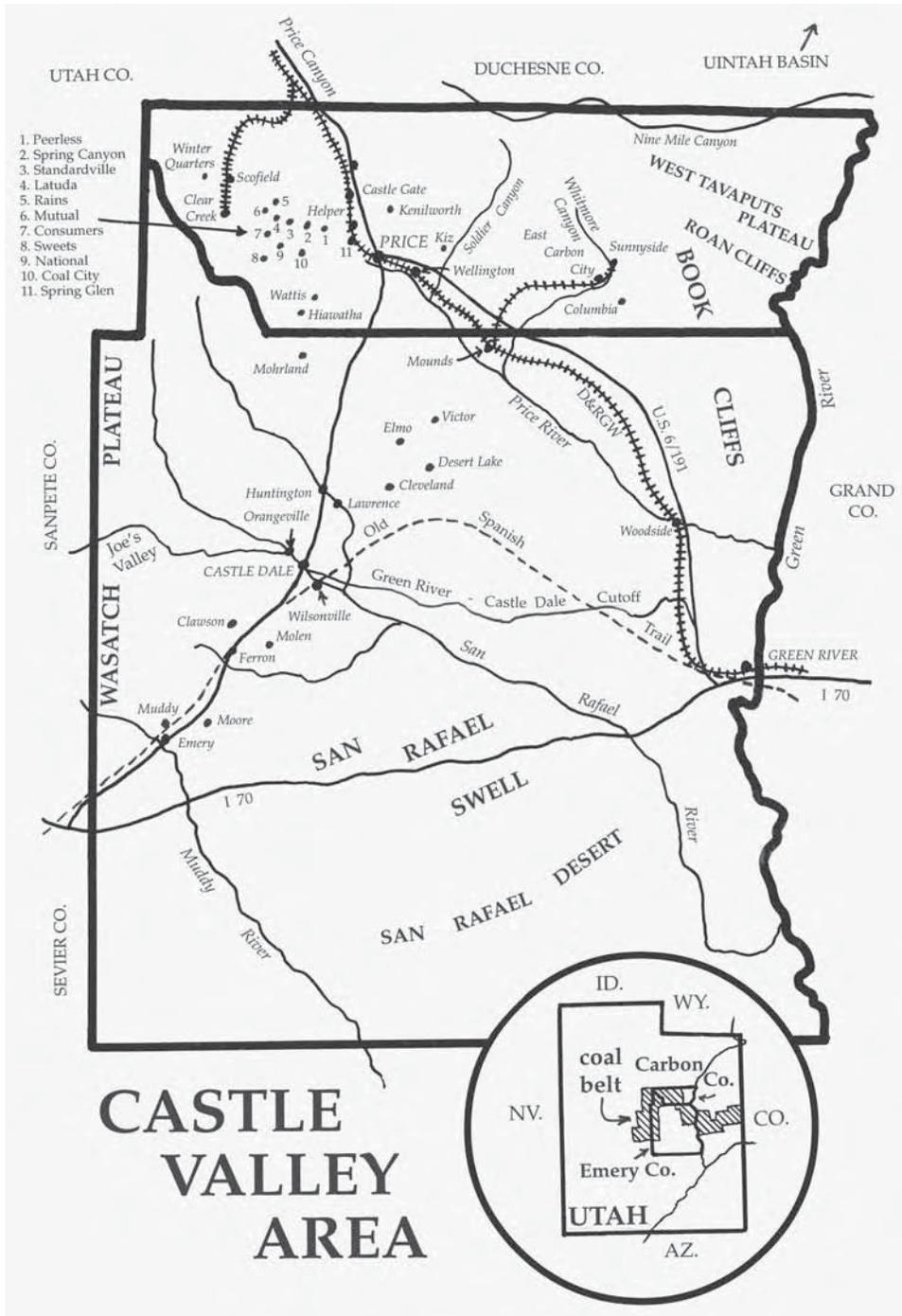
It's hard to be honest about a place where one lives, to show it with all its defects and wrinkles and still reveal why it's so special. I have done my best. There are stories I would have liked to put in but didn't. Like the one about widow Isabella Birch Bryner, wrapped in quilts against the chill,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

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

heads the Utah State Historical Society. Now is a great time for Castle Valley history.

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

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



Introduction

The poet wrote, “No man is an island . . . every man . . . is a part of the main.”¹ The same can be said for places, literally and figuratively, and how and when they become connected indelibly shapes their history. Castle Valley remained an uninhabited island in the American West for generations, as more inviting areas were “discovered,” inhabited, and “civilized.” When occupation finally occurred, industrialization followed within a handful of years. Then, in quick succession, came the sort of change called progress, then cultural innovation, the effects of world-wide upheaval and, finally, self-recognition. Like so many people, in its maturity, after three score years and ten (more or less), Castle Valley started discovering what sort of place it was and where it fit into the continent of the nation and on the map of American and global ideas, creating new, multi-layered identities.²

Visions of American history normally come pre-scripted: the march of “progress” from Old World to New, from sea to shining sea, from autocratic institutions to true democracy. Traditionally, as a result, historians have viewed this process from the power centers (usually New England, New York, or Washington, D.C.) whether the approach is geographical, political, or philosophical. This book views a slice of America from a different perspective, in Utah’s last-settled hinterlands. Even in the twenty-first century, Utah is a sparsely inhabited state (third in amount of public lands after Alaska and Nevada) and the last to be admitted to the Union in the nineteenth century. Only Oklahoma, New Mexico, Arizona, Alaska, and Hawaii joined afterward, but each of them had their own connections to other worlds—Spanish, Russian, or Pacific. Utah had none of those ties. It was (and is), in many respects, the edge of America, and Castle Valley is its last frontier.

But isn’t Utah history all about Mormons? This skewed perception explains much of the persistent historical neglect of Castle Valley. Yes, it is, but also about Utes and Paiutes and Spanish and Mexicans and Finns and Greeks and Japanese and Italians—in fact, many of the peoples of the world came to Castle Valley at one time or another. And most were not Mormon. Some even stayed. So Utah history itself traditionally ignored this area—too late to be part of the usual Mormon pioneer story, too different to fit into the sweeping generalizations with which Utah is usually

characterized. Even in the saga of Utah history, Castle Valley has remained an historical island.

Then how can Castle Valley exemplify America? As recent scholarship attests, America's story is not so much of a movement of white European stock westward as it is a flow of peoples into the interior of the continent from several directions, impelled by motives more varied than simple progress or conquest.³ In historic times, continental penetration began first from the south, as the Spanish empire stretched out to claim increasing fingers of territory. Aside from Florida, ceded to England in 1763, much of Spanish expansion could be tied to the Old Spanish Trail. In 1776, Fathers Dominguez and Escalante initiated what became this well-traveled route. Their goal: the new missions of California; at their back, the 160-year-old entrepot of Santa Fe. The Old Spanish Trail runs through Castle Valley.

The next expansion came from competition between distant commercial empires. Their polyglot fur trappers associated sometimes with the French, or with the Americans, or with the powerful, long-lived Hudson's Bay Company. Men like the American Fur Company's Etienne Provost (for whom Provo, Utah, is named) traversed the region, trapping and later escorting caravans westward to the annual fur trade rendezvous. Compatriots left their names painted on a rock on the west bank of the Green River in the 1830s, at the very northeast edge of Castle Valley, and on the cliffs at its western border. Finding little of value there, they, like the Spanish, traveled on.

The third wave of strangers led to settlement—people of northern European heritage who usually star in the first act of America's historical pageant. Here, they came later. In Utah's case, most were Mormons—members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints who had been driven from their homes by a succession of enraged neighbors. Their fellow Americans had been offended by Mormon clannishness, by their self-righteousness, and by rumors of repugnant practices: theocracy and polygamy. The flip side of these qualities—community solidarity, self-reliance, piety, and centralized authority—made the Saints successful in the West, and led to a well-rooted settlement in Utah's Great Basin. But while many of the Mormons initially sought a separate refuge in their protected Zion, American history would not let them rest long. While they ignored Castle Valley because of its awkward geographical location and desolate lands, they extended westward to California. In 1848, at Sutter's Mill, a handful of Mormon men helped discover gold, stunning the world and rearranging a good portion of its population. Trying to keep travel routes open, Mormons sought a corridor to the sea, founding San Bernardino—and between the excitement of Sutter's Mill and the hustle of California colony-building, Castle Valley's two leading pioneers got their early training.

With California gold came the clamor for a national railroad, which was completed in Utah in 1869. This monopolistic octopus wrapped its tentacles around Utah transportation until the coming of the Denver and

Rio Grande Western in 1883—right through Castle Valley, settled less than a decade earlier. The frontier was now open for settlement, up to its very edge.

A short decade later, historian Frederick Jackson Turner announced that the frontier had closed (in a much-disputed perception). At least the West was so settled that a frontier line could no longer be discerned on a map generated by the 1890 census. He noted the passing of several distinct frontiers: the Indian Traders Frontier, the Ranchers Frontier, the Farmers Frontier, and Army Posts (also, presumably, a sort of frontier). Castle Valley's history, while experiencing some of these types, proceeded in its own order as the grand American parade got somewhat jumbled by the time it reached this far-off region—definitely an island of barrenness among the checkered, settled lands of the West.

Once most lands were taken, American energy turned largely to their development and/or exploitation. The nation was buffeted by successive waves of change brought by the Industrial Revolution, progressive reforms, World War I, and the supremacy of business. These waves surged and crested in the national mainstream, and their crescendos crashed over the edge into Castle Valley in quick succession. No harbor of tradition existed to cushion the force of these blows, and Castle Valley had to devise its own ways to weather these cross currents. In the 1920s, national cultural norms and attitudes began to sink in, due, in part, to improved transportation, communication, and an increasingly mobile set of local residents. By the Great Depression of the 1930s, Castle Valley's history was entwined with the life of the nation, and the federal government had become a mainstay rather than a hindrance. National ties only strengthened in the 1940s and 1950s as Castle Valley minerals truly made the area "the arsenal of democracy." In this epoch, the "ties to the main" became two-way: not just outside influences rushing in, but contributions to the national welfare flowing out. As residents started assessing their home and its main significances, Castle Valley developed its own version of 1960s liberation, 1970s discontent, and 1980s economic revival.

In the most recent decades, Castle Valley has edged toward an economic precipice. Now very much entwined with energy production, its economy faces the practical dilemma of what to do when coal and gas reserves run out, as they are likely to do in the near future. Fortunately, Castle Valley has another kind of virtually untapped reserve: its history, geology, paleontology, archaeology, and its people, who have connections to virtually everywhere else on earth. The past remains near and palpable—you can almost hear it breathing. The future, however, remains a question, as it so often has in unpredictable Castle Valley.

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PART I
CASTLE VALLEY CORRIDOR

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Passing Through, 1776–1869

*We rolled on down the creek a mile or two and then turned northward through Castle Valley, thirteen miles, mostly downhill, to Coal Creek, where we anticipated staying all night; but feed being poor, water bad and the bed of the creek quicksand, we rolled on.*¹

—OLIVER B. HUNTINGTON, EXPLORER

Americans expected to create civilization in the wilderness; they just felt that they could skip Castle Valley. From the beginning of history, no one really liked the area: not the Utes, not the Spanish, not the Mexicans, nor the mountain men, nor the federal surveyors—not even the pioneers who eventually settled there. When Oliver Huntington penned his views in 1855, the valley’s name and its unattractive reputation were both well established. Its dry, alkali soil and gullied landscape initially made only a convenient passageway in what became the American West. From the mid-thirteenth to the late nineteenth centuries, however, no one lived there permanently. The Utes, true, once traveled regularly through Castle Valley in their seasonal cycles through the greater southwest, leaving possessions at favorite campsites. In 1921, for example, a local schoolgirl’s interviews with “old-timers” revealed that, “The early settlers . . . found poles of wigwams, pottery, weapons, Indian graves, bead work and rocks where they ground their corn.”² Further south, circles of stones used to weigh down the sides of teepees and scattered pieces of broken pottery marked other old Ute campsites.³ But these sites had been abandoned, perhaps because the Utes, like all other natives, had suffered greatly from epidemics introduced by whites, who had a resistance that Indians lacked.⁴ Furthermore, the local environment had apparently deteriorated in historic times. One pioneer account related that although Utes “didn’t approve of white settlers [in Castle Valley,] . . . because their own squaws became sick from drinking the

water, they would not live here.”⁵

Permanent settlement came only at the command of the LDS Church (the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, or Mormons). In that, Castle Valley was not distinctive—virtually all of Utah and parts of Idaho, Nevada, Arizona, New Mexico, California, Canada, and Mexico were settled likewise. But within a handful of years after the first farmers scratched the soil for fields and irrigation canals, the Denver and Rio Grande Western Railroad built right through the valley. The railroad brought industry, a cash economy, and a flood of non-Mormon immigrants from all parts of Europe and Asia. From then on, American history ran on fast-forward through the Castle Valley corridor. This isolated, rural-industrial center of Utah, itself a most distinctive state, quickly became very different from its immediate surroundings but very like much of the rest of the country. In quick succession, Castle Valley fulfilled all the expectations of the passing age: exploration, pioneering, industrialization, immigrant adjustment, national boom and bust, Cold War development, an internationally-driven economy, and modern tourism. Yet it remains, to this day, geographically isolated. Other areas have a polyglot population and the trials of industry; most such are near urban centers. Plenty of America remains rural and traditional, but residents do not have to interact with a host of others from different traditions. None of the potentially comparable areas lie within Utah, a state that began as a separate nation: economically cooperative, polygamous, and theocratic. For this reason, a study of how forces and humans created today’s Castle Valley, Utah, reflects a unique view of national aspirations as they played out in the most distinctive rural valley in America. Nowhere else was so diverse but so isolated, so industrialized but so rural, so fraught with labor disturbances yet leavened with religious tolerance. Castle Valley had all these qualities, because that is what people had to do to get along in this strange, remarkable place.

At first, Castle Valley was easy to ignore. Its natural barriers kept it separate from the rest of Utah. On the west, the Wasatch Plateau rises to some 7,500–10,000 feet above sea level, dividing the western Basin and Range Province, with its salt flats and Great Salt Lake, from the more eastern red rock Colorado Plateau, home of Castle Valley.⁶ From north to south, the Plateau’s heights give rise to five major, perennial, eastward-flowing streams: Huntington, Cottonwood, Ferron, Muddy, and Ivie creeks, the last a tributary of the Muddy. The first three of these creeks drain into the San Rafael River, which flows westward out of Castle Valley, cutting spectacular canyons in the northern reaches of the San Rafael Swell. This uranium-rich geological uplift houses secret springs, water pockets, and fantastic rocky shapes with weird names bestowed by lonely cowboys and defines the valley’s southeastern edge. The San Rafael River’s snaking course echoes that of the more northerly Price River, which enters Castle Valley through a canyon separating the Wasatch Plateau from an east-to-west-running pile



Castle Valley's ancient inhabitants left intriguing traces, including unfired, mud figurines, painted rock art that sometimes resembled them, and pecked-in images portraying recognizable animals and fantastic figures, such as these at Rochester Creek, near Moore, Emery County. Photo by the author.

of uplands: the southern Book Cliffs and northern Roan Cliffs, together called the West Tavaputs Plateau. (Northwest of this region lies Utah's dominant Wasatch Front, contrasting with the "backside of the Wasatch Front," where Castle Valley lies.)⁷ The Price River flows down through its canyon and southeast through Castle Valley (through a portion also known as Clark Valley), watering two or three tiny meadows amid a vast expanse of alkali and dirt until it, too, curves east to join the Green River. To the south and southwest, cradling the Swell, lies the San Rafael Desert, completing the circle around this remote area where the last dinosaurs once came to die.⁸

Castle Valley's last known, permanent, human inhabitants had been the Fremont Indians, an understudied group who inhabited the area