

## Historical Threads

# Traces Remain of the old Newcastle Reclamation Company

by Jay M. Jones

Water has always been the major factor in the development of Southern Utah. Irrigation has been and continues to be essential for growing crops in the region. Early agricultural settlements were established where water sources were most accessible and reliable. Communities flourished or withered with the water supply.

As communities grew and younger generations sought places for themselves, the search for water expanded and water projects became more ambitious. During the early part of the 20th century some notable irrigation projects were implemented in Southern Utah. The Hurricane Canal, the Upper and Lower Enterprise Reservoirs, and the development of canals to irrigate farm lands along the lower Sevier River in Millard County are a few examples of impressive water projects from that era.

One of the most ambitious water projects from that time period was a privately funded endeavor intended to bring water from Pine Valley Mountain in Washington County into Iron County. An article from the Salt Lake Tribune on 2 June 1912 states:

“One of the greatest irrigation enterprises established in the state of Utah is that at New Castle. . . .Men who have lived for years in that vicinity are surprised at the thoroughness with which the water is being conserved, and the visitor is astonished to find such a stretch of cultivable land in one compact body. In few places in the west is to be found a tract quite like that at New Castle, according to authorities, every acre under the new project being good farming land.”

The fertile soil of the Escalante Valley lacked only water to fulfill its potential to become one of the most productive agricultural areas in the state. The Newcastle Reclamation Company was established in 1908 to bring water from the Pine Valley Mountains to the dry desert. George W. Middleton, Thomas W. Jones, N. T. Porter, Fred W. Walton, David W. Moffat, J. L. Sevy and D. Forsyth were leaders and shareholders in the company.

The company made plans for extensive development of the Newcastle area. They developed the site for Newcastle, built a large hotel and some homes, and planned for the development of farmland and the infrastructure to deliver irrigation water to the land. That infrastructure included canals, a dam, and a tunnel.



***The canal from Pine Valley to Grass Valley, built in 1914 in Washington County, is now used as a recreational bicycle and walking trail. Jay Jones photo.***

The canal moved headwaters from the Santa Clara River above the town of Pine Valley to Grass Valley, about three miles to the north. Much of the labor for the canal came from Japanese workers who had previously been employed as miners in Utah and Nevada mining camps. It was completed in 1914.

Construction of the Grass Valley Dam began in 1911 and was finished in 1917. It was constructed at the southern end of Grass Valley, measuring 75 feet high and 450 feet across.

As water from the canal filled the reservoir and covered the valley, water on the northern end of the reservoir would flow into a trench and then through a tunnel that had been

constructed through the ridge and into Pinto Creek and eventually on to Newcastle. This was one of the first projects to move water from the Colorado River drainage into the Great Basin.

When water was first diverted into the canal, downstream water users on the Santa Clara River took notice that their river had mostly dried up. Although the Newcastle Reclamation Company had secured



water rights, the farmers in the town of Central had a history of using the water and took the issue to court. The court ruled in favor of the farmers in Central, and part of the Newcastle company water rights were dissipated.

Also, a rancher at Grass Valley was not pleased that his grazing land had been seriously degraded. The fact that the Newcastle Reclamation Company had gone through a legal process to condemn the property for the reservoir did not reduce the hurt experienced by the rancher, and additional lawsuits were to follow.

It was an even more fundamental problem, however, that was to finally doom the Newcastle Reclamation Company. The Grass Valley Reservoir did not hold water very well. The basalt rock underneath the valley floor had cracks and crevices that allowed water to seep through and eventually find its way back to the Santa Clara River. It appeared that Mother Nature held the trump card.

When debts mounted and revenues diminished, the Newcastle Reclamation Company was dissolved. As the principals of the company met to divide the assets and obligations of the company among themselves, it turned out that each man was willing to do more than his share to settle the debts.

The full vision of the Newcastle project did not materialize as planned, but partial fulfillment of that dream can be seen today. Agriculture prospers in the Escalante Valley, limited only by the availability of more water.

The large hotel built by the Newcastle Reclamation Company was later destroyed by fire. One of the fine homes built by the company in Newcastle was moved to 200 West in Cedar City in the 1930s and is now part of Cedar City's historic district.

The Grass Valley Dam remains in place, although it does not guard a permanent reservoir. The canal from Pine Valley is now the Canal Trail, which originates from the Mitt Moddy Campground in the Pine Valley Recreation Area. And some water still flows seasonally through the tunnel from Grass Valley into Pinto Creek, although only a fraction of what was originally intended. The traces that remain confirm the grandeur of the unfulfilled dream.



***The trench to the tunnel that goes from Grass Valley to Pinto Creek on the other side of the ridge, was one of the first diversions of water from the Colorado River drainage to the Great Basin. Jay Jones photo.***

<a href="#">Zion</a>	<a href="#">Exploring</a>	<a href="#">Natives</a>	<a href="#">Pioneers</a>	<a href="#">Towns</a>	<a href="#">Resources</a>	<a href="#">Arts</a>	<a href="#">History</a>	<a href="#">Photos</a>	<a href="#">Maps</a>
----------------------	---------------------------	-------------------------	--------------------------	-----------------------	---------------------------	----------------------	-------------------------	------------------------	----------------------