Utah Studies Core Standards
UT Strand 3, Standard 3.2

Danger and Diversity in Utah's Mining Country

By Lisa Barr & Wendy Rex-Atzet

Carbon County: Bringing the World to Central Utah

Utah entered the railroad age in 1869, when the Transcontinental Railroad was completed at Promontory. From there, railroad and mining development spread around the state hand in hand, as the twin industries tapped Utah's mineral resources and carried them to distant markets. Mining communities such as Alta, Bingham Canyon, Frisco, Marysvale, Park City, Silver City, Stockton, and Carbon County attracted thousands of new immigrants, reshaping the social, cultural, economic, and religious fabric of Utah. This lesson focuses on the mining towns of Carbon County, and dovetails with the lesson "Engines of Change: Railroads in Utah."

Immigrants from the World Over

Mormon migrants established their first settlements in Carbon County along the Price River in the 1870s. Agricultural communities such as Spring Glen, Price, and Wellington engaged in farming, cattle, and sheep grazing. Although the Price River provided water, the arid and unpredictable climate made agriculture difficult.

During the 1880s, a coal mining boom spurred dramatic immigration to the region. Railroads serving the new coal mines needed hundreds of workers, as did mining camps such as Clear Creek, Winter Quarters, Castle Gate, Kenilworth, and Sunnyside. Labor agents, or padrones, traveled the world peddling the job opportunities available in this remote corner of the American West, and families coping with poverty sent their young men off to work.

In Greece, for example, crop failures had devastated the agricultural country's economy. The government urged men to go work in the United States and send money home to bring in needed cash. Some 31,000 Greek men immigrated to the U.S. between 1906-1914, leaving many towns populated only by women, children, and elders. Although many immigrants intended to return home, most did not. They sent for their families or arranged marriages and stayed in their new communities.

About These Documents

Maps: Mining towns, natural and cultural landmarks, and railroad lines in Carbon County.

Photographs: Historic images are from the Classified Photographs, Peoples of Utah, and Shipler Commercial Photographs digital collections of the Utah State Historical Society. These sources allow students to interpret major mining and immigration themes from the late 19th to mid-20th centuries.

Artifacts: Mining signs and clothing can used to interpret the diversity in mining towns and the dangers of working in the mines.

Oral Histories: These oral histories are excerpts from interviews of people who grew up in Carbon County mining communities.

Questions for Young Historians

What drew people to Carbon County?

Why did mines and railroads go hand in hand?

Why did mining and railroad towns outnumber agricultural towns in Carbon County?

What was it like to live in a company town?

How did different ethnic groups interact with each other at work? At school? In town?

Why was mining so dangerous?

What do you think would happen to the family of a miner who was injured or killed on the job?

Why do you think there was conflict among different ethnic groups?

How did ethnic communities overcome their differences?

In 1910, 4,062 Greeks lived in Carbon County. That same year, the entire town of Price numbered 1,021. By 1920, immigrants from **33 countries** lived and worked in Carbon County. International immigrants far outnumbered the American-born population, particularly in the mining towns and railroad camps. For example, sixty percent of Kenilworth residents were foreign-born in 1920. But in Price, just twenty percent of the residents were born outside the United States.

Life in the Mining Towns

Large mining companies owned the mines and built company towns to house their workers nearby. In the early years, workers at Winter Quarters and Castle Gate lived in tents and abandoned train cars. Some miners' families built their own homes out of stones from the canyon. Independent Coal and Coke Company and Utah Fuel built the company towns of Sunnyside and Kenilworth.

The company owned all aspects of a company town, including its homes and essential businesses. Most towns had a general store, elementary school, amusement hall, ice cream parlor, and baseball field. Companies provided the housing for their workers and then deducted rent from each paycheck. The cost of goods that a miner or his family bought at the company store were deducted directly from his paycheck. Some miners received their pay as store credit instead of a paycheck. Miners often went into debt to their employers, which made it impossible for them to quit their jobs.

Immigrants and Euro-Americans usually lived in ethnic enclaves in company towns such as Kenilworth. Living near people who spoke the same language and had similar traditions helped immigrants feel more comfortable in their new homes. The mining companies encouraged immigrant groups to live in ethnic neighborhoods because they believed this separation helped prevent labor strikes.

The company provided two-bedroom homes to miners with families, while mine superintendents lived in four-bedroom homes on the opposite side of town. In Kenilworth, this upscale neighborhood was known as Silk Stocking Row. Single men lived in boarding houses which catered to different ethnic groups. Women usually managed the boarding houses: cooking meals, washing clothes, and cleaning the rooms. When there was a shortage of rooms, families often rented out rooms in their homes to single miners.

Although immigrants lived in enclaves, they shared community spaces such as amusement halls, theaters, ice cream parlors, and baseball fields with other ethnic groups. These common spaces helped to bring groups together. The amusement hall featured live music on weekends, and company baseball teams played each other weekly. Schools also brought groups together because children of all ethnic

Nationalities & Ethnic Communities in Carbon County, 1920
Albanian
African-American
Austrian
Belgian
Canadian
Chinese
Croatian
Danish
Dutch
English
Euro-American
Finnish
French Basque
German
Greek
Hungarian
Irish
Italian
Japanese
Mexican
Montenegrin
Norwegian
Polish
Russian
Scottish
Serbian
Slovenian
Spanish
Swedish
Swiss
Syrian
Welsh
Yugoslav

backgrounds went to the same school. Mining companies also used schools as tools to assimilate immigrants to American culture. Children generally spoke English in school and their native language at home.

Some immigrants owned their own businesses in the mining towns. Greek immigrants opened coffee houses where Greek miners socialized after work. Japanese immigrants opened bath and boarding houses to serve Japanese workers. Mining companies usually contracted with immigrants to operate saloons, butcher shops, and barbershops, which helped immigrant businesses grow. For example, David Menotti, an Italian immigrant, managed the Independent Grocery Company in Helper. He eventually bought the store from Independent Coal and Coke and renamed it Carbon Grocery Company. Mining companies also allowed residents to keep small animals, so families could sell fresh eggs and milk to the local stores. Agricultural communities such as Spring Canyon also sold fresh produce in the company towns.

Religion also influenced community life. Most towns had Mormon, Catholic, Greek Orthodox, and Methodist churches. These spaces allowed immigrants to maintain their religious and cultural traditions in the United States. Since mining towns were so small, different nationalities invited the entire town to celebrate weddings and christenings. These events helped immigrant communities grow more accepting of different traditions.

Recommended Readings

Philip F. Notarianni, "Utah's Ellis Island: The Difficult Americanization of Carbon County," *Utah Historical Quarterly,* 1979.

Helen Zeese Papanikolas, *The Peoples of Utah,* 1981.

David Stanley, "The Dynamics of Multi-Ethnicity in Twentieth Century Carbon County," *Utah Historical Quarterly,* 2006.

Ronald G. Watt, *A History of Carbon County*, 1997.

Danger and Diversity in the Mines

Working in the mines created both comradery and division among immigrant groups. Much like their children who moved in and out of ethnic enclaves and mixed social spaces in town, miners moved in two worlds. When they were at home, they patronized ethnic businesses and churches, and formed fraternal organizations that sustained their ethnic communities through friendship and mutual aid. In the mines, they worked with people from all over the world.

Mining was a dangerous occupation, and workers had to rely on each other for safety. Language barriers made work that much more difficult, and so companies posted signs in up to twelve different languages. Each mine tended to employ a few specific nationalities. Finnish laborers were a majority at the Winter Quarters Mine; Italian and Greek miners formed most of the Castle Gate workforce, and Slavic nationalities worked at Sunnyside. Danish, English, and Welsh immigrants, having been among the earliest to arrive in Carbon County mining towns, often enjoyed higher economic and social status than later immigrants from Southern Europe, Eastern Europe, and Asia.

For this reason, mining disasters often set the stage for ethnic discord. In May 1900, an explosion at Winter Quarters Mine killed more than 200 workers, the majority of whom were Finnish. The mine's superintendent blamed the victims, claiming the Finns had carried too much gunpowder in a greedy effort to dislodge more coal. Non-Finns also criticized the Finnish workers for failing to help with rescue efforts, saying they were "heartless... vultures and ghouls."

OUR PAST, THEIR PRESENT
Danger and Diversity in Utah's Mining Country

In 1924, the Castle Gate Mine Disaster killed all 171 workers who were in the mine at the time, representing 12 percent of the town's population. These Greek, Yugoslavian, Serbian, and Italian miners left more than 400 widows and children without income, many saddled with debt to the company for rent and food.

Both World War I and booming immigration sowed the seeds of racism and anti-immigrant sentiments, laws, and vigilantism across the country, and Utah was no exception. In the 1920s the Ku Klux Klan gained a foothold in Carbon County among local white elites, those who worked in managerial positions for the railroad and mining companies. The KKK held marches and cross burnings in Helper and Price, and was responsible for the violent lynching of Robert Marshall, an African American.

By the 1950s, racial and ethnic tensions in Carbon County had cooled considerably. Ethnic Americans had served honorably in World War II, defusing nativist arguments. The children and grandchildren of immigrants had grown up together in school, spoke English, identified with American culture, maintained friendships, intermarried, and celebrated community and family events across the old ethnic and cultural divisions.

Meanwhile, the economic foundations of Carbon County's mining and railroad industries began to weaken. Demand for coal declined in the 1950s and 1960s, while the costs of mining it increased. Some coal veins were exhausted, while others were too deep underground to reach. Labor costs were higher, and new safety and environmental laws raised the overhead for mining companies. By the 1970s most of the old mines had closed and many residents moved to the cities, while locals looked for new economic foundations. Today Carbon County residents retain enormous pride in their heritage of ethnic diversity, mining, and railroading.

Native American Histories

Indigenous peoples lived and traveled through what is now Carbon County for centuries before European immigrants settled there in the late 19th Century. The Fremont people who created the famous rock art in Nine Mile Canyon lived in the region from roughly 200 to 1,300 CE. After that, these people migrated to different areas or merged with other native groups. The canyons and plateaus of the region are part of historic Ute homelands, and are near the southwestern border of today's Uintah-Ouray Reservation.
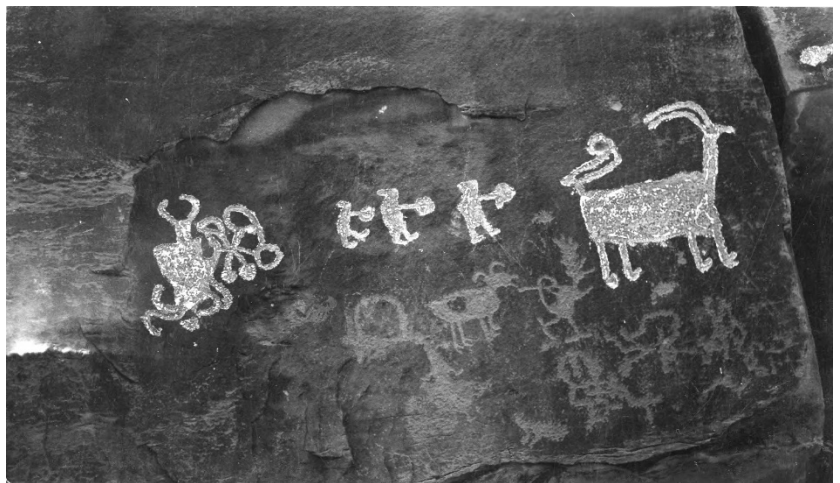
Petroglyphs at Nine Mile Canyon, Utah
Digital Image © 2008 Utah State Historical Society
https://collections.lib.utah.edu/ark:/87278/s6d225rm

OUR PAST, THEIR PRESENT
Danger and Diversity in Utah's Mining Country

STUDENT READING: Carbon County, Bringing the World to Central Utah

After 1880, a new wave of European and Asian immigrants began moving to Utah, attracted by jobs in the railroad and mining industries. Mines and railroads worked together to tap mineral resources such as silver, copper, and coal, and carry them to distant markets. Utah's remote mining towns attracted thousands of new immigrants, who reshaped the social, cultural, economic, and religious fabric of the state. This lesson explores the coal mining communities of Carbon County and what life was like for these Utahns.

By 1920, immigrants from **33 countries** lived and worked in Carbon County. International immigrants far outnumbered the American-born population in this part of Utah, particularly in the mining towns and railroad camps. Look at the map and find the mining towns in Carbon County, which are marked by a pick and shovel icon. Each mine tended to employ a few specific nationalities. Finnish laborers were a majority at the Winter Quarters Mine; Italian and Greek miners formed most of the Castle Gate workforce, and Slavic nationalities worked at Sunnyside.

Large companies owned the mines and built company towns to house their workers nearby. Sunnyside was built and operated by Independent Coal and Coke Company. Kenilworth was owned by Utah Fuel. The company owned all aspects of a company town, including its homes and businesses. Most towns had a general store, elementary school, amusement hall, ice cream parlor, and baseball field. Companies built the housing for their workers and then deducted rent from each paycheck. The cost of goods that a miner or his family bought at the company store were usually deducted directly from his paycheck. Some miners received their pay as store credit instead of a paycheck. Miners often went into debt to their employers, which made it impossible for them to quit their jobs.

Immigrants and Euro-Americans usually lived in ethnic neighborhoods (called enclaves) in the mining towns. Living near people who spoke the same language and had similar traditions helped immigrants feel more comfortable in their new homes. The company provided two-bedroom homes to miners with families, while mine superintendents lived in larger four-bedroom homes on the opposite side of town. In Kenilworth, this upscale neighborhood was known as Silk Stocking Row.

Although immigrants lived in enclaves, they shared community spaces such as amusement halls, theaters, ice cream parlors, and baseball fields with other ethnic groups. These common spaces helped to bring groups together. Schools also brought groups together because children of all ethnic backgrounds went to the same school. Schools worked to assimilate immigrants to American culture. Children generally spoke English in school and their native language at home. Religion also shaped community life. Most towns had Mormon, Catholic, Greek Orthodox, and Methodist churches. These spaces allowed immigrants to maintain their religious and cultural traditions in the United States. Since mining towns were so small, different nationalities invited the entire town to celebrate weddings and christenings. These events helped immigrant communities grow more accepting of different traditions. Miners moved in two worlds. When they were at home, they patronized ethnic businesses and churches. In the mines, they worked with people from all over the world.

Mining was a dangerous occupation, and workers had to rely on each other for safety. Language barriers made work that much more difficult, and so companies posted signs in up to twelve different languages. Accidents and disasters were common in the mines. In 1924, the Castle Gate Mine Disaster killed all 171 workers who were in the mine at the time, which was 12 percent of the town's population. These Greek, Yugoslavian, Serbian, and Italian miners left more than 400 widows and children without income, many saddled with debt to the company for rent and food.
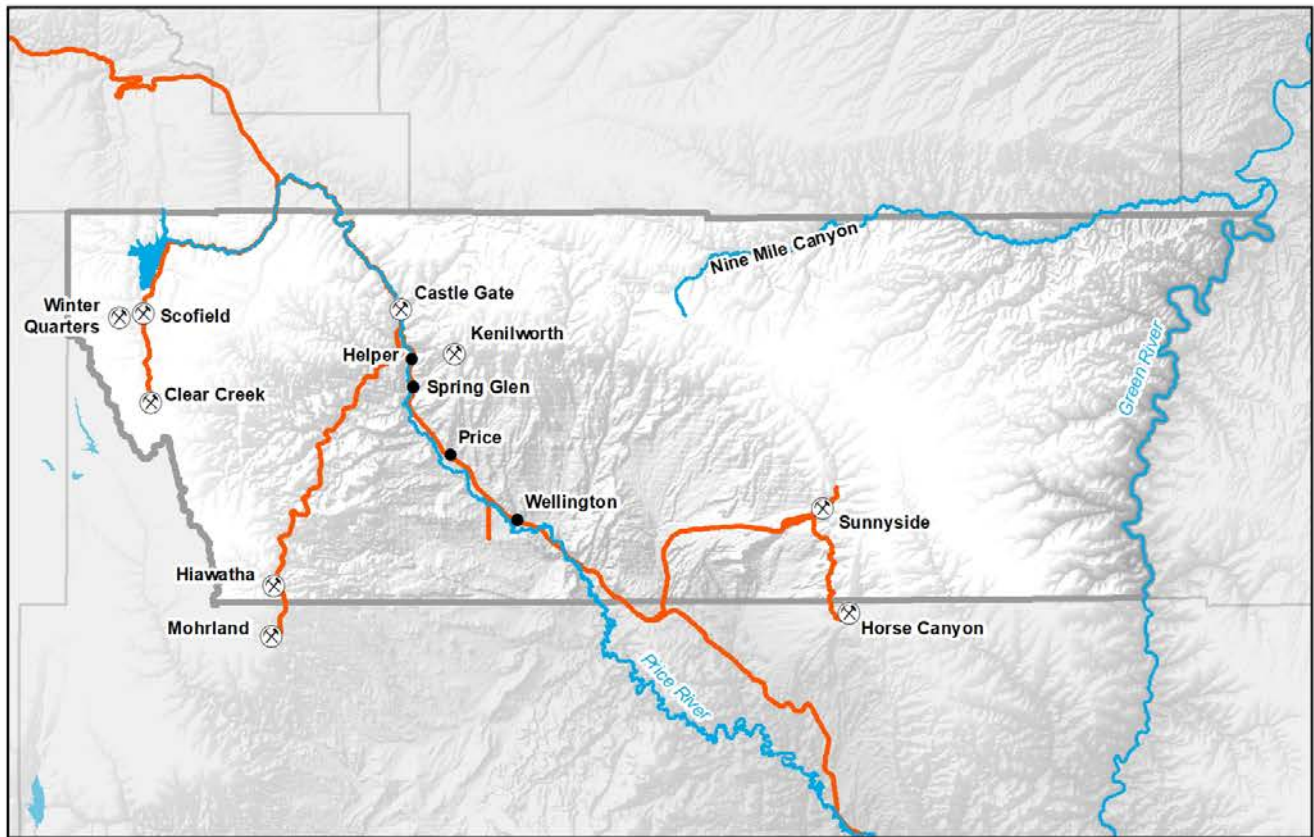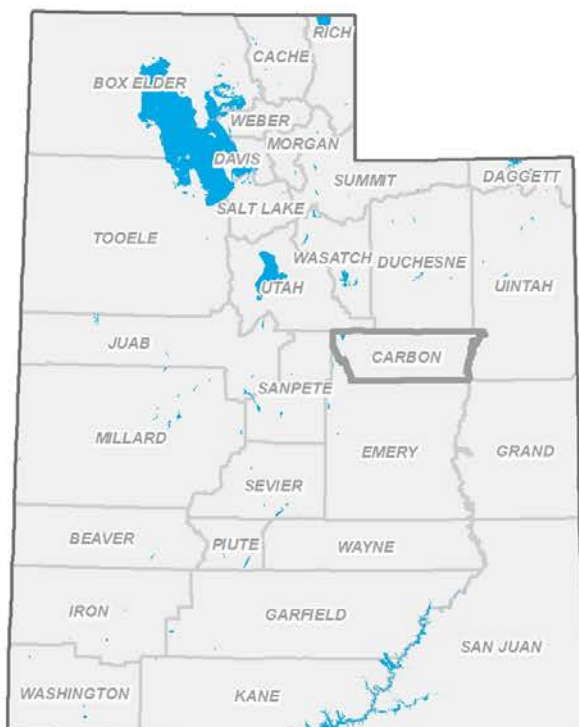
Carbon County Mining Towns, 1920
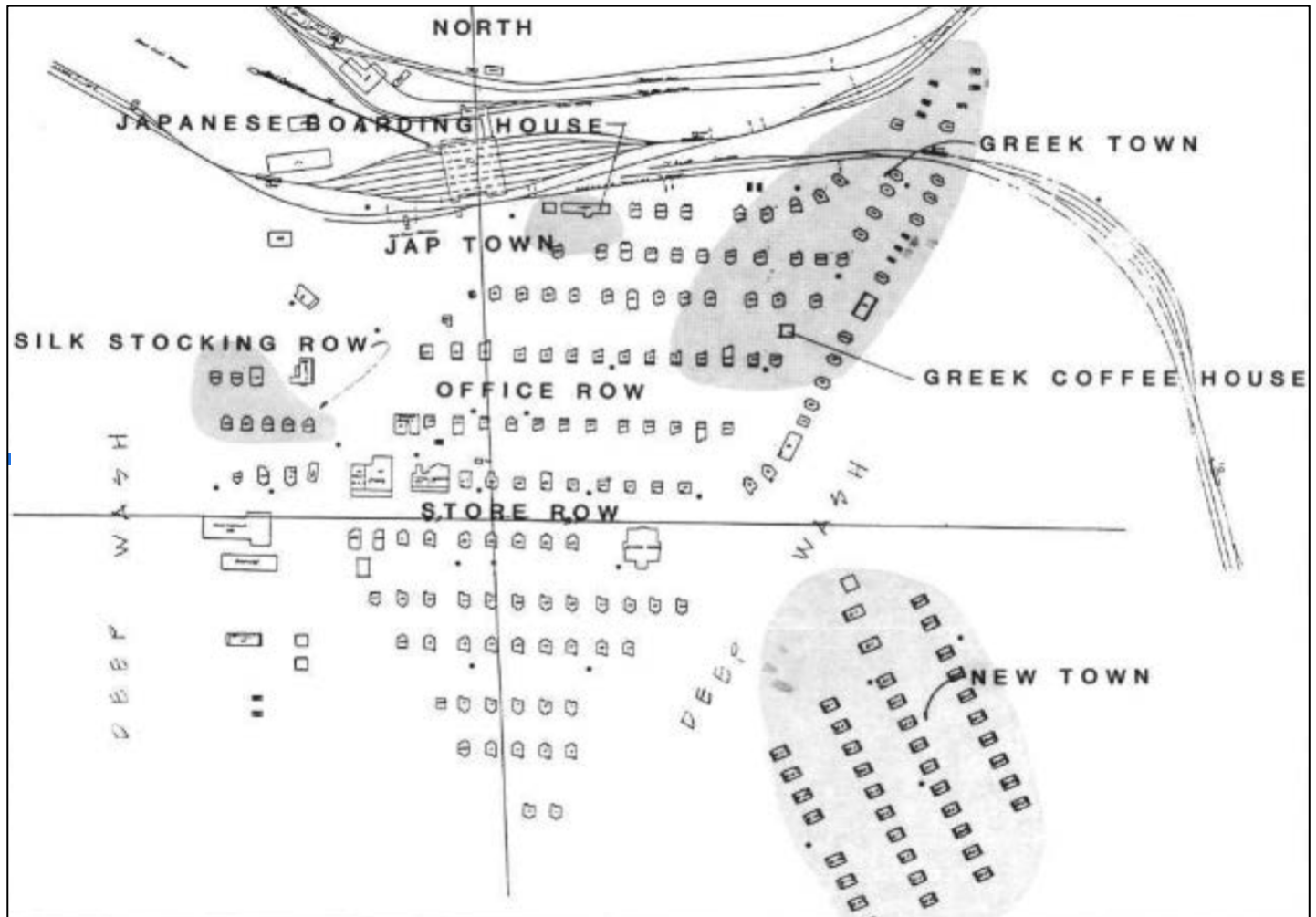
— Railroad Line
● Town Location
⊗ Mining Town

Source: Rand, McNally Standard Map of Utah, 1920. Cartography Associates, David Rumsey Collection.

Map by Utah Division of State History, 2020

Historic Map: Kenilworth, Utah, ca. 1923.

Source: Wayne L. Balle, "'I Owe My Soul': An Architectural and Social History of Kenilworth, Utah," *UHQ* 56, no. 3 (1988): 250- 278. https://collections.lib.utah.edu/details?id=422725

Notice the lines for the railroad at the top of the map. The company managers lived in the neighborhood labeled "Silk Stocking Row." "Greek Town" and "Jap Town" were nicknames for the parts of town where Greek and Japanese workers lived (although commonly used at the time, the term "Jap" is derogatory and is inappropriate to use today). In 1910, there were miners from eight different countries in Kenilworth (180 Americans, 117 Greeks, 91 Italians, 42 Austrians, 30 Japanese, 24 British, 14 Germans, and 1 Swedish worker).

- What does this map tell you about the topography of Kenilworth?
- Why do you think the homes in "New Town" were arranged diagonally?
- Why did people call the managers' neighborhood "Silk Stocking Row"?
- What might be the benefits of living in an ethnic enclave within the larger town?
- What might be the challenges?
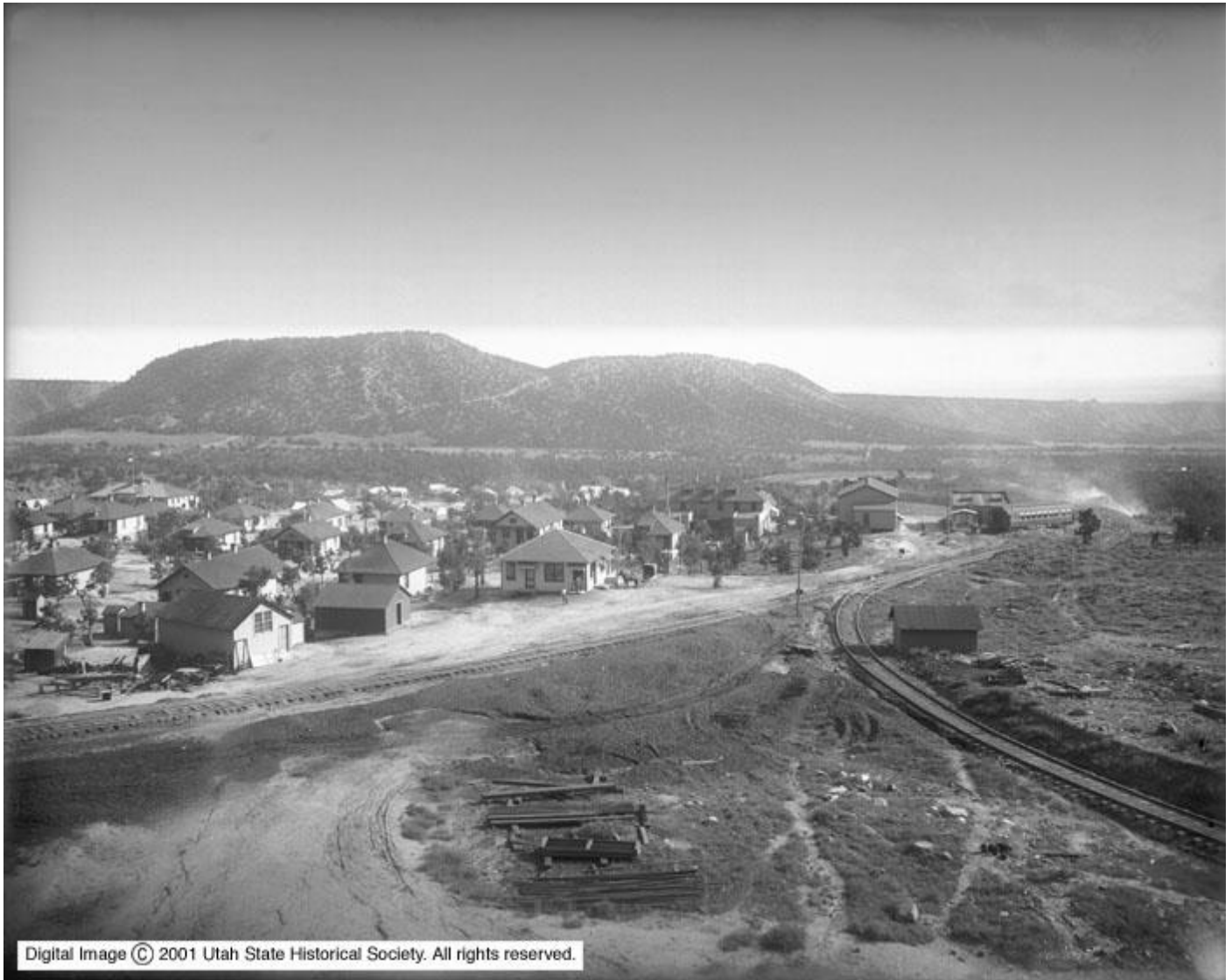
Photograph: Rows of homes at Kenilworth, owned by Independent Coal and Coke, 1910.

Source: "Independent Coal and Coke Company," Utah State Historical Society, Classified Photograph Collection, 1910, 2002. https://collections.lib.utah.edu/ark:/87278/s6611b1p

- Compare this photograph to the map of Kenilworth. What part of town do you think this is?
- Who do you think lived in these homes?

Photograph: Tent houses at Clear Creek, 1906.

Source: "Clear Creek, Utah-Life and Customs p.2," Utah State Historical Society, Classified Photograph Collection, 1906, 2010. https://collections.lib.utah.edu/ark:/87278/s6hq48vf

Families lived in different types of homes in the mining towns. At Clear Creek and Winter Quarters, some families built their own homes, such as the tent house in this photo. Miners usually had to pay rent to the mining company for building homes on its land.

Photograph: The Paul and Barbara Pessetto home, 1915.

Source: Pessetto, Paul-Residence P.1," Utah State Historical Society, Classified Photograph Collection, 1915, 2009.
https://collections.lib.utah.edu/ark:/87278/s6320953

The Pessetto home was located between Castle Gate and Helper. Some Italian immigrants that lived near Castle Gate built houses out of rocks from the nearby canyons. The Pessettos shared their large home with new immigrants, who stayed with the family until they could move into their own lodgings.

Danger and Diversity in Utah's Mining Country

Photograph: Winter Quarters, 1900.

Source: "Winter Quarters, Utah P.1," Utah State Historical Society, Classified Photography Collection, 1900, 2012. https://collections.lib.utah.edu/ark:/87278/s6q249cw

This photo was taken before the Winter Quarters No. 4 mine explosion. The lumber is most likely from Clear Creek lumber camp, which supplied lumber for the mines, homes, and retail establishments for the company town.

- What do you think it was like for families to live so close the railroad and mines?

Photograph: Lumber camp, Clear Creek mining area.

Source: "Lumber Industry P.9," Utah State Historical Society, Classified Photograph Collection, 2008.
https://collections.lib.utah.edu/ark:/87278/s6tt54pr

This lumber camp near Scofield supplied lumber for the Winter Quarters mines and company town.

- Why do you think a mine needed a lot of lumber?

Photograph: Coal Mining at Independent Coal and Coke Company, Kenilworth, 1907. Company bosses oversee the workers.
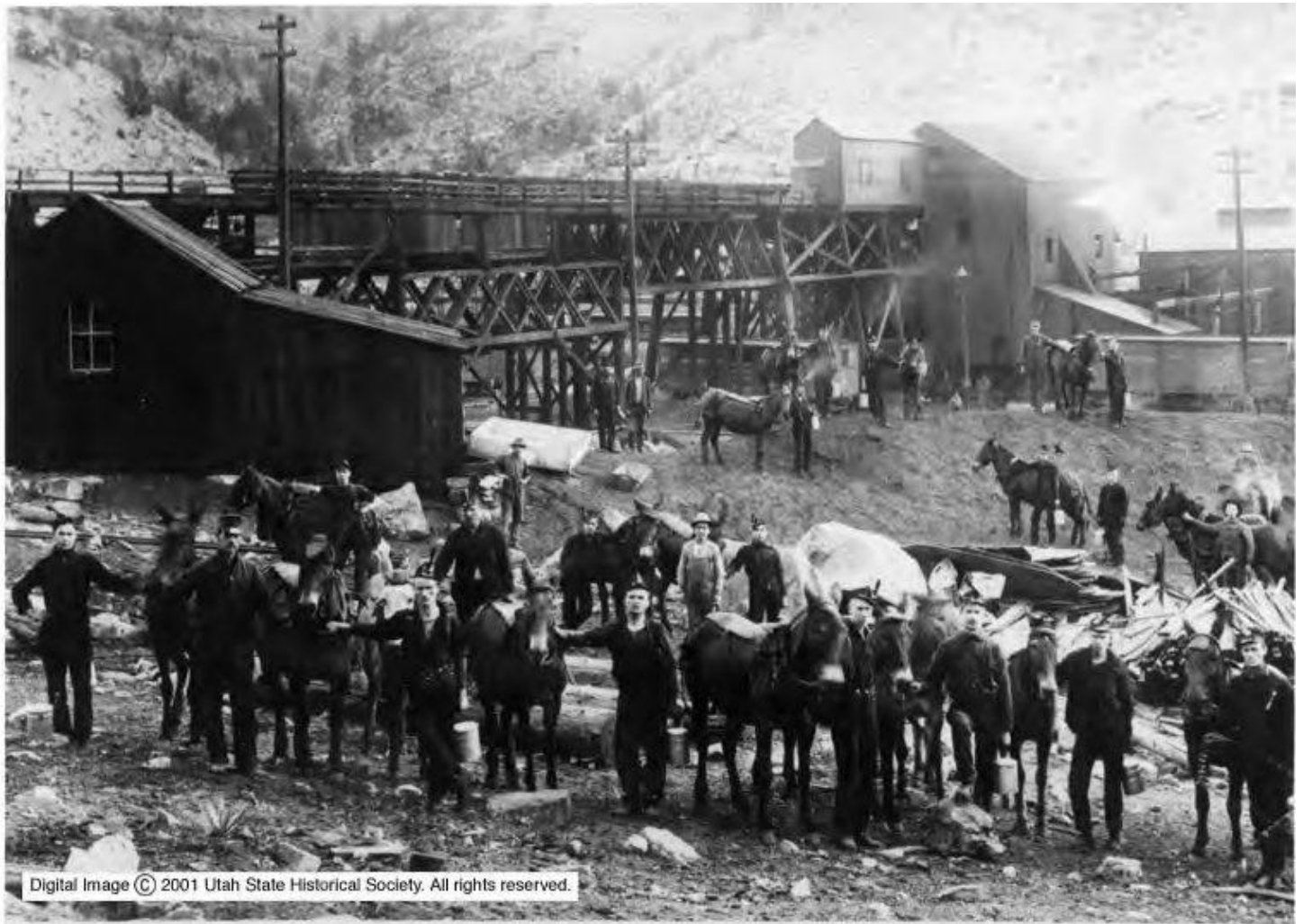
Source: "Independent Coal and Coke Company p.9," Utah State Historical Society, Shipler Commercial Photographers, 1907, 2008. https://collections.lib.utah.edu/ark:/87278/s6df70c9

- What is in the train cars?
- Imagine what it would have been like to do this work in summer heat, and winter cold.

OUR PAST, THEIR PRESENT
Danger and Diversity in Utah's Mining Country

Photograph: English and Welsh miners at Castle Gate, 1920.

Source: "Castle Gate, Utah-Mining p.4," Utah State Historical Society, Classified Photograph Collection, 1920, 2010.
https://collections.lib.utah.edu/ark:/87278/s6000c1h

The structure in the image is a mine tipple, which was used to load coal into railroad cars for transport. The mules in the photograph likely pulled the coal cars from inside the mine to the tipple.

The man at the bottom right, standing next to the horse is Alma Hardee. He was killed in the 1924 Castle Gate mining explosion.

OUR PAST, THEIR PRESENT
Danger and Diversity in Utah's Mining Country

Photograph: Miners and train car at Scofield, Winter Quarters.

Source: "Coal Mining P.33," Utah State Historical Society, Classified Photograph Collection, ca. 1900-1920.
https://collections.lib.utah.edu/ark:/87278/s64j0p84

- Look at the miners' hats. What do you think is attached above the brim? What is it for?
- How old does the older miner look? How old does the youngest miner look?
- What clues suggest which man is the manager? How does his clothing and appearance differ from the miners?

Photograph: Young boy from Winter Quarters, 1914.

Source: "Winter Quarters, Utah," Utah State Historical Society, Classified Photograph Collection, 1914, 2006.
https://collections.lib.utah.edu/ark:/87278/s6pr83q0

- Why do you think a child this age would have a miner's hat?
- What is the object next to him? What do you think it is for?

Photograph: Finnish boy from Castle Gate in mining gear.

Source: "Mining P.14," Carbon County Historical Society, Utah State Historical Society, Classified Photograph Collection, 2008. https://collections.lib.utah.edu/ark:/87278/s6j391sn

- What is the boy wearing and carrying?
- Do you think he used the pickaxe in the mine?
- Look at the background. Where do you think the photograph was taken?
- What stands out most to you in this image? Why?

Photograph: Frank and Teresa Mangone, Castle Gate, 1913.

Source: "Italians in Utah," Utah State Historical Society, Peoples of Utah Photograph Collection, 1913, 2008.
https://collections.lib.utah.edu/ark:/87278/s6np2360

This photograph shows miner Frank Mangone giving his wife, Teresa, his first paycheck. They took the picture to send to her parents in Italy in 1913.

- Why do you think it was important for them to send this photograph to Teresa's parents?

Photograph: Bennett, Leah, and Gabriel Mangone, Castle Gate, 1920.

Source: "Italians in Utah," Utah State Historical Society, Peoples of Utah Photograph Collection, 1920, 2008.
https://collections.lib.utah.edu/ark:/87278/s60000w5

This photograph of Frank and Teresa Mangone's children was taken 7 years after the photo of Frank's first paycheck.

- Why do you think the family took this photo? Who might they have shared it with?
- What are the children holding? Why would they include these items in this photo?

Photograph: Tolanas wedding party standing in front of a Castle Gate boarding house, 1919.

Source: "Greeks in Utah," Utah Historical Society, People of Utah Photograph Collection, 1919, 2008.
https://collections.lib.utah.edu/ark:/87278/s6w094rh

Weddings often brought mining communities together and were a way to continue cultural traditions from their home countries.

- What do you notice in this image?
- Can you find the priest?
- Can you read the inscription along the top of the photo? It is written in Greek.

OUR PAST, THEIR PRESENT
Danger and Diversity in Utah's Mining Country

Photograph: Greek miners in front of their boarding house in Castle Gate, ca. 1907 to 1910.

Source: "Greeks in Utah," Utah State Historical Society, Peoples of Utah Collection, 1907, 2008.
https://collections.lib.utah.edu/ark:/87278/s61n7zw8

Miners from the same ethnic group often gathered at boarding houses, bars, and cafes after their shifts ended at the mines. They attended church together, as well.

- These men are not wearing work clothing or mining gear. Why do you think they are dressed up in this picture? What kind of gathering might this be?

Photograph: A mine rescue team at Winter Quarters, 1900.

Source: "Winter Quarters, Utah," Utah State Historical Society, Classified Photograph Collection, 1900, 2006.
https://collections.lib.utah.edu/ark:/87278/s6z89m52

- What safety equipment are the rescue workers wearing? What do you think it was for?

Photograph: Funeral services for Greek miners killed in the Castle Gate mine explosion in 1924.

Source: "Castle Gate, Utah-Mining p.2," Utah State Historical Society, Classified Photograph Collection, 1924, 2010.
https://collections.lib.utah.edu/ark:/87278/s67h1vgv

Photograph: Evan Williams and James Naylor, two boys who escaped the Winter Quarters mine explosion.

Source: "Winter Quarters, Utah," Utah State Historical Society, Classified Photograph Collection, 1900, 2006.
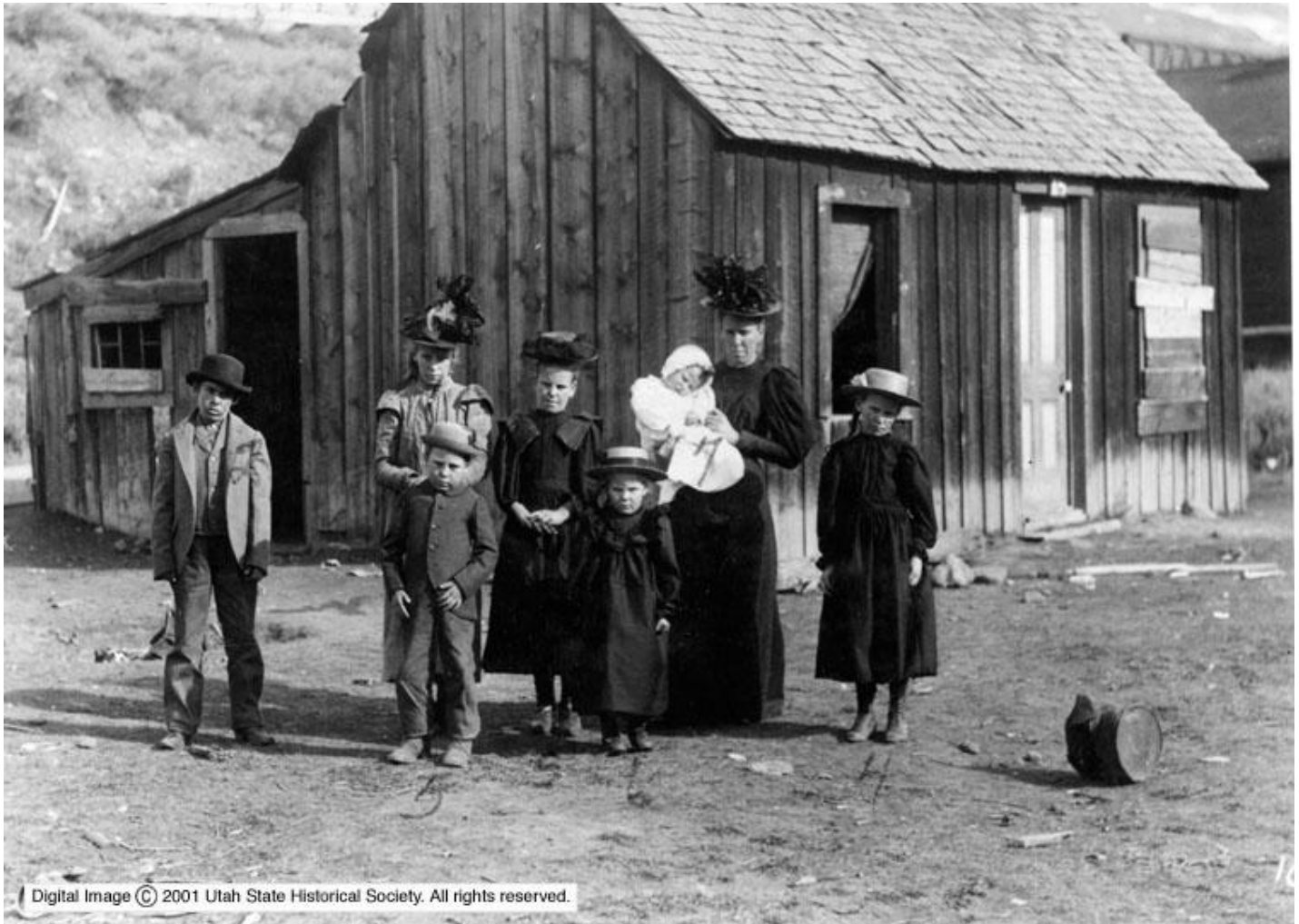https://collections.lib.utah.edu/ark:/87278/s6rr261m

- What kinds of work do you think the boys did in the mines?
- Focus on their facial expressions. Imagine what it would feel like to escape from a mine explosion.

Danger and Diversity in Utah's Mining Country

Photograph: The Jones family outside of their home after losing a family member in the Winter Quarters mine explosion, 1900.

Source: "Winter Quarters, Utah," Utah State Historical Society, Classified Photograph Collection, 1900, 2006. https://collections.lib.utah.edu/ark:/87278/s6g73ngj

Mining families like this one were left without a critical wage-earner, and were also burdened with debt, after a miner died. Mining companies usually paid for funeral expenses but still required the family to repay the miner's outstanding debts from the company store as well as rent.

- How might a widow and her children cope with the loss of a father or brother's income?
- What role might their community play in assisting these families?

Danger and Diversity in Utah's Mining Country

Photograph: Widow and children of O.H. Rollins after he was killed in the Castle Gate mine explosion in 1924. Mrs. Rollins is pregnant in the photo. The child was born two months after the disaster.

Source: "Castle Gate, Utah p.15," Utah Historical Society, Classified Photograph Collection, 1924, 2010.
https://collections.lib.utah.edu/ark:/87278/s69g5xr2

Photograph: Children who lost their fathers in the 1924 Castle Gate mine explosion. This photograph was taken by the Castle Gate Disaster Committee after a tragic explosion in the mine.

Source: Castle Gate, Utah p.22," Utah State Historical Society, Classified Photograph Collection, 1924, 2010.
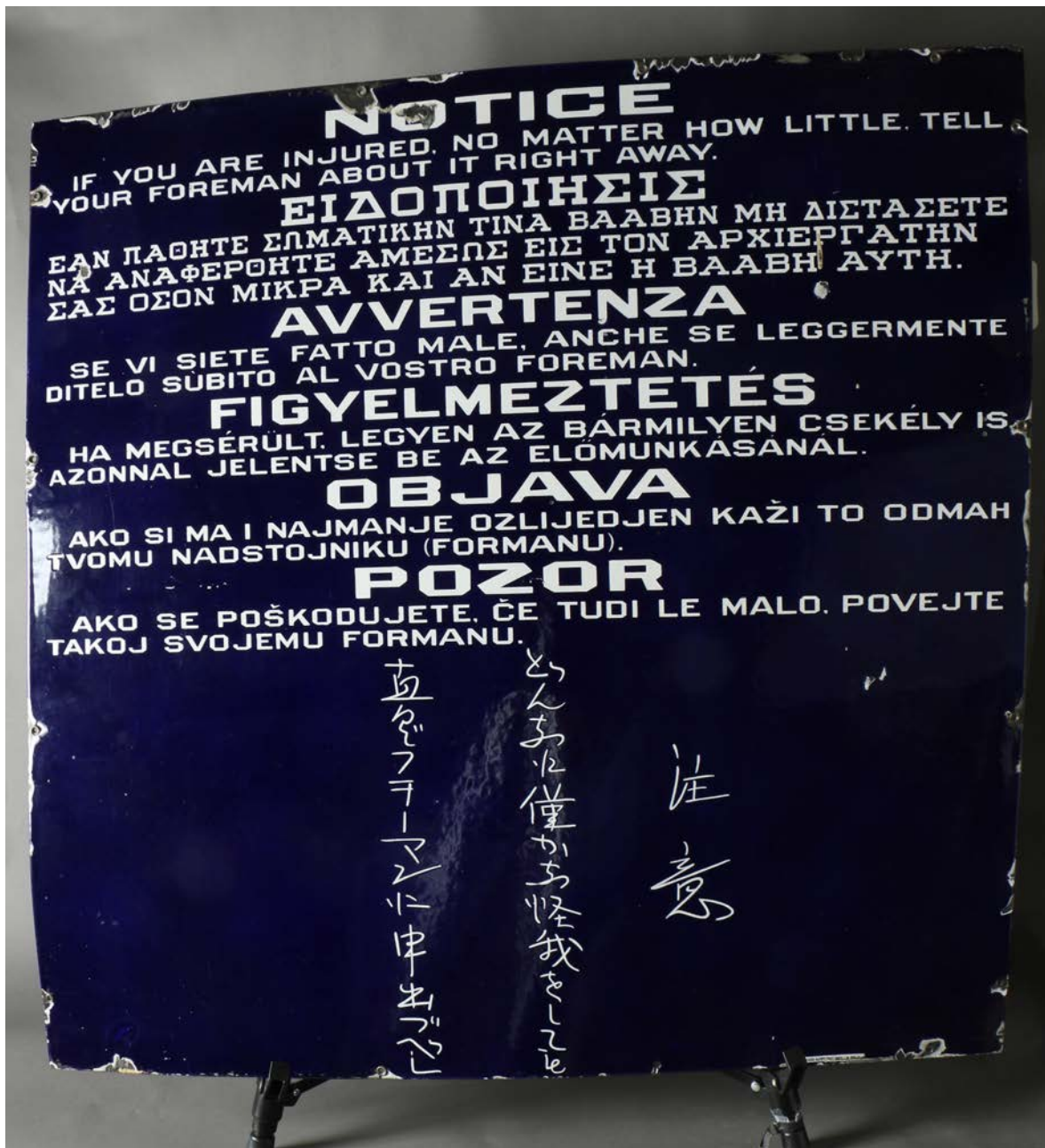https://collections.lib.utah.edu/ark:/87278/s6d79nbd

Photograph: Family of Archie Henderson, who was killed in the Castle Gate mine explosion in 1924.

Source: "African Americans in Utah," Utah State Historical Society, Peoples of Utah Photograph Collection, 1924, 2008.
https://collections.lib.utah.edu/ark:/87278/s6t152dd

Danger and Diversity in Utah's Mining Country

Artifact: "Multilingual Mining Sign"

This sign was used at the Combined Metals Reduction (CMR) Company mine and mill in Bauer, Tooele. It is written in English, Greek, Italian, Hungarian, Croatian, Slovenian, and Japanese to communicate with a diverse group of immigrant workers. Signs like this were used in mines throughout Utah.

Source: Utah Division of State History, Catalog Number: 1978-008-022, http://cloud1.rediscoverysoftware.com:85/ProficioWebModule/Detail.aspx?rID=1978-008-022&db=objects&dir=HISTORY&osearch=mining%2520sign&list=res&rname=&rimage=&page=1
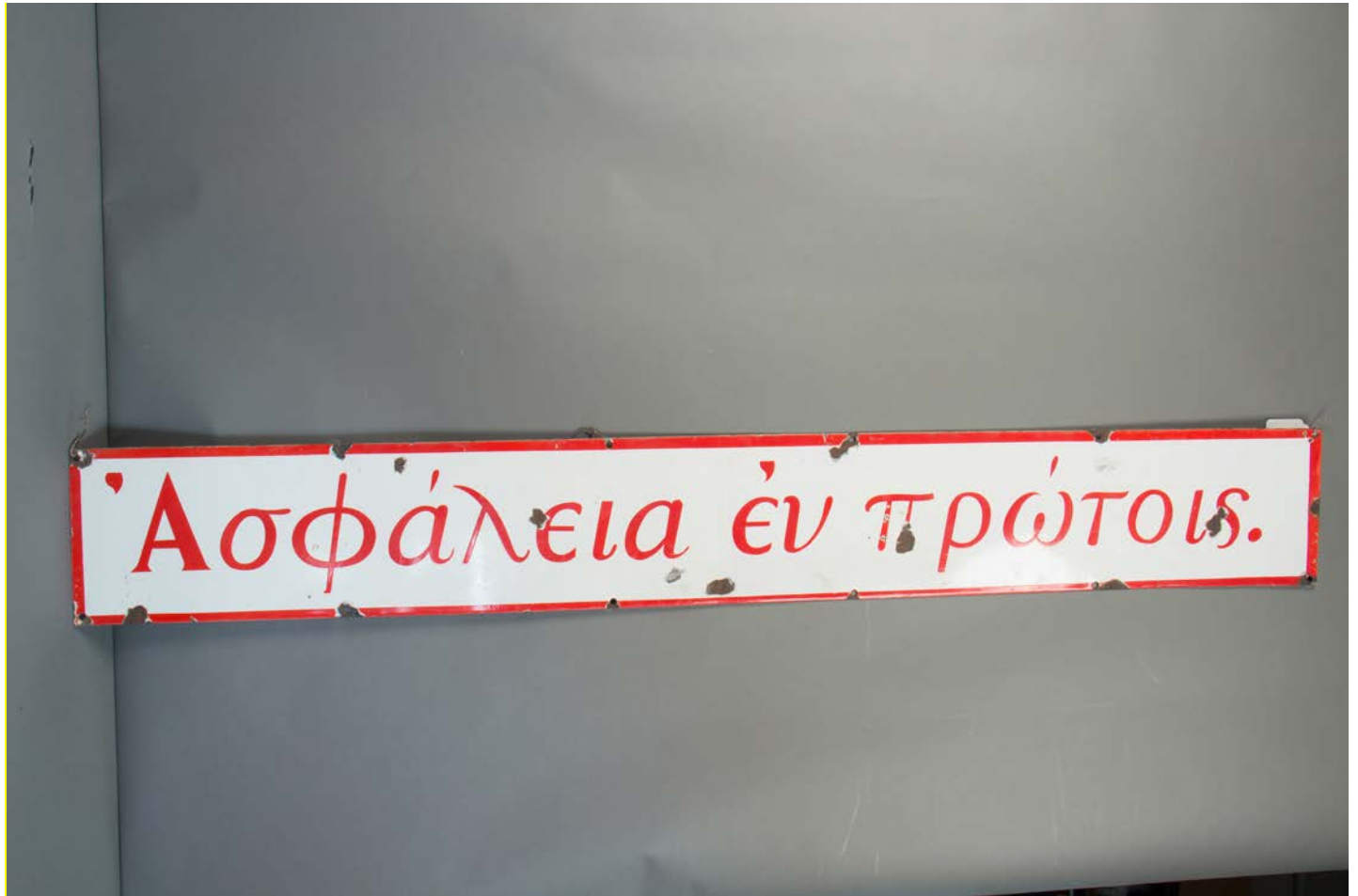
Artifact: Greek Language Mining Sign

This sign says "Safety First" in Greek. It most likely came from a Carbon County mine and was used to communicate with immigrant Greek coal miners who did not speak or were learning to speak English.

Source: Utah Division of State History, Catalog Number: 1998-035-001, http://cloud1.rediscoverysoftware.com:85/ProficioWebModule/Detail.aspx?rID=1998-035-001&db=objects&dir=HISTORY&osearch=mining%2520sign&list=res&rname=&rimage=&page=1

OUR PAST, THEIR PRESENT
Danger and Diversity in Utah's Mining Country

Artifact: "Slovenian Traveling Dress"

This blue bodice and skirt is an early 1900s traveling dress. It was made in Eastern Europe somewhere in modern-day Slovenia and Croatia prior to 1910. It belonged to Christine Logar Tezak, who was born in Slovenia. She immigrated to the United States in 1907 when she was twenty-two years old, sailing across the Atlantic to New York. The Passenger List for immigrants entering the U.S. listed her as single, identifying her as "Kristina Logar" and recorded that her final destination was for Sunnyside, Utah, to join a "friend" named Anton Tezak. Less than three weeks after entering the U.S, Anton and Christine were married on May 19th in Sunnyside. Anton was also born in Slovenia only a few miles from Christine. Anton immigrated to Utah a year earlier in 1906. The couple had eight children, and moved around to various mining towns in Carbon County while Anton worked as a coal mine mechanic.

Source: Utah Division of State History, Catalog Number: 1979-005-001,
http://cloud1.rediscoverysoftware.com:85/ProficioWebModule/Detail.aspx?rID=1979-005-001a-b&db=objects&dir=HISTORY&osearch=carbon%2520county&list=res&rname=&rimage=&page=1

OUR PAST, THEIR PRESENT
Danger and Diversity in Utah's Mining Country

ORAL HISTORY: Elias Degn, interviewed in 1972, Price, Utah
Interviewed by Janet Lloyd (JL)
Source: Carbon County Oral History Project No. CC-30, Marriott Library, University of Utah, Utah State Historical Society

Degn: I was born in Redmond, Sevier County on June 22, 1908. My parents were Mr. and Mrs. Hance Degn. They came from Alborg, Denmark. They came over in 1906.

JL: Can you remember stories they told?

Degn: Yes, very well I remember stories when my mother and father came over here, especially some of the funny incidents about eating peaches. They had no peaches in Denmark and they thought it was the silliest thing, to eat something with a fuzzy fur on them, and they thought the tomatoes were poison. When they saw Americans eat them they thought they were going to die because they had no tomatoes in Denmark.

The missionaries in Denmark had converted my father to the LDS Church and told him this was the land of bread and honey, and he came to Salt Lake City. From there they sent him to Sevier County and then the coal fields over here were intriguing to him so he came to work in the coal mines at Scofield.

There were a lot of prejudiced feelings when my dad started at the coal mine. Most of the coal miners in those days were foreign people and they didn't like Mormon people, they were very prejudiced against them and they had quite a sad time making ends meet, but they would get no help from the foreign people at that time.

As for the mine disasters, there was a Castle Gate explosion on March 8, 1924 and 173 men were killed. I was only a wee lad at that time, but I was hired as a water boy to go in behind the rescue crews and carry water in for the fellows to drink. I remember distinctly how they were carrying the bodies out there and how bad I felt about it. Another explosion happened at Rains, Utah in January of 1930 and 27 men lost their lives. I was on the rescue crew there. I helped bring out a fellow on a stretcher that we found alive but breathing very shallow. I rode the stretcher out with him, giving him artificial respiration while the rest of the men carried us out. That man is alive today.

As far as my education was concerned, I finished the ninth grade, and then my parents being from Denmark, thought when a boy reached the age of 15, he should earn his own living. So I got a job in the mine loading coal. I used to go into the mine every day and load six three-ton cars and drill three holes, lay my track up to the face and set two timbers one day, and the next day do the same. The mine company would shoot the coal down to you at night. We were paid 79 cents for every ton of coal we loaded.

ORAL HISTORY: Ann Tolich, interviewed in 1982, Spring Glen, Utah
Interviewed by Nancy Taniguchi (NT)
Source: Carbon County Coal Mine Oral History Project No. 18, American West Center, University of Utah, Utah State Historical Society

NT: Mrs. Tolich was living in Sunnyside as a child and she's unusual for this area in that she reads, writes, and speaks both Croatian and Slovenian. She herself is a member of the Croatian Fraternal Union. Now your father came in 1912 and you came in 1913.

Tolich: With my mother and two other sisters, three of us, three girls.

NT: You were five years old. How old were your sisters?

Tolich: My sister, Frances, was about fourteen and my sister Tona, she was two years older than me, she was about seven.

NT: So you came straight to Sunnyside?

Tolich: Well of course we landed in New York by boat, you know, there were no flights then. And when we came, they looked you over and they gave you a vaccination in your arm to prevent illnesses. Then we went to Cleveland, Ohio, and I had an uncle there who had a clothing store and he dressed us all in American style. I still remember the wide large hats with a brim and ribbon around it. And our dresses were American style. We stayed about a week and then went directly by train to Sunnyside. My sister Mary, the one that came in 1904 with her husband, came to meet us. When we got to Sunnyside, they had coke ovens, where they would burn coal into coke and a lot of flame and it always frightened my mother. She said to me "It looks like we came to hell."

Tolich: We got a place to live in Sunnyside but it was sort of like a little shack or cabin. There weren't any empty houses at that time. They had houses but they were filled, so we lived there until we got a house. There were lots of fellows that came and worked in the mine and they needed a place to stay. So when we got a bigger home, we'd rent it. They had a boarding house, but it was filled up, so families, not only my parents, took in these fellows and they would have meals, a place to sleep, and women would wash their clothing for a very small amount of money. As far as entertainment, we had a band and the director was Italian.

NT: Like a bandstand?

Tolich: Yes, but a circle. It was called a cabouser. It's round and has a platform. They had ice cream and played movies a few times a week. They had dances usually on Saturday night. And then there were weddings and it was always a big occasion. In those days the nationalities would marry into the same nationality. It was different than it is now. Religion and race that you know now. If you were Italian, you married an Italian girl.

NT: Where were your mother and father from?

Tolich: Slovenia

NT: Why did your dad come over here in 1912?

Tolich: America at that time was noted as a free country and there were jobs you can work to better yourself and help your family. It was an adventure. Like so many came to America of every nationality. And of course, my father didn't speak the language but it didn't take him long to learn. In Sunnyside, were Chinese, Japanese, a few

African Americans, Italians, Yugoslavs, Croatians, Romanians, Czechoslovakians. As far as religion, I would say they were mostly Catholic and Mormon but everybody got along. If there was a wedding or baptism, everybody was invited. And on Christmas, everyone would visit each other's houses and have baked goodies.

NT: Oh, that's delicious!

Tolich: And Italians had better baked goods than, of course, everyone. Most of them made their own wine and smoked their own ham.

ORAL HISTORY: Gabriel Bruno, interviewed in 1972, Spring Glen, Utah

Interviewed by Melanie Bruno (MB)

Source: Carbon County Oral History Project No. CC-37, Marriott Library, University of Utah, Utah State Historical Society

Bruno: I was born November 11, 1917 in Italy and my religion is Catholic. In 1921, my father left Italy when I was just four years old and I hadn't seen him until 1933 when I came here. During that time, he kept writing to us and sending us money, hoping that someday we would come here but that didn't work out until 1933. Life back there wasn't so good. You would work from morning until night and there wasn't much to eat. We had meat once a week and most of our food we raised on our farm.

MB: What made you decide to come to America other than your father being here?

Bruno: I was tired of working so hard. I thought it was an easier life over here which it was.

MB: Tell some of the preparations you went through to come over to America.

Bruno: In 1932, when my dad sent for me, we hired a lawyer to take care of all of my papers. In July of 1933 they were completed and I left. We went through Amatea, then to Naples, and then Genoa. We got there by walking and a donkey. There was no big train or transportation. Then on July 16th, I left by boat.

Bruno: I went to school in Spring Glen for three years. When I was nineteen, I quit school and went to work at Castle Gate and then up to Soldier Summit to build some snow fences. Then went back to Castle Gate and cleaned some of those coal cars that were full of ice. I asked if I could get a job inside the mine but they said I had to be twenty-one. So lied and told them I was twenty-one. They said I didn't look a day over nineteen but still put me down as twenty-one.

MB: Did you ever expect to go back to Italy?

Bruno: I intended to go back to see my mother but we lost contact in 1939 because of World War II. We were cut off from 1939 to 1945. I didn't hear a word until the Red Cross wrote me a letter that my mother and sister were okay. When I was in the service, I got a letter when I was in Luxembourg and I got a thirty-day leave to see my mom in Italy. They were okay but everything was bombed and they were scarce on food and clothing. I left my mother what little money I had.

I was discharged in September of 1945 and moved to Nevada to tend bar and then ran a small market with my brother.

Sources

Balle, Wayne L. "'I Owe My Soul': An Architectural and Social History of Kenilworth, Utah," *Utah Historical Quarterly* 56, no. 3 (Summer 1988).

Bruno, Gabriel, interview by Melanie Bruno, March 1972, transcript, Carbon County Oral History Project, Marriott Library, University of Utah, Salt Lake City, Utah.

Degn, Eliasn interview by Janet Lloyd, 1972, transcript Carbon County Oral History Project, Marriott Library, University of Utah, Salt Lake City, Utah.

Kelen, Leslie G., Eileen Hallet Stone. *Missing Stories: An Oral History of Ethnic and Minority Groups in Utah*. Logan: Utah State University Press, 2000.

Notarianni, Philip F. *Carbon County: Eastern Utah's Industrialized Island*. Salt Lake City: Utah State Historical Society, 1981.

Notarianni, Philip F. "Utah's Ellis Island: The Difficult 'Americanization' of Carbon County,"*Utah Historical Quarterly* 47, no. 2 (Spring 1979).

Papanikolas, Helen Zeese. *The Peoples of Utah*. Salt Lake City: Utah State Historical Society, 1981.

Papanikolas, Helen Zeese. "Toil and Rage in the New Land: The Greek Immigrants in Utah," *Utah Historical Quarterly* 38, no. 2 (Spring 1970).

Papanikolas, Helen Zeese. "Wrestling with Death: Greek Immigrant Funeral Customs in Utah," *Utah Historical Quarterly* 52, no. 1 (Winter 1984).

Stanley, David. "The Dynamics of Multi-Ethnicity in Twentieth Century Carbon County," *Utah Historical Quarterly* 74, no. 3 (Winter 2006).

Taniguchi, Nancy. *Castle Valley America: Hard Land, Hard Won Home*. Logan: Utah State University Press, 2004

Thomas, Erin Ann. *Coal in Our Veins: A Personal Journey*. Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2012.

Tolich, Anna, interview by Nancy Taniguchi, May 13, 1982, transcript, Carbon County Coal Mine Oral History Project, American West Center, University of Utah, Salt Lake City, Utah.

Watt, Ronald G. *A History of Carbon County*. Salt Lake City: Utah State Historical Society, Carbon County Commission, 1997.

Watt, Ronald G. *My Life in Carbon County*. Provo: Scribner Books, 2018.