HISTORY OF LA SAL, UTAH AREA
AS GIVEN BY
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Oral Transcript
During a recording session on May 21, 1997,
Lula Delong recorded the following history of the La Sal, Utah area,
as presented by Norma Blankenagle.

I am from La Sal, Utah which is 30 miles south of Moab, and I live nearby at Rattlesnake Ranch. We have lived at Rattlesnake Ranch since 1952. I wanted especially to give a little history on the La Sal area.

The Name La Sal - Father Escalante’s trail runs past the La Sal Mountains as does the Old Spanish Trail, which was the longest, toughest, pack mule route in the history of the whole United States. So it has a lot of interesting history. We believe they were talking about the snow that looked like salt on top of the mountains. This is how La Sal got its name. La Sal is French for salt. It’s also Spanish for salt, so whether it was Spanish conquistadors or the French trappers came in or who ever it was, they named it salt, which is La Sal.

The Coming of the Mormon Church and the Elk Mountain Mission - Early in 1854, the Mormon Church sent a group of men to the Moab area, and they were called the Elk Mountain Mission. They thought the La Sals were the Elk Mountains and this is why it (the fort) is called the Elk Mountain Mission. The Elks are much further south towards Blanding. This group was lead by Alfred Billings, and I think there were about thirteen men in it. Two of them were my great-great grandfathers, Colonel James Russell Ivie and his son, Colonel John Ivie. The Elk Mountain Mission
was the first group of white people into the Moab area. They had 15 wagons and came by way of the Old Spanish trail to Moab. A previous group of men led by William D. Huntington and Jackson Stewart arrived at the bluff above the Grand River, now called the Colorado River. They couldn’t find a way off the bluff and into Moab valley, so they let their five wagons down the 25 foot bluff, piece by piece, with ropes.

The second group lead by Billings, made a passable road and, by double teaming their wagons, were able to get their wagons down into what was to become the Moab Valley. The Elk Mountain Mission lasted just snort time, from June 12 to September 25, of 1855, at which time, an Indian uprising forced these men to leave. I think the fight was over horses at the time.

It is interesting that I am from Canada, and yet I've found that my progenitors were the first ones into Moab. Also, I have relatives from both sides of my family who came through Hole in the Rock, the Waltons and the Palmers.

**Early Pioneers and First Settlers** - The first people into Moab after the Elk Mountain Mission were either George and Silas Green or Crispen Taylor in 1876-77, so this was quite a few years later. In 1877, Thomas and Elizabeth Ray and their eight children were the first to enter the La Sal area. Rays lived on Ray Mesa, way up there on the La Sals. I believe they originally came from way back east somewhere. They first came to Mount Pleasant, Utah and from there they made their way down to Moab, then settled in Deer Creek at Old La Sal.

Cornelius Maxwell, the William McCartys, and Neils Nielson followed this first settlement, but they settled on Coyote Creek, which is the present town of La Sal and the old townsit. The new LDS Church is on the old townsit. We just found out about that being the townsit not too long before we built that church there. It was
just open land and being used as pasture land by the cattlemen. But we found out that quite a big section of land was owned there by the LDS Church.

These three families also came from Tennessee, then they migrated to Montana, then to Nevada, then to Mount Pleasant, Utah and finally to La Sal. To go from Moab to Monticello, or Mancos (Colorado), the road ran through Lisbon Valley and up Three-Step Hill. These early people named it that, because there were three jump-offs or steps. You can count them as you go up that road now. It is a graveled road, but was a dirt road for many years. These early men are the ones that named it Three-Step Hill and it has kept that name to this day.

Some of the people that came in 1879 were J. W. Webb, Tom Goshom, Bill Hamilton, Kenneth Bennett Young, also known as Kan, and William Robinson.

By 1912 a number of families had come to farm this fertile area. They had a cabin fort that now stands at the old Johnson, which I now own. At that time it was down near Tibbitts Springs which is south of the place where it is now placed. Although they never had to use it, I am sure it was a great safety measure. It made them feel good that they had a place they could run to if the Indians became too bad. One of the first things that I noticed when we bought the place was that you could still see the gun holes to put the rifles through, at shoulder height. Also down at the bottom, a person could lie on his stomach and shoot out of the lower gun ports. There were gun ports all around the building. When there was no longer a use for the fort, they covered the gun ports and used it as a house. That building is still there on the old Johnson place on the road going up the mountain to Two Mile.

Some of the earliest people were the Lopez family and west of them was the Rays and the Maxwells. A Joe Johnson lived in that area, and the Stocks families. And north of the present day highway was Steve Day, John Day, and Delbert Peterson. Jack Wilson was north of there and Mark Beeson, and later Bert Dalton to the east of the Days. Further east was Ervin Day and Joe Amp. We own most of
that land now, where those people all originated. Below the present Forest Service Ranger Station lived Wash Johnson, and that’s the place that we have that has that fort on it. North of that lived Jim Moore, who sold to George Hyle. Also south and east near the present highway, lived Dick Westwood. (re: Map of Old La Sal at the end of this history.)

At the present La Sal location, in the early days, lived Bill Jensen, and to the west was Eph Wilcox, Dutch Rynio, and Lynn Day. Jessie and Sarah LeeMaster lived on the north side of the Black place, and that is our land, too. The land north of the Black place now belongs to Max Wilcox, but he has sold some of it. West of the Wilcox place lived William and Inez Stevens, west of them was Joe Bankhead, which is also on Rattlesnake property. Mel Henry and Merle Hisson, Lynn Hyde, Will Shafer, and Lucian Tangreen were all on land that now is part of Rattlesnake Ranch. North of Rattlesnake was Jim Wilcox, Dill Hammond, the first bishop of the LDS Church in La Sal. Billy Graham, Ken and Nathan Kempton, and C. A. Ploughead were just south of the highway, and we also own the Ploughead place. We have sold that off in little pieces for people to live on, since we have had so many people coming into La Sal.

Then the townsite was about a hundred acres and it was divided into twenty-seven lots. Pluma Yarborough had lot number one, and she married Charles Zufelt. John Swenson, Omere Secrest, Oscar and Dorothy Jameson lived there. Jessie LeeMaster and Will Leech were some more residents of the new La Sal on the old townsite property. I thought you might be interested in some of the old names. It is amazing, Rattlesnake which is just a good ranch for one family, was homesteaded by many small farmers. It is sad that they all had to leave because of drought. This is desert country. For a few years at a time we will have a few good showers in the spring and some good snows in the winter. But that doesn’t happen very often. About every seven years we get a good year. In the meantime we starve, you might
say. Those people just plain got run out because of lack of water. They didn’t even have culinary water and water for the cattle, much less for irrigating the land.

**The Old Cemetery** - There is a cemetery just south of the highway, close to La Sal, and there are fifteen graves in it. Many of them are unmarked. But those that are marked are: William Bass, Frances Bass, Susanna M. Bass, Mark Ralston, Daniel Oscar Ralston, and Benjamin Jones, who is a foster son of Hardy and Sonny Redd. Marjorie Gramlich is buried on a small plot on the old Barney Smith farm, which belongs to the Blankenagels.

**Indians** - I have heard that Piute was the name given to any of the Utes that were renegades. Maybe the name means “bad Ute,” I don’t know. Anyway, early in the spring of 1881 a number of impudent Piute Indians were camped at La Sal and they spent much of their time racing their ponies on a track they made by roping and dragging the settler’s calves to make a smooth track. This of course would anger the settlers. These Piutes were constantly begging for food that the settlers could hardly spare but if they tried to refuse them, they were threatened. One day the old Indian called Wash, finding no one home at Coyote but the Maxwell couple, demanded: “Your squaw cook um biscuits for me.” When Cornelius Maxwell refused, Wash struck him with his quirt several times. Maxwell ran for his gun and took a bead on the retreating Wash, but just as he pulled the trigger, his wife knocked the gun up, probably saving the tiny settlement from annihilation. A few days later, Philander Maxwell, coming home from a trip to Moab, was stopped at Pack Creek by three squaws. They made him understand that “the Indians were heap mad” and he “better vamoose.”

A few hours after arriving home at Coyote, two Wilson boys from Moab came in riding double, they were hunting lost horses. On their return, and near the place where
Maxwell had been stopped earlier, the Wilson boys were fired upon by the Piutes. Joe was shot in the foot and fell from his horse. Both boys hid in the brush. Ervin escaped, but Joe leaving a trail of blood, was found by the Indians and shot in the face.

Surprisingly he survived, but pretended to be dead until nightfall. Afterward, he started crawling toward Moab, fifteen miles away. Near morning, two kind Indian squaws found him, gave him water, placed him on one of their horses, and left him fifty yards from his home. He was blinded in one eye, maimed in one foot, and had his hands and feet full of cactus, but he lived through it [Actual date of the Wilson boys’ being attacked was fall of 1880].

Ervin, thinking his brother was dead, had run as fast as possible to Coyote and safety. The five men gathered the women and children into their cabin fort. Each man had a gun, but only Grandpa Maxwell had a few cartridges. Luckily, they were not attacked, for had they been, this tiny settlement would have been completely wiped out. Several Indians peered over a nearby ridge, but no shots were fired.

The next important Indian story is the Pinhook Draw Massacre. Another band of about forty renegade Piutes, in the early part of May 1881 were harassing the stockman around Big Bend, now Dolores, Colorado. They were rounding up and stealing horses in the area, when they came upon the horse ranch of John Thurman and Joshua Alderson. They had a band of about 1500 head of horses gathered in the vicinity of Ute Springs, on the Utah-Colorado boarder. Dick May and Barney Smith were visiting Thurman to buy saddle horses, when the Indian band appeared.

The bodies of May and Thurman were found at the cabin a few days later by a friendly Navajo called Little Captain. A volunteer posse from Durango, Mancos, Rico, and Dolores was organized a month later with Captain W. H. Dawson in the lead of fifty men. Dawson and his men headed toward the Blue and La Sal mountains. Another posse of Blue Mountain men, under Spud Hudson, were also tracking the killers with about a dozen men.
It is interesting to note that the Bluff settlers had also lost horses. Upon bravely confronting the Indians at Elk Mountain, they demanded their property. They were allowed to cut their own horse out and depart in peace. The main reason for that was because they had fed the Indians and been sent by Brigham Young to make friends with the Indians and try and stop the fighting between the Utes and Navajos. So they trusted the Mormon pioneers, and gave them back their horses without fighting them. The Blue Mountain posse trailed the Indian band westward, then northward, toward Indian Creek, and up Hart Draw to Hatch Rock, and from there to the La Sal Mountains. The Indians had their squaws, children, and goats with them.

The posse proceeded to Mule Shoe near Kane Springs, and the head of Pack Creek on the northern slop of the La Sal Mountains. It would seem that the Indians lead them right straight into a trap, because the Dawson group camped at Mule Shoe, where there was water. The Dawson group captured some squaws and goats at Pack Creek. There was some fighting at Squaw Springs and a squaw was accidentally killed there. Thus the spring got its name.

The Indians then slipped along Shafer Creek into Mason Draw and down to Pinhook. They were able to kill six of Dawson’s men and the other five got away to shelter. It was dark when they were able to sneak back to the main body of men. The Indians had taken their best horses and vanished, but they left two of the white men dead. So at Pinhook Draw, ten men had been killed and three injured by the Indians, as well as Thurman and May. This was the Pinhook Draw massacre. I believe the Daughter of the Utah Pioneers put a plaque up to show where the massacre occurred on June 15, 1881. They put this up in 1940, in memory of those who were massacred by the Indians.

Again, these renegade Piutes, in the spring of 1884, had to prove their ownership of the deer on the La Sal Mountains. These Indians tried to kill all of the deer they could. About 300 Indians slaughtered deer for about a month, then they
systematically drove the deer south to the reservation. They waved their blankets and drove many thousands of deer before them. They repeated this process in 1885 and in 1886, and there was nothing the white settlers could do to stop it. But the Indians killed deer unmercifully for the sale of their hides.

**First Mail Route and Post Office in the Area** - The first mail route was established through La Sal in the spring of 1879. It started in Salina, Utah and went to Green River (then called Blake), La Sal, and Paradox; then to Naturita, Placerville, Telluride, and Ouray, a distance of about 350 miles. A Mr. Howard rode the route for several months, followed by Tom Brewster who rode for two years. Sam Rolly was also one of the early riders. This mail route was one of the strangest and most dangerous in the United States. Since there were no changes of horses, there was no schedule. The horses had to be preserved and, according to the weather, the 700 miles round-trip, sometimes took six weeks, and sometimes many months. A pack horse was loaded with bedroll, food, water, and the mail. A camp would be made whenever the horses were tired. The mail carriers had to ford three rivers, cross the La Sal Mountains, and watch for hostile Indians and outlaws just to bring the mail to less than a hundred settlers. Because of the mining ventures, a lot of money went through this mail route. Never was there any loss. Sometimes they had to travel on snowshoes to get across the La Sals.

The first post office was an old pine log cabin up at Old La Sal, which was the headquarters of the Pittsburgh Cattle Company. This was located in the eastern part of Old La Sal.

In June of 1881, Alonzo Hatch settled in the north end of Dry Valley. He farmed his ranch for less than a year and then moved to Moab. Hatch Ranch was a stopover for travelers between Monticello and Moab. If you know where Mr. Foster and that group of people are living in the rocks (now a bed and breakfast) that’s
Hatch Rock. Hatch Wash is down below that and we take our cattle through the wash every time we move them to Dry Valley. It was named after this early pioneer. I guess that was quite a popular stopover there at Hatch Ranch. They stopped over to rest their horses and rest the people that were on the mail stage. This stage took mail from Thompson through Hatch Wash to Monticello and on to Mancos Colorado.

**The First Schools** – The Leemasters and McCartys moved from Coyote to be nearer the school, which is up on Old La Sal Creek, and fifteen scholars attended that first La Sal school. Another school was built in 1916, which is kind of a long plain building. It was there for a long time, but it has been taken down now. There were long swing bars, just out of tree limbs, and you could see where the swings had been. In fact when we first came here, some of the swings were still there. That was the children’s playground for recess and such. It was used until 1931. A Miss Stair, of Philadelphia, taught a six month term here and was paid cooperatively by everyone who had children attending classes. Quite often each family would put the school teacher up for such percent of the month as determined by how many children they had in the school. This is how the teacher’s wage was partially paid by families. So the wages were mostly in living expenses.

The La Sal school system was the second organized in San Juan County, Bluff being the first one. Coyote, or the new town of La Sal was organized in 1909, and a school was organized there at that time. It is interesting that in this school they had eight grades, plus a class that was beginners. That was a total of nine classes taught by one teacher. Two boys were imported from Moab to make up eight students. They had to have eight students to rate having a teacher, so they imported Carl Berry and Alma Duncan from Moab. The other children were Lacy and Thelma Stocks, Isabella and Alma McCullum, and two other children, names unknown.
For several years school was held in the LDS Church building on the town site. That town site is just north of where the LDS church now stands. This building had a stage, curtains, and dressing rooms on either side of the stage. It had a partial basement with two rooms, a furnace room, and a Relief Society room, with a cook stove. Grade school, plus two years of high school were taught in this building. This historic building was used as a church and school until it was condemned. In 1927, a two-room frame building was erected about a 100 yards south of the church. This was still on the old town site. It was moved to the present town of La Sal and, in 1956, because of the uranium boom, a large addition was added to it, giving the school a multi-purpose room with a stage. Later another section was added, giving the school another two school rooms. But the original building was heated with a little potbellied stove, which had to be stoked up every morning by the teacher. He would get it going early so it would be warm enough for the students, when they arrived. The various families would chop up wood and bring it to the school, so the teacher would have a box full of wood. Those old potbelly stoves were good old heaters though. They had isinglass square windows on them, and you could see the flames flickering. It is quite a chore in addition to teaching sometimes as many as six grades. That potbelly stove was replaced by a furnace that heats the whole building now. It is so efficient. Up in the old CCC building, I remember going to church there. At first they had a potbelly stove, then they had butane and propane heaters and we would be almost hot from the waist up, and our feet would be freezing from the draft in the building. It was difficult.

School was held for a short time in 1956 at an old white CCC building, which had been used by the LDS Church as a chapel. This was necessary, while the new addition was built on the original square school. CCC is short for the Civilian Conservation Corps that was begun by Franklin D. Roosevelt to give unemployed men, during the depression, a place of gainful employment.
Before the uranium boom it was hard to get enough students in La Sal to merit one teacher. During the boom, there were as many as four teachers, teaching up to eighth grade students. Before the boom of the fifties, a few high school students would drive themselves to Moab to attend high school. With the population influx of the fifties, a school bus was driven from La Sal to Monticello. Later, in 1979, two buses were used to haul children to Monticello school, and over 100 students rode those buses. So, La Sal has had quite an interesting history.

This influx of people caused the tiny two-room school house at La Sal to groan. While the new edition was being completed in the fall of 1956, three classes of children were taught in a makeshift CCC building which belonged to the LDS Church. And that CCC building was our first decent church. It was given to us by the government, because they figured that if it was being used as a church building we shouldn’t have to pay for it. It was on Charley Redd’s land, so he gave us the land to put it on. When we built a better church, we let that go back to Charley, so he owned that CCC building. But the next church we had was there at the Wilcox corner. It was a Cord Company bunkhouse. I can remember how thrilled we were to get a kitchen stove from San Miguel Power. They serviced us in La Sal at that time. They said: “For the church, it’s yours.” It was one of the finest stoves I had ever seen. It was so nice to have a stove that we could have pot luck dinners, and luncheons, and cook rolls and anything we wanted. So it was really a kind gesture to the people of La Sal.

Going back to the CCC building that belonged to the LDS Church, we asked if we couldn’t use the building for a school. There has been kind of a reciprocal thing in La Sal, that school was held in the old La Sal Church, on the town site, for many years. So the Church was glad to let us use the Church during the week for a school building. I taught one of these classes, and the interesting part is how the children would seat themselves, then push their desks together, touching, then another group would sit down all around them and push their desks in, and so on, until the whole
room would be filled with desks and nobody could move but the outside ones, and they were right up against the walls or the curtain. While the addition was being put on at La Sal, we had two curtains dividing one big room into three school rooms. I taught 42 students, of three grades, in that room in that situation. That is fifth, sixth, and seventh, and you can’t find rowdier children than junior high, and it was my first year teaching. It was fun and a challenge. There was no bathroom in that building, no water or any sort for drinking. If a student in the middle had to go to the bathroom, every student in the classroom had to move his desk, which would be very disturbing for the other two classes across the curtains. Then we would all have to move back, when the kid got back from the school house bathroom. It was interesting, but the children were just crushed so close together that no one could even move. This went on until January the following year. That would be 1957, when the beautiful new facility of three new rooms was completed. Actually it was one large assembly room, divided in one end by a movable wall, which would close off the eighth grade (and eventually he took my fifth grade). Part of the reason I had such a hard time, is that I had many students in the sixth and seventh grades that could not read or write. The reason is that the miners would move so often, sometimes three and four times in a year, and the children would miss school and never get the fundamentals of reading and writing. It was quite a challenge to try to teach these children. In fact, one young man, a seventh grader, his name was Richard, signed everything with an RIC. I realized that he couldn’t read or write, but he could do math. Anything else was just kind of scribbled on. I offered to teach him. He lived in our Rattlesnake Trailer Court. But he said “No, my dad is a miner and he gets well paid. I’ll just be a miner, then I won’t have to read.” I said to him, “How are your going to get a driver’s license when you turn sixteen?” He was fifteen then. He said “Oh, I'll figure it out some way.” They moved a short time after that. I saw him later in Santaquin, a great big husky fellow. I asked him “Did you ever get your driver’s license?” He said, “Yes.” I said,
“Well what did you have to do?” “I had to sit in third grade for half a year, so I could learn to read.” So he was wishing he had let me teach him when he was younger. He said it was pretty hard to be picked out and put in a third grade room with such little kids, and not be able to do as well as they did. It was really a challenge to him. I wanted to retain him another year but, at that time, it was mandatory that all children be passed to the next grade. It was called a “social pass.” He wasn’t anywhere near ready for eighth grade, much less high school.

This big room was divided at one end by a movable wall and the other by stage curtains. I put my desk up on the stage. We didn’t have to use that. I just used that whole section and the eighth grade, which was much smaller, used the walled off section. Some of the children were really naughty, because some of them didn’t go to school that much and didn’t like school and were poor students and made a lot of trouble. They loved playing tricks on the teacher. One boy once put a lizard on my shoulder and said, “Oh, look what I brought for you teacher.” I am not a country girl and don’t enjoy lizards. I just looked up and said, “Oh, isn’t that cute. Now take it off.” If I had made a fuss, they would have had things in my drawer every morning. But it was a lot of fun.

We had four teachers, just first to eighth grade. We didn’t have a kindergarten at that time. One was later added, and now we have around 25 students and two teachers there. Each of them teaches two grades, and one of them takes kindergarten a half day, too. Even though they have only twelve students or so, they still have to teach two or three grades, which is difficult.

Later on the older students, fifth grade on, were taken by bus to Monticello. We still have two buses. By 1980 the prices on uranium had dropped and mining uranium had become less profitable, so the school population dropped again into the thirties. In 1956, I think we had under twenty students. And when the influx came over the summer, when Charlie Steen hit his strike, they began getting groups of miners in once
the excavation work was done. We went from 15 to 185 students between June and September. The school board saw it coming and built just as fast as they could, but they couldn’t possibly get that building done by September. So that is why we wound up in the CCC building. One nice thing, the new building did have two bathrooms, a boys’ room and a girls’ room. Now there is another set of bathrooms. Later two more rooms were added, so the room I taught in is used for a play room when it’s raining and the children can’t go outside. It is now also used as a kitchen and dining area for hot lunches.

**Area Stockmen** - Now about the cattlemen, first came the individual cattlemen, lured by the long waving grass “up to a horse’s belly,” was often used to describe it. It would be nice if we had that kind of grass now, wouldn’t it? Then, there was very little stock on it but deer.

Tom Ray came to La Sal first, with 60 head of milk cows. Then the McCartys and Maxwells came with a couple of thousand head of cattle. Soon the Taylors and Shafers brought herds to the northern slopes of the La Sals. Spud Hudson, of Colorado, brought several thousand head and settled in double cabins on Carlisle Ranch near Monticello, near Peters Springs. But Peters, of Peters Springs, brought 2000 head. Soon larger cattle companies made their appearances, the LC for the Kansas and New Mexico Land and Cattle Company came to south Montezuma Creek, Eli Iliff and Harold Carlisle, two Englishmen, brought several thousand head of cattle into San Juan County. Some of the individual cattlemen sold their interest to the Carlisle Company, which became the largest in the area. Their foreman was Latigo Gordon (Carlisle’s step-son), and he is probably Lassiter in Zane Grey's book, *Riders of the Purple Sage*, because that story was based on this area. He hired a number of the Robber’s Roost gang, such as Butch Cassidy, Kid Jackson, and Monte Butler. Green
Robinson brought a thousand head of cattle to Coyote. There were at least 10,000 head of cattle in Dry Valley alone in 1885.

In 1884, the Pittsburgh Cattle Company bought out the interests of Maxwells, McCartys, Robinsons, Olsens, and Rays of La Sal, and branded their cattle with a cross H, which is still being used as the brand for La Sal Livestock Company. In 1888, John Cunningham was the manager of this company at La Sal, and in 1887 Thomas B. Carpenter was made ranch foreman of this La Sal company.

In 1915 it was sold to the La Sal Livestock Company. In 1885, D. M. Cooper and Mel Turner came into Indian Creek with a small herd. John E. Brown settled there in 1887 and planted a fine orchard. Then Goudelock, Cooper and Martin formed the Indian Creek Cattle Company. In 1936 they sold out to the Scorup-Somerville Cattle Company. The Scorups were from Salina. The Scorup-Somerville Company sold their large holdings to La Sal Livestock, which was organized in 1915 with Charles Redd as the manager. He later changed the name to Redd Ranches. John Albert Scorup, and his brother Jim, came in from Salina with 300 head of cattle. This herd increased as they bought out the number of outfits until they ran thousands of cattle under the lazy TY brand. They ran cattle from Elk Ridge to the Colorado River, thousands of acres. In 1918 they sold part of it, but in 1927 they held a United States Forest Service grazing permit for 6,780 head of cattle, the largest in the United States. There is a lot of history here. It's actually part of Moab’s history as well as San Juan’s history.

The cattlemen of the area would combine forces twice a year, in June and October, to gather and drift cattle, brand cattle and ship to market. Thousands of sheep were brought into the area from 1896 to 1900, and soon the sheep outnumbered the cattle. So you can see why the land was overgrazed. The early men didn’t care, they just moved the cattle where the grass was good and where there was water. But the cattlemen from then on, after these big huge ranches were broken up, took better
care of the land. Because the range land is so important in this desert country, the ranchers take good care of it. I’ve seen my family get off of the land before the BLM suggests, because they know it’s been grazed enough and they want the grass to come back. My husband even planted grass in Dry Valley to make a better pasture. You know, broke out some of the sage brush and planted good pasture. So most cattleman now days take care of the land, probably even better than the BLM does. At least we feel that we do.

**Outlaws of the Area** - Again, La Sal was a hideout for many outlaws in the 1889s and 90s. Butch Cassidy, Matt Warner, Monte Butler, Kid Jackson, Al Ackers, Kid Parker, Bert Madden, Tom Roach, and the McCarty brothers were all known in this area. They were sometimes cowboys, ranchers and outlaws. These and others were known as the Wild Bunch and made their home in La Sal and Robbers Roost near Green River. Tom McCarty was married to Matt Warner’s sister. These La Sal brothers helped rob the Telluride, Colorado bank in 1893. They were also cattle rustlers. They were connected to the Younger gang. Matt Warner, Tom McCarty, and Butch Cassidy joined forces and became known as *The Invincible Three*, and were notorious throughout the country. Tom was cool, clever, and bold. Matt was brave, but reckless, with an uncontrollable temper. Butch was cool and calculating. They made a formidable trio.

**Area Mining** - There have been great amounts of precious metals found in the La Sal area. There was a small settlement and a post office at Miners Basin in 1899. What is interesting about this is that it was a lively town of about 75 persons. Now I have an idea that there were more than that, just from the fact that it boasted two saloons, a store, a grocery store, two restaurants, a livery stable, a shoemaker shop, mining office, a deputy sheriff, a doctor, and even a Sunday school and boarding houses.
Gold and silver were also mined at Lackey Basin. We go up to Lackey Basin and there is no sign of mining in that area. So I don’t know if it was mined or not, though I’ve heard that silver was found there. Gold Basin, Big Indian, and Lisbon Valley are other places where they mined for gold and silver. Then the Big Indian Copper Mining Company was located seven miles south and west of La Sal. They worked until they couldn’t leech any more copper out. So Keystone Wallace came in the 1960s and used newer methods and mined and leached the copper successfully, until the price of copper dropped, and the mine became unprofitable again. This was a pit mine and was closed.

Vanadium and Carnotite were mined in the La Sal area, since before the turn of the century. In 1871, Doctor Richard Pierce shipped 200 pounds of ore to London. In 1895, Madam Marie Curie, and her husband Pierre, discovered the element uranium, but the only use for uranium was its radium content. Radium was used as a steel alloy at that time. Then Charles Steen, in 1952, discovered the Mi Vida Mine about fifteen miles south and west of La Sal. This was a high grade uranium strike. It is interesting that that fault goes down through our ranch and the Mi Vida Mine is on the same side of the fault as the Rattlesnake Mine, which was very near the surface and was pit mined. But it was also this high grade yellow cake, as they called it. Very good quality, although I think the gray is considered even richer.

Moab was the closest town that could handle the influx of all the miners. It grew from a sleepy town of a thousand or so to a bustling 6000. However, most of the miners had to leave, and other people moved in. They were replaced by government people and retirees, who filled the gaps. There are still some of the old mining families who have retired here. But a lot of the younger families had to move to Nevada and other places to get work. Both Moab and La Sal are nice places for retirement.

There were so many thousands that moved into the La Sal area that the farmers and ranchers there built three trailer villages. They were the Redds, the Blankenagels,
and the Wilcoxes. Homestake Mine also had a large trailer court of homes at their mine site, as did a few other mine companies. Homestake used to haul their water from Rattlesnake Spring for culinary use.

A little story about Charlie Steen: I guess he went into Monticello Merc, which was the only store in town to have groceries, clothes, and shoes. He looked just like a tramp. His clothes were worn out, his boots had holes in them, he had no food. He told them he was a miner and asked if they would stake him. They looked at him and said no. So he went to Moab, to Ralph Miller’s store, and asked him if he would back him and give him supplies. Steen said he saw all the signs of a rich deposit of uranium and he would like to go after it, and Ralph backed him. So Charlie Steen made Moab his headquarters. But all the taxes (from the mines) went to San Juan County. We were a wealthy county for quite a while. That’s when we got our TV station in and it’s sure been a good one.

Steen used to put on big parties in Moab once a year. He would have tubs of iced cans of pop for the kids and beer and anything you wanted to drink. He had wine, liquor of every sort and pop of any kind that you wanted, and all the kids had all they wanted. Steen became a very wealthy man, but I guess he invested it after he left here in Nevada, and lost it all. Then he made a little more, then lost it.

**Lula Delong comments:** Steen would also take men, who worked a whole year with no accidents, to the Gulf of Mexico to go fishing. They had very few accidents, because they were very safety, conscious. He is still in the mining business, because he still has a silver mine in Boulder, Colorado. But he trusted people too much. His bookkeeper didn’t even pay the insurance on the men, but took the money and sent his wife on various trips. This is what I learned from some of the employees that worked there. And then the time that he really went broke, was when they had a strike on the railroad, and he had all these cars loaded with ore. He had to pay for all
these cars on the railroad, which amounted to millions of dollars. Then the IRS got after him, so finally it broke him.

Establishment of the LDS Church at La Sal - In 1912, most of the people took up their homesteads. Among the newcomers were Fletcher B. Hammond, Jr., George W. McConkie, Samuel W. Somerville, William J. Furr, and John W. Gorman. Soon after, Dillworth W. Hammond, Herbert Day, and his sons Harry and Steven, settled there. Again they were handicapped by such a lack of water. A general citizens’ mass meeting was held June 17, 1917 at which time preliminary steps were taken to establish a town. Committees for various purposes were chosen and work was begun. One of the jobs was to build an irrigation ditch from the La Sal Mountains which would get water to the town. In fact, that old ditch which is constantly in repair, is still used by the Wilcoxes, Redds and Blankenagels for their water. This is where a good share of their water comes from, off the La Sal Mountains. Through that same old ditch Wash Johnson and some of those early pioneers got their water. Some of those early men were good engineers. With the Water Conservation Corporation, they are trying to get a dam built up on the La Sals, so there will be year around water, instead of just spring runoff. At Rattlesnake we have two big reservoirs, then a number of little lakes on down where the cattle can water all the way down across the ranch.

The town site was surveyed and engineered by L.H. Redd of Monticello assisted by Alexander Jameson who was one of the first bishops of La Sal Fred Prewer and John Swenson also helped.

The settlers, irrigated their lands from La Sal Creek, which is way up in the La Sal Mountains, and about fifteen miles north of their settlement. They also had a couple of streams from Beaver and Two Mile Creek, and those streams are still in use to day. For recreation, these early people of La Sal loved to sing and dance and put on plays and other dramatic entertainment. In fact, is it funny that one of the things they
needed in that first meeting house was a stage with curtains and dressing rooms. So they loved to put on plays and entertainment. During the summer they would have picnic in the mountains, potluck dinners, rodeos, and sports events. They loved racing. They had men’s races, women’s races, children’s races, and horse races. They would even race men against horses. So they had a lot of fun on Independence Day, Pioneer Day and other holidays.

By 1924 many of the families had already left La Sal. All because of the drought. Isn’t that strange it was such a big community and went to such a small one in not too many years. One of the reasons for this is that with bigger and better farm machinery, one man could do the work of many. Larger farms became necessary to be profitable for the ranchers.