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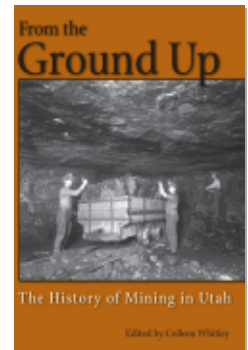
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SILVER REEF AND SOUTHWESTERN UTAH'S SHIFTING FRONTIER

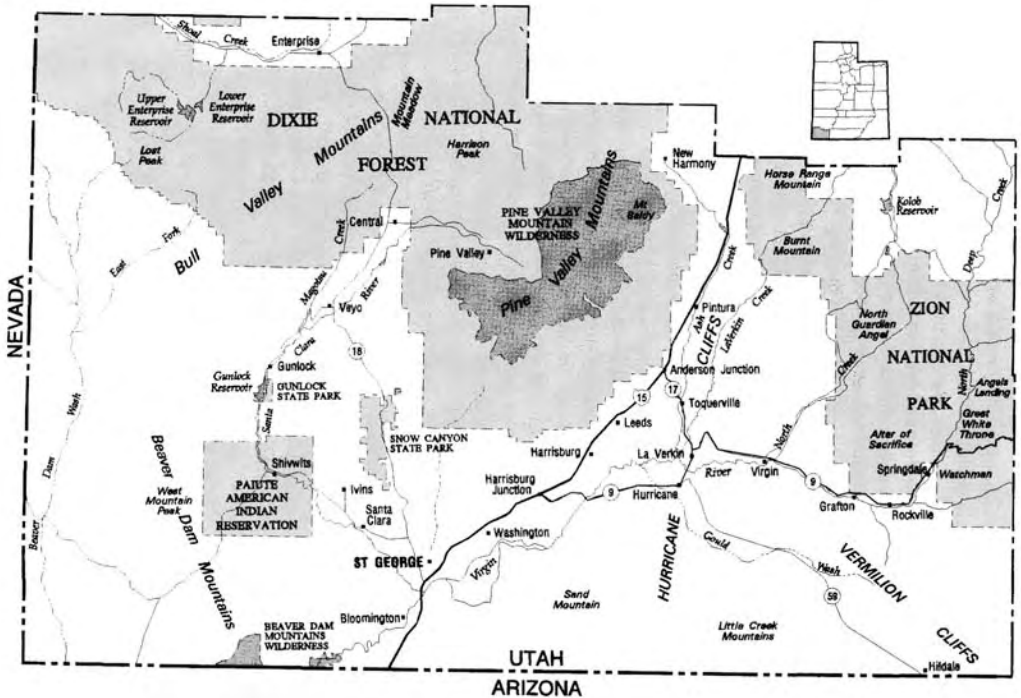
W. Paul Reeve

In a series of letters to the *Salt Lake Tribune* in the fall of 1875 and spring of 1876, prospector William Tecumseh Barbee announced a “singular discovery”: silver had been found in sandstone. “The country is wild with excitement,” Barbee exclaimed and noted that southern Utah’s “sandstone country beats all the boys,” especially the “sheets of silver which are exposed all over the different reefs. . . . This is the most unfavorable looking country for mines that I have ever seen in my varied mining experience,” Barbee explained, “but, as the mines are here, what are the rock sharps going to do about it?” According to Barbee, the new discoveries were so promising that “even our Mormon brethren are getting chloride and horn silver on the brain.”¹

No doubt spurred on by Barbee’s favorable dispatches, a flood of miners, merchants, and speculators soon poured into Washington County in the southwestern corner of Utah Territory. Before long, a raucous mining camp sprang to life at what later became Silver Reef. Over the next two decades, silver mining proved a powerful force in the development of Washington County. The Silver Reef mineral rush generated intense enthusiasm and produced marketable ore until just past the turn of the twentieth century.

Although Silver Reef merits most of the attention due Washington County mining, extractive activity there both pre- and postdated that camp’s boom years. In fact, a series of mining events during the 1860s was responsible for reducing the size of not only Washington County but the territory of Utah as a whole. In the early twentieth century, hot on the heels of Silver Reef’s decline, the county also experienced a short-lived oil boom. Even though the county’s extractive activities proved ephemeral, they nonetheless spawned economic bursts which spilled over to benefit the region’s long-term LDS settlers. Mining also added splashes of contrasting color to the region’s religiously motivated agricultural history.

SILVER REEF



The Silver Reef mining area was located just west of Leeds in Washington County in the southwestern corner of Utah.

EARLY MINING IN WASHINGTON COUNTY

Washington County's mining history had a rather obscure beginning in the fall of 1863, more than a decade before the rush to Silver Reef. When it started, the site of a very rich silver deposit lay hidden from Anglo-American prospectors in remote southwestern Utah Territory. Before it ended, however, the Utah/Nevada border would shift to enfold that site within the Silver State. Although Nevada laid claim to the story's conclusion, its origin belongs to Utah and in many ways provides an essential backdrop to the saga that developed later at Silver Reef.

Initially only local Southern Paiute bands were aware of an outcrop of ore at what would eventually become Pioche, in present-day southeastern Nevada. In fact, what Pioche residents came to call Meadow Valley Street in their town actually was a worn Paiute trail, leading to the ore.² A leader of a Paiute band whom Mormons had named Moroni was well acquainted with LDS settler William Hamblin and once carried a piece of "glittering ore" to him for inspection. Hamblin was a two-year veteran of the California goldfields and quickly recognized the rock's potential.³ Moroni, however, refused to tell where the ore came from, only indicating that "for years chosen members of his tribe had resorted to and used it as a paint." Moroni's dying father had warned him never to disclose the ore's location to white men, "lest they

should come and drive the Indians from their hunting grounds to secure the riches thus exposed." Eventually, however, Hamblin wore down Moroni's resolve through continued friendship and the gift of a new rifle. Moroni led Hamblin, along with William Pulsipher, another Mormon settler, to the rugged side of a mountain where "the glittering ore cropped out above the ground."⁴

The three men dug down several feet to expose a well-defined vein and then laid claim to the spot. This very act set in motion a series of events that would drastically change the meaning of the dirt they dug. Within three years news of silver in southwestern Utah burst onto the national stage and mustered enough power in Congress to move the Utah/Nevada border one degree of longitude farther east.

For the time being, Hamblin and Pulsipher were satisfied with their find and returned home to tell others. Before long, local Mormon leaders expressed interest in the claim. In January 1864 Bishop Edward Bunker, head of the Mormon settlement at Santa Clara, organized an expedition to the site. Bunker's group surveyed and outlined a square claim but did not organize a mining district or post traditional notice, thereby leaving the ore open for the taking. Bunker reported his expedition to Brigham Young and sought the LDS leader's advice on the matter.⁵

Young responded favorably. He not only liked the idea of claiming the ore for Zion but also wanted the surrounding valleys as good grazing ground for Mormon cattle. He put it this way: "I think, all things considered, that it will be best for the brethren to branch out and occupy for their stock the valleys you mention [Clover Valley and Meadow Valley] and also claim, survey and stake off as soon as possible, those veins or ore that br. Hamblin is aware of, . . . all that are sticking out, or likely to be easily found and profitably worked."⁶ Young also furnished Erastus Snow, an LDS apostle and leader of the Saints' colonizing efforts in southwestern Utah, with copies of "the rules and regulations observed by miners in locating and working mining claims" and instructed him to file on the site.⁷

However, almost before Snow had time to act, word of the strike spread beyond Mormon circles and put in motion a contest for silver that quickly grew to include General Patrick Edward Connor.⁸ Upon hearing news of mineral deposits in southern Utah, Connor supplied non-Mormon prospector Stephen Sherwood with a copy of mining laws so that he could establish a proper mining district if he discovered ore on his planned trip south. After arriving in southern Utah in March 1864, Sherwood and his old mining friend, Jacob N. Vandermark, along with Mormons Thomas Box, Sr., Thomas Box, Jr., and Peter Shirts, gained Hamblin's confidence, and he led them to the silver. On March 18 they held a miners' meeting and organized the Meadow Valley Mining District. They adopted with a few alterations the set of mining laws borrowed from Connor. The group then parted ways; Box, Sherwood, Vandermark, and Shirts traveled to Salt Lake City for supplies while Hamblin returned home to Clover Valley.⁹

Despite the establishment of a proper mining district, the campaign over who would control the Paiute silver intensified over the next three months. Erastus Snow

sent settlers to Meadow Valley 12 miles south of the new mines to hold the pasture and farmland there. The first of these Mormons arrived on May 5, and soon others followed, founding the town of Panaca, named for the Paiute word for “silver.”¹⁰ In the meantime, in Salt Lake City, Connor quickly involved his troops. On April 30 he issued orders to one company of soldiers to “scour the country” surrounding the “newly discovered silver mines in Washington County, . . . for the protection of miners and exploration of the resources of the country.” Connor not only wanted his men to “afford protection to miners from Mormons and Indians” but also commanded, “You will thoroughly explore and prospect the country over which you travel, and if successful in finding placer diggings, you will at once report the fact to these headquarters.”¹¹

In addition to two companies of Connor’s men, Sherwood, Vandermark, and an expanded group of mining buddies were also on their way back to the mines. They had spent the previous month gathering supplies, recording the district rules in a proper ledger, and noising news of their find around Salt Lake City. Close to the same time, Erastus Snow left St. George with a large contingent, intent upon solidifying Mormon claims to the area. All of these groups converged in late May and early June 1864 upon the once-isolated land that less than a year before had held meaning only for Southern Paiutes.¹²

Snow’s entourage arrived first. Convinced that, by virtue of abandonment, the Sherwood group’s claims were invalid, Snow organized a new mining district based upon the rules Young had given him. He staked new claims and placed Mormons in charge.¹³ On the return trip to St. George, Snow passed several other parties in the area, including Sherwood, Vandermark, and company, as well as Captain Hempstead and his troops from Fort Douglas. Despite such competition roaming the countryside, Snow seemed satisfied that “our brethren . . . had laid claim to what they supposed, the principal leads for some miles.”¹⁴

When Hempstead arrived at the mines, he found that Snow had indeed “gone in with a vim.” Hempstead and his men discovered the whole mountain “covered and spotted with stakes.” “So frequently did the St. George President’s name appear stuck in the stakes,” Hempstead reported, “that it looked as though there had been a recent *snow* storm on that mountain.” Hempstead concluded that “the whole country has gone wild over the silver mines.”¹⁵ Upon further investigation, however, he determined that the Mormon attempt to establish a competing mining district was illegal. Hempstead convinced the Mormons that this was true, and they filed their claims with Sherwood, the legal recorder of the district. Hempstead remarked, “All is harmony, peace and good will, and Saint and Gentile are at work in happy accord, on Mount Panacker.”¹⁶

PAIUTE SILVER

While Gentiles and Mormons had at least temporarily worked out their differences, neither group had bothered to address the Paiutes’ longer-standing claim to the area.

It was the Paiutes, in June and July, who attempted to reassert their control and in the process placed themselves at the center of the contest. As Sherwood recalled, "The Indians troubled us incessantly: stole and ran off our stock . . . they drew weapons on us . . . [and] threatened to kill us if we did not leave." Thomas Box, Jr., who claimed to know something of the Paiute language, said that he "understood the Indians, and they said they meant war." The hostility escalated to the point that in July 1864 the miners moved to the new town at Panaca, where they huddled together with the Mormons for mutual defense. Sherwood remembered that the miners were forced to guard "against an Indian attack" and alleged that for two years "the Indians were too hostile for us to do anything."¹⁷ In response the miners held a meeting to amend the district laws so they could maintain their claims without actually working them until the Indian danger dissipated.¹⁸

In addition, the miners appealed for government intervention against the Paiutes and then eventually quit working the mines. It would be nearly six years before miners returned to the site and founded Pioche. In the meantime, Thomas C. W. Sale, an Indian subagent sent to investigate reported problems with the Southern Paiutes, himself generated excitement about another site farther west that gained national attention and led to the shift in the Utah/Nevada border.

Sale arrived at his new post in Washington County by the middle of November 1864 and spent considerable time "talking" with various Paiute bands at Panaca, Clover Valley, St. George, and Santa Clara. Sale, however, clearly had more on his mind than just the welfare of the Southern Paiutes. The region's potential mineral wealth soon enticed him into prospecting. By March 1865 Sale had planned a trip throughout the region to meet with Southern Paiutes in southwestern Utah, northwestern Arizona, and southeastern Nevada. He took with him a group of restless miners then staying at Panaca due to the Indian troubles. Included in the group were three of Stephen Sherwood's friends: Samuel S. Shutt, William McCluskey, and David Sanderson. John H. Ely, future partner in the Raymond and Ely Mine at what later became Pioche, also went along, as did a local Mormon, Ira Hatch, employed as Indian interpreter.¹⁹

As the group visited local Indians, they showed specimens of ore. One "old Indian" apparently told them that "he knew where there was plenty more of the same kind" and led them to what would become the Pahrangat silver strikes.²⁰ The men did not hesitate to organize a mining district, with Indian agent Sale elected as recorder, and then smothered the region with claims.²¹ Perhaps Sale did as much as anyone to spread word of the find, which was no doubt aided by his belief that he had found the far-famed "Silver Mountain" for which so many had searched in vain.

In a letter to Utah's superintendent of Indian affairs, Orsemus H. Irish, Sale repeated the legend associated with the mountain and its ill-fated discoverers, the 1849 Lewis Manly party. The Manly group, headed for the California goldfields, took the southern route from Salt Lake City through Utah Territory along the Old Spanish Trail and then west to California. Manly, despite objections from his guide, opted for

a supposed shortcut, leaving the Spanish Trail in southern Utah and heading west through the treacherous terrain of the southern Nevada desert. Unknowingly he led his group into some of America's driest and most barren expanses, including Death Valley—which the party named. Despite horrific hardships, Manly's group did reach California, losing only one life. According to legend, one member of the company, while passing through the Nevada desert, discovered "exceedingly rich mines of silver" and carried a specimen on to California, which proved nearly pure. Since that time, Sale went on to explain, many expeditions had searched for the source of the silver, but none had proven successful—that is, until Sale and his party came along. "Silver Mountain' is found at last," Sale boasted; or, if not that, at least "something worthy of attention is discovered."²²

News of the find spread quickly, swirling a whirlwind in motion that would forever redefine Utah's borders, in an effort to ensure that power to control "Silver Mountain" fell into the right hands. Early reports in national mining journals called the mines "richer than any yet discovered" and predicted that in less than a year "this district will roll out silver bricks in quantities sufficient to shame the Comstock in her palmiest days." One miner called the district "the richest I have ever seen," and another wrote that "there are no more promising mines to be found in Nevada."²³

The early assumption was that the Pahrnatag District *was* in Nevada, but no one really knew. In late 1865 two miners reported that "the Pahrnatag District is believed to be in Washington county, Utah." Another miner a few months later wrote that the "exact locality" of the mines was still in question, but he believed that they were in the "extreme southeast portion of the State of Nevada."²⁴ Even as late as May 1866, at the same time that Congress settled the question with a boundary shift, Dr. O. H. Congar visited the region and made a series of scientific observations. He concluded that the center of the district was "a little more than thirty-one miles within the boundaries of Utah Territory by longitude, and also, about the same by latitude from the Arizona line."²⁵ Congar's measurements notwithstanding, Hiko, the district's easternmost town, actually fell 10 miles *within* the then borders of Nevada.²⁶

With Pahrnatag's promising discoveries of silver at stake, Nevada's politicians and the U.S. Congress could not leave things to chance. In May 1866 one of Nevada's senators, William M. Stewart, introduced a bill that instigated the boundary shift. It moved the border one degree farther east, from the 38th to the 37th meridian of longitude west from Washington. In the debate that ensued on the floor of the House, one congressman argued, "I hope we will by all means give Nevada a slice"; it is, after all, "well governed and is now yielding a very large revenue to the Government." Delos Ashley, the congressman from Nevada, added, "The reason why we want this territory for Nevada is that our people from Nevada have discovered mines in that degree of latitude, and we are occupying the country now." "The people of Nevada are a mining people," Ashley insisted, "while the people of Utah are an agricultural people." Regardless, he only knew of "but one Mormon living in that degree of latitude," anyway, and "the Mormons have always been averse to mining." The bill

passed over the objections of Utah's territorial representative, William H. Hooper, not a voting member of Congress.²⁷

Ironically the Pahranaġat district never lived up to even the tamešt of claims. By 1868 Mining Commissioner Rossiter W. Raymond reported that investors had poured nearly one million dollars into the district while extracting only about \$20,000 worth of bullion.²⁸ While Pahranaġat was a terrible disappointment economically, it did prove powerful enough to move a border. In addition, the spillover from the excitement that it generated drew renewed attention to the nearly forgotten ore at Meadow Valley. By 1869 a few miners from Pahranaġat had shifted their focus there. They reorganized that district and renamed it the Ely Mining District after John H. Ely.²⁹ Within a year the site caught the interest of several California capitalists, including Franois Louis Alfred Pioche, who invested in the mines and was celebrated with the budding town named in his honor. By 1872 the mines at Pioche had reached an annual production peak of nearly \$5.5 million, and the camp was in full swing.³⁰

Even though, by the time the mines at Pioche had begun to yield their riches they had become a part of Nevada, southern Utah residents still benefited. Mormons from throughout the region freighted and traded at the mining camp, all the while denouncing the evil that they believed it embodied. In 1872 Bishop George H. Crosby of Hebron, a ranching outpost in the northwestern corner of Washington County near the Utah/Nevada border, reported that everything was "prosperous" at his town and emphasized the financial benefit that proximity to Pioche represented: the co-operative store paid a yearly dividend of 30 percent, residents enjoyed "a ready cash market for all their produce," and peddlers received "sufficiently higher" prices at Pioche "to make it profitable to the freighter."³¹

Hebronite Orson Huntsman concurred: "I made several trips to Pioche with lumber, in company with Father Terry and others from our place," he wrote. "Pioche proved to be a great camp, . . . [and] made a good market for lumber and other products or produce, also a great amount of labor." Over the next several years, Huntsman continued his forays to Pioche. He generally returned home well pleased with his cash payments, especially after one trip where he sold "one little horse" for \$50 in gold. Despite the economic benefit, Huntsman still described Pioche as "a very wicked city," or, "at least," he explained, "there is some very wicked men and women in and around Pioche."³²

Pioche eventually developed a more direct connection to southern Utah, especially after prospectors uncovered marketable ore at Silver Reef. Much of the early activity at the reef took place simultaneously with the events at Meadow Valley, Pahranaġat, and Pioche. Silver Reef's development, however, lagged behind the other districts. By 1876, when William Tecumseh Barbee began publicizing his strikes at Silver Reef, Pioche had already started to decline. Many Pioche miners, merchants, and mill owners simply moved east to the new bonanza town—buildings and all—in what some called the "Pioche stampede."³³

SILVER REEF

Before that move took place, however, prospectors had to discover the unlikely existence of silver in sandstone and convince others of its reality. Common wisdom dictated that silver did not exist in sandstone, at least not in any marketable quantity. Silver Reef was therefore somewhat of an oddity that required overcoming long-standing geological ideas before its riches could be extracted. That was nearly a decade-long process that involved a variety of colorful characters and spawned a smattering of folk legends.

FINDING SILVER IN SANDSTONE

As chronicled in chapter 4, one account involves a Pioche assayer nicknamed Metalliferous Murphy. Another popular legend tells it differently. Apparently an unnamed weary traveler sought refuge one particularly cold winter evening in the home of a resident of Leeds, Utah, a small farming village a few miles south of what later became Silver Reef. As the traveler warmed himself by the side of the home-owner's sandstone fireplace, he noticed drops of white metal weeping from the stone. He collected enough of the substance to have it tested, and, when it proved to be silver, he laid claim to a nearby sandstone ledge and the subsequent fortune that it yielded.³⁵

These accounts notwithstanding, mining records from Washington County suggest quite a different story. John Kemple, a long time prospector trailing a string of horses from his recent mining forays into Montana, deserves credit for the first discovery of silver in sandstone in 1866. Kemple took a room with Orson B. Adams, a settler at the small Mormon hamlet of Harrisburg. Kemple had brought with him his own assay equipment and spent the winter prospecting around southern Utah. He shortly moved on to the White Pine District in Nevada but returned to the Harrisburg area by 1868. He eventually found silver in *float* material (eroded rock from a lode, usually found at the base of a ledge or in a stream), which he assayed at more than \$17,000 to the ton. He was initially not able to locate its source, however. Kemple did send a sample of sandstone rock to an assayer, H. H. Smith, then living at Shaunty in Beaver County, who refused to test it, exclaiming, "Kemple must be crazy to ask me to assay a sandrock."³⁶

By 1870 Kemple had discovered ore on "a prominent white ledge sandstone west of Harrisburg and northward." Local settlers grew increasingly interested in Kemple's activities, and in February 1871, under his lead, several men organized the Union Mining District. The group elected Samuel Hamilton of Harrisburg as the recorder for the district, and over the following year, he noted 16 claims. Mormons from Harrisburg and Leeds figured prominently amongst the claimants (William Robb, Orson B. Adams, Elijah Fuller, William Leany, Brigham Y. McMullen, and E. W. Ellsworth) as did a few noteworthy leaders from St. George, including E. G. Woolley, Richard I. Bently, James Andrews, and Apostle Erastus Snow. A few settlers from Toquerville and Washington also tried their luck at mining in the new district.³⁷

Despite this surge in activity, the would-be miners never developed their claims. It is possible that their only intention was to keep the ore from falling into Gentile hands. "The Saints have said these mines would be opened when the Lord's own time should come," the *Salt Lake Tribune* asserted in 1876. "The right time is now," it announced. "Christ was too slow," so "Barbee brought the time with him."³⁸ Brigham Young had long exhorted his southern Utah flock to avoid mining. He especially preached against Pioche and on one occasion "deprecat[ed] the desire of many to go to the mines and mingle with the wicked,—learn to swear—drink—gamble, lie and practice every other wickedness of the world."³⁹ It was not so much the act of mining that Young disliked but the individualism, instability, and social stratification that the search for wealth tended to breed. As long as mining operations existed for the benefit of Zion and could be managed on the cooperative plan, Young approved. In 1870 Erastus Snow explained the distinction this way: "If the mines must be worked, it is better for the saints to work them than for others to do it, but we have all the time prayed that the Lord would shut up the mines. It is better for us to live in peace and good order, and to raise wheat corn, potatoes and fruit, than to suffer the evils of a mining life."⁴⁰ Perhaps this notion best explains the inactivity among Mormon claimants—Snow included—in the Union Mining District.

Whatever the reason, the claims lay dormant until Kemple returned yet again to Harrisburg in 1874 and organized a new district, calling it the Harrisburg Mining District. This time interested parties gathered on 22 June at the Harrisburg schoolhouse and elected Orson Adams president; W. J. Early, secretary; and John Kemple, recorder. The new district encompassed 144 square miles with the schoolhouse at its center. Over the next three months, eager prospectors filed 23 claims, all of which were staked on the Pride of the West Ledge (later known as the White Reef). The claimants were again largely comprised of local settlers, although this time two groups of Mormon women from Harrisburg also filed strikes with the recorder. Kemple, however, was the only miner to work his location. He sank a 50-foot shaft and attempted to develop his mine. Meanwhile, the Mormons largely did nothing to advance their claims and eventually abandoned them. In fact, apart from Kemple, only Walter E. Dodge maintained his strike and later patented it.⁴¹

After the organization of the Harrisburg District it took another nine months for outsiders to pay any significant attention to the location. John S. Ferris and Elijah Thomas provided the impetus, and William Tecumseh Barbee spread the word. Ferris, much later in life, recalled those events: In 1874 LDS leaders sent him to quarry rock for the St. George Temple, and as a result, he spent the winter cutting stone in southern Utah. In March 1875 he took a week's leave of absence from his labors to go prospecting. Before doing so, he decided to visit Elijah Thomas, then living at Leeds. Thomas was a Mormon Battalion veteran who had been at Sutter's Mill in California when gold was discovered there. "We took a ramble up onto Quail Creek, north of Harrisburg," Ferris remembered, "and in returning back we went up on the great white reef. In climbing up the reef we came to a crevice of copper stain about

mid way of the reef. We dug on it and opened up about a foot vein of ore of that class." Ferris took a rock sample with him, which eventually made its way to Pioche for testing. When it proved "high in silver," it generated excitement at Pioche, and Ferris eventually took prospectors from there to the site.⁴²

Word spread quickly among miners at Pioche. Before long, news of the silver that Mormon prospectors had long kept secret spiraled in a variety of directions and brought an influx of outsiders to southern Utah. Joseph M. Coschina and his brother, Victor, two miners from Pioche, staked claim in April 1875, locating the Bonanza, Emily Jane, and Maggie Mines. Another Pioche resident, Robert Shaky, staked the Stormont, while several more men from Pioche followed suit.⁴³

Rumors of silver in sandstone also circulated in Salt Lake City and piqued the interest of David, Joseph, Samuel, and Matthew Walker. The Walker brothers, as they were known, were prominent merchants, bankers, and mining capitalists who had earlier invested in the Emma Mine at Alta, Utah, as well as other ventures in the Ophir fields and at Butte, Montana.⁴⁴ The brothers soon decided to investigate the stories then swirling around Salt Lake City about silver strikes in southern Utah. In June 1875 they sent three men south to serve as their agents and inspect conditions there. William Tecumseh Barbee led the expedition while fellow miner Thomas McNalley accompanied him, as did Ed Maynard, an assayer. It was Barbee, however, who was destined to discover a rich vein of silver and instigate a mining boom at the reef.⁴⁵

Barbee was an experienced miner by the time he arrived in southern Utah. He had been born in Kentucky but had spent considerable time in the West prospecting. He was influential in the discovery of silver in the Ophir District near Tooele, Utah, and later sold his Silveropolis Mine there for a reported \$27,000. Barbee and his companions arrived in the Harrisburg Mining District in June 1875 and shortly began prospecting. By August Barbee had filed claim on a mine for himself and then recorded a location for Joseph R. Walker as well. In September he and McNalley excitedly returned to Salt Lake City to report to the Walker brothers about what they deemed to be a promising district. The Walkers, however, were not convinced and opted for cautious involvement, perhaps only by Joseph. Undaunted, Barbee returned to southern Utah and by November had struck a rich silver-bearing vein.⁴⁶

It was one of those rare moments of good fortune for Barbee, thanks in part to the two sons of widow Nancy Jane McCleve of Leeds. The two young men had spent a fall day in 1875 gathering wood along Quail Creek and on the Buckeye Reef for their mother's winter supply. As they returned to Leeds, their well-loaded wagon scraped along soft rock for several feet at one fortuitous spot. Barbee happened to be the next person traveling the same route and immediately recognized the exposed "waxy brown mineral" as *horn silver* (a term used to describe an outcrop of ore that dust and wind have polished to the dull luster of a cow horn). Barbee filed on the site, naming it the Tecumseh claim, and shortly located several more lucrative strikes.

He also began promoting what he deemed to be the entire region's enormous potential through a series of reports to the *Salt Lake Tribune*. Barbee thereby touched off a rush to Silver Reef. In December 1875 he described his activities: "About one month ago I discovered the Tecumseh mine, situated on a hill by the same name. The vein is small, but rich, and easily worked," he explained. "On the northeast end of Tecumseh Hill is Silver Flat, chuck full of little chloride veins. Still further east we have Silver Reef and Silver Butte Hills, also full of chlorides by the acre." So rich were these strikes, Barbee claimed, that a man "can dig up the ore as easily as the farmer digs his potatoes."⁴⁷

Barbee and other prospectors sent early shipments of mined ores to Salt Lake City for refining. His rock assayed at from \$440 to \$850 of silver to the ton, wonderfully rich in comparison to the usual \$20 per ton typical of the district.⁴⁸ For his early shipments to the Utah capital city, Barbee earned a reported \$17,000. By July 1876, however, he investigated Pioche as a closer and less expensive destination for his raw ore. He soon realized a \$23,000 return from several shipments to Pioche, a fact that no doubt fueled interest among residents in the new Utah mines. Twenty-nine claims were recorded in the Harrisburg District by the close of 1875, many of them made by men from Pioche.⁴⁹

These early strikes produced considerable wealth and proved easily workable without significant capital investment. They came to be called "poor man's mines" and prompted the *Salt Lake Tribune* to report in the spring of 1876 that "more crude wealth has been developed in a shorter period of time, considering the number of men engaged than any other mining district on the continent. Nine out of ten men who have assayed their fortunes are now in possession of good properties."⁵⁰ Barbee no doubt concurred and expressed a similar sentiment when he claimed that "the success of the mines of this district does not depend upon a rush of miners and adventurers that usually flock to new mining camps, and make hurrah times for a brief season; nor does it depend upon San Francisco, Salt Lake, or Eastern capital." Rather, Barbee bragged, "our mines are our capital; our banks are sand banks; we draw on them at will, and our drafts are never dishonored. We have no board of directors to consult, nor sinecure officers to pay." As proof of this, Barbee claimed that it was "a matter of perfect indifference" to the reef miners "whether any immigration come into our district or not."⁵¹

Even if Barbee's assertions were true initially, the easily worked surface strikes quickly played out, and significant capital investment was required to reach the deeper ore. In addition, Barbee's "perfect indifference" in regard to immigration proved rather imperfect because, by the end of 1876, he had had a town site surveyed at the base of Tecumseh Hill, which he named Bonanza City. Barbee's planned community included an assay office, a boardinghouse, a general store, a blacksmith shop, and a racetrack. Clearly he intended to profit not only from his mines but from real-estate development as well. Unfortunately for Barbee, however, outside capitalists were already investing in the district, and they managed to steer Silver Reef's development in a different direction.⁵²

SILVER REEF

Pioche became the center of much of the early excitement about Silver Reef. Many miners and merchants from that town moved more than 100 miles southeast to the new strikes. The timing was right for a move anyway. By the mid 1870s, both the Raymond and Ely and Meadow Valley mining companies at Pioche had hit water in their shafts and fallen on hard times.⁵³ When news of Barbee's strikes circulated, it therefore touched off what some people described as a stampede. It proved a rather slow one at first, but it increased in volume and speed as 1876 wore on and grew to include even the relocation of buildings and mills from Pioche to Silver Reef.⁵⁴

It took more than news of Barbee's success to startle the stampede into motion, however. Many Piochers kept a watchful eye on developments at the reef but waited for capitalists to make a move before they were willing to cast their lots with the new camp. Outsiders remained leery of the district's true potential, not believing that silver could exist in sandstone in sustainable quantities. Two Pioche merchants, Hyman Jacobs and Louis Sultan, however, were influential in changing these attitudes. The two businessmen received an ore sample from a Mr. Shepherd of Leeds, which they promptly forwarded to Charles Hoffman, then superintendent at the Almaden Quicksilver mines outside San Jose, California. The sample caught Hoffman's attention, so much so that he traveled to Pioche and brought with him a metallurgist, Professor Janney. These two men obtained their own sample from the Harrisburg District and, after testing and retesting it, became convinced of the region's potential. Hot on the heels of Janney and Hoffman's report, in October 1876, a group of San Francisco capitalists, including A. Borland, L. L. Robinson, W. L. Oliver, George D. Roberts and S. F. Gashwiler, organized the Leeds Mining Company. The new business promptly purchased a few different claims from local owners and appointed Hoffman as superintendent of operations.⁵⁵

Jacobs and Sultan benefited indirectly from this new venture. The Leeds Mining and Milling Company soon had a town site of its own surveyed less than a mile above Barbee's Bonanza City. The company appointed Jacobs as its agent to sell town lots at the new location. He named the place Silver Reef and then demonstrated a significant level of commitment to the undertaking. He promptly boxed the merchandise from his Pioche store, dismantled the store itself, and moved the entire enterprise to Silver Reef. Jacobs's faith in the reef's potential, combined with the perceived security that outside investors seemed to promise, generated widespread excitement at Pioche, and the stampede began in earnest. By the spring of 1878, one former Pioche resident described Silver Reef as "flourishing" and estimated that more than 1,000 inhabitants lived there. He believed that "fully eight hundred of them are from Pioche and vicinity. Many of the old Piochers established here are doing well," he continued, "among whom are John Cassidy, Jacobs & Sultan and Peter Harrison." He went on to describe Harrison's large and commodious building, which served as a grocery store, furniture store, and "first-class lodging house." Other former residents of Pioche had moved saloons, hardware stores, and other businesses to Silver Reef and were all benefiting from the boom.⁵⁶

The reef's early roar quickly attracted additional outside investors, who purchased strikes from prospectors eager to sell. Barbee sold some of his claims but held onto others and worked them with the aid of capital from the Walker brothers under the name of Barbee and Walker. He developed his most lucrative mine on the White Reef, and by March of 1878, he had even constructed the Barbee and Walker mill, a five-stamp facility within 50 feet of his mine. In June 1879, however, a fire destroyed the mill, and although he spent the time and money to rebuild, New York investors eventually bought him out. By June 1881 Barbee had given up his dreams for Bonanza City and left Silver Reef altogether. He moved on to other mining ventures in Humboldt County, Nevada, although he kept in touch with his old friends at the reef through occasional reports to the local newspaper.⁵⁷

Under the direction of Milton S. Latham, New York businessmen continued to work the Barbee and Walker mines and mill. They launched their new venture after issuing 100,000 shares of stock at a par value of \$10. Investors also appointed Richard L. Odgen resident director of the mines and rejoiced as the value of company stock rose to \$41.60 per share within six months. By 1882, however, the high-grade ore at the Barbee and Walker mines was nearly depleted, and before the end of the year, company assets were sold at a marshal's sale.⁵⁸

Leeds Mining and Milling proved to be another large operation at Silver Reef, among the top four companies there. To save time and money transporting its ore for processing, Leeds investors purchased the Old Maggie mill in a town south of Pioche. They then had the mill dismantled and moved to Silver Reef, where the company rebuilt it less than a mile from its mine. There the ten-stamp mill crushed sandstone ore and extracted silver in marketable quantities, an operation that enjoyed early success. However, as the company sank its shaft to around the 300-foot level, it hit a thick zone of "lower-grade copper-bearing silver ore," which only yielded \$16 of silver per ton. The mill also suffered from breakdowns caused by the difficulty in refining the poor-quality ore.

By 1881 the bust part of the mining cycle was already haunting Leeds Mining and Milling. That year it issued an assessment of 25 cents per share in an effort to repair its mill and infuse new life into the company. However, additional problems plagued the mill, so by June 1882, the company was bankrupt. Its assets passed into the hands of the county sheriff. It had produced almost \$800,000 worth of silver in its initial 20 months of operation but could not sustain such levels of profitability on low-grade ore.⁵⁹

The Christy Mining and Milling Company enjoyed much more success. San Francisco investors, under the leadership of William H. Graves, organized this venture after purchasing Barbee's Tecumseh claim as well as the Buckeye, California, and Maggie Mines. The Stormy King and Silver Flat strikes adjacent to the Tecumseh also produced ore for Christy Mining. Directors selected Captain Henry Lubbock, an astute businessman and former superintendent of the Floral Springs Water Company at Pioche, to head the development of its mines at Silver Reef. Under Lubbock's skilled guidance, the Christy mines enjoyed a wonderfully productive boom and managed

to outlast the reef's other companies. The Tecumseh alone produced \$500 of silver per ton of rock in its surface ore and continued to yield rich quantities at lower levels as well. The company soon opened a five-stamp mill near its mines, situated on a five-acre mill site. The mill processed around 40 tons of ore per day, which on average yielded a \$2,000 silver brick every other day. At its peak the company employed about 20 mill hands and 40 miners; in total those men extracted an estimated \$2.5 million worth of silver. Production slowed after 1882, but Christy Mining continued operations until 1889, when its silver-bearing ore finally played out.⁶⁰

The Stormont Mining Company found similar success at Silver Reef, although it did not last as long as Christy. New York financiers held the purse strings to this company under the leadership of J. R. Bothwell and W. C. Clark. Charles S. Hinchman of Philadelphia was the largest investor in the company and served as financial representative to the board of trustees. The Stormont controlled the Buckeye, Last Chance, and Stormont Mines on Buckeye Reef as well as the Thompson-McNalley strikes on White Reef. It also erected a "large and efficient mill" on the Virgin River. While the mill's river location made water power possible, the six-mile distance from company mines proved costly. Simply hauling the ore to the mill added \$2.20 per ton in expenses and prompted managers to search for alternatives. They investigated the possibility of erecting a tramway that would have bisected present-day Interstate 15, passed over Purgatory Hill, and then descended to the river below. Nothing came of the plan, and the Stormont continued paying teamsters to haul its ore.⁶¹

A more pressing concern, especially for stockholders, was company management under Clark and Bothwell. When financial problems hit the company in 1881 and 1882, some stockholders, as well as business analysts, suggested that profiteering and mismanagement were to blame. In May 1882 Charles Hinchman, representing the board of trustees, and Schuyler Van Rensselaer, company secretary, traveled to Silver Reef to investigate such allegations firsthand. The two reportedly resolved the difficulties, and the Stormont successfully continued producing silver. By 1886, however, work began to slow, hampered by a flood on the Virgin that washed out the dam and temporarily closed the mill. As ore quality deteriorated at lower depths, especially in the Savage and Buckeye shafts, managers instituted vigorous underground explorations in the hopes of striking new silver-bearing veins. While these efforts were extensive, they were also costly and yielded little return. As a result, in August 1887 Stormont Mining announced its closing.⁶²

Even though outside capital funded the major mines at Silver Reef, it did not call all the shots. The Kinner Mine on the Buckeye Reef is an important example. Colonel Enos Andrew Wall owned and operated the mine, albeit somewhat disastrously. Wall was born in North Carolina and raised in Indiana. In 1860 he traveled west, where he began his mining career at Pike's Peak, Colorado. He later established ties to Utah when he began a freighting business between Salt Lake City and the Montana goldfields. He no doubt heard of silver discoveries in the southern corner of the territory and arrived at Silver Reef in 1876. He discovered the Kinner strike

and was apparently aided in its development by his father-in-law, a California mining man. By 1879 he was furnishing the Leeds mill about 15 tons of ore per day, and some advisors recommended that Wall build a mill of his own. However, he soon hit water in his mine and accumulated significant debt installing a pump and hoisting machinery. He employed about 30 men to keep his operation running, which also added labor costs to his financial stress. Wall owed at least some of his debt to Christy Mining, and the company eventually brought a suit against him in an effort to collect. In July 1881 Washington County Sheriff August Hardy auctioned Wall's mine to pay delinquent interest on a \$728 note.

In addition, Wall's men were frustrated at his inability to pay them; many demanded back wages and soon incarcerated Wall at the Harrison House to prevent him from skipping town. However, a friend of Wall's, remembered only as Shautesy, planned a daring escape. As predetermined, Shautesy pulled up in front of the Harrison House in a buckboard hitched to a span of fast horses. Wall ran from the hotel, jumped on the wagon, and grabbed the reins while Shautesy leveled a repeating Henry rifle at the bewildered crowd. Some versions of the story suggest that Wall called out that he would return and pay his men everything that he owed them. He went on to become very wealthy from his involvement in the Utah Copper Company and the development of the Bingham Copper Mine. Legend has it that he eventually made good on his promise to repay his men at Silver Reef.⁶³

Besides Wall's Kinner Mine, a variety of other small operators worked among the big companies, although the details of their activities are largely lost to history. The Thompson and McNally claims were on the White Reef and had around 15 men working them in 1879. Two mines were also developed on the East Reef: the Duffin and Vanderbilt. These were largely worked by independent miners, who were granted leases to extract whatever they might find. As many as 30 men tested their luck at the Duffin Mine; some at least supported themselves for a time before moving elsewhere. In general, however, the bigger companies controlled both mining and milling at Silver Reef, and the men who worked the mines did so for wages, not any significant share of the wealth.⁶⁴

IMMIGRATION AND TOWN DEVELOPMENT

Merchants no doubt made good on the town's boom years as well. By 1877 Main Street and the surrounding commercial district sported nine saloons, three restaurants, four assay offices, two barbershops, five merchandise and clothing stores, a furniture store, printing office, cabinet shop, tobacco store, and a variety of other businesses, including three Chinese laundries. The most notable among the new establishments was the impressive stone structure that John Rice constructed to house the Wells Fargo and Company Bank and express office. It was touted as one of the finest structures of its kind in southern Utah and still stands at Silver Reef, a solid reminder of the city's heyday.⁶⁵

SILVER REEF

Not all was prosperous for the merchants, however. The heart of the business district experienced a terrible setback in May 1879 when fire tore through town. It started under the plank walkway outside Harry Wiest's barbershop. Despite the diligent efforts of most townspeople who formed bucket brigades, the fire did an estimated quarter-million dollars in damage. Flames destroyed the stately Harrison House, Jacobs and Sultan's store, and a variety of other businesses before firefighters could contain it. Within two months the Barbee and Walker mill and a significant portion of Silver Reef's Chinatown also burned. Arson was suspected in the latter blaze. Townspeople rallied, nonetheless, and appointed Captain Lubbock of Christy Mining to chair a cleanup and reconstruction committee. Both the town and mill were rebuilt and even improved in the process. Over the ensuing years, other fires plagued Silver Reef, but none to the extent of the 1879 blaze.⁶⁶

By 1880, when the census taker passed through town, 1,046 people listed Silver Reef as their home. The demographics of this group were typical of a mining town but stood in stark contrast to the family-dominated Mormon agricultural settlements that surrounded Silver Reef. Of the total population, 459 were single men, a full 45 percent. As historians Douglas Alder and Karl Brooks note, "There were more single men in Silver Reef than there were in the rest of the county combined."⁶⁷ In addition, only 28 percent of the population was female, a stark contrast to women at the nearby Mormon community of St. George, who comprised 52 percent of the population. Besides being overwhelmingly male, Silver Reef was an adult community. Almost 75 percent of its population was 20 or older, compared with 45 percent in St. George.⁶⁸

Of those who listed their occupation as miners, more than half were foreign born. Forty percent of those came from Ireland, while another 32 percent listed England as their place of birth. Germany, Scotland, Wales, Sweden, Peru, Poland, Italy, Mexico, Australia, Denmark, Canada, and Norway all had at least one native son searching for wealth at Silver Reef in 1880, as did a smattering of other countries. Of the native-born miners, the largest contingent—20 percent—hailed from New York, with Illinois, Kentucky, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Utah making strong showings. While miner was the single-most-prevalent occupation, a plethora of other professions were well represented. Fifteen saloon keepers, 27 merchants, 17 blacksmiths, three bakers, seven butchers, two brewers, and a charcoal burner are on the list of jobs people attributed to themselves at Silver Reef.⁶⁹

A large contingent of native-born Chinese endured racial prejudice to make the mining camp their home. The census record lists 50 foreign-born Chinese at Silver Reef in 1880, none of them working as miners. Rather, they owned laundries, grocery stores, and restaurants as well as operated slaughterhouses and meat markets. At various times the Chinese were derided for selling alcohol to the Indians, living in opium dens, and generating a stink with their pigpens. They were even accused of refusing to help fight the 1879 fire that destroyed the business district, a belief that suggests a possible motive for a blaze that later burned the Chinatown section of Silver Reef.

In addition, one Chinaman was targeted for his interracial relationship with a white woman. "China Joe," as the *Silver Reef Miner* called him, lost his home to fire and was forced into the street with his lover early one Sunday morning. "No one knows how the blaze originated," the newspaper reported, "but the Chinaman thinks somebody applied the torch to smoke out him and his girl. Anyhow, his loss is \$2,000 by the fire, and he is now sloshing around town the maddest Chinaman this side of Hong Kong." Other Chinese residents had their houses stoned while the town press openly rejoiced at the passage of the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1882, a law that banned Chinese immigration into the United States for 20 years.⁷⁰

Silver Reef's large Irish population, almost one-quarter of the town in 1880, fared much better. Because of this large contingent of Irish Catholics, the Catholic Church took an active role at Silver Reef. Father Lawrence Scanlan, an Irishman himself, had presided over many of the Catholic miners previously at Pioche. By the time of Silver Reef's boom, Scanlan had been appointed missionary rector over the Salt Lake diocese, a vast geographic area that included Silver Reef. Scanlan visited Silver Reef in 1877 and the following year sent Father Dennis Kiely there to preside. Scanlan later returned to Silver Reef and helped direct a fund-raising effort to build a church. He proved successful, and soon the new frame building was dedicated as St. John's Church. It housed its first services on Easter Sunday in 1879.

Scanlan also oversaw the establishment of a hospital at Silver Reef and secured five Holy Cross sisters to staff it. These sisters then expanded their outreach to include a day school, which they named St. Mary's. Besides the education that it offered, the school also put on programs and dramas which provided entertainment and uplifting social activities for youth and adults alike. By 1883, as Silver Reef started to decline, the hospital lacked enough miners to support it, and the sisters were recalled to Salt Lake City.⁷¹

Perhaps the most notable event to come from the Catholic Church's presence in southwestern Utah was an interdenominational mass held at the Mormon tabernacle at St. George. During his visits to Silver Reef, Father Scanlan struck up a friendship with John Macfarlane, a Mormon surveyor often employed there. In the course of this friendship, Macfarlane became aware of Scanlan's desire to hold a High Mass in southern Utah. Scanlan, however, lacked a choir and a large facility to accommodate the service. Macfarlane spoke with Erastus Snow about the matter. The LDS apostle offered the St. George Tabernacle, and Scanlan gladly accepted.⁷²

As for the music, Macfarlane solved that problem, too. Since moving to St. George in 1868, he had formed a choir from local talent which had quickly gained a reputation for its fine singing. Songs for the High Mass, however, would have to be sung in Latin. Undaunted, the choir set to work memorizing the text of the songs and learning the music. Its members practiced every night for six weeks until they could sing in the ancient language with confidence.⁷³

On the third Sunday in May 1879, the St. George Tabernacle filled to capacity with Catholic faithful and a throng of curious Mormon onlookers. Father Scanlan

conducted the service, centering his sermon around the topic, "True adorers of God adore Him in spirit and in truth." He reportedly began his homily, "I think you are wrong, and you think I am wrong, but this should not prevent us from treating each other with due consideration and respect." Macfarlane's choir performed with its usual precision, and following the service, Scanlan complimented the group for singing the Latin as beautifully as he had ever heard it. The occasion proved an uplifting one for all involved.⁷⁴ More recently, on 16 May 2004, in a tribute to Father Scanlan, the Southern Utah Heritage Choir relived the 1879 event when it performed, in Latin, Peters's celebrated Mass in D. Elder M. Russell Ballard of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and Monsignor J. Terrence Fitzgerald, vicar general of the Catholic Diocese of Salt Lake City, both spoke at the event and honored Scanlan for his efforts to establish positive relationships that stretched across religious boundaries.⁷⁵

The High Mass notwithstanding, Mormon/Gentile relations at Silver Reef were less than friendly. The *Silver Reef Miner* occasionally poked fun at Mormon leaders, calling them "revelations sharps," and spoke contemptuously of the Saints' aversion to mining. Barbee even predicted that with an influx of miners to southern Utah, Silver Reef could provide the means of outvoting the Mormons and taking control of Washington County politics. At the very least, it offered a shout of "hurrah for Leeds and her hardy miners who braved the Prophet's bowie-knife, and laid the foundations for a prosperous Gentile community in Southern Zion." "We hope they will use Brigham's new temple for a smelter," it prodded.⁷⁶ Silver Reef's voting population, nonetheless, never reached numbers high enough to challenge Mormon control of politics in the county.⁷⁷

Mormons did not view Silver Reef any more kindly. Brigham Young had long preached against Pioche and the evil he believed that it represented.⁷⁸ By 1877 he had expanded his definition of evil to include Silver Reef. That year, in his remarks at the dedication of the St. George Temple, he urged the saints to "go to work and let these holes in the ground alone, and let the Gentiles alone, who would destroy us if they had the power." "You will go to hell, lots of you, unless you repent," he announced.⁷⁹

Such warnings notwithstanding, southern Utah Saints were quick to recognize the abundant economic opportunity available at Silver Reef. Joseph E. Johnson opened a drugstore and enjoyed a successful business. Other Mormons took advantage of the ready cash market for agricultural goods that the mining camp offered. Saints from throughout southern Utah peddled their produce at the mines and earned higher profits than elsewhere in the region. Other Mormons supplied rock salt, coal, hay, meat, and wine to the miners. Supplying lumber for the mines and mills also proved lucrative, and for a time a Mormon wood-haulers' camp existed on the edge of town. Indeed, as Alder and Brooks contend, "the economic impact of Silver Reef and silver mining on the county was fortuitous."⁸⁰

The Mormons did not fare as well spiritually as economically at Silver Reef. They made an attempt at proselytizing, but the results were dismal, and the effort soon ended. Local church authorities sent missionaries from St. George, Leeds, and

Toquerville to Silver Reef on a weekly basis to preach. Occasionally small crowds turned out to hear the Mormon speeches. Eventually, however, Bishop George H. Crosby of Leeds asked permission of his superiors at St. George to discontinue the practice. At several meetings, “not one soul came,” and the missionaries who had been sent felt that it amounted to “labor thrown away.” St. George authorities concurred, and the Saints relegated themselves to interactions of an economic nature.⁸¹

Even those economic exchanges changed over time, and before the reef’s ultimate demise, Mormons entered the workforce as miners. That story is largely bound up in the bigger economic context within which Silver Reef mines operated. Miners at the reef enjoyed wages of four dollars per day, equal to those at the more lucrative Comstock mines in Nevada and above the wages offered elsewhere in Utah. By 1881 a showdown occurred between labor and management that ended in reduced wages at the reef and a significant loss of power for the town’s short-lived labor union.

UNION ORGANIZATION

It was February 1880 when miners at Silver Reef first organized themselves into a union. At the initial meeting, interested miners elected P. H. Shea temporary president and C. C. Reynolds secretary. The miners who wished to join the new organization signed their names, 110 in total, and agreed to adopt as applicable the constitution and bylaws of the Virginia Miner’s Union of Virginia City, Nevada. Later the same month, members elected Matthew O’Loughlin permanent president. Under his leadership, the union began regular meetings and held frequent socials. Just one year later, however, the nature of those meetings changed drastically in response to several companies’ attempts to slash wages.⁸²

This effort apparently originated with Colonel Allen, superintendent of Stormont Mining. He became convinced that, given the deteriorating quality of ore being extracted from the Stormont mines, his company could no longer afford to pay four dollars per day. He met with Richard Ogden, superintendent at Barbee and Walker, and Captain Lubbock at Christy Mining and suggested that the three Silver Reef powerhouses unanimously cut wages by 50 cents per day. Ogden agreed, but Lubbock refused.⁸³

According to plan, then, when the miners of the Stormont and Barbee and Walker companies showed up for work on 1 February 1881, they were given an ultimatum: either work for \$3.50 per day or do not work at all. The miners walked away. After a one o’clock meeting, union members took action. They marched on Stormont’s Buckeye Mine and took possession of it. Later that afternoon, faced with demands from Sheriff Hardy, the miners relinquished control of the mine. They did not, however, back down on the issue of wages. They began a strike that dragged on for three months and threatened the long-term viability of Silver Reef.⁸⁴

In an effort to solidify control of the reef’s labor, the union issued a circular requesting all miners to join before 15 February. As a result, union membership

swelled to around 300. Union leaders began a round of talks with management teams from both companies aimed at compromise. However, by the end of February, the newspaper reported that negotiations had “broken off” and the situation had deteriorated into “a freeze out game.”⁸⁵ The Miners’ Union drafted a letter to the *Salt Lake Tribune* explaining its perspective: “Miners’ trade takes longer to master than others. It takes more strength and endurance. He ends up broken when he should be in the flush of manhood. Danger is ever present,” the union argued. Under such conditions the “miners feel about the same way to the superintendents as a mule to his driver.”

The union went on to question management’s handling of the wage issue. It wondered why the companies did not approach the union with the matter, rather than waiting for the men to show up at work “and say you can’t go down unless you will go for \$3.50 a day.” The companies “could have at least told us the night before,” the union complained; they “treat us like mules, this is the way they have ever dealt with us.”⁸⁶ The union, however, found little sympathy, at least at the *Tribune*. It reminded the miners that while Comstock workers earned \$4.00 per day, conditions at the Nevada camp were a “little hell” in comparison to the favorable atmosphere at Silver Reef.⁸⁷

For the miners, the success of their strike largely depended upon Christy Mining as a holdout in refusing to drop wages. When rumors circulated in late February that Christy also planned to cut its daily rate, the union panicked. Allen, Stormont’s superintendent and instigator of the whole affair, became its target. A committee of 12 men from the union paid Allen a hostile and unexpected visit. They ordered him at gunpoint to leave town. When Allen requested three hours to gather his things, they allowed him three minutes and then escorted him out of Silver Reef.⁸⁸ It was an act of desperation on the part of the union which eventually led to its own loss of power.

The strike was proving difficult for the miners and the companies. The Stormont closed completely while Barbee and Walker remained open, along with the other companies not involved in the dispute. Still, the strike affected the mood at Silver Reef and drastically slowed economic activity. One report put it this way: “A great many men are leaving town, the aspect of which is rather blue just at present.”⁸⁹ Another predicted that “unless something unexpected should ‘turn up,’” it would be “the dullest Summer ever experienced here since Silver Reef first flung its banner to the breeze as a bullion producing camp.”⁹⁰

Things only got worse before they got better. Allen did not take his dismissal from town lightly. He traveled directly to Beaver, Utah, and filed a complaint with the federal district court. Before long, a grand jury had handed down indictments against the miners who had forced Allen from town. On 16 March a posse, largely comprised of Mormons from St. George, headed by U.S. Deputy Marshal Arthur Pratt, invaded Silver Reef and rounded up 36 men, including many of the leaders of the Miner’s Union. Pratt charged the arrested men with riot, conspiracy, and false imprisonment and placed them under guard at the town jail. The jail, however, proved too small, which forced law officials to house overflow prisoners at another building, where, according to one account, a line was drawn around it and “those

under arrest were told that they would be shot if they crossed the line." The following day the suspects were taken to Beaver, where they eventually stood trial. The court convicted a total of 13 men, three of whom paid fines and were released; the remaining 10 served time in the penitentiary. O'Loughlin, union president, received a \$75 fine and 20 days in jail; the court fined another union member, Joe Carr, \$50; and the remaining 11 were fined \$100 each.⁹¹

In the wake of these activities, the Miners' Union, its power already drastically diminished, met in early April to decide upon a course of action. After considerable deliberation, members voted to accept the \$3.50 wage. Management had won. Hot on the heels of this decision, Christy Mining reduced its hourly rate to match the other companies. Rehiring at the mines also curtailed the union's strength because some companies replaced striking Irish workers with Cornish ones. Mormons from surrounding towns also took advantage of the turnover in the workforce to begin jobs at the mines.⁹²

While some local historians have suggested that the strike represented the beginning of the end for Silver Reef, silver extraction continued for more than 20 years. More than the strike, it was the simple bust of the mining cycle that brought an end to the reef. Ore quality continued to deteriorate over the course of the 1880s, and no new discoveries replaced the veins that were playing out. Each of Silver Reef's major companies had closed by 1890, but a local company, Wooley, Lund, and Judd, continued operations until 1898. The St. George businessmen for whom the company was named leased and operated the Stormont and Christy mill and mines, although at a significantly reduced pace. In 1898 the Brundage Company of Cleveland, Ohio, purchased Wooley, Lund, and Judd's interest at Silver Reef and made plans to revive the camp. It did conduct business there past the turn of the century; however, declining silver prices forced it to reconsider further investment. Independent miners and leasers continued to work sporadically at Silver Reef, refining tailings and looking for new strikes. The last recorded mill run took place in 1908.⁹³

MINING'S IMPACT ON SOUTHERN UTAH

It is difficult to estimate Silver Reef's impact upon southern Utah. Between 1875 and 1908, miners extracted an estimated \$7.9 million worth of silver from the district. However, the camp's influence reaches well beyond that. The influx of hard cash into a cash-poor economy was vital to the stability of the surrounding agricultural settlements. Silver Reef provided a ready market for Mormon wine, fruit, beef, and grain and offered labor opportunities otherwise not available for teamsters, sawmill operators, carpenters, lumbermen, merchants, and miners alike.⁹⁴

Silver Reef was by far the most successful extractive enterprise in Washington County. Prospectors scoured the countryside looking for similar riches but largely left disappointed. The Apex Mine west of St. George employed southern Utah men starting in 1890. Wooley, Lund, and Judd eventually controlled the mine and even built a smelter at St. George, but its output was minimal in comparison to the reef.⁹⁵

Oil was the only other extractive industry to impact the region significantly. It did so for a short time, just after the turn of the twentieth century.

In 1907 Walter Spencer was working as foreman of the Rescue Consolidated Mine in Tonopah, Nevada, when he learned of peculiar burning rocks from a southern Utah farmer. After considerable questioning, Spencer ascertained the rocks' location, near the small town of Virgin City in southwest Utah. Soon oil men and drilling equipment invaded the sleepy little Mormon village and for a time startled it awake.⁹⁶

After ordering geological research in the area, Spencer and other interested parties sent Elwood I. Hastings, an experienced eastern driller, to Virgin. Hastings recommended drilling, and soon Tonopah businessmen joined other investors to organize an oil company. They chose a spot almost two miles northeast of Virgin City to sink their first well. They struck oil at 480 feet and installed a pump, and the well began producing about 15 barrels a day.

Oil men continued to drill wells in the area, eventually sinking nearly 15 different holes, most of which were failures, producing little or no oil or gas. Three wells did produce—by some estimates as high as 36 barrels a day—but the financial panic of 1907 limited capital for further exploration, and the boom proved ephemeral.

In 1918 investors started pumping the three productive wells again and even built a small local refinery. A fourth well was soon added, and in September 1920 production from the Virgin dome totaled 20 barrels a day. The refinery handled about 800 gallons of dark brown crude per eight-hour shift, and the gasoline and kerosene it produced found a ready local market.

From 1920 to 1932, various companies dreamed of striking it rich in the area and continued drilling in Washington County. In 1924 the Gustaveson Oil Company erected a large refinery to handle the crude oil from the six wells it had in operation near Virgin that were producing nearly 300 barrels per day. Even as late as 1929, a variety of investors held high hopes for oil production in Washington County, but output never quite met expectations, and with the onset of the Great Depression, drilling slowed dramatically. Following World War II, investors revived interest in Utah's oil and gas possibilities, but yield at the Virgin field remained limited.

In the end southwestern Utah's extractive industry proved a powerful—albeit fleeting—force in the development of the region. The Pioche and Pahrangat strikes, for example, mustered enough power to move the Utah/Nevada border. Pioche went on to become an important regional economic center that attracted peddlers, freighters, and laborers from throughout southern Utah. As Pioche started declining, Silver Reef sprang to life and filled a similar role.

Mormons were heavily involved in early discovery of both Pioche and Silver Reef silver. In both cases, however, it took outsiders to actually work the claims and absentee owners to develop them. The Mormons still benefited, especially from the overflow of work and cash that mining brought into their midst. As a result, southwestern Utah's extractive industries were a boon not only to Utah's mining economy, but to its agricultural one as well.