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2. Westwater Town: A Trip in Time

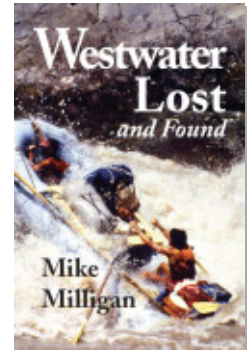
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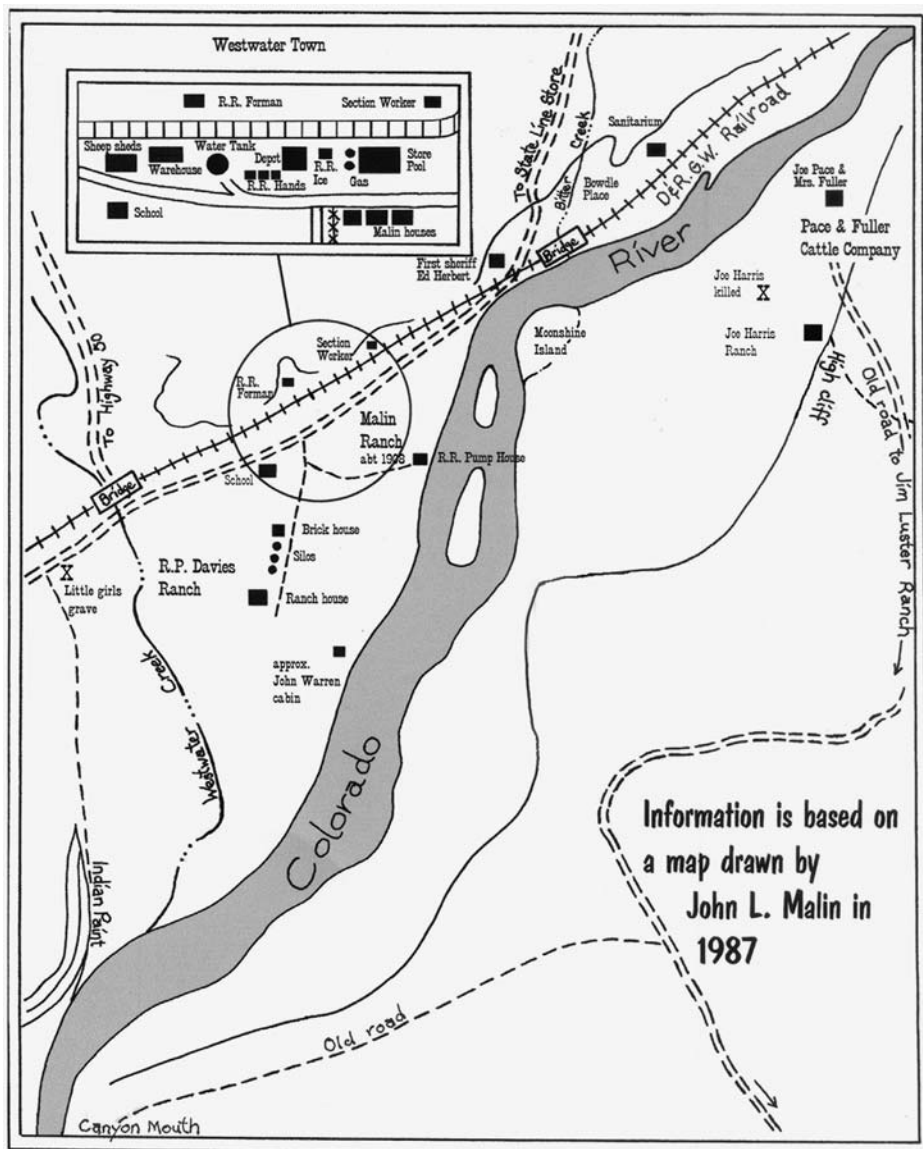
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Westwater Town

A Trip in Time

For three miles the Colorado River runs flat but steady, curving a bit around Westwater Ranch, a private property that runs south from the Westwater launch along the western bank and ends where the river narrows at the granite outcrops. The ranch itself isn't visible from the river, but along the banks old ranch equipment and an irrigation pump can be seen. The river flows lazily past the ranch and then briefly widens as it prepares for an abrupt southerly turn. Ahead, outcrops of granite jut out of the water like gates into another world. This is where the river journey begins. One begins to feel imprisoned by the Wingate sandstone cliffs standing five hundred feet high to the northwest, but on the southeast side there is more open country. Downstream, more clumps of granite are scattered throughout the river and begin to form small walls along the shore. Shortly after entering Westwater Canyon and immediately past the first granite outcrop, to the southeast a small dugout cabin comes into view high enough above the bank not to be affected by high water. The dugout is today the first noticeable sign of early human settlement at Westwater. Wild Horse, or Miner's, Cabin measures fifteen by eighteen feet and is built of rocks and timber against a soil bank, hiding it from any view except that from the river. Archeologist Richard Fike of the BLM, who traveled the





Wild Horse (Miner's) Cabin may have been built by Owen M. Malin shortly after he returned to Westwater in 1918.

canyon in 1973 with veteran river guide Dee Holladay, dated the cabin between the 1890s and late 1920s or early 1930s.¹ During the 1970s many boaters referred to the dugout as “Outlaw Cabin” (not to be confused with Outlaw Cave farther downstream), but no evidence existed that outlaws had used it. Then on April 23, 1978, a BLM ranger interviewed an old-timer from the Westwater area named Owen Malin who claimed that he built the Wild Horse Cabin himself to placer mine.²

In the interview Malin gave details of his experiences with placer mining for gold. Owen built a pipe out of roped-together tin



Owen Madox Malin in Moab. Photo courtesy of Ila B. (Malin) Reay.

cans to bring water out of the river and wash river sand and gravel to extract gold.³ At one time he said the river just below the cabin was dammed up, raising it about four feet higher than it is now. This might be supported by a *Times-Independent* article from July 27, 1922, reporting the Colorado River at the mouth of the canyon had developed a small waterfall over two feet high that affected cattle getting to the river to drink. Ed Herbert and the Malin family reportedly spent one day “blasting out a place in the side of the canyon so that their stock might have access to the water.”⁴

Malin claimed to have built the cabin when he was a boy, shortly after arriving at Westwater. His parents, Elwood Clark and Maggie Bryson Malin, had lived at Westwater when Owen was born on November 22, 1908. Their marriage did not last long, and for the first ten years of Owen’s life he was raised by his grandparents, Commadore Perry and Annie Bryson, in Minidoka, Idaho. It was not until 1918 that Owen came back to Westwater



E. C. and Lula Malin at their Westwater Ranch. The dog's name is Fritz. Photo courtesy of Ila B. (Malin) Reay.

to live with his father and stepmother, Lula Lawrence Malin. Maintenance has been done to preserve the cabin as a historical monument that can be respected by all passing parties. There is no known evidence of the cabin existing before Owen arrived that would dispute his claim, although there was other mining activity along the gravel bars in the upper Westwater region as early as 1884.⁵



The Bryson family lived near Westwater Creek at the turn of the twentieth century. The Brysons ran cattle and broke wild mustangs. Left to right, Les Vanderberg, Pearl Eandy Bryson Vanderberg, Annie Mary Lucas Bryson, Commadore Perry Bryson, Maggie Salome Bryson, Christie Etta Bryson, and George Walter Bryson. A 1900 census lists Maggie as eight years old. Hence, this photograph was probably taken between 1900 and 1902. Maggie was Owen Malin's mother. Photo courtesy of Connie Badayos.

Most of the earliest news regarding the Westwater region involved gold. A potential gold stir was reported in the *Grand Junction News* on January 21, 1893; a Salt Lake City party had staked the entire region around Westwater on the Colorado River near the state line. Some skepticism about the strike existed, and a newspaper reporter admonished his readers to “keep cool” and not to “perpetuate another San Juan fake.”⁶ A few weeks later the reporter followed up by investigating the excitement and wrote that his inquiries

lead up to the discovery that the aforesaid prospectors were working on some gold placer claims on the Grand River near Westwater, Utah, just beyond the Mesa County line. It is reported that some very rich



Dee Holladay named these unidentified dugouts above Wild Horse Rapid, Duplex Miners' Cabins. There may have been numerous dugouts and tents in this region in the early 1900s.

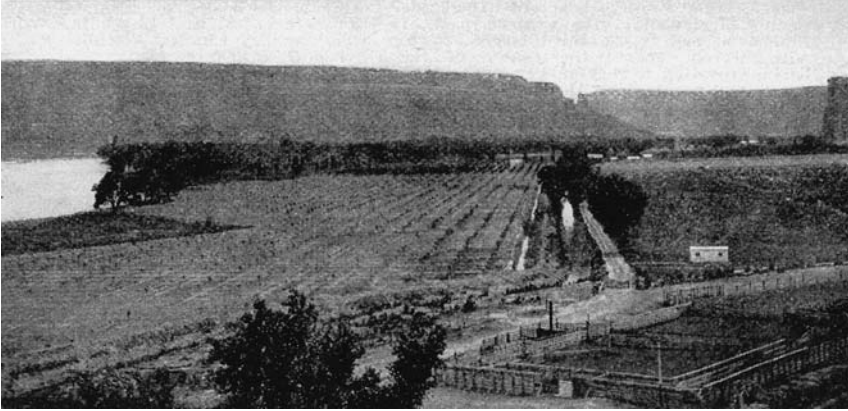




The foundation of the former Westwater school still exists on Westwater Ranch and can be seen on the private property from the road. Photo from the Wilford Hill files courtesy of Elsa Spaulding Hill.



Westwater's economy strongly hinged on the D&RGW Railroad and Westwater Ranch. This view would have included the former railroad town had it survived.



Westwater town site photographed from the railroad tracks by former resident Beatrix Simpson. Photo from *The Railroad Red Book* (1916 and 1917).

dirt has been panned out there lately and hence these mysterious movements. This is not the first time these claims have been prospected, however. Ten years ago they were located by a party of Grand Junctionites, who abandoned them, and only a year ago a party of prospectors from Fruita also gave them some attention. J. Clayton Nichols of this city has also examined them, but does not give a very favorable report of his observations. He says the gold is there but hardly in paying quantities.⁷

There is plenty of evidence at the head of Westwater Canyon of possible mining activity, including the remains of a fireplace at a camp along the sandy beach near Wild Horse Cabin. Further south on the same, eastern side of the river, on the slope parallel to Wild Horse Rapid, are two other dugout cabins that Dee Holladay refers to as the Duplex Miners' Cabins. The dugouts can be seen briefly while running Wild Horse Rapid or can be observed more leisurely during high water. One of the cabins has an unusual-looking, large, spring-type contraption in front of it that is called a rocker and is used to break apart rocks to search for gold or other minerals. I am not aware of any dating of this site, but the rocker does not look very old in comparison to the dugouts.⁸ There are several mounds in the vicinity of the Duplex Miners' Cabins, suggesting other buildings or even an entire camp of miners who remained there for some time. Dee Holladay recalls a Model T Ford engine by the riverbank in this area, which may have been used by later miners to pump water to their sluice boxes.⁹



This engine (possibly a special Model A designed for pumping water) was pulled out of the Colorado River near Wild Horse Rapid. Dee Holladay of Holiday River Expeditions reports seeing the old engine for a number of years when there was low water. It was probably used by placer miners who worked the area extensively from the late 1800s through the early 1900s.

Reports of gold in the gravel around Westwater did not cease in 1893. On through the early 1900s, mining outfits came to Westwater searching for gold and established camps along the banks of the Colorado River. Placer mining involves on-site separating of gold flakes from sand or gravel. Presumably, much of this “flower” gold was in the more extensive sand and gravel banks and river bottom above the entrance to Westwater Canyon. The section immediately inside the canyon as far down as Wild Horse, where the water is still placid, clearly was also mined.

From the initial report in 1894 through 1920, when the mining started to diminish, prospectors reiterated the theme that the placer gold in the vicinity of Westwater existed in unusual abundance but that its fineness made it difficult to obtain.¹⁰ They brought many new inventions and technologies into the area between State Line and Cisco in an attempt to procure the precious metal. The gravel and sandbars were worked, reworked, promoted, and regularly sold until approximately 1920. In 1896 the Winn brothers used a primitive rocking operation to claim \$700 worth in gold from a bar over a seven-week period.¹¹ They worked the Westwater area for a couple of years but by the end of 1898 were reported working claims on the Little Dolores River.

While the Winn brothers were rocking out their living, nearby was the Hattie E. Gold Mining Company, which was formed by J. W. Coustan and O.G. Elkins and controlled 250 acres of land for mining. Prior to establishing a “splendid machinery plant,” they also saw success with rockers, earning \$2,000 within a 150 foot square.¹² In 1897 the company brought in machinery to build the plant, which washed the bars for gold. The following year they employed eight men and ran their plant at full capacity, ordering another pump to assist with washing out the bars. In February 1898 the Hattie E. Gold Mining Company reportedly was entertaining the idea of selling its placer to a Chicago group for \$20,000. Perhaps promoting the sale, Elkins claimed that he “never saw anything in fine gold to equal the Westwater bar.”¹³

In 1898, newspapers predicted a placer mining boom from Westwater down to Moab, with claims being sought all along the Colorado River. In the spring of 1899 a placer dredge that had operated successfully on other rivers was reconstructed at Cisco and “[assured] its success on the Grand River where the bars are



Mickey Thompson, age two, playing in front of the Westwater water tank and the brick treatment plant in 1931. Her father built the merry-go-round/teeter-toter Mickey is playing on. Photo from the Wilford Hill files courtesy of Beryle Marah.

much richer. The demonstration of what the machine will do is most sure to attract capital to put in many other machines.”¹⁴ In the mining news section of the *Grand Valley Times* dated September 7, 1900, the La Sal Mountain Mining District claimed to embrace a strip of land “along the Colorado State line about 20 miles in width and from where the Grand River enters Utah for a distance of more than 100 miles south. The greater part of all this land area is mineral land and is now being prospected and mined by numerous persons who have made substantial and valuable improvements.”

Mining and livestock brought conflict over the legal jurisdiction of land adjacent to the Colorado River when stockmen sought an increase in the grazing land available for leases. This pitted the United States government against the state of Utah.¹⁵ The men running livestock argued that land within the La Sal Mountain Mining District was nonmineral even though it was being mined extensively.

Understandably, residents of the small town developing at Westwater were anxious to get in the mining. Perhaps too late, George H. Darrow in the fall of 1901 expanded his land developing and established the Westwater Land and Mining Company with capital given to him by a party from Lansing, Michigan.¹⁶ Some of the prospectors grew frustrated and moved their machinery to the Little Dolores River, where copper as well as gold was mined.¹⁷ (A copper prospect existed at Little Hole as well.)¹⁸ Still, as late as 1916, Westwater resident Beatrix Simpson wrote enthusiastically: “There is much placer gravel at the mouth of Granite (Westwater) Canyon and its assays have yielded rich returns. Solitary prospectors have realized a generous daily wage by simply panning this gravel, while at present elaborate placer mining machinery is being installed in an endeavor to save the precious metal more rapidly and in greater quantity.”¹⁹ The Westwater gravel bars continually stirred interest until the early 1920s when the miners apparently concluded the gold was too fine and no longer cost-effective to mine.

Jesse Gruver tells a story of a carload of big timbers that tipped over into the Colorado River as the Denver and Rio Grande Western Railroad traveled through Ruby Canyon: “At a point where there is a big whirlpool in the canyon the poles started

to jam and dig up gravel at that point and it was said to have a lot of gold in the gravel.”²⁰ No direct evidence supports the story, but there is plenty of evidence that the railroad had difficulties in Ruby Canyon from landslides. They prompted the Denver and Rio Grande in 1927 to move eleven miles of track away from the bluffs and dangerous rolling boulders. Sometime during the early 1920s, deputy sheriff Ed Herbert; his stepson, Elwood C. Malin; and a friend used dynamite to blast an ice jam at the head of Westwater Canyon that was flooding the town of Westwater. As the broken ice gouged the river bottom, it stirred up gravel and, again, some gold was found in it.²¹ It did not make them rich, however.

The Westwater gold rush was short lived, and prospectors gradually stopped coming to the area. During the great uranium boom that gripped the Colorado River region in the 1950s, very little was found near Westwater, and the area once again disappointed prospectors.

Cattlemen arrived at Westwater about the same time or not long after the prospectors. The Bar X Cattle Company had a ranch at Westwater as early as April 10, 1889, when Frank Clarence Kendrick and his party of surveyors for the Denver, Colorado Canyon and Pacific Railroad passed through the region on their way from Grand Junction to Green River Crossing.²² At Green River, Kendrick’s party turned over the survey and their boat, the *Brown Betty*, to railroad president Frank M. Brown and his chief engineer, Robert Brewster Stanton, who intended to complete the survey through the Grand Canyon. The Kendrick party had surveyed all of the Colorado and Green Rivers between Grand Junction and Green River Crossing except for a twelve-mile stretch they portaged around at Westwater Canyon.

The Bar X Cattle Company²³ was spread throughout the valley, using small cabins as shelter for their herders. Homesteaders later inherited the cabins. Upstream from Westwater, near the state line, the surveying party met the first man they had seen in a week at the Murphy Ranch across the Colorado River. So, at least two ranches existed near Westwater in 1889 when Kendrick’s survey crew entered the region. How long the ranches had been there has not been determined. They may have arrived shortly after 1883, when the Denver and Rio Grande Western Railroad

laid tracks through the region, or closer to 1889, when they could have known the railroad had surveyed the area and would shortly be moving their tracks through the valley, closer to the river, and that a railroad station would be built at Westwater.

If you walk along the dirt road from Westwater Creek to the BLM ranger station today, it may be difficult to imagine that a small town once existed there. Owen Malin's family had a pasture at Westwater where the ranger station is, and their home was about a mile away, next to the dirt road leading to the boat launch. Along the railroad tracks near the bluffs, the foundations of several homes existed until just recently. The foundation of a school still can be seen just over the Westwater Ranch property fence. Names painted on the rocks overlooking the site date back to the early 1900s. Perhaps these are the names of railroad workers. One large rock, which is nearly faded, has the name of Joe Rush in large, well-executed block letters. John Malin said that Joe Rush was a transient artist who painted his name on the rock during a short stay at Westwater. These are the few remnants of the town at Westwater.

The town existed because of the Denver and Rio Grande Western Railroad's need to stop for water and coal to run the trains. A number of small towns popped up during the early railroad years for this purpose. In 1883, when the Denver and Rio Grande was using narrow-gauge tracks and steam-driven engines, there were more than twenty railroad stops between Grand Junction and Salt Lake City. The original "West Water" narrow-gauge line was spiked down from January through March 1883. The line was located farther from the river, near a useless alkali water source on Westwater Creek, until 1890, when the railroad changed to standard-gauge track and relocated it.²⁴ The narrow-gauge track had followed a path of least resistance that led to numerous curves and slowed the trains down. The standard-gauge track was faster and allowed heavier tonnage than the narrow gauge. Increasing competition and the fact that a standard-gauge track had already been laid from Denver to Grand Junction prompted the decision to complete the line to Salt Lake City.²⁵

The decision to replace the narrow-gauge track created an opportunity to relocate the Westwater station nearer to the Colorado River and straighten the line, further improving the

speed of the trains. Other stops in the region included Utaline (State Line), Cottonwood, Agate, and Cisco. Of these, only Cisco is recognized today as once being inhabited. One source claims that during the building of the railroad there were a thousand people, including Asians, and Mexicans, living in the valley and that Westwater was once considered for the county seat.²⁶ If true, Westwater's large population was short-lived, and Moab instead became the county seat when Grand County was created on March 13, 1890. The 1890 census recorded only 541 occupants in all of Grand County and did not indicate the population of individual town sites.²⁷

While the Bar X Cattle Company spread throughout the valley and into part of Ruby Canyon, other small ranchers began settling the area once the Denver and Rio Grande Western Railroad had laid its standard-gauge tracks nearer to the river. Many of the original Westwater place names came from these early ranchers: Snyder Mesa (southeast of Westwater, across the Colorado River), Grant's Slough (above Bitter Creek along the Colorado River), Bowdle Pasture (also above Bitter Creek but slightly further from the river), the Hallett Pasture (south of Westwater Ranch near Westwater Creek), and May Flat (near the Utah border).²⁸ Most of the town's original settlers were ranchers and cattlemen who claimed the grass and other vegetation were excellent for winter grazing.

The most stable ranch in the Westwater region was the Pace-Fuller Cattle Company, which was northeast of the current ranger station and across the river. Robert L. and Florence Lorene Harris Fuller arrived at Westwater prior to the turn of the century. Florence probably came into the area about 1895 with her parents, Leroy T. and Nancy V. Harris, who also resided at Westwater for awhile. L. T. Harris died at his home there in the summer of 1915. Nancy was living at Green River, Utah, at the time, so his body was not discovered for a couple of weeks. The Harris and Fuller families were prominent in Grand County and western Colorado. Robert Fuller and his brother-in-law Gilbert A. Harris each served for a time as commissioners of Grand County. In May 1902, Robert died of "inflammation of the bowels," leaving Florence the cattle company. Shortly afterwards she partnered with Joe Pace, a cowboy originally from Texas, to form the Pace-Fuller Cattle Company, which ranged at Westwater during



The Joe Rush inscription overlooks the former Westwater townsite. John L. Malin claims the transient artist stayed for a short time at Westwater. The painting he left then is becoming increasingly indiscernible. Photo from Wilford Hill files courtesy of Elsa Spaulding Hill.



Lorraine Thompson in front of the railroad signal tower and section house at Westwater. Photo courtesy of Beryle Marah.



Westwater water tanks. The railroad tank on the left was replaced in 1928. Photo courtesy of Roberta Knutson.

the winter and at Pinon Mesa in the summer. The company owned more than five thousand acres of land and ran several thousand head of cattle, making it one of the largest outfits in Grand County.

Many of the news items from Westwater mentioned activities of Florence's family or her cattle business. Her daughter, Leola Fuller, was successful in horseback-riding competition each year at the Grand Junction Fair. Leola later married Ross Scarlett, of Grand Junction, and resided near Westwater for a short time. Then on January 30, 1930, the news was of Florence's death from pneumonia. The obituary could not say enough about her accomplishments as a woman of the range. It read in part: "Mrs. Fuller had many friends over both Colorado and Utah who came within the scope of her acquaintance and all knew of her exceptional kindness, her hospitality and her charitability. She was willing to help anyone in trouble at all times as far as her ability would permit. She has been one of the most important figures in the cattle industry for many years, handling her business exactly as a man and working on the range as a man until she had built her business to the point where she no longer had to labor each day."²⁹ The Pace-Fuller Cattle Company continued to operate, but like the dying town, it no longer provided much news to write about.

Adding to the influx of new ranchers, by the end of June 1891 the railroad had built a section house, bunk house, and

water tank.³⁰ Westwater received a post office by March 10, 1887, which continued to operate until February 15, 1954.

Westwater Ranch was nearly as central to the success of the town as the railroad was. The ranch has always been one of the largest and most expensive pieces of real estate in Grand County. Smaller ranches originally surrounded the central ranch and were later absorbed into its current acreage. Whatever industry the ranch owners pursued was generally mirrored by the other ranchers. The original industry was cattle, run by the Bar X Cattle Company, but land development, placer mining, fruit trees, sheep, and sugar beets followed. By February 1891 Captain Wilson Ellis Davis had bought the main ranch. He was described as a successful cattleman, but he had lived at Westwater just over a year when he was incarcerated for the shooting of three other Westwater residents near the state border.

In 1893 the Darrow brothers entered the valley and purchased Westwater Ranch. Prior to their arrival there was not much promotion of the land or development of farm sites. The brothers started buying up the land and created a small boom that stirred up friction between some of the older residents and recent homesteaders. Disputing the homesteaders' claims, the ranchers tried to muscle them out. Regardless that they had no prior legal interest in the homesteaders' property, the senior ranchers were now motivated by greed that was stimulated by the land boom.³¹

Originally from New York, George H. and Frank D. Darrow were land speculators who had more recently resided in Colorado. They immediately made an impact on Westwater's economy that lasted for many years. The soil at Westwater was considered excellent for agriculture so their priority was putting it under irrigation. In 1897 the brothers proposed a ditch that would capture water from the Colorado River at State Line and irrigate all of the property along the railroad tracks as far as Westwater Valley.³² By November 1897 seven miles of the ditch were completed. The following spring they hired twelve men and eight teams to finish it in time for crops. Of the brothers, the *Grand Valley Times* wrote: "These gentlemen have practically built up Westwater and in building this nine miles of ditch credit must be given to Mr. George Darrow for the energetic and determined way he has pushed the work, it would be well for this section



Beryle (age five) and Gerry Thompson (three or four) in front of D&RGW section house in 1933. Photo from Wilford Hill files courtesy of Beryle (Thompson) Marah.

of the country if we had a few more like him.”³³ Shortly after the ditch was completed advertisements promoting the purchase of property followed:

Are You Looking For A Home

If so do not fail to investigate Westwater Valley lands. The soil is a fine sandy loam, free from alkali, and has the fertility of river bottom land. A new gravity canal just completed furnishes abundance of water. The finest fruit in the world is grown in the valley along the Grand River. Westwater is on the main line of the Rio Grande Western Railway. Tract adjoining the depot and Grand River can be

had at reasonable prices and convenient terms. Address Darrow Brothers, Westwater, Utah.³⁴

The Darrows were also heavily involved with community and county responsibilities, which included each taking a turn as Westwater's postmaster between 1894 and 1900. In 1901 George H. Darrow filed papers to incorporate their business to include mining speculation, establishing the Westwater Land and Mining Company. There are indications the brothers had been struggling for some time to promote and develop the resources at Westwater, and they secured financing from Michigan investors for the new enterprise. Westwater Land and Mining Company maintained title to the ranch property. However, it is unclear whether the Darrows sold their business or whether it was taken over by investors after the brothers moved to Idaho in 1904.

The *Grand Valley Times* of Moab continued to regularly report expectations of great populations at Westwater because of the soil, proximity to the railroad, and the climate. A little more than ten years after the Darrow brothers had purchased Westwater Ranch, it became the property of the Westwater Land and Mining Company. Westwater Land and Mining Company's headquarters was in Lansing, Michigan, and it hired F. S. Johnson as manager over the ranch. Johnson had strong credentials, having served a term as mayor of Lansing and having recently resigned as a member of the Lansing Board of Works to come to Westwater. In the spring of 1905 Johnson planted 4,500 apple trees and eight hundred cherry trees. The company sold five-, ten-, and twenty-acre blocks of land with water rights for \$200 per acre, mostly to people from Michigan.³⁵

Westwater soil was extremely conducive for growing fruit, so on November 17, 1906, Alamanzo A. Piatt, the president of the Westwater Land and Mining Company, called a special meeting where the stock holders amended the articles of incorporation to change the company name to Grand Valley Fruit Company. The name would later change again to the Westwater Land and Fruit Company. Although Westwater's agricultural potential was widely recognized, eventually the problem of irrigation caught up with many of the ranch owners. Getting water from the Colorado River presented a problem from the onset, and many attempts to capture the water failed over the long term. From a nine-mile

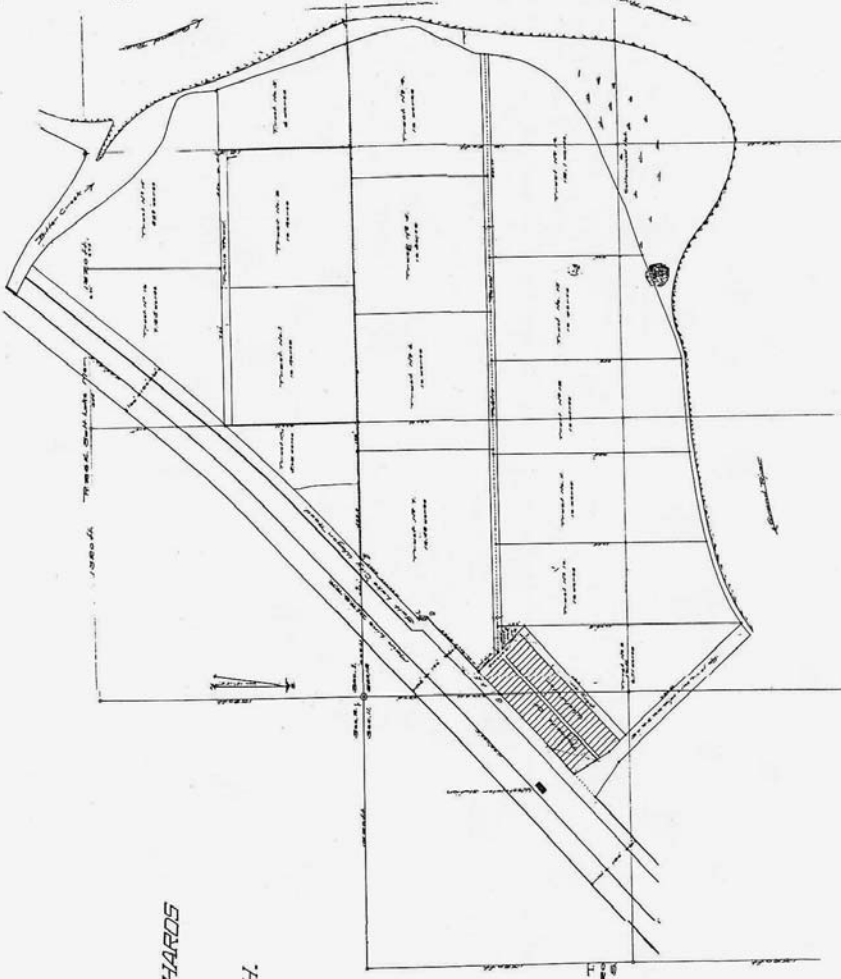
ditch to water wheels and various pumps, the irrigation of the land proved costly.

In 1909 Theodore C. Henry took his turn and purchased the Westwater Ranch for \$70,000, a considerable amount at the time. He came to the valley with good credentials, having been formerly known in Nebraska as the "Wheat King." His ambition at Westwater was to become the "Alfalfa King."³⁶ He promoted the site, as others had done, and drew up plans to sell plots of five and ten acres of land in what he called the Henrylyn Orchards Colony. Had it materialized, a road he planned for the Westwater town site was to be named after him. Henry was a good promoter, perhaps too good. Needing irrigation, he talked the residents into voting for \$100,000 worth of bonds by the Grand Valley Irrigation District to erect a gravity ditch that would irrigate 4,000 acres of Westwater land, half of which was his. Instead of enhancing it, the costly bonds hindered Westwater's development.³⁷ T.C. Henry owned the ranch for a short time. It is unclear if he defaulted, but eight hundred and forty-three acres were sold in 1911 to satisfy a legal settlement.³⁸

In the spring of 1916, wealthy businessman William P. Martin Sr. of Realto, California, purchased the Westwater Ranch. In September 1917 he also generously purchased the outstanding Grand Valley Irrigation District bonds and surrendered them back to the district to be cancelled. Unlike Henry, Martin had an interest in the entire town's well being.³⁹ He probably did more for the economy of Westwater than any ranch owner since the Darrow brothers. Martin intended to use part of the one thousand acres he bought as a "model stock farm," raising registered horses. Unfortunately, not long after the horses arrived at Westwater, two died from pneumonia because of the change in climate. However, Martin remained motivated and had other investments elsewhere, including a producing copper mine in Swansea, Arizona.⁴⁰ His enthusiasm and insight seemed to be contagious; when he decided to devote his property to sugar beets, many of the other landowners in the area followed suit.

The Westwater farmers aggressively cultivated their smaller farms for the production of the beets. Throughout the valley news spread of ranchers installing pumps to irrigate their property and prepare it for sugar beets. Owen Malin said that one beet reportedly

FLAT A.
of
THE HENRYLYN ORCHARDS
of
COLONY
of
WESTWATER, UTAH.
SCALE: 1 INCH=300 FT.
Grand County



State of Colorado
County of Grand
I, the undersigned, being the duly qualified and authorized Surveyor of the County of Grand, State of Colorado, do hereby certify that the above and foregoing is a true and correct copy of the original record of the plat of Flat A of the Henrylyn Orchards of the Colony of Westwater, Utah, as the same is recorded in my office, and that the same is a true and correct copy of the original record of the plat of Flat A of the Henrylyn Orchards of the Colony of Westwater, Utah, as the same is recorded in my office, and that the same is a true and correct copy of the original record of the plat of Flat A of the Henrylyn Orchards of the Colony of Westwater, Utah, as the same is recorded in my office.

James H. Williams
Surveyor of Grand County



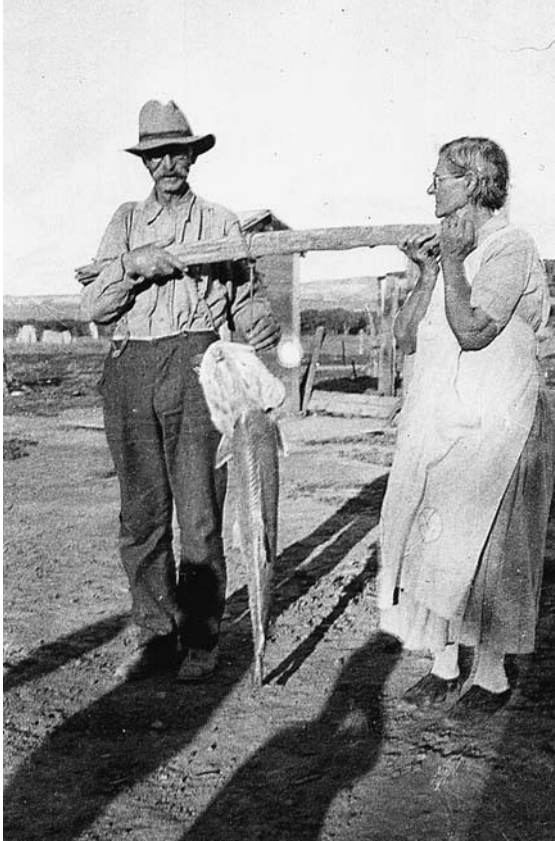
A Westwater building, ca. 1926–1928. Sign on building reads American Railway Exp. Photo courtesy of Roberta Knutson.

weighed thirty-six pounds. Of Martin's decision, Beatrix Simpson of Westwater wrote:

For thirty years, and more, Westwater's fertile acres have lain practically idle and profitless, except for spasmodic attempts at reclamation by speculative irrigation promoters. All the while thousands of acre-feet of water wasted daily passed it's [sic] thirsty soil through the ever abundantly supplied Grand River. Now, however, the valley seems about to come into its own, and years of fullness are predicted in lieu of those so barren in the past.

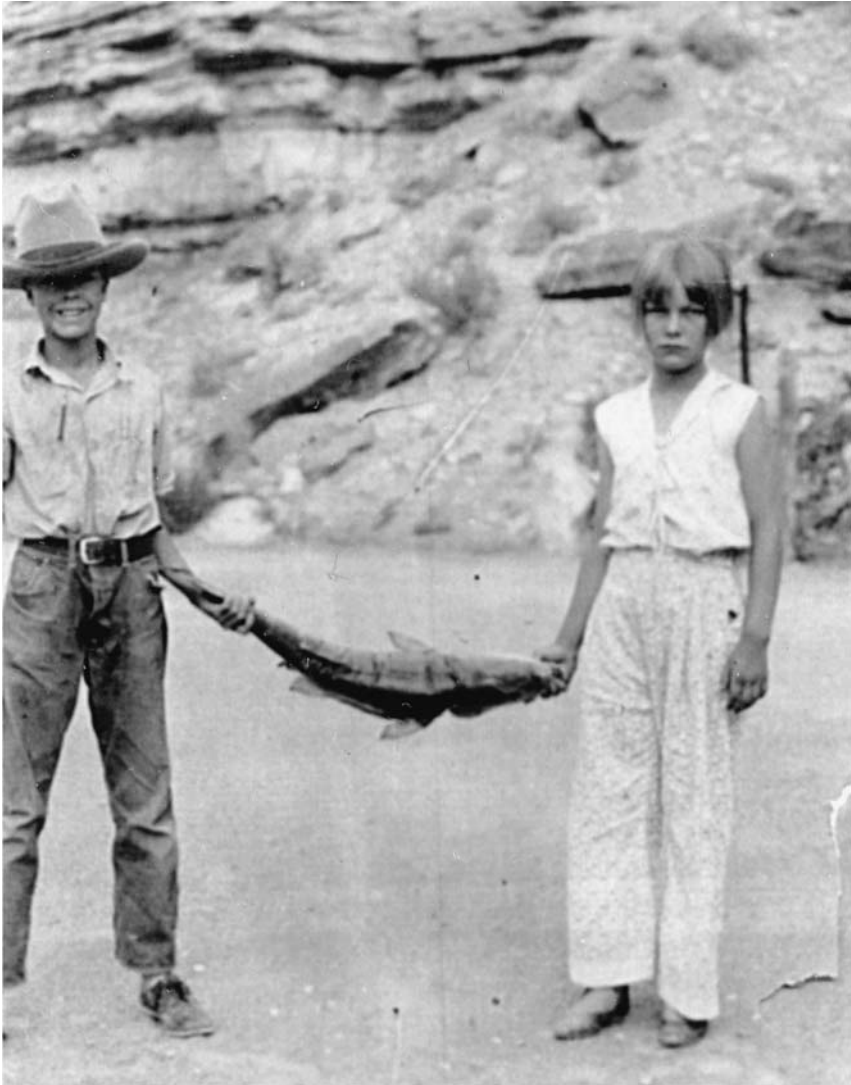
Recent purchasers of eight hundred odd acres in Westwater Valley have installed an engine and pump powerful enough and of a capacity to irrigate such an area and more, and the spring of 1917 is expected to show a large acreage devoted to sugar beet culture and the erection of a beet dump for handling a bumper crop of the sugar-producing root. Experts from the sugar factories who made an examination of the soil and attendant conditions with a view to determine the suitability of this situation for beet culture, pronounced it as possessing a peculiar fitness for that purpose—more so than any location on the Western Slope. In fact, it is authentically stated that a trial crop of sugar beets, made in this valley some years ago, resulted in the almost unbelievable yield of thirty-two tons to the acre. Local people, therefore, feel justified in predicting great things for their valley during the ensuing year.⁴¹

Interest in sugar beet cultivation escalated in the United States in the wake of World War I when Americans speculated



Mr. and Mrs. J. M. Lawrence with a giant pikeminnow (Colorado squawfish) they caught at Westwater in 1930. The Lawrences were John L. Malin's grandparents. Photo courtesy of John L. Malin.

that the European sugar beet growing areas would require considerable time to recover from the war: "Soon after the outbreak of the war in Europe, sugar prices, like those of many farm commodities, began to rise. If anything, sugar rose faster going from \$4.00 to \$7.25 per 100-pound bag in just a few months and ultimately higher." Eventually, sugar prices reached their peak in mid-1920 at "more than \$25.00 per bag."⁴² Throughout Utah acreage dedicated to sugar beets increased dramatically with the onset of the war. In 1916 Utah had 68,000 acres cultivated for sugar beets, this was up from 28,000 in 1905. Acreage dedicated



Jack and Ila Malin with a pikeminnow (Colorado squawfish). Photo courtesy of Ila B. (Malin) Reay.

to sugar beets increased to its highest usage of 113,000 acres in 1920 when Utah farmers were paid an average \$12.03 per ton of beets. By 1930 the total acreage dropped to 44,000, and farmers' prices dropped to seven dollars per ton.⁴³

Martin hired contractors to manage his ranch throughout the summer of 1917. However, he was not satisfied with their work, and after dismissing them, he harvested the beets himself. The harvest was successful, shipping forty railroad cars of sugar beets and four cars of tomatoes to Grand Junction. The successful crop can be ascribed to the large pumping plant he imported the previous summer, which included a twenty-five thousand gallon steel tank for a distillate fuel. At least four railroad cars carried the engine, pump, pipe, and a "Giant Semi-diesel" engine.

For the first time, irrigation did not present a problem for the valley, but with successful crops a new problem developed for the Martins— labor. He claimed the Japanese contractors that he first hired and fired did not cultivate the acreage sufficiently, but that left him handicapped by lack of help. To thin, weed, and harvest sugar beets required considerable labor. Smaller farms conceivably could rely on their families for the necessary work, but the larger Westwater Ranch needed considerably more hand labor. The following year Martin hired four Mexican families, who supplied twenty-eight helpers to plant and harvest the crops. He also bought a new harvester that created "quite a bit of interest among the Westwater folks." Although it had been productive, Martin sold his ranch in 1919 "solely because of the difficulty in securing labor and the state of his own health which makes it impractical to remain in this climate." The *Grand Valley Times* reported: "Big Ranch sells for over \$60,000 and is the largest real estate transaction in the history of the county."⁴⁴

The buyers were Herman Tweedy and William B. Allen of Provo, Utah, who expected to run cattle and raise sugar beets on the property. Tweedy and Allen's ownership of Westwater Ranch was short lived, and the property again was sold in 1920 to Fred G. Holmes of the Holly Sugar Company and W. B. Wallace of Grand Junction. The new owners continued to raise sugar beets and shipped thirty-four cars of beets (twenty-five to forty tons per car) to the Holly Sugar Company from their Westwater crop, but they soon let the ranch go as well.⁴⁵ Except for the decade-long ownership by the Darrow brothers, the Westwater Ranch seemed



Concrete forms on Westwater Ranch may have once held a 25,000 gallon fuel tank that was needed for a pump W. P. Martin purchased for the ranch in 1916.

like a hot potato, having been praised for its value but not producing enough profit to maintain.

Then, about 1921 or 1922, Robert P. Davie was either assigned the ranch or deeded it; he would farm the land until the early 1930s. The townspeople during that period referred to it as the Davie Ranch. Davie was a former president of the Holly Sugar Company and continued to raise sugar beets until shortly after 1920 when Westwater's sugar beet production stopped. The final word about the Davie Ranch was in 1932, when R. P. Davie intended on "colonizing" the place. When the Westwater Ranch stopped making news, it marked the beginning of the end of the town as well.

The town had a population of ninety-four on the 1920 census, which was about its peak. It had once claimed a much larger temporary population when tracks for the Denver and Rio Grande Western Railroad were being laid, and Chinese, Mexican, and other immigrant laborers came to the valley. One source claimed there were thirty-five Chinese graves located at Westwater.⁴⁶ The 1930 census reported a drop to forty-four residents at Westwater, and the population continued dwindling.

Beginning as a railroad water stop, Westwater was not destined for much more until the Darrow brothers promoted it. Men from the East, primarily Chicago and Michigan, visited the town throughout the 1890s and early 1900s and considered establishing businesses there. A general supply house opened in 1898 during a time when mining and land speculation was at its height. What became of the supply house is not known, but William J. Darrow built a store in 1900. Darrow was also involved in organizing the first school at Westwater, where there were twelve students enrolled in 1898. There was a boarding house near the railroad station run by Chloe Hallett in 1894. Charles and Chloe, with sons Roscoe and Charles Jr., later settled on land near Westwater Creek at the south end of the valley. They eventually ended up near Cisco where the Rose Ranch is located. Besides business, easterners visited the area for health reasons. In 1905 a “large comfortable hotel” was erected at Westwater, primarily housing families from Michigan. John Malin referred to the building as a sanitarium and noted that the climate was ideal for tuberculosis patients. His brother Owen Malin said there were twenty-one rooms in it and confirmed that it was for people with lung problems. The hotel was located about two miles north of town near Bitter Creek and was there until at least 1912. It eventually burned down. Such visits for health problems occurred more often in the winter months when humidity was low, though temperatures would often dive well below zero.

The temperatures would sometimes get as cold as twenty-five to thirty degrees below zero, so that the Colorado River would freeze in the slower parts, and the railroad, store owners, and ranchers would cut ice blocks from it to use during the summer to preserve meats and keep cold drinks and ice cream. Blocks of ice, each measuring about two feet by three feet, were cut using ice saws and transported to an ice house for the railroad, to the store, and to individual ranchers’ cellars. John Malin reminisced about having to wade through the snow to the outhouse on brisk winter mornings: “it was a touch and go situation. Sometimes we made it; other times no.” Ice skating on the Colorado River was not unheard of, and the ice blocks were invaluable. Some years were worse than others. Owen Malin recalled: “I seen it one year where the ice jammed the canyon



This structure built in the side of the hill near the mouth of Bitter Creek was Ed Herbert's garage according to John L. Malin. Photo from Wilford Hill files courtesy of Elsa Spaulding Hill.

down there and backed up until it pushed clear out this field . . . there was three foot of ice shoved out over that field. Just scooped that river out . . . gravel and everything." The river would freeze to a five- or six-foot thickness as far as Little Hole, and the Westwater folks on still, cold winter nights could often hear the ice breaking up, as it "was poppin and crackin down there, just shake the earth." Old-timers say the climate has mellowed considerably over the past fifty years.

Many of the early ranchers built their homes alongside the Colorado River, and as irrigation methods improved and the use of water pumps increased, they saw the need of moving away from the banks of the Colorado and spreading themselves out. Unfortunately it was too late for some of the earliest settlers. Many saw their homes get washed away by the Colorado River because of their proximity to its bank. Although dependent on the river for water and ice, some of the Westwater town folk avoided it. Only one mile from the river, they would rarely visit its banks, and their only recollections of it were the horror stories they were told. Not all of the stories were fiction; bloated or partially decomposed bodies would periodically be found floating

in the river or along its banks. Individuals drowning at Grand Junction or other locations upstream seemed to wind up at Westwater more often than not. On March 12, 1925, the *Times-Independent* reported:

A tragic mystery was uncovered with the accidental discovery of the body of a well dressed man buried in driftwood in a slough along the Colorado river near Westwater, Utah, yesterday. The only clue to the man's identity is the laundry mark 'H. C. B.' on his collar.

Jesse and Owen Malin, who live on a ranch near Westwater, discovered the body while crossing the slough to catch their saddle horses yesterday. In crossing the drift pile they noticed a pair of shoes sticking up. Upon investigating they found the body.

The man was large and well dressed. No papers of any kind were found in his pockets by which he could be identified. He carried a pair of eyeglasses in their case in his hip pocket. He wore a white pleated shirt and a soft white collar. A watch chain dangled from his vest where the watch was missing and with no other valuables on the body foul play was suspected. Evidently a victim of robbery his body was dumped into the river hoping to forever hide the evidence.

The man was not identified and remained at Westwater where he was buried. At least nine bodies have been buried in a graveyard established by Owen Malin north of Bitter Creek. One body in particular was described as being "a black man over seven feet tall and over 300 pounds. He was so big they buried him sitting up."⁴⁷

Long before river runners were keeping tabs on the Colorado River's fluctuations, ranchers and townspeople all along its course depended on knowing how they would be affected by its flow. During low water the pumps were out and running to guarantee a harvest, while high water did not require pumping. High water created difficulties for cowboys who needed to ford the river to reach town. Living conditions were more difficult when the river overflowed its banks and spread out over the valleys. On June 20, 1918, the *Times-Independent* reported: "The Ed Herbert ranch is entirely submerged by the high water. Ed got high minded and moved up to the second story of his house. He says that for once his ranch is getting a thorough irrigating with no particular damage and only a little inconvenience to himself. Ed makes his regular visits to town via a boat." Ed Herbert had settled in the valley

about 1892. Sometime in late 1917 or early 1918 he moved onto land formerly owned by Ed G. Bowdle near Bitter Creek. One of the few Westwater homes still standing is Herbert's, but it is off limits to visitors since it is on private property.

Others affected by high water included the school children who waded in ankle deep mud for one week during September 1927. When the children were asked to write a poem with water as the theme, one "little fellow" wrote:

We like water in the river.
 We like water in the spout.
 But water round the school house,
 We could get along without.⁴⁸

Schools were a continual concern for residents hoping to make a permanent home at Westwater. The first mention of schools in Westwater was in 1896 when resident Frank D. Darrow was made clerk over school board district two. The twelve children W. J. Darrow, the first teacher, taught in 1898 may have been the biggest class. Not much is recorded about schools in Westwater from 1901 until December 1920, when the local board of education met to secure a school building at Westwater. A decision on the building was deferred though, prompting a Westwater resident to respond with a scathing note in the *Times-Independent*:

Some of the good people of Westwater are wondering whether or not there is any law in Utah regarding the education of children. We have thirteen of school age now, and it would seem that in a state boasting of its rank along educational lines some provision should be made for their schooling. We hear that doubts have been expressed in some quarters as to our really having the thirteen. Well, they are all here, alive and kicking, and will gladly be exhibited to anyone caring to make an investigation.⁴⁹

By September 1922 a location was selected in the rear of Richard Favorel's home, across the road from the Rio Grande Railroad Station. An inconsistent number of school age children, the inability to secure teachers, and the generally poor quality of education forced many parents to send their children to schools in Moab, Cisco, or Grand Junction.

The layout of Westwater centered close to the railroad station. John Malin described the area:

There was a general store—feed store in one building, also a P.O. in the same building, a railroad depot, railroad section houses, about five small buildings, also a pool hall in the general store where they held card games with about 4 slot machines. Also, cow pens and loading sheets for the railroad later on. About 1920 a man by the name of [R.A. Tawney] built a sheep-shearing shed. They could shear about 1,000 head a day. There was a large ranch there, about 150 acres on the south part of the valley belonging to R. P. Davies. There was also a pump house, to supply water to the Denver & Rio Grande Western Railroad. Also a warehouse complex for grain and supplies for a sheep company belonging to Emmett Elizondo. There was a sanitarium built about 2 miles north of Westwater for the T. B. patients.⁵⁰

Greta Galyean, whose father, Fred, owned the Westwater store from about 1922 to 1929, estimated there were about “twenty-five houses including the store and depot.”⁵¹

The general supply house George J. Maypole of Chicago established in 1898 likely mostly supplied mining activities in the area. William J. Darrow’s 1900 store that supplied “general merchandise” may have been the one located near the Westwater Ranch until at least 1905, when Louise R. Hess was postmaster for the town. Later the store was located nearer the railroad, probably after Owen L. Simpson established the Westwater Mercantile Company, which operated from approximately 1914 until 1922. Owen and his brother Ben were very enterprising, and under the Cisco Mercantile Company they owned additional property at Little Dolores and Cisco.

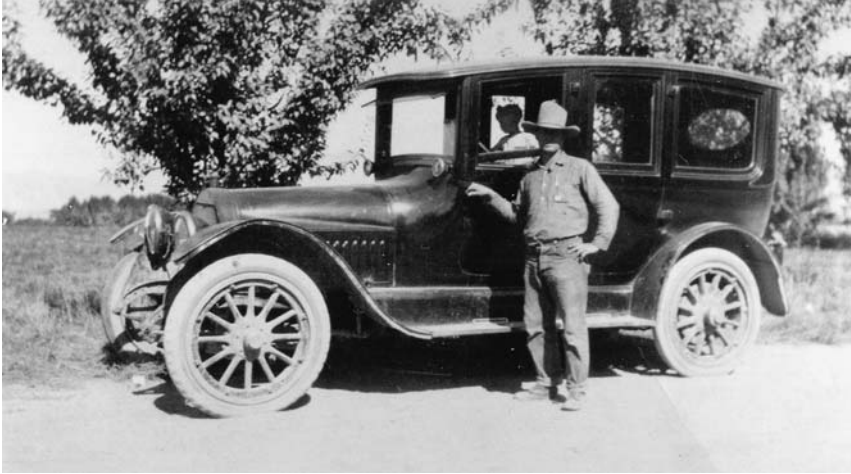
Fred Galyean purchased the Westwater store next. His daughter wrote that he “was from DeBeque, Co.. He was young, had a wife, and new baby. Some sheep people, also from there, told him of the prospects of West Water. Railroad right thru town, easy access to all supplies. So he bought it in his early 20s. It was a general merchandise, Post Office, groceries, barber shop, grain elevator, Ice house and anything else that was needed.”⁵² Eventually Fred Galyean felt the environment at Westwater was not conducive to his daughters’ upbringing, what with numerous fights and questionable education, so he sold the Galyean Mercantile Store to J. C. Hardison in 1929. Galyean did not retire



One of the buildings on E. C. Malin's 640-acre ranch, which he left in 1937. Malin owned three different ranches while he resided at Westwater from 1904 to 1937.

from the area, however, and during sheep shearing had a temporary setup at Westwater and Cottonwood stations.

Hardison seemed to be a determined man who lacked foresight. When he purchased the store, Westwater was entering a decline from which it would not recover. Joe Ocomico purchased the Tawney Shearing Plant in 1932 and later moved it to Cisco. It was reported that year that no shearing would occur at Westwater. Hardison's son, J. W., responded that the news reports were incorrect and that the Westwater Blade Shearing Plant would indeed operate. In an almost desperate plea, he advertised, "We have already booked numerous herds and are in a position to care for your shearing needs. Write or phone us as to the date you want, and we will do our best to accommodate you. Work is guaranteed to your satisfaction. Prices will be no greater if as much as at the other plants. Feed is starting nicely at Westwater, there will be plenty of water, and altogether we believe you can do no better than use our plant."⁵³ Sheep traveling between Colorado and Utah was an important source of income to the



E. C. Malin with son Jack (John L. Malin) in 1918 Cadillac 4-door Brougham, at Westwater. Photo courtesy of John L. Malin.

store at Westwater, so it was vital that the Hardisons compete for the shearing business.

At some point Hardison may have defaulted on his purchase of the Galyean Mercantile Store because in May 1932 he was reportedly building a store across from it. Another man from Fruita, Colorado, was considering purchasing the existing store and running the post office from it. It was inconceivable that two stores could coexist at Westwater at that time. That month Hardison also bought property in Cisco with the intent to build a grocery store there. Then he moved the “old filling station” in Westwater to Mack, Colorado, and replaced it with a new one. Within the next five years the advantages for having a store at Westwater would fade, but John Coleman Hardison remained at Westwater and died there in 1943.⁵⁴

Recreational social activities in town included fairly regular dances that, at times, were attended by as many as thirty couples. Invitations were extended to Cisco residents, announcing that ice cream, cake, coffee, cocoa, and ice tea would be served. Even during prohibition a few other drinks were served, off the record of course. Ed Herbert often acted as caller, and a small orchestra, radio, or phonograph provided the music. A non-denominational Sunday school was started in 1927, meeting in the

schoolhouse for at least a couple of years. During the summer the vicinity of the ranger station and Bitter Creek became popular picnic sites. Other than ice-skating in the winter, there was no other recorded recreation on the Colorado River. Of the town's swimming hole, a Westwater correspondent wrote: "The swimming pool in Bitter Creek is getting to be quite a popular resort [with] this hot weather. Some very nifty bathing suits are in evidence, too, but then there isn't any censor, so we wear, or fail to wear, what we please."⁵⁵ Other activities included hiking and investigating the back country. In 1927 Harlow McHenry, Bryan Arant, and Carlos Dahling hiked the canyons looking for Indian ruins. They reported they "had quite an enjoyable trip going down, but say that it was at least twice as far coming back, and that the cliff dwellers had inconsiderately left no traces of their existence in that particular location."⁵⁶

Hunting was enjoyed by both sexes. About the only location in the area considered successful for deer hunting was across the river at Star Canyon. While the men hunted deer, the women more frequently hunted rabbits. Of one such outing it was reported that Fred Hall, Sr., the pumper for the Denver and Rio Grande Western Railroad, and his son Henry

forded the river very early one morning, armed to the teeth and with blood in their eyes, each determined to enact the role of "Deerslayer" and bring home the bacon, as it were. Not far from dusk, however, they returned with lagging steps and most uncommunicative as to their expedition. Those of us who had confidently expected to add venison to the next day's menu, were forced to the conclusion that the huntsmen either experienced "buck fever" at the crucial moment, or that their [com]plaint of not meeting so much as a deer track is true and that in reality "there ain't no such animal" in these parts. They did see numbers of Joe Pace's cattle, rolling fat from summer range on Pinon Mesa, and say they were sorely tempted to bring home some regular meat; but discretion prevailed, and the Pace-Fuller herds are still intact.⁵⁷

Another hunter had a more difficult time while hunting in the canyons across the river. Bob Tappin, in 1922, became lost while trying to find his way back across a cliff. Testing the ledges for a way down he ended up falling a considerable distance. The fall rendered him unconscious for a few hours. Awakening, he

began wandering around until dark, when he dug out a burrow with his bare hands to sleep in, covering himself with bark. Without food he the next day again wandered until dark, when he saw a light across the river on the Davie Ranch. With his new rifle in hand he started to swim across. About midstream he could no longer hold on to the rifle and lost it to the river. He managed to make it to the other side where a Mexican camp was located, and eventually he received the necessary help from Mrs. Florence Fuller.⁵⁸

For a number of years government trappers were stationed at Westwater. Their primary job was to exterminate predatory animals, including wolves, coyotes, and mountain lions, that attacked livestock in the area. Wolves and mountain lions in particular were a threat to the area's cattle. In 1913 Joe Pace of the Pace-Fuller Cattle Company had a problem with a wolf that was killing his cattle on their summer range at Pinon Mesa. He tracked the wolf for twenty-five miles up Jones Gulch across the river from Westwater, where he shot and killed the six-foot-long animal.⁵⁹

Perhaps because cowboys didn't have time to hunt the predators, the government trappers were assigned to Westwater a few years later. One such trapper was Hymie J. Turner, who arrived in Westwater with his family in the winter of 1922. His initial emphasis was trapping coyotes. However, his residency only lasted about three months because his nine-year-old son, Herman, tripped while carrying a gasoline can. The spilled gas landed on their stove and exploded, destroying the house and burning the boy badly. Other trappers followed, and in 1924 E. R. Dalton of Westwater was crowned "Champion Trapper of Mountain Lions." To win the title, Dalton brought in four large pelts of mountain lions he trapped across the river on the Pace-Fuller cattle range. The cats were inflicting heavy losses to the cattle in the region. Only a handful of trappers ventured into Westwater Canyon. During the winter of 1927, H. H. Turner, a government trapper from Moab, and Elwood Malin were fined for illegally trapping beaver in the canyon. Also, trapper brothers John and Parley Galloway made at least one pass through the canyon trapping beaver.

Although bears existed in the vicinity, they are not known to have caused any problems for ranchers. On one particular occasion in September 1922, a bear was sighted near Westwater.



Norval, Jack, Ila, Betty, and May Malin. The nearest building on the right is the Lawrence's home. Left of it are the saloon, pool house, post office (white), section house, and a small railroad ice house. Photo courtesy of Ila B. Reay.

Elwood Malin located the “bruin on the Davie Ranch, across the wash. He lassoed the bear, and managed to lead him more than halfway home. The bruin put up such a fight that Mr. Malin had to shoot him, and carried the carcass the rest of the way across his saddle.”⁶⁰

The town of Westwater's prime years were between about 1900 and 1925. It was at that time a community of families that included Malin, May, Harris, Simpson, Dahling, and Fuller. Although the Denver and Rio Grande Western Railroad made frequent changes in personnel, many employees spent numerous years at Westwater and invited their relatives to spend significant time with them working and vacationing there. Frank “Dad” Hall ran the railroad pump at Westwater. His wife, Polly, was affectionately called “Mommie” by area residents. John D. Pearson ran the Westwater pumping plant and was referred to as “Uncle.”



Beryle Thompson, age five, in front of her home at Westwater in the early 1930s. Photo from Wilford Hill files courtesy of Beryle (Thompson) Marah.

Charlie Salatino was section foreman for a number of years as well. Perhaps working and living at Westwater during its heyday was best remembered by J. G. Imhoff, who came there in 1907 as a telegraph operator for the railroad. When he retired in 1925 he said, "In my fifty years of railroading there was no place so hard to leave as Westwater".⁶¹

Westwater residents realized that they could not always depend on the railroad. In their continuing struggle for survival, the residents needed good roads. As early as 1897 the idea of building a river road to bring more business to Westwater was being explored. There had been wagon roads near the railroad

tracks, but they needed considerable improvement. At times they were impassable. The *Times-Independent* reported on May 23, 1918:

What has become of the Grand county commissioners, are they still in the land of the living? If so, why don't they try to come to Westwater over the wagon road. There is a chance that they would never be able to survive the trip. One man started for this place last week with a team and wagon, he first lost his wagon, then his team, and finally arrived in town on foot. A rescue party from here went out and succeeded in finding the lost articles, and started him on his journey toward Mack, Colorado. A cordial invitation was extended to the visitor to call again, just what he said in answer we could not make out, but it sounded to the writer as though he was not very enthusiastic over the idea.

A few weeks later Will May traveled to Westwater to visit relatives at Echo Ranch on May Flats. When asked his opinion of the roads, he replied that "he had not found it yet." His trip ended when his car had to be pulled out of deep sand by two horses.

Roads were the brunt of many jokes during succeeding years. During the summer of 1920 grading commenced to establish a "real road" that would replace what had been merely a set of wagon tracks from Cisco to Grand Junction. Many of the residents of Westwater took turns assisting with the road work, which was initiated by Mesa County in Colorado. They were particularly interested, though in the development of the Midland Trail road proposed to follow the former narrow-gauge railroad and create a shorter distance between Moab and Grand Junction. Westwater residents lobbied heavily to persuade the Mesa County commissioners to take this road through Westwater. Edward Herbert suggested the following:

[The road will follow] the Midland Trail beyond Mack to Bitter creek from there the road turns down Bitter Creek canon, following it the entire distance to Westwater, thus eliminating some 10 miles of travel, all of which is across the desert. Another advantage of the road is that it follows quite closely the line of the D&RG and water is available along much of the distance. The Utah road officials have already completed the new road from Cisco to Westwater, and are now at work to the east from that point. The road on Bitter Creek will be a fine auto highway, and one of the best links to the Midland Trail. It



These foundations of houses at Westwater have been destroyed since this photo was taken in 1981. Photo from Wilford Hill files courtesy of Elsa Spaulding Hill.



Former site of Westwater town next to railroad tracks. Concrete blocks in the distance formerly supported the railroad water tank. They have recently been removed or buried.

will shorten the distance between this city [Grand Junction] and Westwater by 10 miles or more and will there connect with the river route into Moab now being constructed, which will shorten the distance to Moab by a total of 20 miles. Mesa County will have but little new road to construct and that will be across an open park where the cost will be small.⁶²

Although they were excited about the roads being graded from Cisco to the state line, Westwater residents were more anxious for Mesa County to connect the primary road from Colorado with the Midland Trail highway by passing through Westwater. The proposed route would travel east from Cisco, run parallel to Denver and Rio Grande Western Railroad tracks to Westwater and then to a natural rock bridge across Bitter Creek, and then follow that canyon to a location near the Colorado border. By April 28, 1921, the decision had not been made. At this time a Westwater correspondent wrote, "it is hoped that work on the Colorado end will soon commence so that tourists and others who are anxious to drive across country via this excellent and abbreviated route may soon do so."

In 1922 Elwood Malin reported that Westwater residents had worked on the road, and it was in "first class" condition. The work crew also put up signs to direct travelers to "springs and water holes near the road" between Westwater and the Colorado border. With little control over the outcome, Westwater residents watched as the debates continued regarding the route that the Midland Trail, now being called the Pikes Peak Highway, should follow. The commissioners investigating the routes said "that the Westwater route is by far the most practical, will cost less to construct and the maintenance expense will be much less than on the old road. A car can now negotiate the road with less difficulty than is encountered on the upper road, due to the many bad crossings on the latter highway. The people of Westwater have done considerable work on the road up Bitter Creek canyon, and as a result the lower route is even now the best road to the state line."⁶³ Apparently though Westwater was not selected. The *Times-Independent* reported that the survey decided that the highway should not have any railroad crossings.

In 1927 a petition from Cisco and Westwater was submitted favoring construction of a road between the two towns. The petition

was rejected on the grounds that no additional road construction would be done until the state road was completed. The road supervisors were, however, given instructions to maintain the existing dirt road. But desperation continued for a road through Westwater. In 1929 the town's correspondent wrote, "If the people only knew about our road through Westwater, and Colorado would do a little work on their eight miles on the east end, this route would be much better than getting stuck in the bad washes on the highway. Our washes are never boggy."⁶⁴ She continued: "We are very desirous of having the main highway run through Westwater, and can offer some excellent scenery, splendid camping locations, markets for groceries, gas and oil stations. The route through Westwater is much better than the direct route across the desert to Cisco, where the traveler is miles away from aid in case of accident or motor trouble."⁶⁵

Then the little town lost support for even maintaining its existing roads, in particular the road to Grand Junction. Discouraged to hear they could not secure a primary road, residents pled with Colorado to at least maintain an eight-mile stretch from the state line, reminding Coloradans that Westwater residents spent a considerable amount of money there and some also paid taxes. Then, during the summer of 1930 the crossing at Bitter Creek collapsed, and the town folk were unable to repair the damage to their county road to the state line. The road was closed and a notice posted that "no further attempt will be made by the county to keep it in repair."⁶⁶

Throughout the 1920s Westwater had focused on obtaining a highway through their town. As the decade came to a close, so did their hopes. Other signs of a depressed economy included the disappearance of the sugar beet market that had been so highly touted at the beginning of that decade. Sheep shearing moved primarily to Cisco and Thompson, and all that remained in Westwater were the ranchers and their dying hopes. J. C. Hardison's purchase of the mercantile store in 1929 and attempt to revive sheep shearing's heydays were among the last failures.

Westwater was of course not the only rural town affected by an economic downturn during the 1920s and 1930s. The decade that began as the roaring twenties soon brought signs of trouble throughout rural Utah. It culminated in the Great Depression

that was preceded by the 1929 stock market crash. However, Utah agriculture was depressed long before the stock market crash. Falling prices resulted from lowered demand and other unforeseen conditions that “included soil deficiency, plant regression, insect pests, drought and erosion.”⁶⁷ After “Utah harvested its largest acreage of crops ever in 1922 and its greatest yield per acre in 1925,” its production spiraled downward until the 1930s, when extreme drought conditions, depressed prices, and the increased costs of maintaining farms drove many farmers from their lands or into bankruptcy.⁶⁸

Westwater had been one of the stronger agricultural areas in Grand County because the Colorado River provided necessary irrigation. But even the Colorado River worked against the locals, as it reached extreme low water levels. On August 26, 1931, it measured 885 cubic feet per second (cfs), and on June 21, 1934, it trickled by at 640 cfs. The high water level during those years reached 17,400 and 16,800 cfs respectively.⁶⁹ Leonard J. Arrington wrote of the great drought of 1934:

The climatological data tell us that never before in United States history had so little rain fallen over so wide a territory during an entire growing season as in 1934. Moreover, according to U.S. Weather Bureau reports, although most dry years are preceded by years of adequate rainfall, this was not true in 1934, for the preceding four years were abnormally dry in many parts of the country. The year June 1933 to May 1934 was the driest on record in most midwestern and Great Plains states (Indiana, Illinois, Wisconsin, Minnesota, Iowa, Missouri, Nebraska, and the Dakotas), and the seasonal snowfall in California, Colorado, and Utah was about half of normal and in Wyoming about one-third of normal.⁷⁰

Westwater had prided itself on its sugar beet production. After the success Westwater Ranch experienced shortly after World War I, many of the smaller farmers in the area excitedly followed suit in planting sugar beets. Their decision was reinforced when members of the Holly Sugar Company became frequent visitors to Westwater and eventually owned some of the land. One thing that may have eventually hurt their crops was the beet leafhopper, an insect pest that “induced curly top disease in sugar beets, beans, and tomatoes.” Also, reports indicate there may not have been any crop rotations, and thus the soil

was depleted. Perhaps the biggest burden for the farmers to bear was that during the Depression the trains became too expensive to ship their produce.

Harvey Edward Herbert died on May 8, 1929. Herbert had been a colorful resident of Westwater since about 1898 and was central to its history. He had held positions such as state sheep inspector, deputy sheriff, caller at dances, road repairer, rancher, and assistant to Ellsworth Kolb's and Bert Loper's historic river trip through Westwater Canyon. As the new decade approached there was little indication that Westwater even stood a chance. With no outside support its advantages began to diminish. Advances in locomotive train engines made frequent stops for water and coal no longer necessary. Like dominoes falling, railroad stations were closed. Westwater seemed to sense its end coming. Many of the long-time residents started looking elsewhere to live. A town that established itself because of the railroad was now being extinguished by it. The railroad station at Westwater, Grand County, was officially abandoned on May 5, 1931.⁷¹

According to John Malin, the railroad continued to stop for livestock through most of the 1930s, but the large portion of the town's central population that consisted of railroad personnel moved. A store and gas station remained open for a number of years, until people stopped coming. The post office survived until it was closed on February 15, 1954. Its receipts during 1952 totaled \$62.19 while the cost for maintaining it exceeded \$504.40.⁷² The departure of the post office finally extinguished the once lively town of Westwater.