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The Dark Side of a Promotion: A History of the Elberta Project

[Roger D. Hansen](#)

Kimberly Rawlins

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During its last big fruit harvest, Elberta was alive with activity. Its peach crop had developed a well-deserved reputation, and the demand for its produce had increased. There was a rush of activity in the packing houses. Over thirty boxcars of fruit, produce from the area's thousands of trees, were being shipped out daily on the trunk line of the Denver and Rio Grande Western railroad. The local economy was booming, and it looked as though the development might finally succeed. This brief boom period was dashed when a freeze in 1925 destroyed the project's peach trees.

Today, Elberta is a few buildings at the intersection of two state highways. The center of town has moved from the railroad tracks south to an east-west highway which connects Santaquin and Eureka. In 1984, the town's post office and solitary store were only open a few hours each day. Many of the community's old homes stood vacant, and the old townsite, had been reclaimed by sagebrush and cheatgrass. The few dead fruit trees which still dot red the landscape gave the old townsite a ghost town aura (see Photographs [1](#) and [2](#)).

So, what happened to the once prosperous project?

In point of fact, the Elberta project has had a roller-coaster history with incredible peaks and valleys. Unfortunately for all, the valleys inflicted pain on both the investor-farmers and owner-developers.



Photograph 1. A downed fruit tree and a solitary standing wall give a homesite in old Elberta a ghostlike aura. Circa 1984.



Photograph 2. The Waterburys were one of the last families with an orchard. Their house was destroyed by fire in 1984. Circa 1984.

The Origin

The development of the Elberta area, located near the southern tip of Utah Lake, was the brainchild of two land speculators. In the late nineteenth century, land development in Utah was relegated to those areas where earlier pioneers had found it difficult to settle. These areas were far enough from the mountains to make water difficult to obtain and this made irrigation farming an expensive proposition. The Elberta lands in southern Goshen Valley were such an area.

Gilbert S. Peyton, a gentleman who had made money in Mercur, Utah, from the discovery of a cyanide milling process for gold, and his lawyer associate, E. G. Rognon, decided to use a portion of their wealth and go into the dam building and irrigation business ([Penrod](#), undated; Steele, 1960). They purchased 10,000 acres of barren state and federal land in southern Goshen Valley with the intent of placing it under irrigation. Peyton and Rognon were familiar with the successful orchards around Grand Junction, Colorado. The two speculators figured that if peaches were successful in Grand Junction, why not in Goshen Valley?

The water rights and land for their proposed reservoir were purchased from William Starr, a Juab Valley rancher. Rognon and Peyton became the owners of the Starr Irrigation Company. The company was eventually incorporated as the Mt. Nebo Land and Irrigation Company. Peyton and Rognon were the principals along with H. W. Brown. In 1895, Rognon entered into an agreement with the Goshen Irrigation and Canal Company, the principal irrigators on Currant Creek. Rognon agreed to furnish a stipulated quantity of water each year to the Goshen company, in return for which the company agreed to transfer its water right to him.

An ideal damsite was located in a narrow constriction of the channel at the head of Goshen Canyon. Construction on a small earthen dam (using wooden plows, scrapers, and a tamper) was begun soon after the purchase of the reservoir site. A crude spillway was hewn out of the agglomerate on the dam's northern abutment. All went smoothly until typhoid fever broke out. Currant Creek had been tested for cleanliness, but unfortunately the tests were taken upstream and the men were drawing their drinking water from below

their camp and construction site. The water became contaminated and many of the men caught typhoid fever; one man died and several more were never able to return to work ([Steele, 1960](#)). Despite this setback, the small dam was eventually completed (see [Photograph 3](#)).



Photograph 3. Mona Dam and Reservoir as seen looking east from the air. Mona Reservoir provided water storage for the Elberta project. The dam is one of the oldest in the state of Utah. During the high snowmelt of 1983, it came close to overtopping. Sandbags (the long white line) had to be brought in to raise the freeboard. Circa 1983.

To get the irrigation water to the company's benchland, the Mt. Nebo Land and Irrigation Company had to divert its water well up Goshen Canyon. To get the water down the canyon, it was necessary to build a long impressive flume. The flume, constructed of redwood staves, was six feet wide and ran about one and one-half miles down the canyon, some sections resting high on a wooden trestle, others just clinging to the sheer rock cliffs. (see [Photograph 4](#)).

At the mouth of Goshen Canyon, the flume emptied into an unlined canal which circled around the southern end of Goshen Valley before ending at a terminal reservoir just north of the present-day community of Elberta (see [Photograph 5](#)). The lands to be serviced by the canal system were located inside a natural amphitheater created by the nearby mountains, which overlook the southern end of the valley (see [Drawing 1](#)). Once placed under production, the lands to be serviced by the Elberta project had an excellent capacity for crop production. All that was required was a reliable water supply.

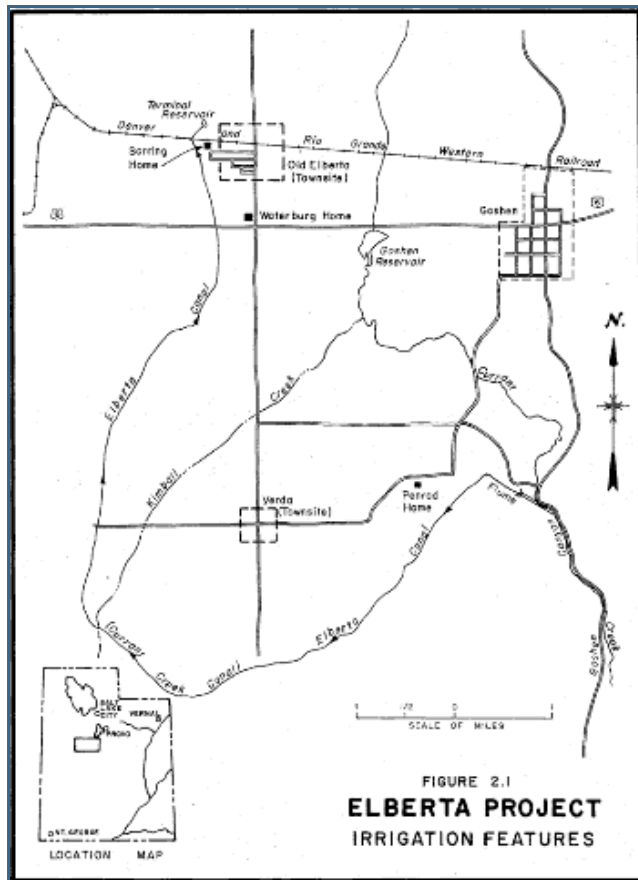


Photograph 4. An impressive flume was built down Goshen Canyon, sections of which were supported on a wooden trestle. Circa 1910.



Photograph 5. An unlined canal circled around the southern end of Goshen Valley. This canal, which is still in use, delivered irrigation water. Circa 1984.

At the north end of the project, the town of Mt. Nebo (named after the mountain which dominated the southeastern horizon) was laid out. It was to be built around the Denver and Rio Grande Western Railroad tracks which served as a vital support for the new project. The railroad provided access for potential investors as well as transport to get the "fruits" of the project to market. It was near the railroad that the first buildings in Mt. Nebo rose, a commissary, consisting of a store, warehouse, boarding house, and hotel, and a group of tents to serve as general purpose shelters.



Drawing 1. Elberta Project Irrigation Features.

[➔ Click on the image for a larger version.](#)

Before the reservoir and flume were completed, additional monies had to be raised to finance the expensive project. To accomplish this, H. W. Brown went to Nebraska, Kansas, Illinois and Iowa to sell land in the project. According to Raymond Steele, historian of Goshen valley, Brown told potential investors:

by pamphlet, pictures, and personal contacts the wonderful opportunities Mt. Nebo offered to those that wanted to better their condition--a land of opportunity for the fruit grower--a locale where apples, peaches, pears, and other small fruit could be raised with very little work.

Grain prices in the Midwest were depressed, so the promises made by the Elberta promoter fell on receptive ears.

According to Doris Penrod in her history of Elberta, many of the settlers who came to Goshen Valley felt they had been cheated. She states that prospective buyers were shown pictures of a thriving metropolis, and when they got off the train at Mt. Nebo and saw nothing but sagebrush and tents they were mad as hell. Some just waited till the train came back and reboarded; others stayed only because they had no money for a train ticket back or because they had "the pioneer spirit and decided to make the best of it." In all, about 25 families moved to the Mt. Nebo project from the East and Midwest.

Not all of the initial reactions were negative. The Miller family represents a more positive story. Henry

Miller, before buying property, made a trip out West to inspect the land. He found it fertile and purchased land near the canal for fifty dollars an acre, including water. He moved his whole family out in two emigrant railroad cars, paying \$135 for each car.

Whatever the settler's initial reaction, things went well enough to ship in thousands of fruit trees from Colorado and Utah nurseries. The first trees were planted in neat rows in orchard fashion. Since water had not yet reached the end of the canal system, it had to be hauled in barrels from a nearby reservoir.

Shortly after the water was first diverted into the project's irrigation system, the canal broke, and service was disrupted for two weeks. Meanwhile the settlers were again forced to haul water and pour it bucketful by bucketful on the newly planted trees. The conveyance system turned out to be very expensive to maintain. This put the already financially strapped Mount Nebo Land and Irrigation Company in further jeopardy. Additional problems developed when the project's water right was found to be inadequate.

As with other irrigation projects in the West, the area served by the project was too large for the water supply. The landowners and the Mt. Nebo company had frequent disagreements over the delivery of water and the payment for its use. One source for these disagreements can be seen in the project's water deeds registered in Juab County. For example, Neils Anderson Sorring purchased a water right (for 40 acres of land) from the company. The "quantity of water represented by said right being 1,742,400 cubic feet." For farmers from the Midwest, this may have seemed like an adequate supply. Unfortunately, this amounted to only one cubic foot of water for each square foot of land, and agricultural engineering studies have indicated that land in the Elberta area requires at least three times that amount of water to sustain reasonable growth.

In addition to internal difficulties with water deliveries, disagreements arose between the Goshen Irrigation and Canal Company, independent water users, and the Mt. Nebo Land and Irrigation Company on the division of water. A court action was initiated to adjudicate the rights of all water users of Current Creek. In 1902, a decree was handed down which gave to the prior water users a definite amount of water and decreed the balance to the Mt. Nebo Land and Irrigation Company. In essence, the Mt. Nebo company received what was left over after the demands of the prior appropriators were met. During wet weather the project could fill its reservoir, but during dry years they had last call on a comparatively small creek.

At the turn of the century investors, aggravated by an unreliable water supply, were unable or unwilling to make their payments to the irrigation company. The Mt. Nebo Land and Irrigation Company, depending on the land income to pay what it owed to Starr, ceased making its payments. Starr, when the company stopped paying, shut the water out of the canal and placed a 24-hour guard at the reservoir. Without water for their crops, the settlers on the project began to drift away and it appeared that the brief boom had run its course.

This was a particularly trying period for the new settlers. Folktales relate dismal stories of individuals driven to despair by the demise of the project. [Doris Penrod](#) (undated, p. 9) relates the story of John Jose:

He sat day after day watching his farm crops burn up, and refused to leave, thinking something would turn up. His wife gave up and refused to stay any longer, and finally took their family and went back east where they had come from. He stayed on alone for a while, because he had invested all he owned in this place, and finally he committed suicide by hanging himself.

Penrod relates another tragic story of a man named "Mr. Shyster," who after his son died, just wandered off leaving remaining belongings to whoever wanted them.

By 1905, the canal system and other assets of the company were held in receivership by the Commercial National Bank of Salt Lake City. The bank had received the land from H. W. Brown who had purchased it in a last effort to save the project. For the next two years there was little water drawn from the reservoir,

allowing it to fill to capacity. With a full reservoir, it was an opportune time to sell the project.

The Rebirth

The project was eventually purchased by Matthew B. Whitney, a native New Yorker who had been in Utah for several years. Whitney had started in New York as a traveling salesman and eventually ended up in Salt Lake City as a commissioned salesman for an implement company. As a result of this job he earned enough so that when he heard of the Mt. Nebo project, he investigated and purchased it in 1907. Whitney and four other men incorporated as the Utah Lake Land, Water and Power Company with capital stock of \$935,000.

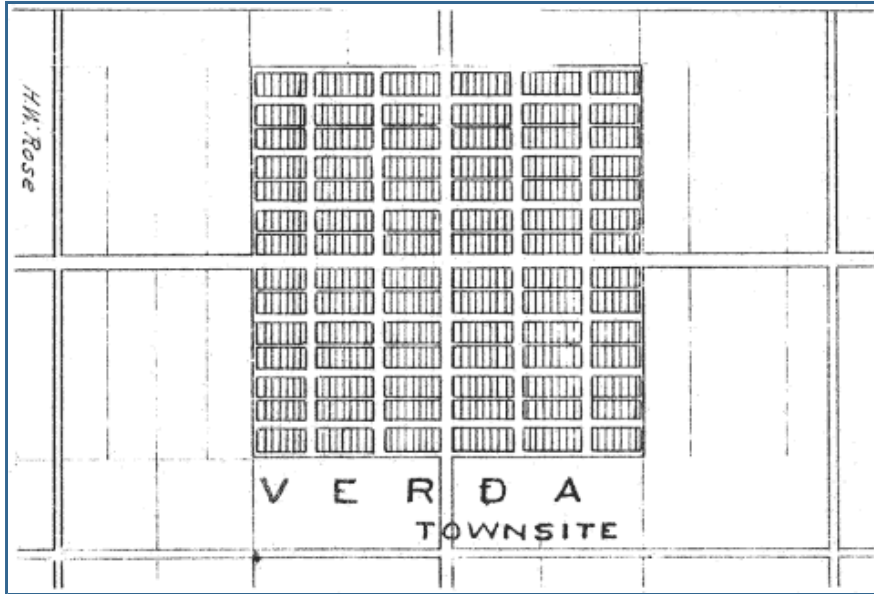
Whitney planned on making the project a major fruit producing area featuring the Elberta peach. For this reason, he changed the name of the project's town from Mt. Nebo to Elberta. Whitney's plans were big; he laid out a town complete with a main street, a park, and residential streets (see [Drawing 2](#)). The main street, Cherry Avenue, ran north and south. Along this street the lots were 50 feet deep with a 25-foot frontage, and were designed to accommodate businesses. Running parallel to Cherry Avenue were other streets, most of which bore the names of the stockholders. The lots along these streets were 50 by 150 feet and were intended to be residential lots.



Drawing 2. Whitney's dream for the town of Elberta.

➡ [Click on the image for a larger version.](#)

Whitney and his associates also had plans for the southern end of the project. They established a town at Verda, at a site approximately 2 miles south of Elberta. An elaborate complex of streets and lots was envisioned for this town as can be seen on an old landownership maps (see [Drawing 3](#)). Enough people moved into the southern end of the project to require a school (see [Photograph 6](#)). Verda became the center for Mormon settlers and Elberta was viewed as a "gentile" or non-Mormon community.



Drawing 3. An ownership map of the Elberta project shows the elaborate plans which were envisioned for the Verda townsite.

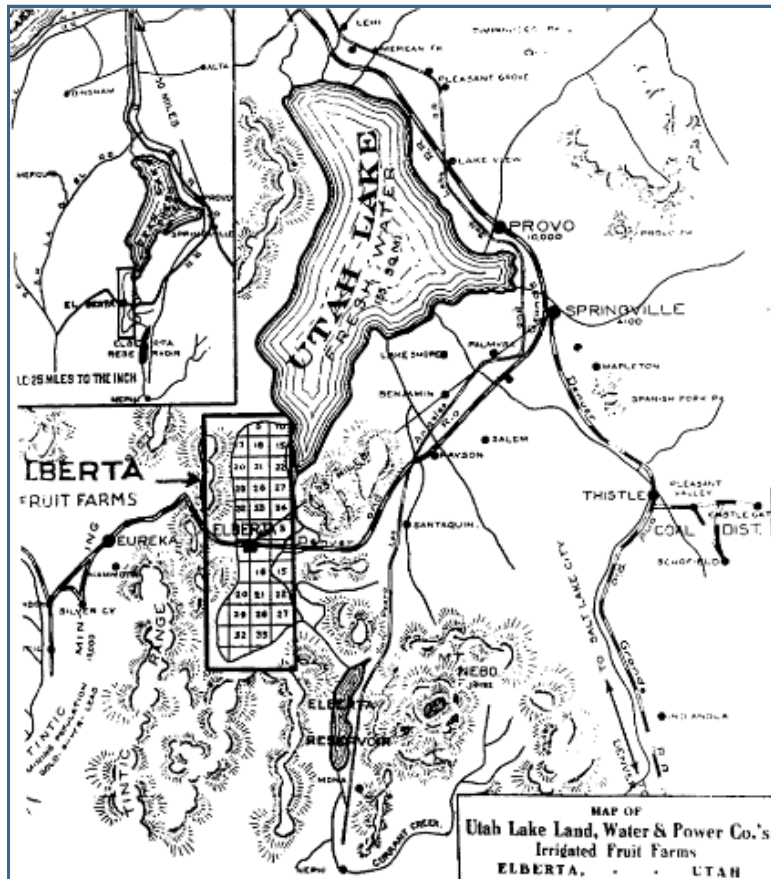
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Photograph 6. A schoolhouse was built in Verda (circa 1912) to serve the needs of the residents in the southern end of the project.

Whitney had other grandiose plans for his company. The incorporators not only planned to irrigate the 10,000 acres they had purchased, but were also planning on "constructing, erecting, owning, leasing, and operating steam or water power, light, and heat for all purposes whatever." Evidently the plan was for a power plant to be built below the dam to produce electricity. They were serious enough about the power project to make an agreement with the Mosida boomers to provide electricity for their pumps. Unfortunately as with other aspects of the project, they were overly optimistic, and the power plant was never built.

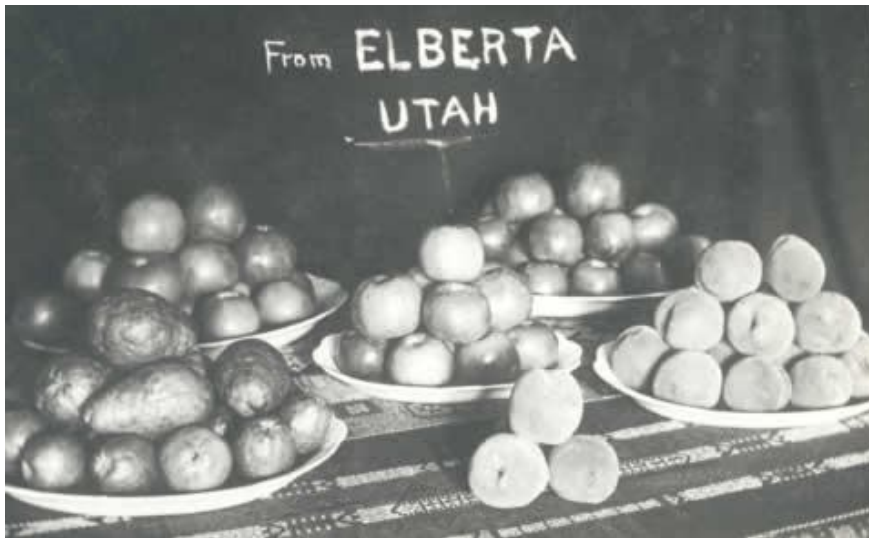
The board of directors of the Utah Lake Land, Water and Power Company decided to dispose of all lands owned by the company (see [Drawing 4](#)). W.E.Tollestrup was hired to sell the real estate. Like Brown before him, Tollestrup decided that the Midwest was a good location for recruiting would be settlers.



Drawing 4. Map from a promotional brochure showing an exaggerated version of the project's potential service area. Elberta Reservoir could scarcely irrigate a fraction of the lands delineated.

➡ [Click on the image for a larger version.](#)

Some of the older residents in Goshen Valley tell interesting stories about this round of promotions. Lloyd Penrod told of the Foote family from Nebraska who came West after seeing a large poster at a railroad station. The poster described Elberta as the only city in Utah without "Mormons." Mabel Peterson Finch's parents moved to Elberta from McCook, Nebraska, when she was a young girl. Her father, Ira Peterson, had a ranch and had served as sheriff for the four years before he left. The family moved to Elberta in 1910 as the result of listening to salesmen. Ira Peterson carefully investigated the promoters claims. He came to Elberta twice before moving his family to Utah. When he first came out in the Spring, the promoters talked so much about the great harvests in Elberta that he decided to come back in the Fall. After his second visit, he was evidently impressed by what he saw; he decided to buy a barren 40 acre plot. Promoters from the company gave him peaches, potatoes, and other fruits to take back with him to McCook. He also brought home postcards with photographs of peaches, pears, and apples (see photographs [7](#) and [8](#)).



Photograph 7. Postcards, displaying the "fruits" of labor, were used to promote the Elberta project in the Midwest (Circa 1910).



Photograph 8. Promotional brochures like the ones above made unrealistic claims about the Elberta and nearby Mosida land and water developments (Utah State Historical Society).

In spite of Ira Peterson's thorough examination of the Elberta project, there were still disappointments. When he and his family arrived in April, 1910, they were supposed to have had a four room house, instead they had to live in the company house until a "shack" was built. According to Mrs. Finch, "that's all it ever was, we all called it 'the shack.'"

Besides the lack of housing, other qualities had been exaggerated. Mrs. Finch remembered one of her mother's anecdotes. While getting ready to leave McCook, her mother was packing her clothespins, the items to be taken. One of the promoters who was at the house and told her to leave the clothespins, adding that she wouldn't need them in Elberta. "In Elberta," he told them "the wind don't blow hard enough to use clothespins." Being a bit skeptical, he mother said she would take them anyway.

It is little wonder Whitney and his company were mistrusted by some of the investors; the pamphlets they printed painted an unrealistic picture of Elberta. One of the pamphlets states that, "It is not uncommon for

a single apple tree to yield a larger income per year than the choicest acre of farm land in Iowa or Illinois!" The brochure also promised a bounteous harvest and excellent financial returns:

How must the farmer of Indiana, Illinois, Ohio, Iowa, Minnesota, Nebraska, Kansas, or Missouri--glad of a \$25 per acre profit--view a statement of profits over \$250 per acre? Profits sure as death and taxes--returns ten times as large, from labor one-tenth as great. Yet it is done--every season--in Utah.

And the cruelest exaggeration of all: "the reservoir is filled--the canals are dug. The water is ready to be turned in upon every acre sold." Whitney's training as a salesman seemed to have flowed naturally over into the "hype" which filled his company's brochures.

As with the original Mt. Nebo development, water shortages eventually came to haunt the project. The settlers had been promised water "as long as Mt. Nebo shall stand." But in 1912, the reservoir ran dry and the irrigators were understandable mad.

With water shortage problems, Whitney decided to promote conservation thinking that this would ease the problem and appease the farmers. Whitney wrote to John A. Widsøe, president of Utah Agricultural College, requesting six copies of a poster promoting conservation. The company appointed a watermaster, and a circular was sent out which outlined the new conservation program.

One thing that Whitney's actions highlighted was the previous lack of organization in making water deliveries. As long as water had been plentiful, there was no need to conserve, but once things tightened, a system to better manage water deliveries had to be organized. These institutions, which had already been developed in the neighboring "Mormon" canals, were apparently late in arriving in Elberta.

A list of ten rules requiring conservation was developed. Rule nine stated that "all water for domestic purposes shall be conserved in cisterns of proper size for several months supply. Arrangements for filling the cistern to be made with the watermaster." These cisterns were not just the result of the 1912 water shortage, they were an important necessity. There was not a separate culinary water system in Elberta until 1926. Prior to that year all drinking water had to be hauled in or diverted from the irrigation system. The irrigation water was typically filtered before it was stored in a cistern. During field investigations in 1984, Bureau of Reclamation personnel located several of the old cisterns and one filter box (see Photographs [9](#) and [10](#)). The filter was a small concrete box with two chambers. One chamber was filled with sand and the other with charcoal. The irrigation water was diverted through the filter to remove suspended solids and other noxious substances.



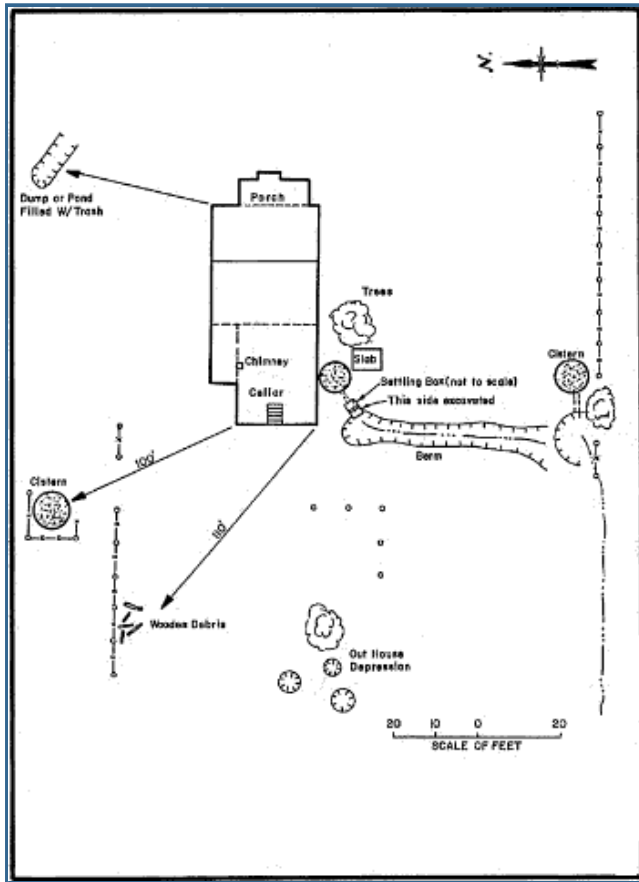
Photograph 9. Drinking water for Elberta residences was provided from cisterns located near individual homes. Circa 1984.



Photograph 10. Before water entered the cistern it was filtered in a small concrete box which contained sand and charcoal. Circa 1984.

Two of the cisterns located on the Sorring property were approximately 8 feet in diameter, 10 feet deep, and had a capacity of approximately 3800 gallons (see [Drawing 5](#)). If the irrigation system was turned off during the winter months, the storage in one cistern would give a family 40 gallons of culinary water per day.

The cisterns were placed close to the house, and various methods were used to raise the water. If the need for a cistern was designed into the house, the cistern was placed under the kitchen or back porch, and a hand pump was used to raise the water. If the house was less modern, the cistern was located at some distance from the house, and a bucket was used to raise the water. The cisterns were filled in the fall and were supposed to last through the entire winter. It was not unusual for the cistern to run dry; when this occurred culinary water had to be hauled from Goshen in wooden barrels. Culinary water always had to be conserved, and was often in short supply. Despite the somewhat primitive nature of the Elberta culinary water system, there is no evidence that there was a significant outbreak of disease.



Drawing 5. The above drawing shows the spatial relationships on the Anderson Soring property in Elberta. The two cisterns were fed from the irrigation ditch. During the winter months when there was no water in the irrigation system, the entire culinary water supply was stored in cisterns.

➔ *Click on the image for a larger version.*

Water was not the only thing in short supply. The lack of capital was a problem with both Whitney and the new settlers. Farm land was sold for \$250 per acre with a down payment of \$100. The remainder was to be paid back over a five year period. Many could not afford the down payment, so they borrowed for it. The new settlers were, in most cases, financially obligated over their heads. Their farms could not possibly return enough for them to meet their financial commitments and still have enough left over to live. Whitney depended on the land sales and annual payments from the homesteaders to keep his company afloat. With the unreliability of the water supply, it became impossible for for the settlers to make payments for the land and water.

With the severe conditions in the repayment schedule, as well as the water shortage, it is little wonder that the Utah Lake Land, Water and Power Company found itself in financial trouble. Eventually, Whitney was forced to attempt to try to sell his sinking company. In 1916, he wrote a letter to Mr. J. F. Jack in Los Angeles, California, trying to convince him to purchase the project. The asking price for the Elberta project was \$1,525,000. Whitney stated that:

by spending \$6,000 on our canal (it) can be extended, watering about 1600 acres of our land, which would sell for \$200,000. After all of the above land has been sold, the company can put in a power plant in our canyon and pumping plant on our canal and irrigate 3,500 acres more of land we own at a cost not exceeding \$20,000, and said land will sell for \$150 per acre, making \$525,000."

Whitney made it sound like a good deal; what he was forgetting to mention was that the project did not have enough water to irrigate existing developed land let alone additional acreage.

Jack evidently was not interested, for Whitney started negotiations for the sale of the property to Otho S. Houston and M.B. Loy of Los Angeles in February, 1916. This was the last promotion Whitney or the Utah Lake Land, Water and Power Co. made.

Whitney sold them the company, but when the buyers discovered what a bad condition the company was in, they sued alleging that the Utah Lake Land, Water and Power Company was not a legal corporation because of its failure to pay a required state corporate fee. Whitney had told them the company property was worth \$1,301,625.00; Loy and Houston estimated that, without water and with the flume and canal system in need of repair, the maximum worth of the company was only \$75,000. Houston and Loy won the suit and the project went partially for tax sales, and partially to a receiver, Edward T. Jones. Mrs. Penrod, in her history of Elberta, states that:

The lawsuits broke the man (Whitney) financially as well as physically,
...although Mr. Whitney remained the head of the project, and never ceased trying
to redeem it until his death in the fall of 1917.

The Ultimate Dream

Louis Thompson bought the project out of receivership in 1919 and initiated a new era for the Elberta project. Prior to Thompson, Whitney had sworn that the company would never fall into the hands of Mormons. However, with the purchase by Thompson, the project became the property of Mormon investors.

Thompson eventually sold the property to a company owned by Jesse Knight, a man important in Mormon history. The name of Knight's new company was Utah Valley Land and Water Company. Jesse Knight was not only a Mormon, but a rich one; in less than three years he had gone literally from rags to riches.

Jesse Knight made his money from mining in the Tintic Mountains, located west of Elberta. As the story goes, he was inspired about a spot of ground in the Tintic area and a geologist-friend told him it was "humbug" and he would never find productive ore at that location. Eleven years later he borrowed \$1,500 at 12% interest and began mining. His second shipment of ore from the mine, named the "Humbug," returned \$11,189.05.

Jesse Knight felt that his newly acquired wealth was a sacred trust, given to him to improve the lot of the Mormon Church and its members. He planned to use his riches to provide employment for other people. Known to be a kind man, always striving to help others with his riches, he became known as "Uncle Jesse," and an easy mark to the people in Utah Valley. According to his daughter Inez:

He loved projects that were unusual. ..big and full of opportunity for
others. As soon as his promotions were placed on a dividend basis,
his interest waned and he desired to sell as a means of financing other
development.

Knight made numerous investments throughout Utah, the Intermountain West, and Canada. Two of his projects affected the Goshen Valley area.

By 1917 Knight's mines were no longer producing heavily. He decided that what was needed was a long drainage tunnel to launch a new epoch in the mining industry of the famous Tintic District; to make possible deep mining by unwatering the whole southern region. .." The drain tunnel was to extend approximately five miles into the mountains under the southern Tintic District. Its tunnel portal was located southwest of the Elberta canal in southern Goshen valley. Jesse Knight had implicit faith in his

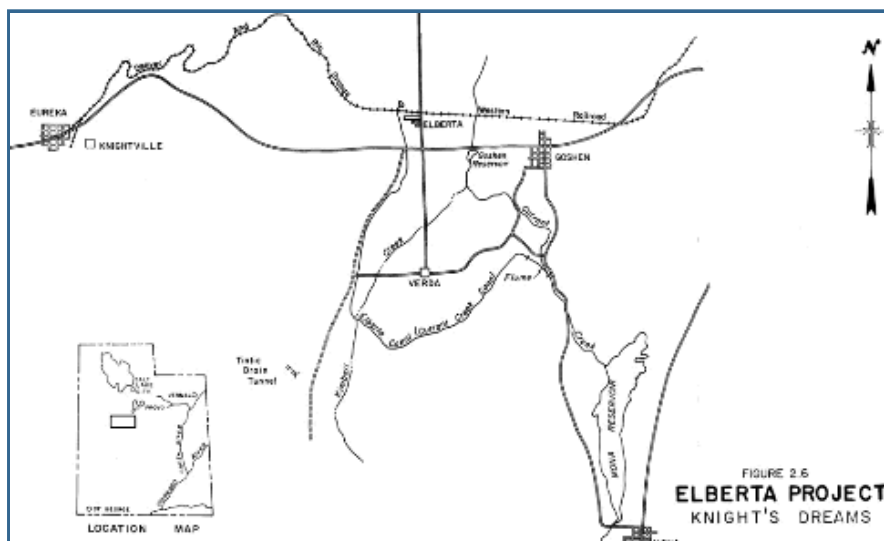
drainage venture, but unfortunately he had more faith than money. After tunneling into the mountain one and one-eighth miles, the project was stopped because of a lack of funding. Uncle Jesse, showing unusual integrity, personally bought back the stock in the drain tunnel company that he had encouraged others to buy.

At the same time Knight was working on his drainage tunnel, Thompson enticed "Uncle Jesse" to buy the Elberta property. Knight was convinced of its possibilities and bought the project despite the opposition of his family and his lawyer ([Knight](#), 1940).

Big plans were made for the area, but this time, there was a lack of the elaborate promotion tactics that Elberta had experienced earlier. The immediate problem was getting the project back on its feet. The flume was in a dilapidated condition, as was the rest of the irrigation system. The Utah Valley Land and Water Company spent thousands of dollars repairing the flume and replacing irrigation headgates. Knight brought in W. T. Jolley as watermaster, and his son-in-law, Lester Mangum, to manage the project.

Unfortunately, the Knight empire was no longer in a healthy financial situation. The Knight mines were no longer profitable, and the drainage tunnel was sapping cash resources. When the tunnel was not able to be completed, the mine production continued their decline and the capital for improvements in Elberta evaporated. Jesse Knight died in 1921, and with him a dream of what Elberta could become.

Exactly what Knight's intentions were in Elberta may never be completely known. We know he had planned to construct a sugar refinery in Elberta ([Penrod](#), undated). A cash crop was important to payoff the project's debt. But one nagging question remains. Did he have any intention to connect the waterway from the drain tunnel to the Elberta irrigation canal (see [Drawing 6](#)). There is no specific evidence he did. But one cannot help but wonder whether he intended to firm up the project's water supply by supplementing it with the drainage water. One statement by Knight's son ([Knight](#), 1940) adds a little light to the subject but does not totally clarify the issue: "He had also in mind the use of the tunnel water to irrigate the gardens of miners working in the various Knight properties."



Drawing 6. Knight's Dream for the Elberta Project.

➡ [Click on the image for a larger version.](#)

In spite of financial difficulties, the Knight empire retained the Elberta project and made improvements until 1932. To make the improvements, the company mortgaged the irrigation system, including the water rights, to the Knight Investment Company and the Knight Trust and Savings Bank.

The Utah Valley Land and Water Company tried to irrigate the large acreage that their predecessors had attempted to irrigate. They also were not successful. The irrigation system was allowed to deteriorate. The remaining settlers on the project did not receive the water they had contracted for and refused to make payments on their contracts or for operation and maintenance charges. The Knight Investment Company and the Knight Trust and Savings Bank foreclosed their mortgage on the irrigation system and bought the system at a sheriff's sale. Later the assets of investment and banking companies were acquired by First Security Bank. The bank was at a loss as to how to operate the Elberta project.

In February, 1939, the settlers themselves organized. They formed the Currant Creek Irrigation Company and acquired the irrigation system including the reservoir, flume, canal, and water rights. The new irrigation company was run by Pratt Thomas, a banker from Spanish Fork.

When Thomas took over, a new system of water delivery was used, a share system. When the reservoir was full, each share got its full value, but if it was only half full then each share only received half its value. So at the beginning of the irrigation season each farmer knew how much water he would receive. This system was much better for planning; if a farmer had an alfalfa field and water was going to be short, he knew to not plant corn in the next field, but instead a short season crop. When Thomas switched the system over, a lot of people were bitter. They felt they were being cheated; they felt the reservoir owners were holding back water for their own use and "choking them (the farmers) off."

After World War II, the Current Creek Irrigation Company constructed a three-foot-diameter, concrete-pressure pipe down Goshen Canyon to replace the redwood flume. After the pipe was in and working, the old redwood flume was torn down. Everyone who owned water shares (and some who didn't) had the opportunity to salvage a part of it. For every share of water owned, a water user received one foot of flume.

Conclusion

Besides problems with the water supply and financial troubles, weather was occasionally a problem. As already noted, in 1925, a devastating freeze killed all the peach trees. Consequently, Elberta today has few fruit trees left. It is no longer the major fruit producing town it was in 1922 when the project shipped out a reported 125 boxcars full of fruit. In spite of the effort made by both the owner-promoters and the farmer-investors, Elberta couldn't surmount the problems of a lack of money, junior water rights, and mother nature. In spite of the hard times experienced in Elberta, a few old-timers still remain. They and the irrigation system are the last monuments to old Elberta.

Unlike many of the other Utah promotion ventures, a scaled-down version of the project has survived to this day. To survive dry cycles, existing farms, many of which are owned by the Mormon Church, have developed groundwater resources to supplement their water supply from Mona Reservoir.

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Oral Interviews

William Keith, Elberta, Utah

William Oram, Payson, Utah

Mabel Peterson Penrod, Goshen, Utah

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