

ECONOMIC PROFILE

Summit County History

Park City & Summit County Utah

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SUMMIT COUNTY HISTORY

Summit County's history is unique, rich, and diverse. The early settlers faced great hardship in these high, alpine valleys, tucked between the Uinta and Wasatch Mountains. Host of the 2002 Winter Olympics, Summit County today is entering a new era of growth. We welcome you to Utah's gateway and invite you on a trip through the past.

Echo Canyon was described in 1860 by Sir Richard Burton: "An American artist might extract from such scenery as Echo Canyon, a system of architecture as original and as national as Egypt ever borrowed from her sandstone ledges or the North of Europe from the depths of her fir forests."

The trail through Echo Canyon was one of the most important of westward expansion. Buffalo, native Americans, and explorers used this natural pathway between the lush grass of Wyoming and the salt deserts to the west. They were later followed by wagon trains, the Mormon pioneers in 1847, the Overland Stage, the Pony Express, gold prospectors and silver miners, the Union Pacific railroad, the first transcontinental telegraph line, the Lincoln Highway, and Interstate 80.

In 1858 the U.S. Army was sent to Utah to quell the Mormon Rebellion and enforce laws prohibiting polygamy. A Mormon militia dammed the creek with a rock wall at the Narrows, and built other fortifications to deter the soldiers. Luckily, they were never needed, but the stone relics can still be seen. Pony Express riders carried the mail on the Mormon Trail down Echo Canyon to Echo, Henefer, and Salt Lake City for 18 months starting in 1860. The cost for a ten word message from Salt Lake City to New York City was \$5.00 (equivalent to \$85.00 today). It was abandoned when the transcontinental telegraph was finished in the fall of 1861. Eight years later the transcontinental railroad reached the Weber Canyon on its way to a meeting with the Central Pacific on Promontory Point near the Great Salt Lake.

Wasatch is an abandoned railroad division point for crew and engine changes. Hundreds of workers lived on the treeless divide at the head of Echo Canyon during the railroad construction of 1868 and 1869.

Named for the surrounding castle-like sandstone cliffs, Castle Rock was a Pony Express and stage station. Attracted by the hope of trading with travelers through the canyon, a number of families homesteaded the land and began a town. The active though small community soon boasted a railroad depot, section house for railroad workers, gas station, store, water windmill, and schoolhouse. Hanging Rock, in Emory, is another abandoned Pony Express Station.

Echo was settled in 1854 by James Bromley, who ran the Weber Stage Station. Fourteen years later, tents, saloons, and brothels sprang up as men built the transcontinental railroad. When the railroad moved on, seven human skeletons were discovered under one saloon. When the old stage station was demolished a love letter to a Pony Express rider, a \$5 gold piece, and a pair of gold rim spectacles were found in the walls.

Underneath towering conglomerate cliffs is the Echo Church, built in 1876, with a belfry steeple, wooden entry, pine paneled interior, and brick walls. It was a public school from 1880 to 1913, and Mormon chapel for 50 years until 1963.

Vacant for 20 years the Echo Church is a meeting hall and museum alongside the Echo Cemetery.

In July, 1846, the Harlan-Young party drove their wagons past this site and down the nearly impassable lower Weber River (named after Captain John Weber, a member of the 1823 Ashley Fur expedition). They found a rocky canyon with a raging river in its bottoms. That summer the Donner-Reed party avoided the canyon and blazed a new trail to the west. It took 21 days to travel the 36 miles to the Great Salt Lake. The delay would prove fatal for them in the Sierra Nevada later that autumn.

Brigham Young led his Mormon immigrants over this new trail in 1847 to the Salt Lake Valley. From 1847 to 1867, 80,000 Mormon immigrants traveled this way by wagon, handcart and foot. Pony Express riders took the same cutoff.

Henefer is a farming community along the banks of the Weber River, located where this trail leaves the Weber River. In 1859 the first homes were made from adobe brick, packed mud floors, dirt roofs, and windows with barred shutters for protection from the Indians. Early settlers raised grain and cattle, but items such as matches, yeast, and needles were scarce. The Echo Dam (158 feet high) was built from 1927-30 by the Bureau of Reclamation at a cost of \$2.9 million.

The reservoir inundated about 1825 acres of farmland and forced the relocation of 3.9 miles of the Lincoln Highway and 4.7 miles of railroad track between Echo and Coalville.

Coal was discovered in Grass Creek in the 1860s and the Grass Creek Fuel Company quickly raised a company town for its workers. In 1884 a narrow gauge track was built and the town reached its peak between 1910 and 1920 with a population of 200. However increasing costs and competition from other coal mining areas forced the mines to close and the last coal came out of Grass Creek in 1940.

Camped near present Coalville in 1858, immigrants saw mature wheat where a grain bag had spilled the previous year. A supply center for farmers, the town was originally named Chalk Creek, but the name was changed when Thomas Rhodes discovered coal. The Summit County Courthouse, in Coalville, was built of native stone in 1903-1904 and has been recently restored.

Upton was settled in 1861 to the east of Coalville on Chalk Creek. First a sawmill town, it later had a store and schoolhouse. Today Upton is the site of a major oil field discovered in the 1970's. Part of the Overthrust Belt, its wells have been drilled as deep as 18,000 feet

Hoytsville was settled in the autumn of 1859, but in 1866 the houses were torn down to build a fort against the Indians. Early homes were made of brick (baked 150,000 at a time). Homes of this brick include: 880 S. and 936 S. Hoytsville Road, and 1090 S. West Hoytsville Road and 1085 S. West Hoytsville Road. The Hoyt Mansion, the large stone house built from 1863-1868, is one of Utah's most elegant 19th century homes and can be seen from Creamery Lane.

Wanship was settled in 1857, and named after a Ute Chief. It was once a hub for coal from Coalville, timber from Kamas, and silver from Park City. Two railroads passed through Wanship on their way to Park City. The Union Pacific Spur was built up Silver Creek Canyon in 1879, at the same time as a narrow gauge track was built by the Utah Central Railroad. Before then wagons hauled grain, coal, and flour from mills.

The town of Rockport (1860) was on the original route of the Overland Stage as it turned up Three Mile Canyon. The population in 1940 was around 200 people, but today the town is under the waters of Rockport Reservoir.

From 1824 to 1825 William Ashley, Jedediah Smith, Jim Bridger and Kit Carson stopped at the numerous springs near Peoa. Named from a word found carved into an old log in 1857, Peoa at one time had a hotel, store, and blacksmith. Cattle and dairy farmers also grew lettuce and peas for sale to the miners in Park City. In 1825 William Ashley's party of trappers rode across the Kamas Valley to the Weber River, and on to Echo Canyon and Wyoming. An old Indian trail followed the eastern foothills. Early visitors found a Spanish canon in the middle of the valley, abandoned during their search for gold. At Oakley, Thomas Rhodes built his home on the banks of the Weber River in 1853. In 1868 first William Stevens became the permanent settler in what was called Oak Creek, then Oakley. In 1859 Thomas Rhodes settled at a spring at the base of Hoyt's Canyon near Marion, Samuel P. Hoyt established a ranch in 1861, his herd of over 600 cattle was one of the largest in the territory. In the 1940s there was a cooperative pea vinery here.

The town of Kamas was settled in 1857 at the mouth of Beaver Creek Canyon by Rhodes. He operated a sawmill, grazed cattle, and gave his name to the valley. In 1867 a log fort was built for 32 families for protection during the Blackhawk Indian Wars, and vacated in 1870. Kamas grew with flour mills, creameries, a bank, hotel, movie theatre, undertaker and garages. In 1860 workers began work in earnest to open a road through Silver Creek Canyon. A toll gate was installed about five miles up the canyon from the town of Wanship, giving rise to the name Toll Gate Canyon. The toll was \$1.00. At the western end of the Silver Creek Canyon, Atkinson Station serviced wagon freighters. In the 1910s a school was built near the Big 4 Mill and can still be seen along the Historic Rail Trail south of I-80.

Near Snyderville, Mormon pioneers Parley Pratt and Samuel Snyder explored this grassy basin in 1848, grazing cattle there in 1853. In 1862 William Kimball built the Kimball Hotel at this Overland Stage Station, visited by the likes of Mark Twain, Walt Whitman, and Horace Greeley. Today these grassy meadows are growing more homes than cattle.

The Ecker Hill ski jump was the site of international competition in the 1930's. Today the Olympic Sports Park ski jumps are open to anyone with the courage to jump.

In 1869, Park City's rush was on when rich ore was discovered by three soldiers, assaying at 96 oz. of silver, 54% lead, and 1/10 oz of gold per ton. The boom town quickly swelled with miners, saloons, brothels, and cemeteries. In 1898, fire destroyed most of Main Street, and it was rebuilt within 90 days.

By 1960, decimated by low silver prices, Park City was a ghost of its former self. But three years later the United Park City Mines Company built the first ski trails on its land, followed by a gondola and golf course.

Three decades later, Park City is a boom town once again, with three ski areas, shops, 100 restaurants, luxury homes, and a name known around the world. Yearly events include the Sundance Film Festival and Park City Arts Festival.

There are over 100 historic sites in Park City that are listed on the National Register. Many of these are on historic Main Street. The Park City Museum (528 Main St.) offers a walking guide as well as exhibits and information.

“The Uinta Mountains,” wrote William Ashley in 1825, “is in many places fertile and closely timbered with pine, cedar, quaking-asp, and a dwarfish growth of oak; a great number of beautiful streams issue from them on each side, running through fertile valleys richly clothed with grass.”

When the transcontinental railroad was built through Wyoming and into Echo Canyon from 1867 through 1869, tens of thousands of wooden ties were cut from the thickly timbered Uinta Mountains.

In 1872 the Hilliard Flume and Lumber Company began construction of a large v-shaped flume which ran 30 miles from Gold Hill, along Hayden’s Fork, to the town of Hilliard. The flume was 16 feet above ground, and the logs ran at 15 miles per hour. Today there is little left of Mill City, which was at the head of the flume, where there were once bunkhouses for 500 men, company store and sawmill.

The Upper Weber Canyon was a main route for Indians from Wyoming, across the Kamas Valley and on to Utah Lake. Loggers cut wood for ties, lumber, and cord wood. The ties were floated down the Weber River and taken out at Wanship. Francis was settled in 1865. In the 1890s the Utah Central Railroad hired locals from surrounding communities to grade a route and set ties along the Provo River over Wolf Creek Pass. The project went broke however, and none of the workmen were paid. The ties were removed and used as fence posts.

Woodland was settled in 1867 along the valley of the Provo River.

For more information, please contact:

Summit County Historical Society summitcounty.org/history