

In mortal memory lay these images

The Escalante Well

Incident

March 6, 1935

A personal perspective and overview by Clark N. Nelson, Sr. based upon historical accounts, photograph comparisons, abstract conclusions and assumptions, following a search for the former site of Escalante well #1

Cadence of Events:

1. The Escante well – of hopes, dreams, reality

2. The Escalante well -Anticipation

3. The Incident

4. Immortal Sorrow

In Mortal Memory

Acknowledgement - In appreciation

“The Wrong Car Came” by Ellen Raye Brown – Copy courtesy the Librarian at Val Browning Library - Dixie State College – St. George, Utah.

To Pause, with Patience, To Photographs

Inasmuch as my father’s identical twin, Ray Nelson, was a victim of the incident March 6, 1935, and, since my best opportunity to search for the former well site had fallen short due to an unforgiving anomaly known as cancer diagnosis.

Thereby accepting my situation, having accepted the fact this had likely been my final opportunity, a friend of more than fifty years offered to conduct a search on my behalf, as well as a relevancy within his own personal interest(s).

In late-February and early-March of 2007, Jim Kemple, along with friend and companion Larry Higgins, relative to GPS coordinates, conducted a search for the former site of Escalante well #1.

At a point during the month of March, a reference map and eighteen photographs were made available in five separate folders, courtesy Jim Kemple. Three of these folders, labeled as ‘Images’, containing eleven photographs, appear to prove applicable to the general location of the area to be searched.

The fourth folder, labeled ‘Well 8’, contains four photographs that were basically taken from the same spot; a nearby unpaved road, or path, with rocks and boulders on each side; warehouse-type structures in the distance, off to the far-left. One of these four photographs, hereby noted as ‘Photograph #1’, can be seen later in this overview.

The fifth and final folder, labeled ‘The Site’, contains three photographs; moreover, considering the lay of the land and general appearance, relative to

confirmed GPS coordinates, have apparently been confirmed as images of the former location of Escalante well #1.

To recap, in brief summary, three of the aforementioned photographs, in particular photograph #2, relevant to GPS coordinates, were determined to have been the approximate location of the well derrick, as well as the tragedy that occurred there March 6, 1935.

In The Mind's Eye

Accordingly, we have three photographs for consideration, hereby noted within this overview as photographs #2, #3, and #4, with #2 appearing the primary focus.

However, once examining photograph #2, considering GPS coordinates the ultimate tool, notwithstanding that which appears to confirm a 'mirror image', questions arise as to the accuracy within these three photographs. Furthermore, whereas statements within this overview, as they may relate to accuracy within these photographs, are based solely upon my individual, personal perspective(s) following a thorough review.

Moreover, based solely upon my personal observation and review; whereas characteristics of soil composition and texture, abundant vegetation, as well as contour and lay of the land, appear to confirm an apparent mismatch.

Furthermore, a photograph taken following the incident is provided for comparison, relative only to aforementioned characteristics; whereas the earthen-ledge fronting the bluff, as well as the bluff itself in photograph #5, serve as earthen-fingerprints of where the power pole stood and where the derrick lay, as depicted in the photograph from 1935.

Notwithstanding what appears the approximate location, relative to photographs #2, #3, and #4, an additional photograph, hereby noted as photograph #5, and purely from the abstract, seems somewhat logical relative to the actual location, hereby deserving additional consideration in the process of comparison and subsequent conclusion, be it of one type or another.

Photograph #5, again from the abstract, seems to suggest the possibility of alternative conclusion as to the genuine location; moreover, this seems to serve a perspective based upon a particular bluff and lay of the land as it appeared in 2007.

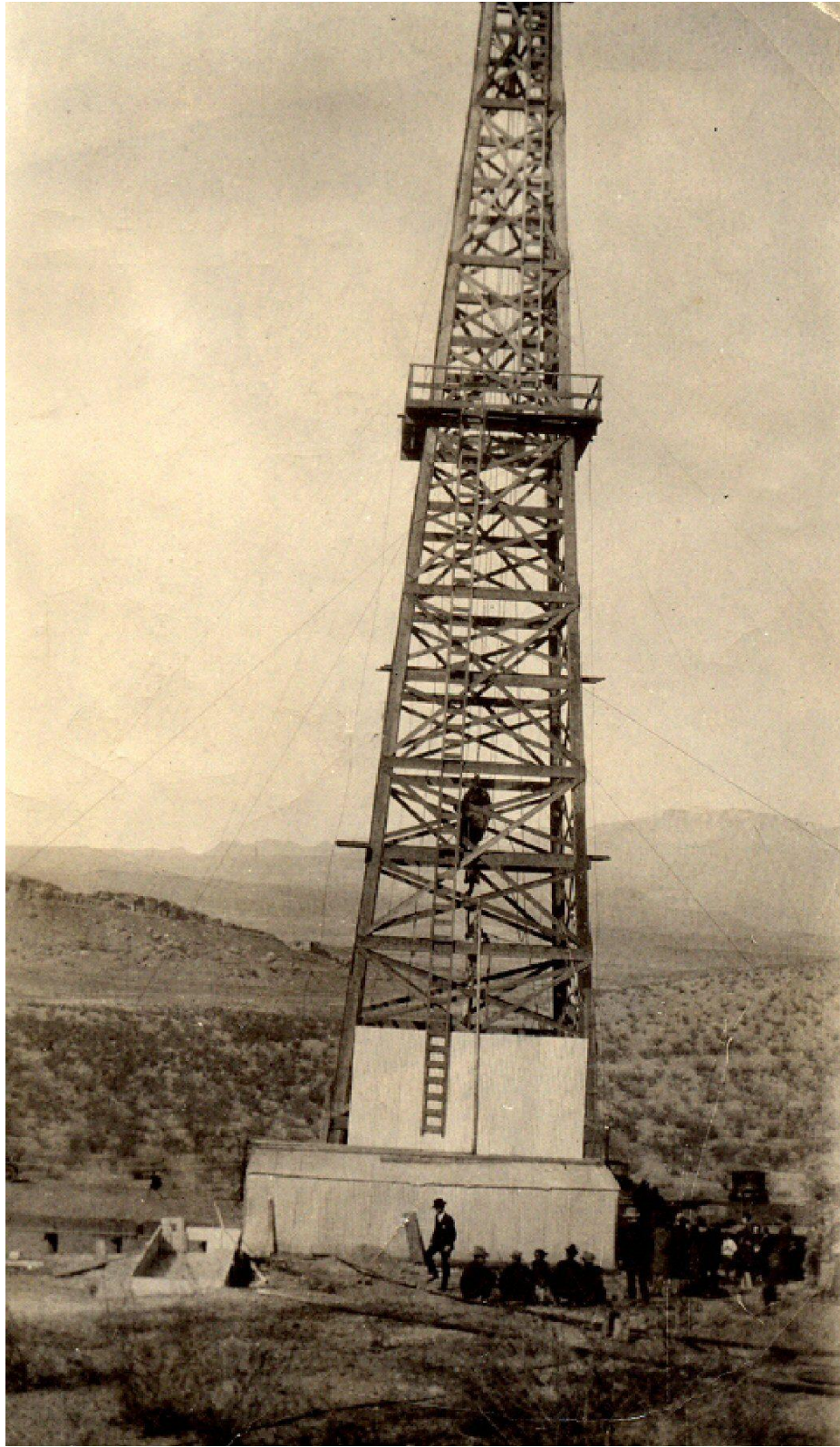
Photograph #5 appears to be the mirror-image to the scene following the incident in 1935, considering the shape, taper, and characteristics common to that particular bluff.

In addition, please note the shape, height, and characteristics common to the ledge in the foreground, fronting that bluff. I find this a compelling photograph.

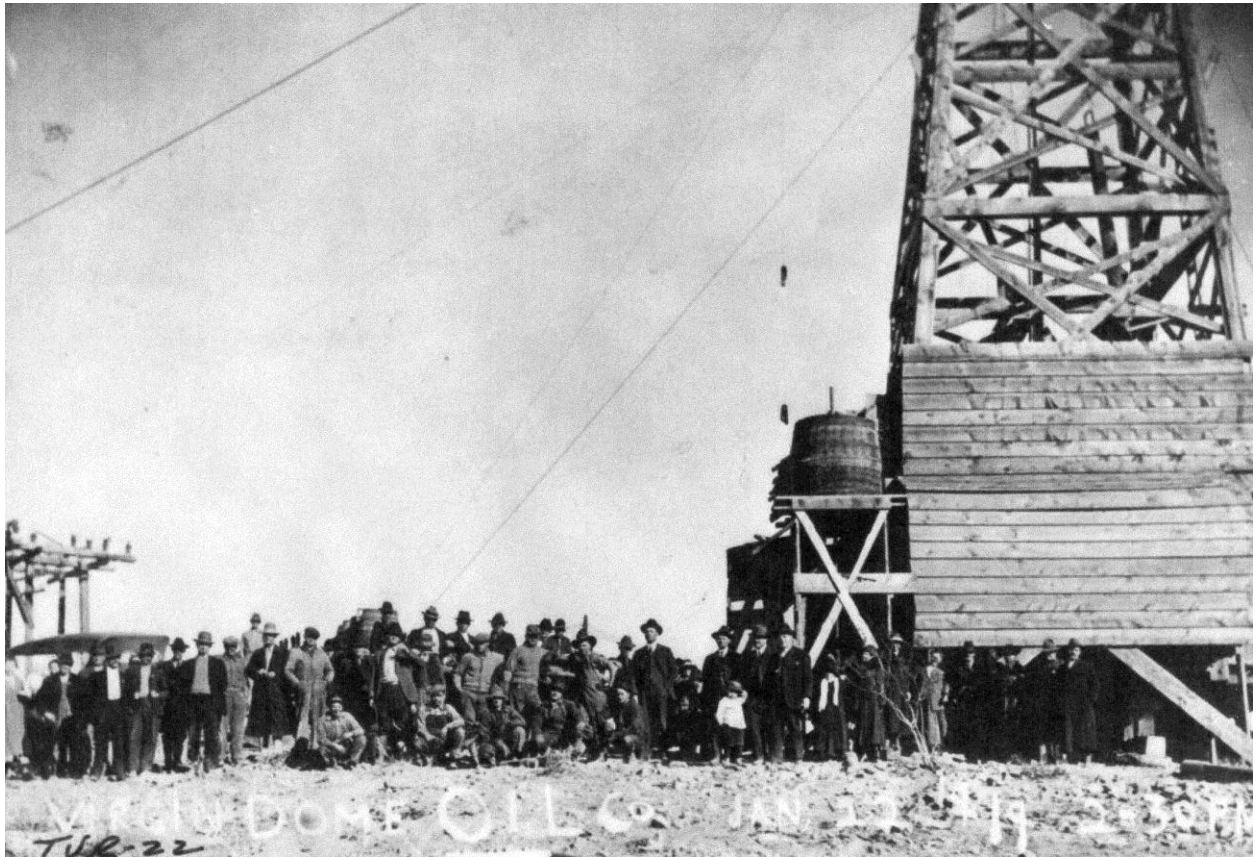
After all, the bluff in photograph #2, considered the genuine former site, doesn't appear to match up with the bluff seen in the photograph available for comparison, the photograph taken following the incident.

Moreover, notwithstanding GPS coordinates or previously drawn conclusions, photograph #5 seems to capture what I would consider the genuine former site of Escalante well #1.

**** The preceding overview and argument regarding photographs #2, #3, and #4 versus conclusions drawn relative to photograph #5, andt purely from the abstract, is merely my personal perspective in consumption for appropriate consideration.***



1. The Escalante well – of hopes, dreams, reality



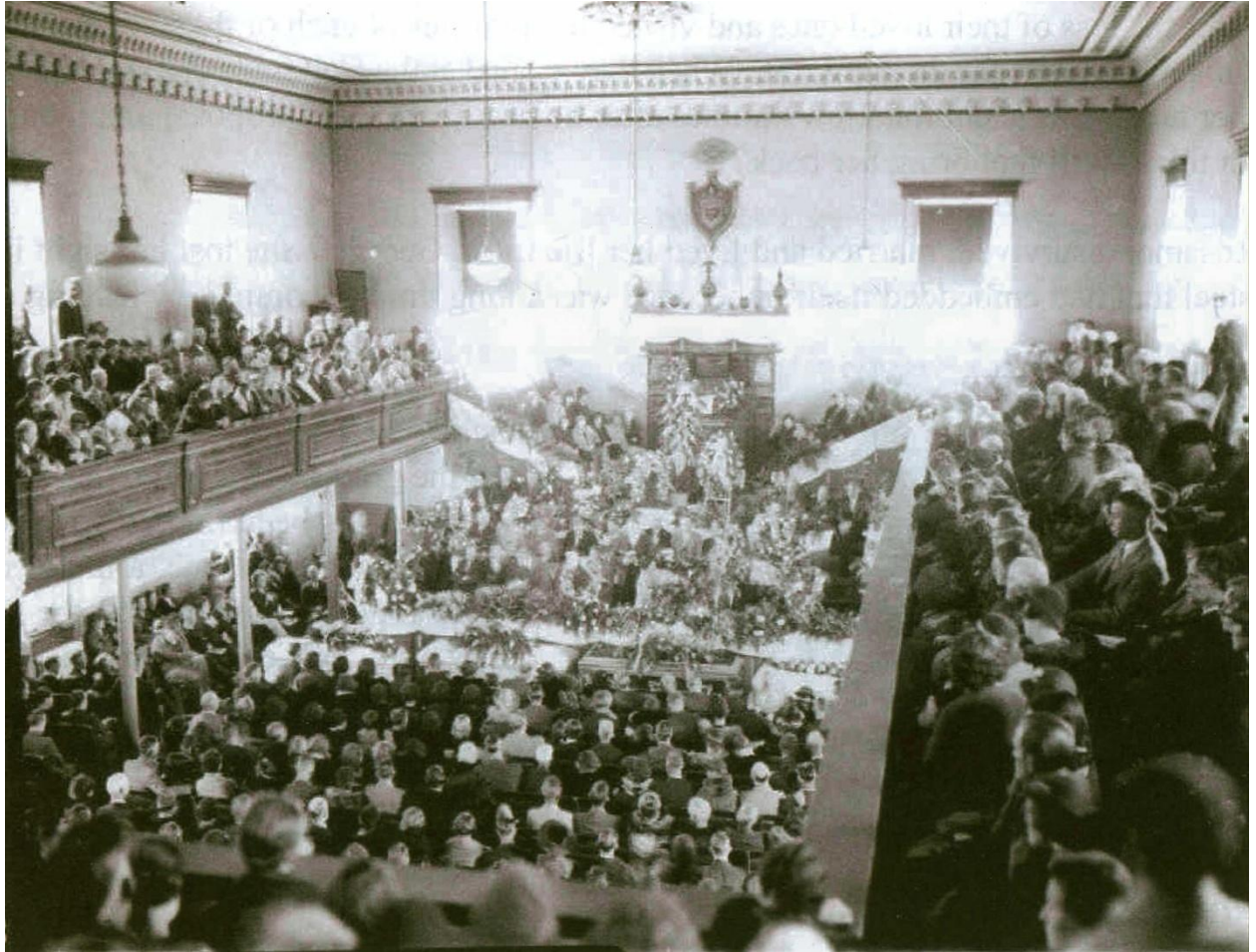
2.

The Escalante well - Anticipation



3.

The Incident



4.

Immortal Sorrow

Part I.

'The Wrong Car Came'

By Ellen Raye Brown

“The Wrong Car Came”

Dawn was just sending its golden rays up over the black ridge to the east on this Wednesday morning, March 7, 1935 as this city of about 2000 awoke with a sense of anticipation and excitement. Spring was in the air and the hint of cherry blossoms gave the air that special freshness and fragrance of blossom time in Utah's "Dixie."

The townsfolk had been hosts to the Escalante #1 well of the Arrowhead Oil Company since August, 1933 and drilling for oil had proceeded intermittently since that time. As the drilling had proceeded through the winter the optimism of the citizens had increased.

This small community had been established just seventy-three years before. Many of the original settlers were still living and remembered, only too well, the struggles they had endured trying to make a city in this hot dry desert. All had endured poverty as they struggled to bring water to the parched land so their crops could survive. Life had been extremely difficult and they had learned to go without many of the niceties of life just to exist in the harsh climate where summers often found the temperature hovering around 110 for days, and sometimes weeks, at a time.

Now there was new hope for better days ahead. The oil crews had been drilling through the sandstone and with each passing week there was renewed anticipation of what striking oil could mean to the prosperity of the citizens. The drilling had not been easy. Beneath the surface lay underground voids that had to be filled with cement so that the oil would not reach the subterranean caves and spread out before ever reaching the surface.

In town, just seven miles to the north, the day's activities were just beginning at the company office. Lea Cottam, Una Pickett and Rosamond Snow had arrived to take up their duties as secretaries, and Charles D. Alsop, general manager of the oil company, had arrived. Joseph Empey, the electrician, and some of the men had gone out to the site to prepare for drilling and were getting charges ready to set off later that day. They felt they were very close to bringing in the oil. They had drilled to a depth of 4250 feet. Several months earlier, an attempt had been made to shoot the well at that depth, but it had proved unsuccessful. They had encountered trouble with a lost string of tools and caving formations. In view of this situation, it is thought that the driller this day was attempting to shoot the oil sand at the 3200 foot level.

In the afternoon, workmen burst into the office with the news that with one more blast, they would bring in the oil. Mr. Alsop thought this was just the time for a celebration and plans were made for all the employees to meet at the drilling site that evening for a party. They would all be there when the oil gushed out of the ground and into the sky heralding new prosperity for the people of St. George, Utah.

Around town, different scenarios were playing out as townspeople began their day's activities and each of those who were going to the well, made their preparations. One of those who had a busy day scheduled was Viola Woodbury, a friend and classmate of Iris, Lea's sister. She had her

appendix out that morning and spent several days in the hospital in recovery. Una and Lea, who were inseparable friends, worked until 5:00 p.m. and then walked home. One of the workmen had seen them at the office just before they had left and told them to hurry home, get something to eat and someone would come by to pick them up and take them to the site. They talked as friends do as they walked the two or three blocks to their homes. As they reached Una's home they parted, Lea continuing the half block to her home.

Inside, something interrupted Una's thoughts and instead of hurrying and eating, she laid down on her bed and was soon in deep sleep.

Lea arrived home to find a bustling home life with her parents and seven brothers and sisters getting ready for their evening meal. Lea told her family of the plans for bringing in the oil and there was a sense of excitement in the family. As Lea talked to her mother, they remembered that Lea had made an appointment with Dr. Harris for a chiropractic adjustment that evening and she expected his house call shortly. Lea told her mother that if Dr. Harris came first, she wouldn't go with her company friends out to the well.

The night was dark as a car pulled up in front of Lea's home and as she went to the door to see who it was, she turned to her parents with the remark, "The wrong car came." Then she was off.

Mr. Alsop had invited many of the townspeople to come to share in the excitement at the well site and there was a sizeable group that planned to be there. However, there was a school basketball game that night, too and quite a few of the players and their families had to make a decision of going to the well or going to support the team at their game in Cedar City. Many of them chose the game, but more than a hundred people gathered at the well to see it "blow in."

Thus it was that a group of eight or ten employees and a group of spectators gathered to watch as the charge was set. The driller who was in charge of "shooting the well," objected to having others there and told Mr. Alsop that this wasn't party time. It was dangerous work and he didn't want anyone there but himself as he set the charge and ignited it. Alsop pooh-poohed his concerns and they exchanged some heated words. The driller made his decision. If people other than himself were going to be there, he was leaving--and he did. Alsop, not to be thwarted in his plans, proceeded to get things ready to blast.

Lea turned to her friend Rosamond Snow, who had come with her mother, Mrs. Joseph S. Snow, and said, "There's a bad feeling here, let's leave." They both turned and started to run from the scene. They had not gone far when the night air was shattered with the noise of a tremendous blast.

As reported by the Deseret News, "six torpedoes, each 10 feet long and five inches in diameter, had been fastened together in a string and hung from the derrick, for lowering into the well.



Lea Cottam and friend Una Pickett about 1934

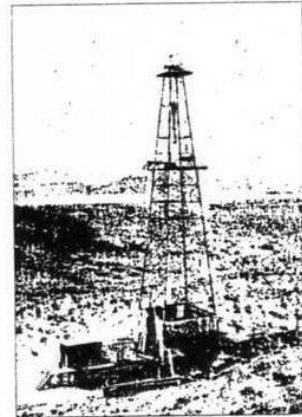
Each torpedo was loaded with nitroglycerin and TNT. Two caps were attached to each torpedo, connected by wires. The crew was all set to start the machinery for the lowering operations when the torpedoes exploded."

So violent was the explosion that it was heard distinctly by the residents of St. George and many rushing out of their homes to try to determine what had caused it, saw the flames billowing into the night sky. Hundreds of townspeople hurried to the scene.

Over a hundred spectators who had come to watch the well "blow in" were thrown into a panic by the explosion. Scores suffered minor injuries. Those who were uninjured ran to the assistance of the dead and injured and rushed them to the St. George hospital.

Sheriff John H. Cottam rushed a group to the scene to battle the flames at the well. At first they could not determine whether it was the oil ablaze or if gas that had been brought to the surface was burning.

The derrick was blown to bits and the nearby storehouse, which contained another 1000 pounds of nitroglycerin, was blown to bits and burned. Altogether, there was a ton and a half of Nitroglycerin that exploded. More than 800 pounds of explosives that had been used in the torpedoes ignited and sent a shaft of fire into the sky. Those who were nearest the derrick were either burned badly, mutilated or crushed by the falling timbers.



The oil well derrick

One of the spectators, Ellis Pickett, an attorney, who with his wife had come to witness the event were nearby. Ellis was right up by the derrick and his wife, Ruth, sitting in their car. His wife became nervous and asked him to move further back from the site for safety. He ignored her concerns and stayed where he was. She kept insisting that he move the car farther away from the derrick. After she kept up her requests, he became irritated and finally stalked over to the car rather angrily, got in, started the car and backed it up some fifty feet or more. They had just watched the men finish loading the cartridge of nitroglycerin and start sending it down the casing. He had just shut off his motor and was about to open the car door when the blast occurred. As he described the scene, "flames shot into the air, the derrick collapsed upon the heads of the watching crowd, and the air was rent by the screams of men, women and children."



Clark Empey

He jumped from his car and ran to see if he could give help. He met 'Swede' Erickson and Bert Covington, both of whom were badly injured. He transported them to the hospital and returned to give more help. He estimated that the cartridge had been lowered about halfway down the shaft when it exploded.

He and his brother Henry had learned that their sister Una's best friend, Lea, had been one of the victims and they were both frantic. "Where's Una? Find Una." His brother assured him that Una had not

come. She was safe at home. But he could not accept that. "Find Una. If Lea was here, Una was here. They are always together!" Again his brother assured him that their sister was not there.

News of the tragedy quickly reached St. George residents. One of the people to hear was Fay Terry, a neighbor of the Empeys. She rushed over to the Empey home and banged on the door until eighteen year old Clark Empey answered. She told him there had been an accident at the well and did he know how to shut off the power? Yes, he did. He had worked at the well on numerous occasions with his dad, Joseph Empey, so he knew what had to be done. They put him in a car with some of the men going to the site. He was not prepared for the sight that would meet his young eyes that night with flames shooting up, lighting the disastrous event. He could not reach the switch without being lifted up by two of the men. Upon being boosted up, he reached up and pulled the switch that would prevent the rescuers from becoming victims themselves. Back in town he spent a sleepless night unable to get the scene out of his mind as the realization of his personal loss of a father and brother-in-law sank in.

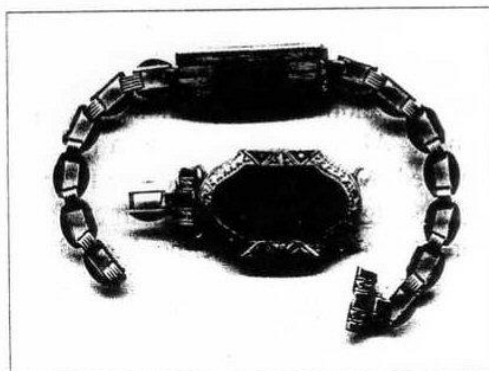
As the injured were taken to the hospital in St. George, the commotion disturbed the patients there, including Viola Woodbury. As she lay in her bed wondering what was going on, but not getting any answers from the nurses or hospital staff, she heard a girl calling, "Mama! Mama!" Startled, she recognized the voice as that of her friend Lea, but no one would tell her what was going on. It was not until the next day that she learned the truth and realized that the calls for "Mama" were indeed those of her friend.

The search for the remains of the other five victims went on the next day. The bodies of Nelson, Kitterman, Mrs. Alsop, Mrs. Snow and Fleckinger were taken to St. George Thursday morning. Rosamond Snow and Lea Cottam had been taken to the hospital during the night, along with others seriously injured, where Lea died at 2:15 a.m. Rosamond was not expected to survive.

County Attorney Orval Hafen, who went to the scene of the disaster and took charge of the investigation said, "Many bits of human flesh and bone were scattered around the area and identification of some of the bodies would be impossible."

Mrs. Joseph Empey, wife of the electrician, was ill with heart problems and was bed ridden. She begged the searchers to please find something that they could identify positively as her husband and that she could put in his casket. They finally found a piece of his distinctive salt and pepper hair which clung to a small portion of his flesh and a piece of skull.

Fearing that an earthquake had occurred in southern Utah, several of the surrounding towns, including LaVerkin, 20 miles away and Leeds 18 miles away, telephoned to learn what the shock



The watch Lea was wearing. The only clothing that was not blown off was part of the front panel of her brown felt skirt and her underpants.

was that they had felt the night before. The flames from the column of fire could be seen clearly in Hurricane, 18 miles away.

Blast Occurs While Lowering Dynamite in Arrowhead Petroleum Well

(As reported in the Washington County News of March 7, 1935)

Nine people, two of whom were women, were instantly killed when the shot which was being prepared to be lowered into the Escalante oil well exploded at approximately 9:40 p.m. Wednesday night, from causes unknown. Two women, Rosamond Snow and Lea Cottam, who were part of the group, were so badly injured that the latter died after they had been taken to the Washington County hospital and Miss Snow is so badly injured that it is not known whether she will live or not.

Two men, Bert Covington and Elmer "Swede" Erickson, spectators, were injured by the blast, Mr. Erickson seriously when a piece of metal was blown into his chest. Considerable blood was lost by the injured man before he was given medical attention at the hospital. Dr. McGregor reports that surgery will be required before they know the extent of his injuries. Mr. Covington was bruised and lacerated about the head and his ears were injured but it is thought that his case will not prove to be serious.

The known dead are: Charles Alsop, president and general manager of the Arrowhead Petroleum Company, by whom the Escalante Well is leased and was being drilled; his wife, Mrs. Mabel Alsop; C. M. Flickenger, veteran oil driller who was handling the shooting; Joseph Empey Jr., electrician; his son-in-law, Kall Nicholson, assistant electrician; Billy Maloney, oil worker, son of Mrs. Vivien Maloney; Mrs. Olive Bleak Snow, wife of Joseph S. Snow; Ray Nelson, son of Mrs. Ernest Nelson; Joseph F. Kitterman, druggist at the Liberty Drug Store.

Mr. and Mrs. Ellis Pickett; Wallace Blake of St. George; A. Samson, an oil land salesman; Jack Williams, oil well driller; Mrs. C. M. Flickenger and her sister, and Tex Bethea, driller, were also spectators at the scene, but had all retired a distance from the well and so were not seriously injured.

According to Mr. Pickett, his wife and he had parked close to the well along with others, but Mr. Bethea came by and suggested that since they were under some high tension wires it would be better if they moved their car to another spot. Mrs. Pickett was nervous and so when they got to the place they first thought to move to, a spot about seventy-five yards from the well, she asked him to go a little farther so that the place where they stopped was approximately 100 yards from the well. They had the back of

the car toward the well and were sitting there listening to the radio. Mr. Picket bases his estimate of the time when the explosion occurred by the fact that the 9:30 program had just been announced and he figures that it was about ten minutes from that time when the explosion came. Although they were 100 yards from the well, the top of their car was blown in. Mr. Picket received a slight wound on the side of his head and the right window was shattered, although it is of unbreakable glass. Several dents were made in the side of the car and one of the fenders was bent.

Immediately after the explosion, Bert Covington and Elmer Erickson came staggering out from among the falling debris, both injured as described. Not knowing how badly the men were hurt, and realizing that help must be secured, Mr. Pickett immediately put those two men in the car and started for St. George. George A. Samson also came in, went to the Liberty Drug store and asked that they get doctors out at the well immediately. Mr. Pickett also attempted to get in touch with the doctors and left word that they be notified.

Cars loaded with men were rushed out to the scene as no one knew the extent of the damage although it was thought that some of the ones that were in close could be alive.

Tex Bethea also left at the same time as Mr. Pickett and drove to the Hyrum Leany place where he phoned for Sheriff Cottam, who left at once for the well. On his return, Mr. Bethea helped rescue Rosamond Snow and Lea Cottam, put them in his car and brought them to the hospital.

According to Wallace Blake's son, his father was the last man to leave the derrick and the first man back to the well after the explosion. Mr. Blake picked up Miss Snow and attempted to carry her out, but because of a recent sickness, had trouble doing so. He had her away from the well though when Mr. Bethea came back.

Rescue work was handicapped by the many live high tension wires that were scattered by the blast. Extreme caution had to be used until these were turned off by Bert Riding when he had been notified to do so, by C. W. Love, Jr., who was one of the first to arrive. Mr. Love immediately turned around and came back into town to notify Mr. Riding. It is believed that the power was turned off at about 10:30 p.m.

Mr. Blake's son states that his father had felt a premonition of the disaster. He and Mr. Samson had gone to Ray Nelson's car about 500 feet from the well and were sitting in it when the accident occurred. The back of the car, which was toward the well, was blown in and the back window smashed. Mr. Blake feels that had they not had the windows of the car up, they would both have been seriously hurt.

People for miles around felt and heard the explosion. Many St. George residents were conscious of it, but didn't associate it with anything serious, since there had been considerable blasting being done in connection with the installation of the St. George sewage system.

Drilling operations had been going on for some time at the Escalante well and several oil sands had been encountered showing fine indications of oil so it had been decided to shoot the well. Preparation had been made during the day by the day crew and everything was ready at about 8:00 p.m. when the group left here. It is estimated that between 700 and 800 pounds of explosive material had been raised in preparation to letting it down into the well. This was in cartridges approximately ten feet long. Five or six of these having been raised at the time the accident occurred. The men had planned on lowering this to an oil sand strata located about 3,000 feet deep. There was more powder in the powder house which was to be used if other shots were thought necessary. This powder burned without exploding.

The first arrivals after the accident found a terrible sight with the derrick a tangled mass of wreckage and fire burning in the different parts of the wrecked derrick. Although this structure was of steel, cement and galvanized iron, there was some timber among it and it was this that burned.

A coroner's inquest was held Thursday morning at the well under the jurisdiction of Harold Snow, Justice of the Peace, and a jury was sworn in. An investigation was made of the bodies and C. M. Flickenger, Ray Nelson, Mrs. Joseph Snow, Mrs. Charles Alsop, and Joseph Kitterman were identified. The bodies of the other four, Charles Alsop, Joseph Empey, Jr., Kall Nicholson, and Billy Maloney were not found.

Joseph Kitterman, 46, was born at Salida, Kansas. He leaves a wife and two children who reside at Salt Lake City. The body was sealed in a casket and shipped Thursday to that city.

Officials of the Arrowhead Petroleum Corporation report that their employees were covered by compensation insurance in the amount of \$5,000 each. This of course, doesn't cover the spectators who were there at their own risk.

Grave side services for Mr. Flickenger will be held in the city cemetery at 10:00 a.m. Friday morning. Funeral services will be held for the rest of the group on Friday afternoon in the tabernacle. Business houses will close their doors and the entire town will turn out to mourn their dead. Obituaries will be published in the next issue of the News.

Deseret News Report of Explosion

Ton and a Half of Nitroglycerine Explodes at Well Scores Hurt at St. George When Premature Discharge at Escalante No.1 Oil Well Sets Off Terrific Explosion

By A Staff Correspondent

ST. GEORGE, Utah, March 7--Ten persons lost their lives three others are in a dying condition, and several others were less seriously injured when a ton and a half of nitroglycerin and TNT exploded at the Escalante No 1 well of the Arrowhead Oil company, seven miles south of here at 9:30 last night.

Four of the bodies are still unrecovered.

THE DEAD

MRS. JOSEPH S. SNOW, 60, wife of the Washington county Democratic committeeman and former legislator, residing at St. George.
CHARLES D. ALSOP, 50, St. George, general manager of the company.
MRS. CHARLES D. (MABEL) ALSOP, 45, St. George.
JOSEPH KITTERMAN, 43, 1371 Ramona avenue, St. Lake, druggist.
CAIL NICHOLSON, 24, 618 south Seventh West street, Salt Lake.
C. M. FLECKINGER, of California, who was in charge of "shooting" the well.
RAY NELSON, 21, St. George.
WILLIAM MALONEY, 19, of St. George.
JOSEPH EMPEY, 47, St. George.
MISS LEAH COTTAM, 25, DAUGHTER of Heber Cottam, St. George contractor.

CRITICALLY INJURED

MISS ROSAMOND SNOW, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Joseph S. Snow, who lost her sight, and whose face was badly injured. She is regaining consciousness.
"SWEDE" ERICKSON, St. George workman.
BERT COVINGTON, St. George service station operator.

The bodies of Charles D. Alsop, William Maloney, Joseph Empey and Cail Nicholson have not yet been recovered. Nicholson was a son-in-law of Empey.

Miss Cottam died this morning, despite efforts of doctors and nurses who worked over her all night.

Charge Goes Off

The blast is believed to have been caused when the shot that would have brought in the well exploded prematurely.

The explosion struck death to the gay throng gathered at the well which was to bring "black gold" from the ground and give southern Utah one of its first producers.

Suddenly, as the nitroglycerin charge was being lowered into the casing, more than 800 pounds of explosives ignited and sent a flaming shaft of fire into the sky. The oil derrick toppled, and those nearest the structure were either burned badly, mutilated, or crushed by the falling timbers. So terrific was the blast it was heard distinctly at St. George.

Storehouse Explodes

A ton of nitroglycerin in a storehouse a few feet from the well also exploded. Both the well derrick and storehouse were blown to bits and burned. Spectators who were standing near the well were killed by the blast or showered with dirt and bits of metal and wood from the derrick.

County Attorney Orval Hafen, who went to the scene of the disaster last night and took charge of the investigation, said that many charred bits of human flesh and bone, were scattered about and identification of some bodies would be impossible. He continued the search for bodies when daylight came.

Six torpedoes, each 10 feet long and five inches in diameter, had been fastened together in a string and hung from the derrick, for lowering into the well.

Saw Flames

The explosion was so violent that residents of St. George heard it distinctly, and many rushing out to determine the cause of it saw the flames rising from the well. Hundreds hurried to the scene.

More than a hundred people, gathered at the well to see it "blow in", were thrown into a panic by the explosion. Scores suffered minor injuries.

The uninjured ran to the assistance of the dead and injured. And rushed them to St. George, where all available hospital service was provided for burns, cuts, and broken bones.

A force rushed to the scene by Sheriff John H. Cottam began fighting the flames at the well. At first it could not be determined whether the oil was ablaze, or whether gas brought in by the blast was burning.

Witnesses' Story

Ellis J. Pickett, St. George attorney, said that he and his wife were sitting in their car, waiting for the blowing in of the well, and watched the men finish loading the cartridge of nitroglycerin and start sending it down the casing. He said his wife became nervous, and suggested moving further back to avoid any danger.

Turning his car about Mr. Pickett moved it another fifty feet away from the well and had just shut off his motor when the blast occurred.

He estimated the cartridge had been lowered about half way down when it went off.

As described by him, flames shot into the air, the derrick collapsed upon the heads of the watching crowd, and the air was rent by the screams of men, women and children. The top of Pickett's car was blown completely off.

Jumping from his car he ran to the scene to see if he could give help. First he met Erickson and Covington, both of whom were badly injured. He took them to the St. George hospital.

S. L. Dixon auditor of the Arrowhead corporation, said that he couldn't understand how the explosion occurred. Others suggested friction had set off the cartridge.

Mr. Dixon said there are four wells being operated by the company in this district.

Called Accident

Death by accidental explosion, the cause of which is a mystery, was the verdict of a coroner's jury at an inquest into the disaster this morning. On the jury were Washington County Attorney Oval Hafen, Sheriff John H. Cottam, Clair Morris, Morris Whitehead, and Hubert Snow.

Zora Alsop, about 8 years old, who was reported dead, earlier today, was said by St. George Justice of the Peace Harold S. Snow, to be safe at home with her sister,

Virginia, 18; they are both survivors of Mr. and Mrs. Charles D. Alsop, victims of the tragedy.

The work of recovering the bits of the missing five bodies was going forward at noon today, under direction of Sheriff Cottam, with the assistance of city and county officials, and members of the oil company oil well crew. Sheriff

Cottam gave orders that the canvasses in which the victims are being wrapped must not be undone yet, because of their mangled condition.

The bodies of Nelson, Kitterman, Mrs. Alsop, Mrs. Snow, and Fleckinger, were brought to St. George this morning. Sheriff Cottam stated that there was little hope of ever identifying the other five because of their mangled condition.

Community Memorial services are being arranged in St. George Friday afternoon for all of the victims except Joseph Kitterman, whose body will be removed to Lehi this afternoon.

Fearing that an earthquake had struck southern Utah when they felt the shock of the explosion last night, residents of LaVerkin, 20 miles away and Leeds, 18 miles away from St. George, phoned to learn what the trouble was.

**Tragedy Well Center of Prospecting Work
Drilling Done by Canadian Corporation
Had Reached Good Showing at 3200 Feet.**

The Escalante well No. 1 of the Arrowhead Petroleum company, situated on the Bloomington structure, about 7 miles east of St. George, where 10 persons were killed in an explosion last night, has been the center of oil prospecting operations for over four years.

The well was started originally by the Escalante Exploration Corporation, a Canadian corporation financed by the Timming interests in April 1931. The Canadian organization drilled to a depth of approximately 3600 feet and in August 1933 sold the well to the Arrowhead Petroleum Corporation.

This company was organized in the state of Nevada and had been active in the St. George field for a number of years. The Arrowhead company began operations in August 1933 and continued drilling intermittently since that time.

Strong Showing Made

A strong showing of oil was encountered at a depth of 3200 Feet, but this horizon was passed up for what was believed to be a better oil sands below. Last reports from the well were to the effect that it had reached a depth of 4230 feet.

Several months ago an attempt was made to shoot the well at 4250 feet in an effort to bring in production. This attempt was unsuccessful and in trying to drill deeper trouble was encountered with a lost string of tools and caving formation. In view of this, it is believed that the driller was attempting to shoot the oil sand at 3200 feet when the explosion occurred.

Has Other Prospects

Besides this well, the Arrowhead company has wildcat tests on the Punch Bowl, and Virgin structures near St. George and the Antelope structure, just over the line in Arizona.

The tragedy well is located on the northeast quarter of section 19, township 43 south, range 15 west.

St. George Holds Public Services For Ten Victims

**Searchers Abandon All Hope of Finding Four Remaining Bodies;
Two Others Critically Hurt**

ST. GEORGE, Utah, March 8--General community memorial services for the ten victims who lost their lives Wednesday night in a dynamite-nitroglycerin explosion during the blowing in of Escalante No. 1 well of the Arrowhead Oil company, seven miles south of here, were held at 2 o'clock this afternoon, under direction of the St. George stake presidency.

Miss Rosamond Snow, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Joseph S. Snow, who lost her sight, and whose face was seriously injured in the explosion, was in a more critical condition today after a restless night, and her recovery is not expected.

Elmer Erickson, 32, of St. George suffered a punctured lung and other internal injuries, also was in a critical condition. He was given a blood transfusion today after a two-inch steel fragment had been removed from his chest.

Meanwhile search for the unrecovered bodies of four of the ten dead, was

abandoned. A force of 15 men, working all day Thursday was unable to find any traces of the missing persons known to have been killed in the premature explosion of 752 pounds of nitroglycerin.

Believed Destroyed

County Attorney Orval Hafen said that bodies of the missing blast victims had probably been blown into small bits and could never be recovered and identified.

The six badly mutilated bodies that were found in the wreckage were being prepared today for burial. That of Mrs. Charles D. Alsop, 47, wife of the promoter of the well, whose body was not recovered, is being held while an airtight casket is being obtained from Salt Lake City. It will be held here for two days and then removed to California for further services and interment.

Will Honor All

The body of Joseph F. Kitterman 47, pharmacist of 1371 Ramona avenue of Salt Lake City, was removed yesterday to Lehi, for funeral services which will be held in Lehi First ward Sunday at 12:30 p.m.

The St. George services this afternoon will be for all of the victims:

Mrs. Olive Bleak Snow, 62, St. George, wife of the Washington Democratic chairman, Joseph S. Snow, who also is a former state representative.
Cail A. Nicholson, 22, oil well employee, formerly of Salt Lake City.
Joseph Empey Jr., 47, St. George electrician and father-in-law to Mr. Nicholson.
Charles D. Alsop, 47, St. George, promoter of the well.
Mabel Boyce Alsop, 46, wife of Charles D. Alsop.
C. M. Fleckinger, 50, oil driller and powder expert of Virgin City, Utah.
Joseph R.F. Kitterman, 47, pharmacist of 1371 Ramona Avenue, Salt Lake City.
William Maloney, 16, St. George, spectator.
Ray B. Nelson, 22, St. George, spectator.
Leah Cottam, 25, St. George, spectator.

Among the others injured are:

B. L. Covington, 30, St. George, minor cuts and bruises.
A. Sampson, 50, St. George, minor cuts and bruises.

The bodies of Nicholson, Empey, Charles D. Alsop, and Maloney are still unrecovered.

The explosion was accidental a jury found at an inquest here yesterday. Officials of the company said that surface property valued at \$125,000 was destroyed. This included more than 1,500 pounds of powder, which burned but did not explode.

Under Stake Head

The community memorial services today were to be held in the St. George Tabernacle, under direction of Stake President, William O. Bentley and his counselors, with the bishops of the three St. George wards in charge of pallbearers and other parts of the services. The bishops are Vernon Worthen, West ward; Harold B. Snow, South ward, also justice of the peace; and Arthur K. Hafen, East ward.

The bodies of the victims who have been found will lie in state at the tabernacle. Speakers will be David H. Morris, former district judge and representative in the state legislature.

A concurrent memorial of condolence to those intimately connected with victims of the St. George oil well tragedy, passed by the Utah state legislature, was extended at the memorial services here today.

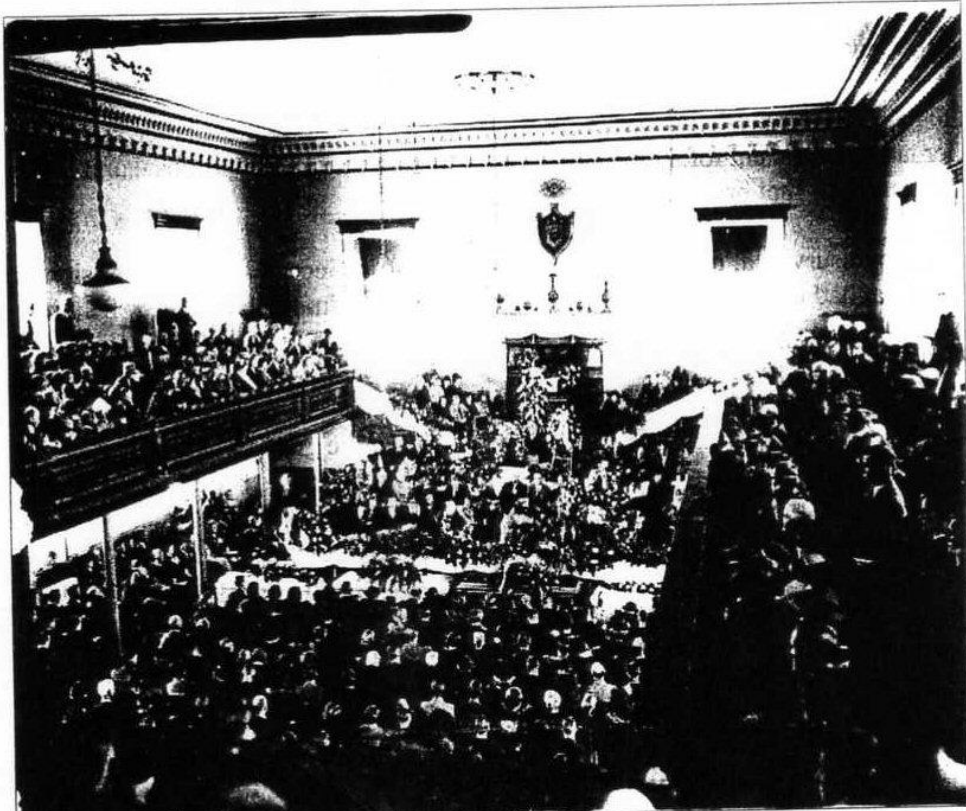
An offer of assistance and an expression of sympathy was sent today by the Salt Lake chamber of commerce to the St. George organization as a result of the oil well explosion disaster near St. George.

Paul F. Kayser, Salt Lake chamber president, in his wire said: This organization joins with the balance of the community in expressing sympathy to you and the people of your community over the tragedy which occurred yesterday. We tender you any assistance we can render in mitigating the tremendous loss which has been suffered by the community as a whole and particularly the families of the victims.

Few people are left today of those who were intimately effected by this terrific explosion. Any additional efforts to drill for oil in the area were abandoned. The search for prosperity from "Black Gold" did not materialize. But a new type of "gold" has brought unexpected prosperity to this desert land. "Yellow Gold" from the sky has brought people in droves to play in the abundant sunshine in great part from the advertisement, "St. George, Where the Summer Sun Spends The Winter."

Each year, as March approaches, Clark Empey remembers that night vividly. He relives the sights and sounds, remembers his feelings at the time and how devastated his life was and that of his family. He remembers the others who lost loved ones and how the whole town mourned. He wonders if others remember.

Today, Una Pickett contemplates the events that kept her home that fateful night, of how all thoughts of the planned gathering suddenly left her mind, and of the dream she had of her classmates



Funeral for 5 of the oil well explosion victims. It was held at the St. George Tabernacle, March 1935. Coffins from left to right: Leah Cottam, Mrs. Olive Snow, Ray Nelson, Joseph Empey, and Kall Nicholson.

being at a funeral. She awoke from her dream at 2:15 a.m., just as her friend Lea had appeared in her dream to tell her that she would not be able to go with them (This was the very time that Lea died). She thinks, too, of the many times growing up that the two of them had “girl talks” about the type of person they wanted to marry. On each of these occasions, Lea’s response would be, “I’ll never marry.”

Lea’s sister, Iris, recalls that she was baby-sitting Beth Dixon, whose father was the company auditor. She was at the hospital with her parents when her sister died. And the next morning it was she who went to tell Una of Lea’s death. Iris recalls the three of them (she and her parents) stood

around Lea's bed in the waiting room at the hospital as she became weaker and her breathing became increasingly more shallow---and then stopped. Her father, after realizing that she was gone and being in shock, half staggered over and sat on a nearby couch. His first words were, "I thank God for letting us have her this long."

Una's mother felt that Lea's death must have been why Una could not sleep after awakening at 2:15 a.m.. Iris describes the area where the blast occurred as looking like a herd of elephants had rampled it.

In the few weeks that followed the explosion, a group of townsmen sought to sue the oil company for the loss of their loved ones and visited the families of each of those whose family was involved to gain support for their lawsuit. When they visited at the Cottam home and talked to Lea's parents, her father was silent for a few minutes after he had heard their proposal and then answered them with this, "Will that bring her back?"

Rosamond survived, married and lived her life in St. George. She lost her sight in one eye and the steel that had embedded itself in her face was a long time in completely healing.



Oil well explosion site as it looks today

Today, the spot is used for target practice and spent cartridges from shells litter the ground. Anything that can be used as a target has been riddled with bullets. A scant half mile distance, a major industrial area is rapidly growing and the site could easily be bull-dozed in the name of "progress" unless something is done, and soon.

No plaque or monument of any kind marks the spot where one of the most devastating events of Utah's history occurred (and certainly the most devastating accident in the history of St. George.) As the area grows, houses creep ever closer to where ten people lost their lives. Soon, if nothing is done, the spot will be lost in the sands of time and the memory of those who perished, will be dimmed and disappear. Those who come to play will know nothing of these events unless efforts are made now to preserve the history and to mark the spot of his tragedy.

By Ellen Raye Cottam Brown
For the Heber C. Cottam family

Historical Note: This story was submitted in 2003 to the Val A. Browning Library at Dixie State College of Utah for inclusion in their Special Collections section of stories of the history of Dixie. It has also been requested by the Daughters of the Utah Pioneers Camp in St. George for inclusion in their collection of history of the locality.

S.C.M. No. 5

By Mr. Day
Mrs. Stewart
Mr. Bowman

A CONCURRENT MEMORIAL OF CONDOLENCE

Be it enacted by the Legislature of the State of Utah, the
Governor concurring therein:

WHEREAS, the people of the city of St. George, Washing-
County and of the entire state have been overtaken by
stark tragedy resulting in the death of ten valued citizens
and the serious injury of many others; and

WHEREAS, the governor and State legislature are deep-
ly shocked and grieved by the enormity of the loss and deep-
ly deplore the suffering of those intimately connected with
those killed and injured;

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, that the sincerest sym-
pathy of the governor and the legislature be extended to the
entire community affected and particularly to those
intimately touched;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the secretary of state
be instructed to forward copies of this resolution to the
city of St. George, to the Arrowhead Petroleum Corporation,
and to the members of the bereaved families.



THE STATE OF UTAH
OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY OF STATE
SALT LAKE CITY

MILTON H. WELLING
SECRETARY OF STATE
FRANK E. LEE
DEPUTY

March 8, 1935

TO THE MEMBERS OF THE BEREAVED FAMILIES
In the Arrowhead Petroleum Disaster

St. George, Utah

I am directed by the Legislature of the State of Utah, His Excellency our Governor, Henry H. Blood concurring, to transmit to you SENATE CONCURRENT MEMORIAL No. 5, which carries with it the deep sympathy and the universal bereavement felt for you by every citizen of this Commonwealth.

Very respectfully yours,

M. H. WELLING
SEC. OF STATE

MHW:M
Inc.

The foregoing S. C. M. No. 5 was publicly read by title and immediately thereafter signed by the President of the Senate, in the presence of the house over which he presides, and the fact of such signing duly entered upon the

Journal this 8th day of March, 1935

ATTEST:

Lynn S. Richards

Secretary of the Senate

Herbert B. Law

President of the Senate

S. C. M. No. 5

The foregoing S. C. M. No. 5 was publicly read by title and immediately thereafter signed by the Speaker of the House, in the presence of the house over which he presides, and the fact of such signing duly entered upon the

Journal this 8th day of March, 1935

ATTEST:

J. Edward Lynch

Chief Clerk of House

W. K. Granger

Speaker of the House

Received from the Senate this 8th day of March, 1935

Approved March 8, 1935

Henry H. Blood

Governor

Received from the Governor, and filed in the office of the Secretary of State this 8th day of

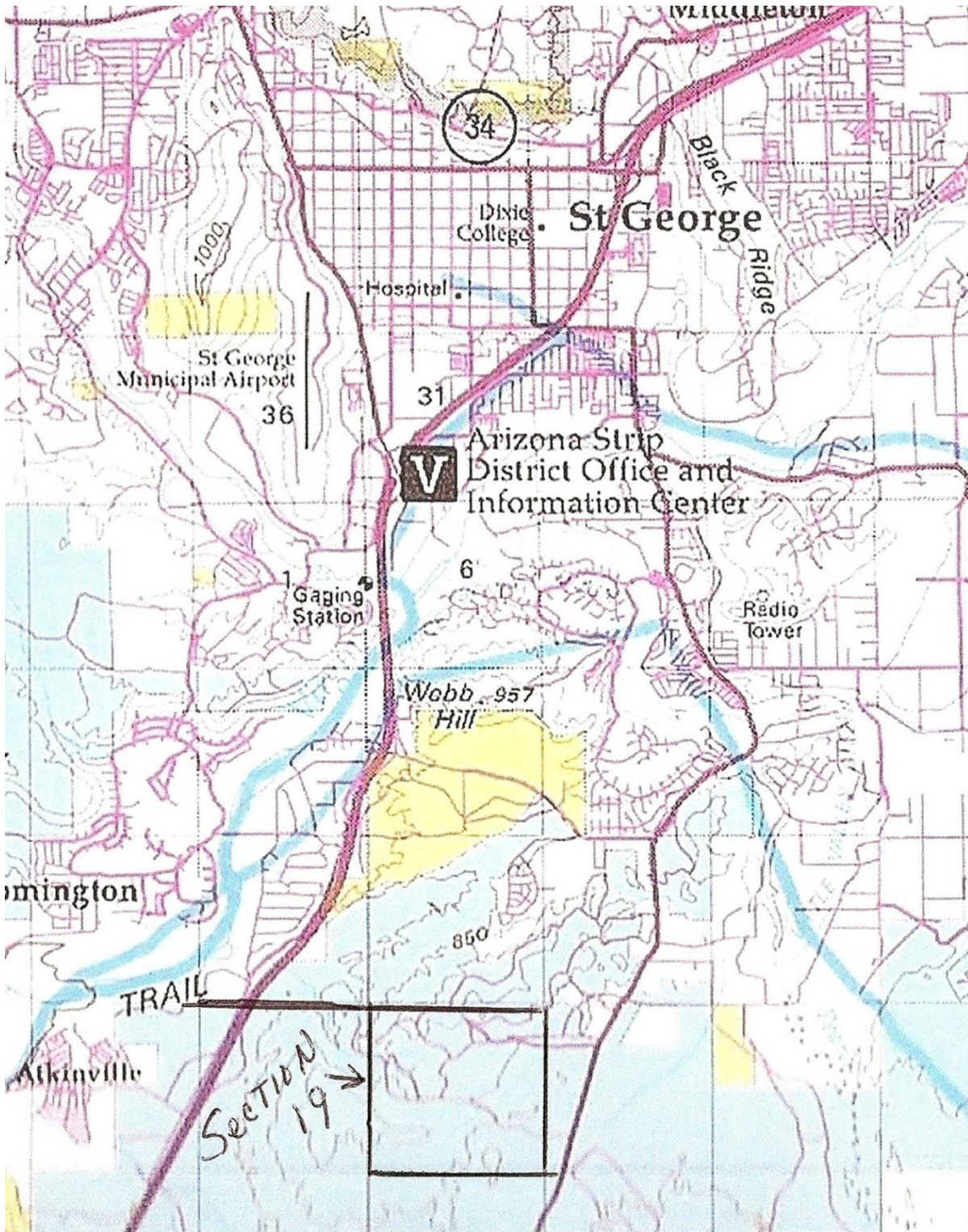
March, 1935

M. H. Welling

Secretary of State

Part II.

Map and Four Photographs For Comparison Following Search For Former Escalante Well Site



General location of former Escalante well * see arrow*

Photograph #1: **A view in the direction of the former Escalante well site**



Photograph #2:

Comparison to former Escalante well site



Photograph #3:

Comparison to former Escalante well site



Photograph #4:

Comparison to former Escalante well site



Photograph #5: From the abstract; a comparison to the former well site



- - End - -