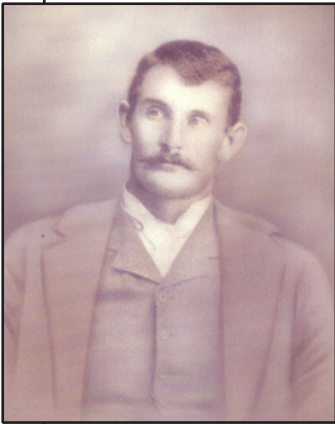


NEW CASTLE, COLORADO

A Brief History of New Castle

Surrounded by rugged, natural, Colorado beauty, it's easy to see why early Anglo settlers chose New Castle. Prospectors and miners arrived in the early 1880s leading to the discovery of rich coal veins.



The founding father of New Castle was Jasper Ward, a freight supplier, farmer and one of the town's first Anglo settlers. Ward and his family built a one-room, dirt-floor cabin along the west bank of Elk Creek. The cabin became the town's first post office and Ward the first postmaster. The

Ute Indian Chief Colorow was a friend who often visited the cabin.

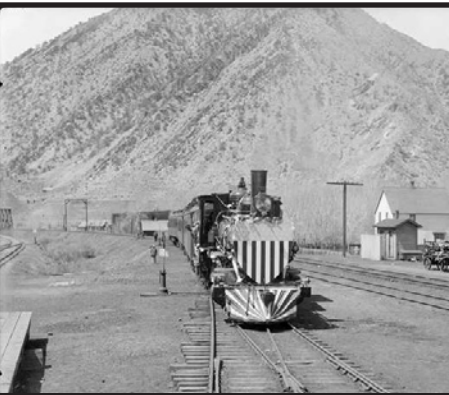
Ward also served as the town's deputy sheriff and led a posse to try to calm a Ute uprising that followed the Meeker Massacre. Ward died by gunfire at age 37 during a Ute and Colorado National Guard conflict in August 1887.

First known as Grand Buttes and later Chapman, the town was incorporated as New Castle on February 2, 1888. English miners suggested the name after Newcastle-upon-Tyne, a town in England noted for its coal mines.



Garfield County was home to various mines including two major mines in New Castle, the Consolidated Mine just west of downtown on Ward's Peak (now Burning Mountain) and the Vulcan Mine to the southeast on Roderick's Ridge across the Grand River (now the Colorado River). By 1892, some 400 miners were employed in town.

During the peak of mining activity in the 1890s, New Castle was home to a population ranging from 1,500 to 2,500 people. Coal was transported by railway to fire the silver smelters in Aspen and Leadville. New Castle was home to such businesses as a cannery, brickyard, brewery, banks, cement factory, dance halls, printing office, saloons and restaurants, three livery stables, two bakeries and several hotels.



An 1889 listing in the Colorado Business Directory showed 50 businesses in town including 10 saloons.

The town became a small transportation hub with two train depots for the Denver & Rio Grande Railroad and the Colorado Midland.

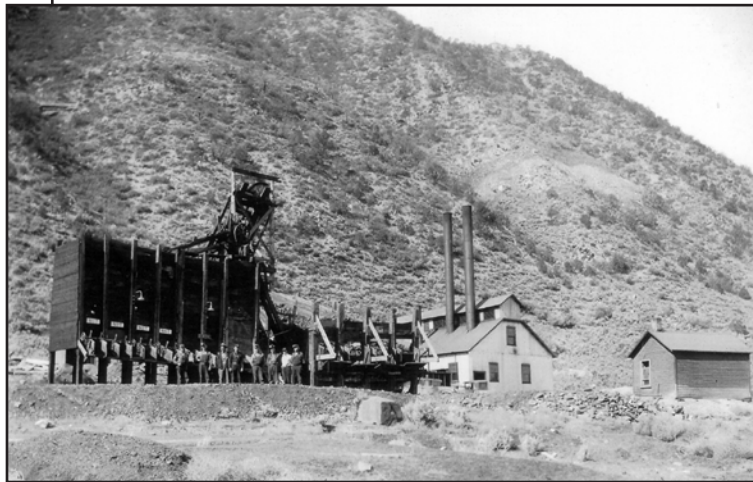
In 1910, another mining company purchased the Roderick's Ridge site and began operations 200 yards from the original Vulcan Mine. On Dec. 16, 1913, an early morning explosion again devastated the town, killing 37 miners. The coal industry in New Castle declined, and another blast in November 1918, that killed three men, ended significant production.

For the next seven decades, the population remained steady at about 600 to 800 residents. In the late 1980s, former ranch land north of downtown was opened up to create quickly growing housing developments.

Prominent earthen scars and occasional steam mark the still-smoldering underground mines today. Signs marking the town's historic landmarks can be found on 11 downtown buildings designated by the New Castle Historic Preservation Commission. A life-size memorial statue honoring the lost miners was dedicated in 2004 in Burning Mountain Park on Main Street.

The New Castle Historical Museum, located in the original 1893 Town Hall and Fire Station on Fourth Street, is home to an interesting collection and local history information can be found in a newly organized collection at the New Castle library.

This brief historical information is drawn from the 2000 book *The Legend of the Burning Mountain: An Early History of New Castle* by local resident, newspaper editor and former coal miner Dale Shrull. The paperback can be purchased through Town Hall. Historic photos courtesy of Steve Rippy.



The New Castle mines produced high-quality, soft coal but also yielded high levels of methane gas. On Feb. 18, 1896, tragedy rocked New Castle. The Vulcan Mine exploded with a force powerful enough to blow timbers from the mouth of the mine to the Colorado River 400 feet away. The explosion killed 49 men. A total of 37 children lost their fathers that day.

In April 1896 the Vulcan Mine was flooded and closed. In 1899, the Consolidated Mine caught fire and was closed.

The community livelihood turned to cattle, agriculture, sawmills and fruit farming. According to the 1900 Census, the population had dropped to 431.

