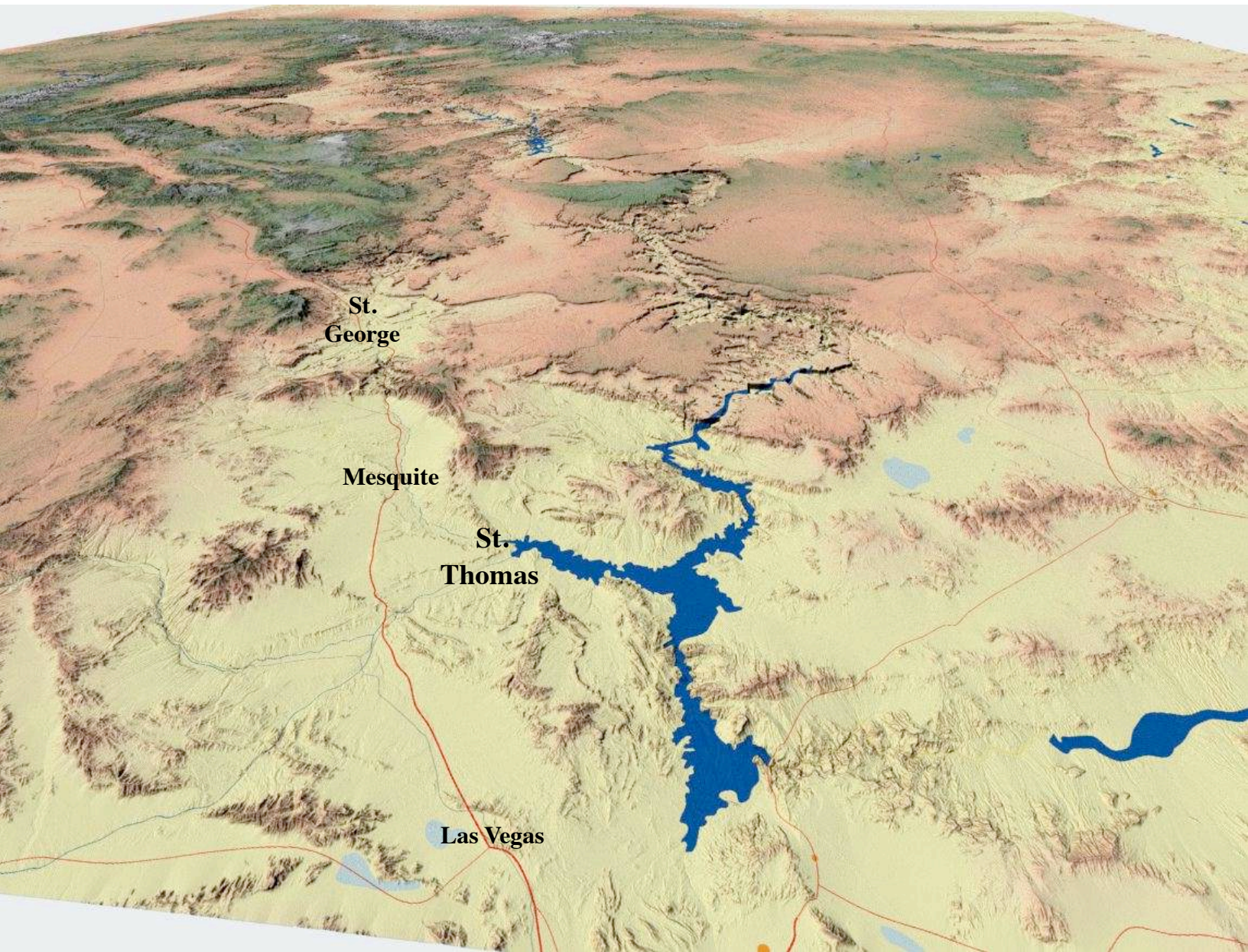




Where is St. Thomas? Where was St. Thomas?

Probably best known as a town that disappeared beneath the rising waters of Lake Mead in 1938, only to reappear almost 70 years later when the lake's level fell.

One of a number of small Mormon agricultural settlements on the Muddy River that was first scouted by Mormons sent from Fort Clara, Utah in 1857 and 1858 including Jacob Hamblin, Dudley Leavitt, Ira Hatch, Samuel Knight and Thales Haskell, while on their way to "monitor the progress" of the United States Army steamboat expedition up the Colorado, under the command Lieutenant Joseph C. Ives.

St. Thomas, Nevada
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Ruins of St. Thomas School (2010)



St. Thomas School (1936)

St. Thomas, Nevada
May 2014

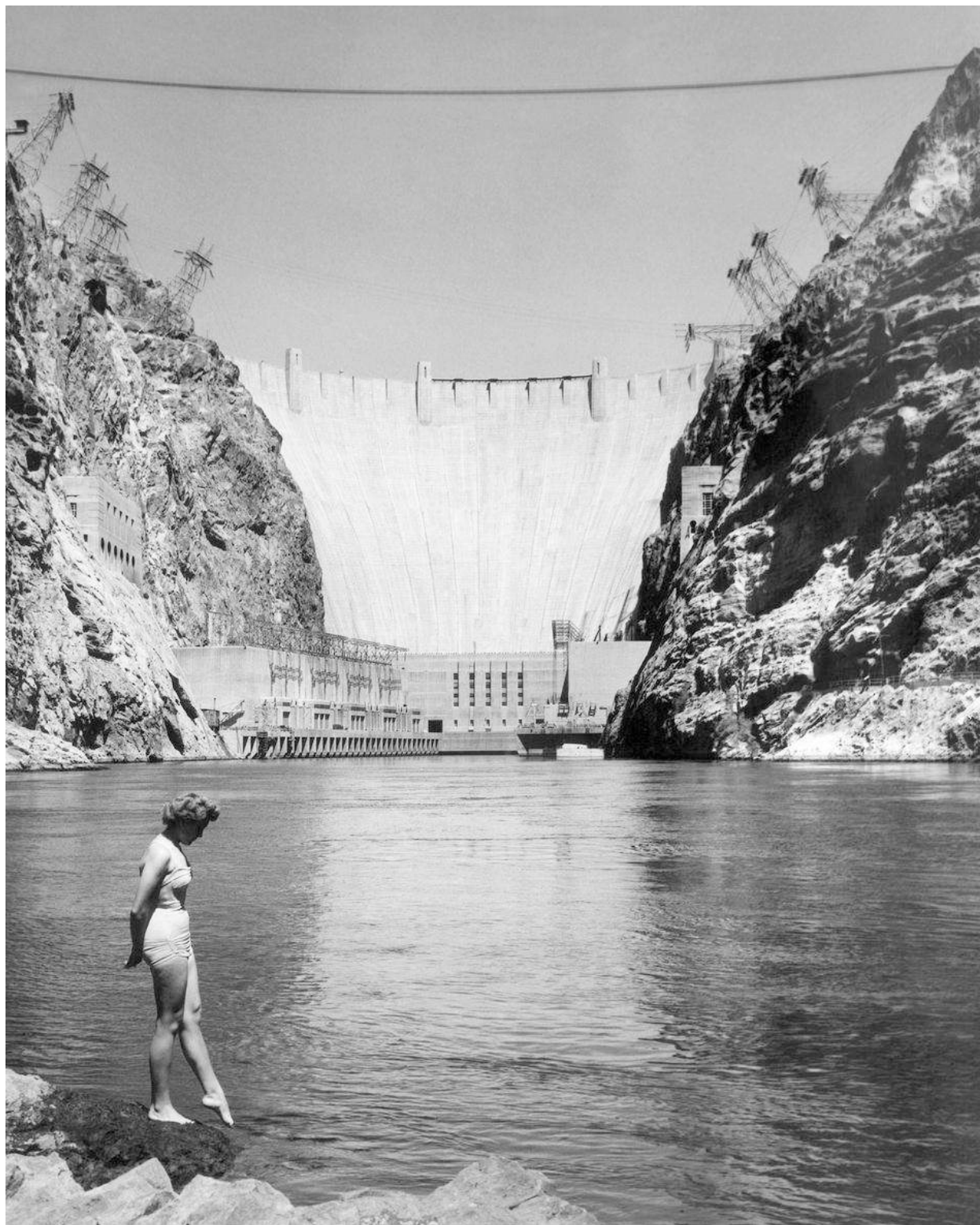


Men on Raft in St. Thomas (1939)

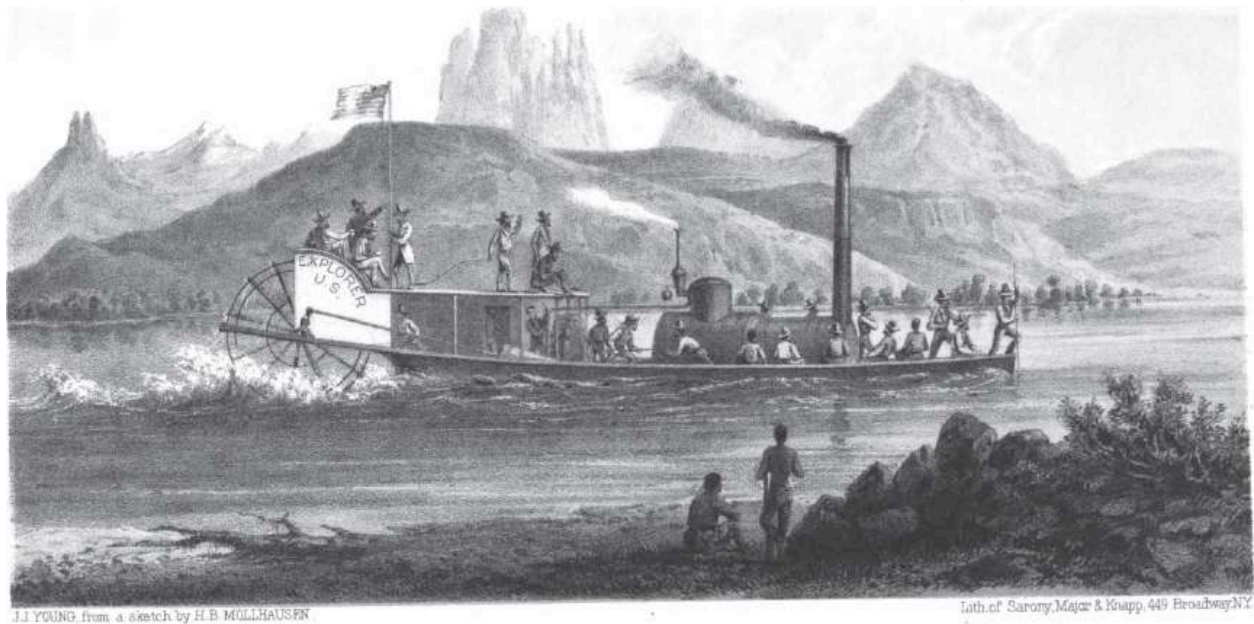


Gentry Hotel St. Thomas (1936)

St. Thomas, Nevada
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*Hoover (1930), Boulder (1935), Hoover (1947) Dam
with power plant and power lines (1950s)*



CHIMNEY PEAK

Steamboat Explorer from "The Colorado River of the West" Lieutenant Ives (1857)

First Lieutenant Joseph C. Ives published the findings of his detailed exploration and survey of the lower Colorado River to the Secretary of War in 1861. The expedition was funded in the summer of 1857, at the height of the Utah War. The journey, by steamboat, up the Colorado was commenced in late November the same year. It took only eight days to reach the "head of navigation" where the "Virgen" joins the Colorado.

Ives company scouted out terrain for a roadway that would connect from the river to the "Mormon road" which extended from San Bernardino, California to Santa Clara, Utah via a few scattered Mormon outposts including "the Vegas" (latter Las Vegas). The expedition confirmed the navigability of the Colorado and the belief that it could be an economical avenue for the transportation of supplies to various military posts in Utah and New Mexico. It also found that the region while of the highest interest from a scientific point of view "and presenting natural features whose strange sublimity is perhaps unparalleled in any part of the world--(but) is not of much value. Most of it uninhabitable, and a great deal of it is impassable."



*Black Canyon of the
Colorado (1857)*

Ives party kept detailed records of the flora, fauna and native tribes they encountered along the way. They made hydrographic, barometric and meteorological measurements. The geology, the topography and the geography were the subject of numerous illustrations that accompanied their report to the war department. Additionally, they maintained a journal detailing the events of the journey and the information they received from the other they met, local Indians and the Mormons already living in the area.

St. Thomas, Nevada
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H. B. Mollhausen, Del.

IRETSA

CAIROOK

MOJAVES



J. J. Young, from a sketch by F. W. Egloffstein

INTERIOR OF A MOQUIS HOUSE

St. Thomas was claimed by five U. S. Territories and States during its existence.



The State of Deseret (1850)

The Mormons first application to the United States was for the State of Deseret which extended to the Pacific Ocean, was bounded on the south by the Gila River, on the east by the Continental Divide, on the west by the Sierra Nevada mountain range and extended northward to include all land that didn't drain into the Snake River. By the mid 1850s, there were Mormon outposts in San Bernardino, Tucson and Carson City.

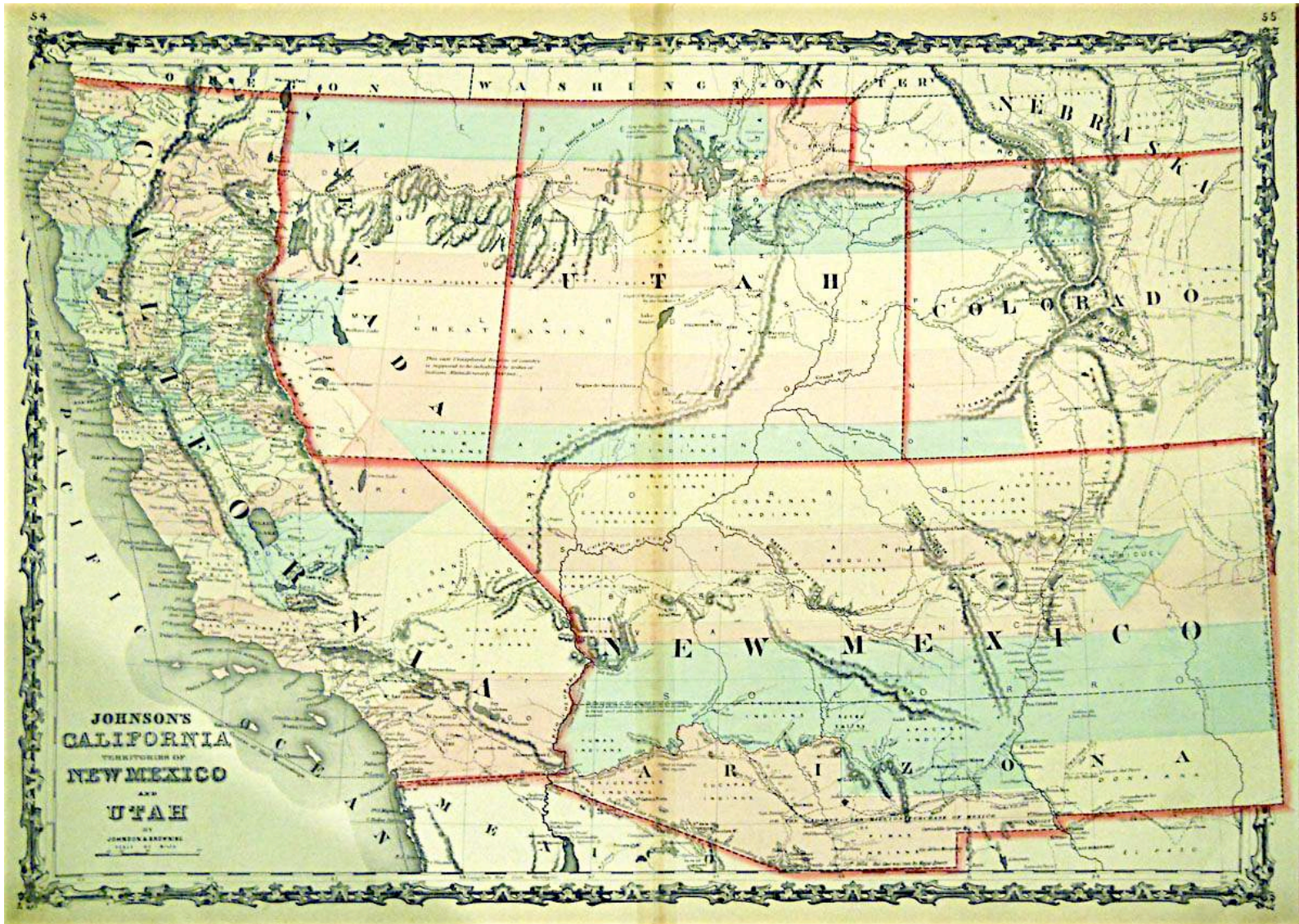
St. Thomas, Nevada

May 2014



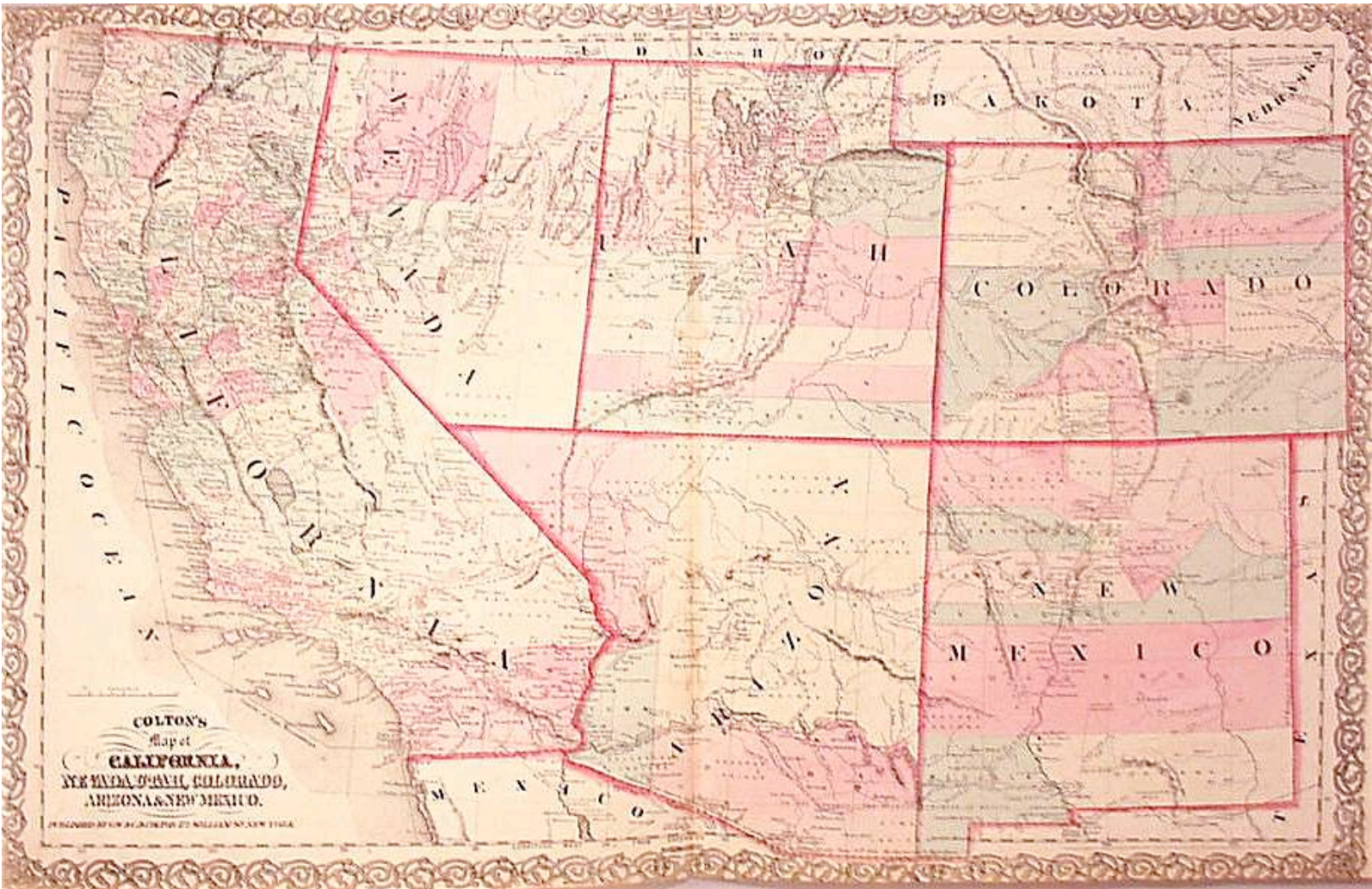
The Western Territories of the United States (1854)

Utah Territory was organized by an Act of Congress in 1850 and Brigham Young was appointed its first governor in 1851. The future St. Thomas was located in Santa Anna, County, New Mexico in 1852 (pale green). Note that Washington County, Utah extends from the Continental Divide on the east to the California line on the west.



Southwestern United States Map (1861)

St. Thomas remained a part of New Mexico when the territories of Nevada and Colorado were organized in 1861. Note the depiction on this map of Arizona which was claimed as a part of the Confederate States of America from 1861, until the conclusion of the Civil War, in 1865.

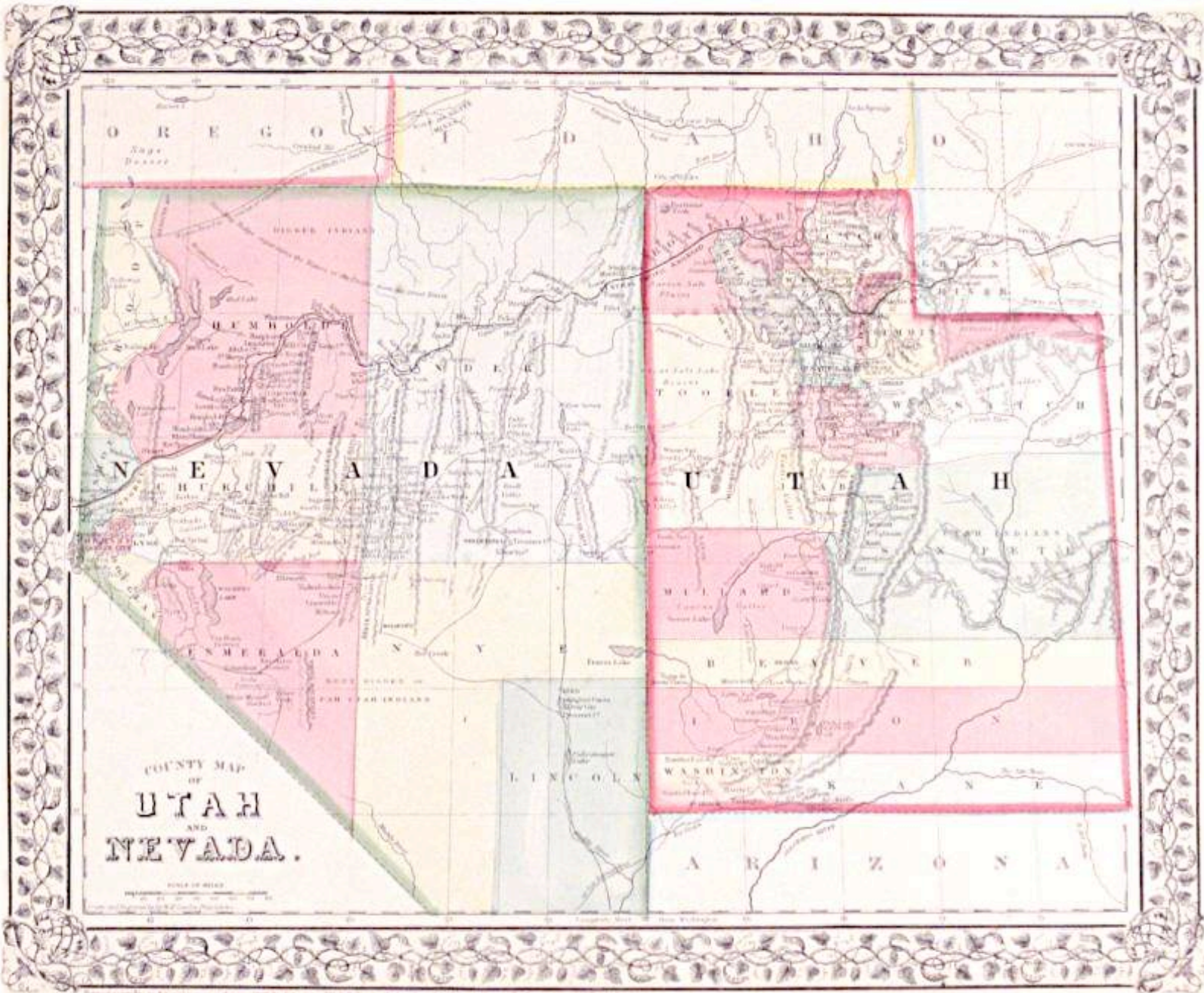


Southwestern United States Map (1865)

At the conclusion of the Civil War, Arizona and New Mexico were divided along the 109th meridian, as they are today, and St. Thomas was located in Mojave County, Arizona. Mormons were called to the Muddy Mission (for the Muddy River a tributary to the Rio Virgen) by Brigham Young, where they were expected to grow cotton and other semi-tropical fruits. Note that Nevada's boundary with Utah has been shifted east. The State of Nevada was admitted to the Union in 1864.

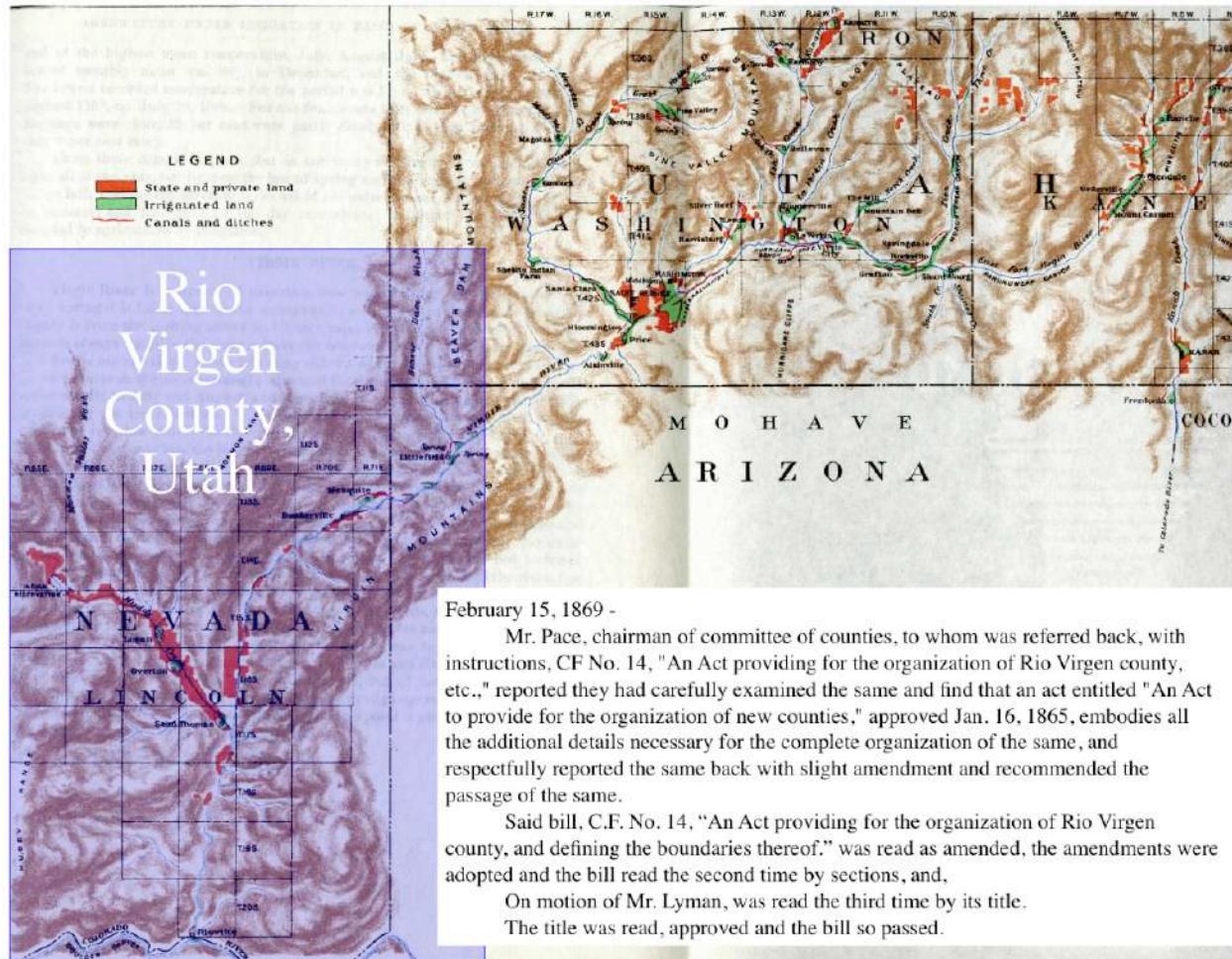
In late 1865, Pah-Ute County, Arizona was created from the northern portion of Mojave County with the county seat located at Callville, a Mormon settlement that had been established by Anson Call, James Whitmore, A.M. Cannon and Jacob Hamblin in 1864. Callville was located on the Colorado River to provide a landing for immigrating Mormon converts, who would make their way by sea from Europe via Panama and the Gulf of California, where they would travel by steamboat up the Colorado River, as Lieutenant Ives had done with his expedition in 1857.

May 2014



Map of Utah and Nevada (1867)

The northwestern most corner of Arizona Territory was ceded to the State of Nevada in 1866. The next year the county seat of Pah-Ute County, Arizona was transferred to St. Thomas, the largest of seven Mormon settlements on the Muddy. But... by 1867, St. Thomas was no longer in Arizona... it was now part of Lincoln County, which was created by the Nevada State Legislature that same year.



Approximate Area of Rio Virgen County, Utah

Adding to an already confusing situation, the Utah Territorial Legislature had approved an Act to create Rio Virgen County in 1864, before Brigham Young had called Mormons to the Muddy Mission. In 1869, Rio Virgen County, Utah was voted into existence. Since St. Thomas and the other Muddy settlements were populated almost exclusively by Mormons from Utah, they chose to recognize Rio Virgen County and its locally elected officials rather than those sent from Lincoln County. They also paid their taxes to Utah.

Lincoln County and the State of Nevada made tax assessments and tax levies in the Mormon communities in 1868 and 1869 that went unpaid. It should be noted that Nevada demanded payment in gold coin, while Utah accepted "payment in kind", which could be livestock, dairy products, or other crops. An 1870 boundary line survey was made verifying Nevada's claim to the land.



PRESIDENT BRIGHAM YOUNG AND PARTY AT THE MOUTH OF THE VIRGIN, MARCH 17, 1870
Others in the party are: Amelia Young, Geo. A. Smith, Bathsheba W. Smith, John Taylor, Erastus Snow, Minerva Snow, Jos. W., Lorenzo D. and Brigham Young, Jr., B. S. and Albert C. Young, A. S. Gibbons, Jno. W. Young, Nathaniel V. Jones, John Squires, Joseph Assay, Van Etta, Levi Stewart
Photo by C. R. Savage

Brigham Young visited the Muddy Mission settlements in early 1870 and advised the Mormons to abandon their homes and farms due to the combination of political and physical difficulties, particularly the devastating summer heat. One caretaker resident was to remain behind in each community.

The Nevada Point Abandoned

December 20, 1870, the people of the Muddy met with John W. Young of Salt Lake and resolved to abandon the location and to look for new homes. The only opposing votes were those of Daniel Bonelli and wife. Bonelli later was a ferryman on the Colorado and his son now is a prominent resident of Mohave County. Among those who voted to move were a number who later were residents of the Little Colorado settlements of Arizona.

In early 1872, the Utah Territorial Legislature, repealed the legislation which had created Rio Virgen County, Utah. By then most of the Muddy's 750 settlers had departed, many for Orderville in Kane County, Utah and others for settlements along the Little Colorado in Arizona.

Daniel Bonelli and his wife chose to stay. They continued to farm in St. Thomas, even after they established a ferry at the junction of the Colorado and Virgin rivers (then called Rioville instead of Callville). The slightly stubborn, Swiss immigrant Bonelli always maintained that "the (Mormon) Church had left him, and not the other way round."

Born Johan Daniel Bonelli in Switzerland on February 25, 1836, Daniel Bonelli was a Colorado River pioneer. An early convert to Mormonism, he left his native land for his missionary work in 1857 and spent the next two years in London. In 1859, as he sailed for America, he met and fell in love with Ann Hight aboard ship. They were married in New York City shortly after landing. A few weeks later, they embarked for St. Louis where they joined a wagon train bound for Salt Lake City.

In Salt Lake City, he worked as a weaver and a tailor and took part in church activities before accepting a missionary assignment in the southern section of the Utah Territory, leading a group of Swiss converts. Arriving in Santa Clara on November 28, 1861, Bonelli and the colonists set out the first grape arbors in that section of the territory, having brought cuttings from France and Spain.

While Bonelli and his wife were living at Santa Clara, he happened to meet an Indian who was exhibiting specimens of silver and lead ore from which he had molded bullets. When word of this reached church authorities in Salt Lake City, Bonelli and two other Mormons were ordered to investigate. In 1863, they made the first mineral locations in what was later to become the Meadow Valley Mining District and later the Pioche District in Southeastern Nevada. They knew nothing of mining law, however, and the claims were taken over by General Patrick Connor and some of his soldiers out of Ft. Douglas, Utah Territory.

Bonelli and his growing family—a son and a daughter—moved from Santa Clara after a flood, settling in Beaver Valley in 1867, only to be flooded out again on December 24, 1868. Determined to find a home, the family moved to St. Thomas on the Muddy River a few weeks later. They were once again frustrated, however, when an 1870 survey determined that the communities of the Muddy were within the boundaries of the State of Nevada and had been for four years. Nevada officials were soon on the scene to collect back taxes and the first of the Mormon families began returning to Utah in February 1871. All but the Bonelli family. “I’ve twice been washed out by floods and to pick up now and leave everything after getting a home started again is too much,” he told George Perkins, a writer. Other Mormons considered him an apostate for remaining, but he always maintained that he was a believer in the original tenets of Mormonism and that the church had left him, not the other way around.

He retained his farm at St. Thomas, but began to look at the prospects of establishing a river ferry at the junction of the Colorado and the Virgin rivers to serve the mines of Mineral Park, Arizona Territory, and those of Pioche, Nevada. He started the ferry business in 1872 and moved his family there. Bonelli’s Landing, as it was known, became the community of Rioville when a post office opened on November 2, 1881.

Bonelli also cleared a hundred acres on the west bank of the Virgin to raise hay, started a cattle herd to raise beef for the mining camps, put in a large vegetable garden and opened a trading post. In 1882, he discovered a large salt deposit near St. Thomas and began freighting the mineral to mining camps where it was used in the smelting processes. He also developed a market for salt in the Eldorado District, downstream on the Colorado, ferrying it down by barge. He was never able to patent the claims because salt deposits were considered public domain under U.S. mining law until 1902, however. Thereafter, he was engaged in litigation with others seeking to exploit his claims. For example, he had mica claims fifteen miles up the Colorado and was involved in suits over his patents. He also took part in water suits with his neighbors to the north in St. Thomas.

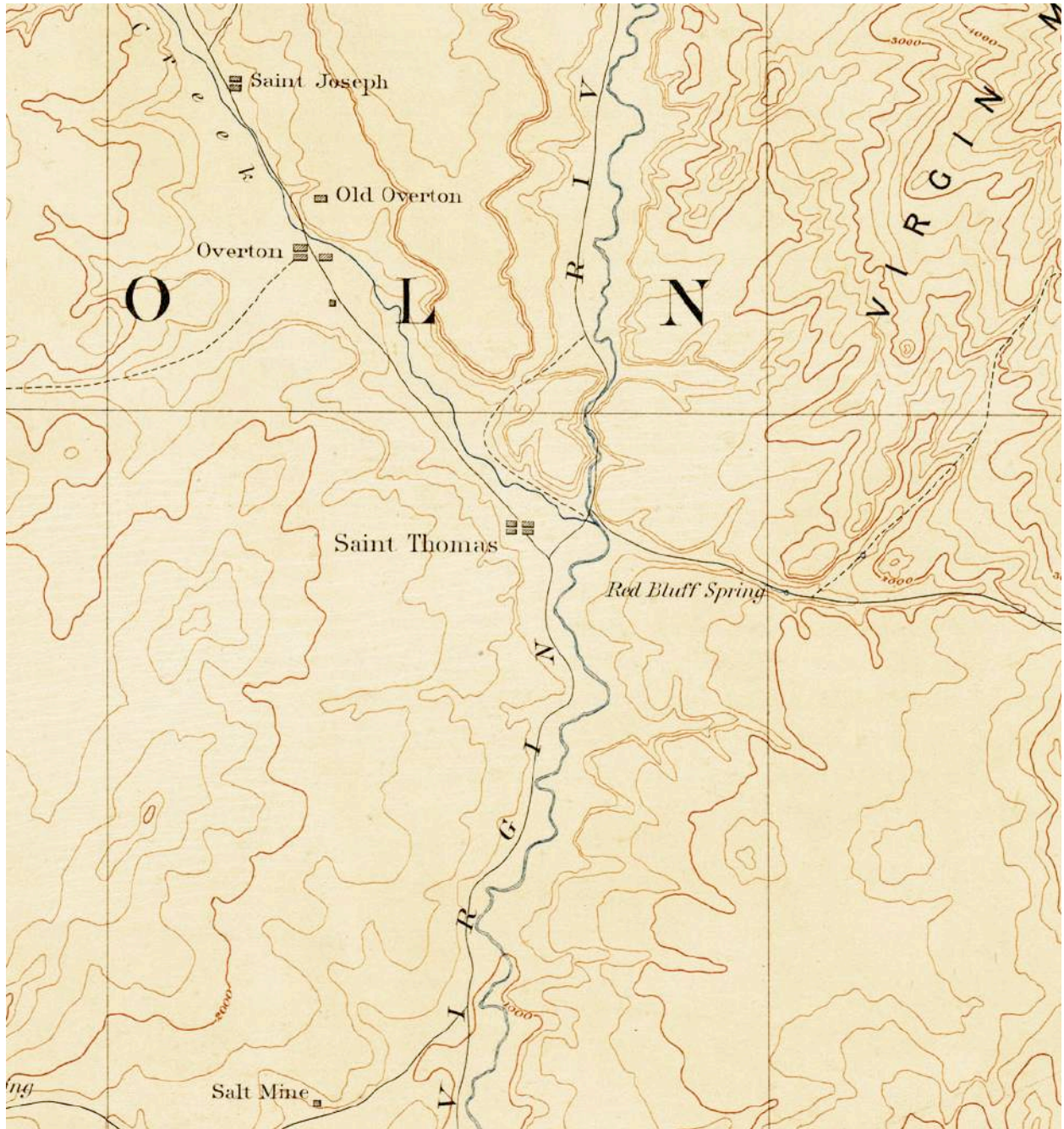
As the first citizen of his remote section of the state, Daniel Bonelli took a hand in local educational affairs, served on the Nevada State Board of Agriculture and put together agricultural and mineral exhibits for the World’s Columbian Exposition in Chicago in 1893, and San Francisco’s Mid Winter Fair in 1894. Among the exhibits were blocks of his famous translucent salt, sheets of mica and figs, peaches, grapes and almonds he grew himself.

In November 1903, he traveled to Pioche in connection with a salt suit in district court. He returned to St. Thomas on November 16, remaining a day with his son, Frank. He continued on to Reoville the next day, but apparently suffered a stroke on the way. He was suffering from dementia when he arrived home and never recovered his sensibilities. He died at his home on December 20 and was buried behind his house.

Some thirty years later, Rioville was due to be covered by the waters of Lake Mead backing up behind Boulder Dam, so a son, George, had his father’s body disinterred and moved to a cemetery in Kingman, Arizona where he was reburied on December 21, 1934.



Daniel Bonelli Biography in Salt Lake Herald



Topographic Map of the St. Thomas Area (1886)

St. Thomas' strategic location at the convergence of the Muddy and the Virgin rivers insured its prominence as time passed. The agricultural base of the community transitioned with the emergence of the Gold Butte mining district east the Virgin River in the 1880s. The San Pedro, Las Vegas and Salt Lake Railroad built a spur to St. Thomas in 1908. The improved accessibility to markets made the production of fruit and vegetable crops profitable for the first time. The Grand Gulch mine had existed before the railroad came and was part of the reason for its construction.

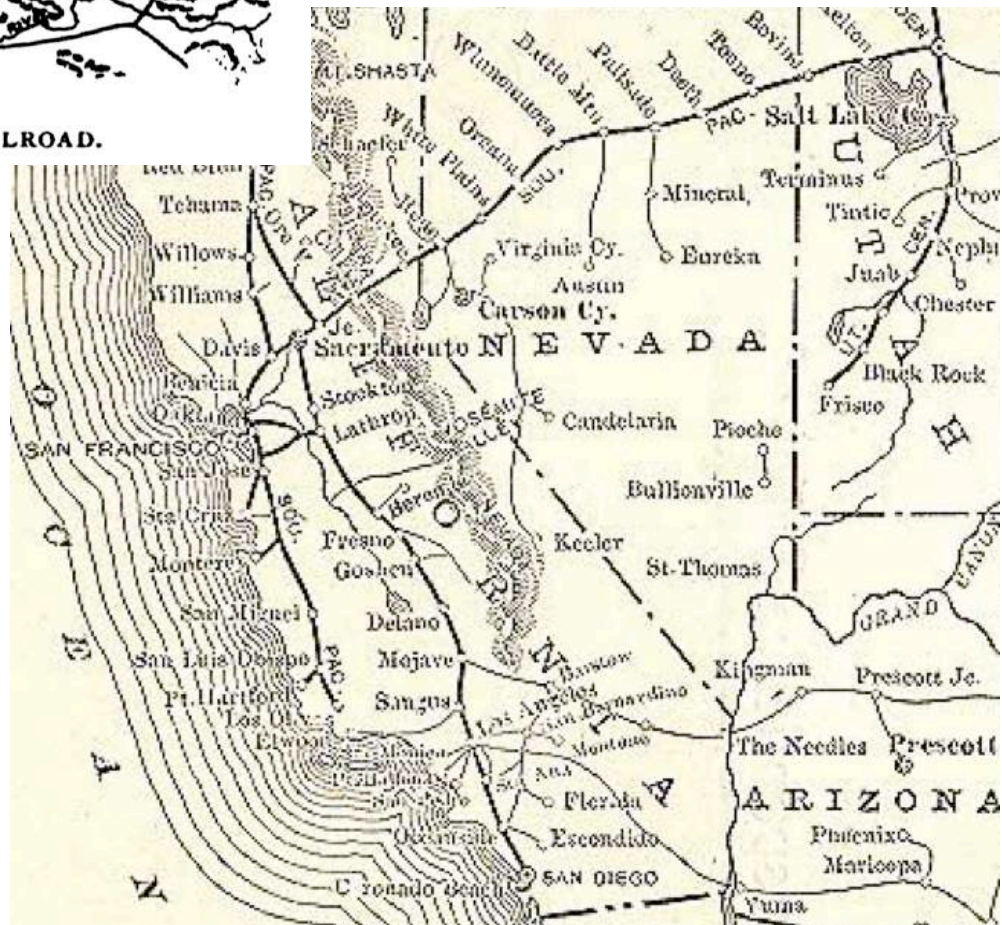


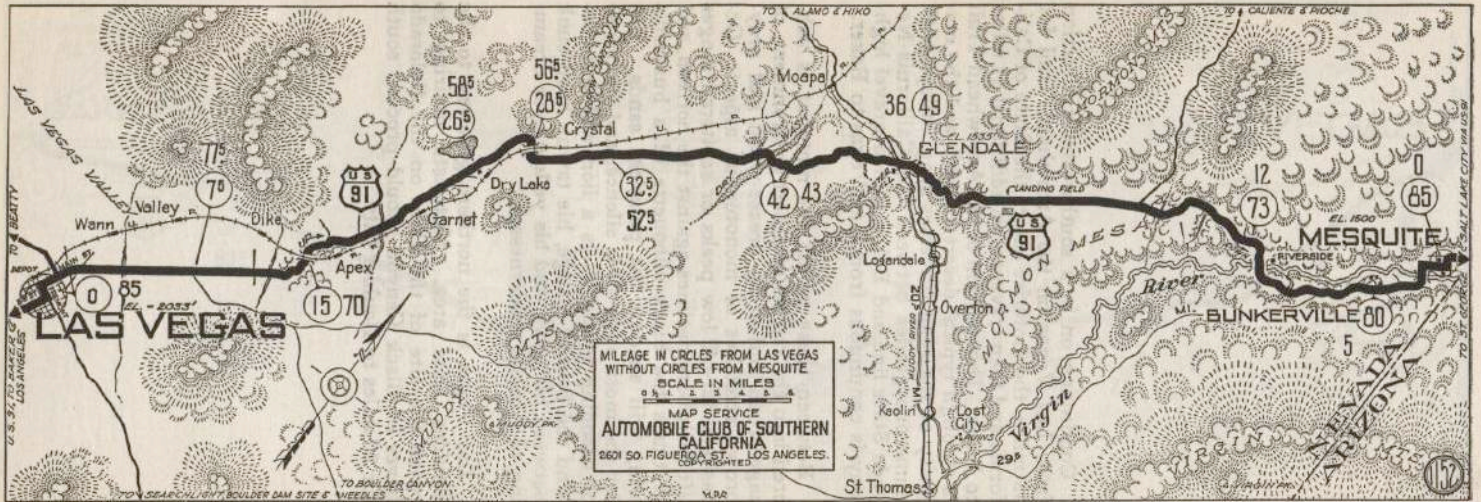
*Marysville, Utah to Barstow,
California Railroad Proposal (1894)*

An interesting proposal to extend the Denver, Rio Grande and Western Railroad from the mines in Marysville all the way to California was considered briefly in the late 1890s. The alignment was chosen to maximize the scenic beauty of the trip, while connecting known and potential mining districts along the way.

*Map of Nevada, Utah, Arizona
and California (1891)*

Note that St. Thomas is the only town shown in Southern Nevada.





Map of the Arrowhead Trail between Las Vegas and Mesquite (1917)

St. Thomas survived the coming of the railroad but became an early victim of the automobile age, when it was bypassed by the Automobile Club of Southern California's mapmaker. A 1920 effort to construct an improved highway through St. Thomas and Bunkerville came too late to influence the motoring public. St. Thomas enjoyed little of the tourist traffic and only had one small hotel in 1936.

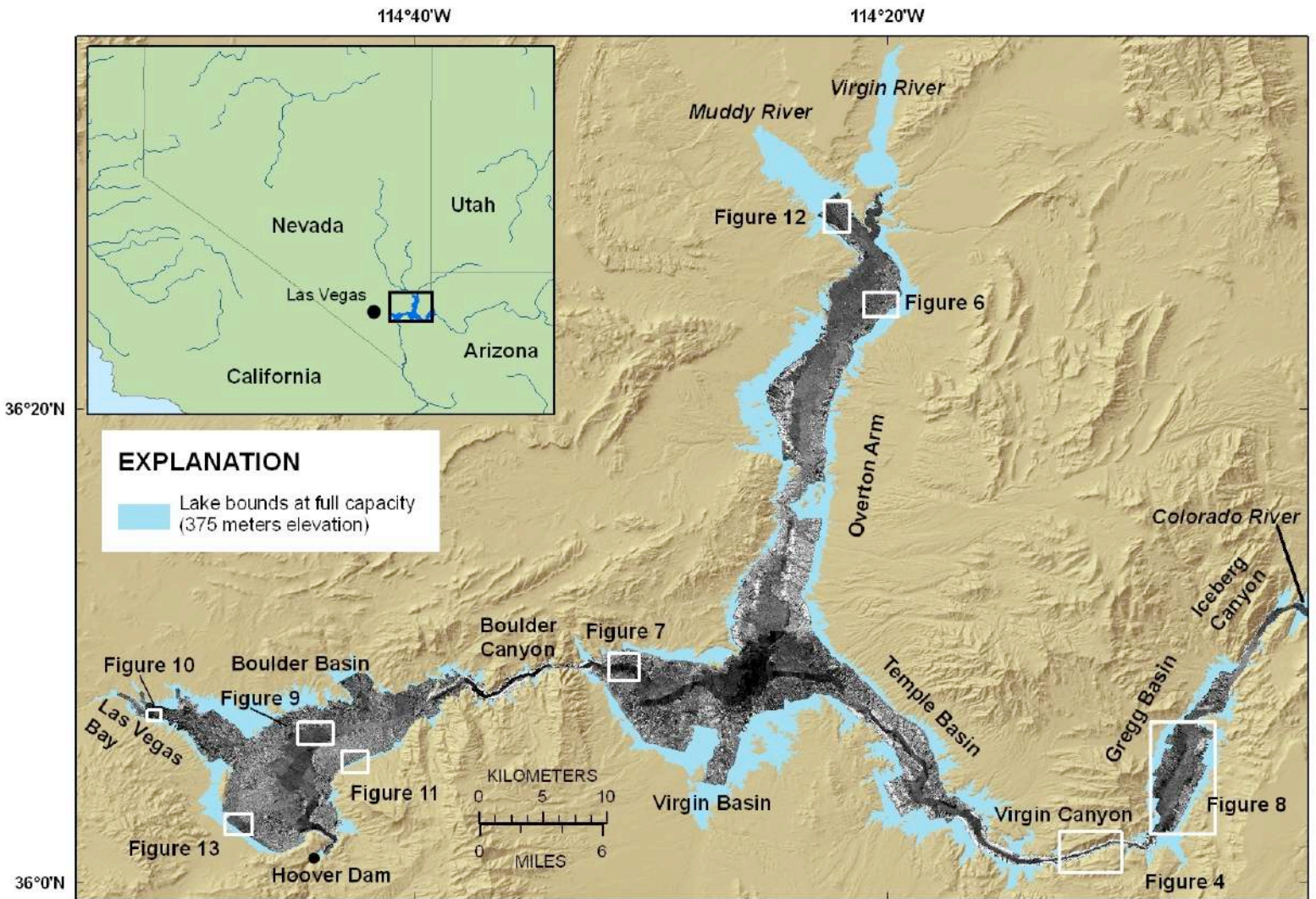
Las Vegas-St. Thomas Road

On October 18, 1920, the department submitted a project statement to the Federal Government covering the improvement of that portion of the St. Thomas-Las Vegas road from a point 16.79 miles southwest of St. Thomas to a point 30.10 miles southwest of St. Thomas, a total length of 13.31 miles, the improvement to consist of a graveled road 18 feet wide with permanent drainage structures of corrugated-metal pipe and reinforced concrete. The estimated cost of this project, together with the apportionment of costs, is as follows:

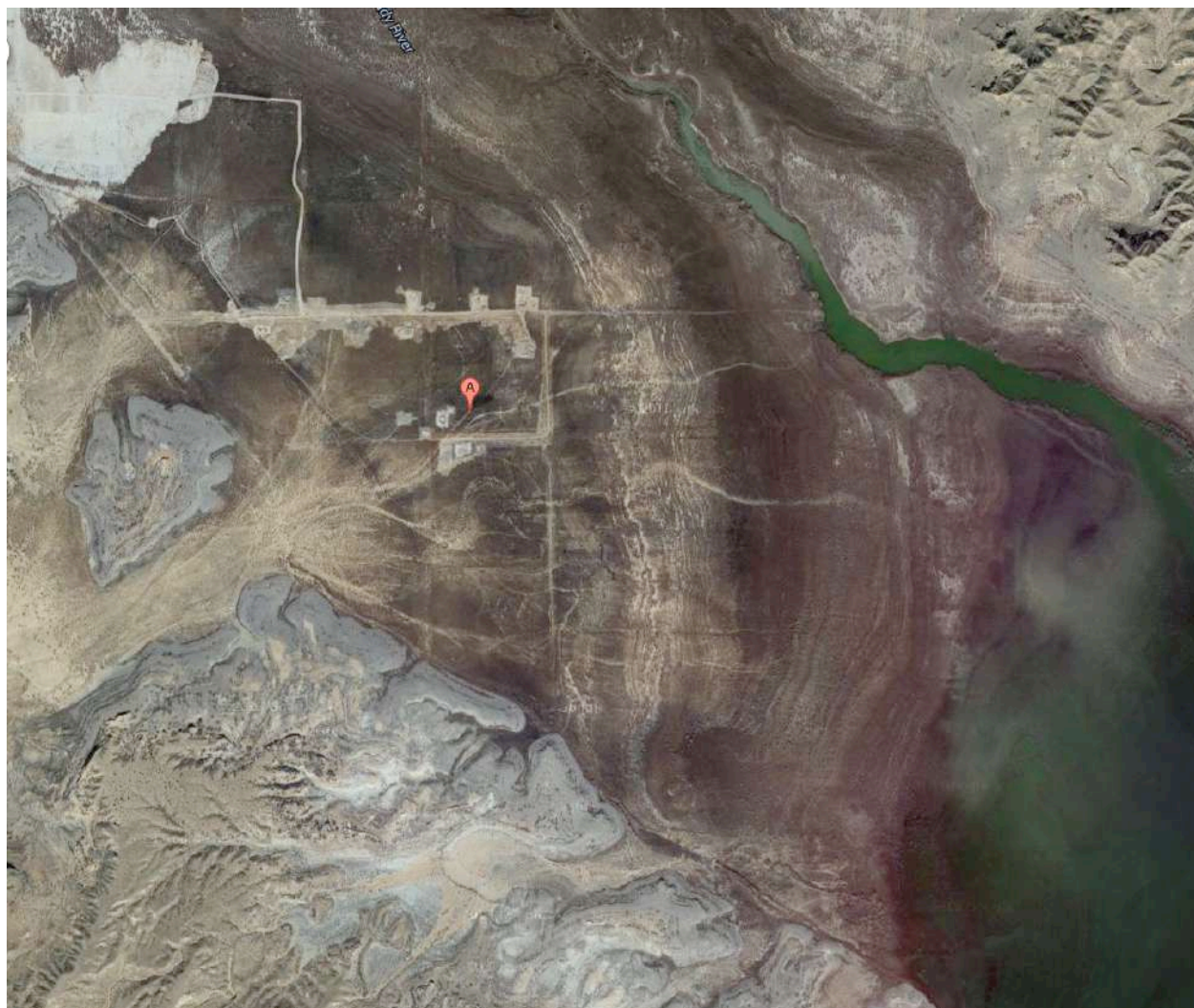
Federal Government.....	\$40,294.87
Clark County.....	25,294.87
State share.....	15,000.00
Total estimated cost.....	\$80,589.74

The surveys for this project are practically complete and the plans are now under way. Bids were called for on this project in November, 1920, but only one bid was received, which was too high, and was rejected. Bids will again be called for in the near future, and it is hoped to have this project under construction in January, 1921. It is also probable that, early in 1921, construction will be begun on an additional ten miles of the Las Vegas-St. Thomas road, the surveys for which are completed.

St. Thomas, Nevada
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St. Thomas, Nevada
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St. Thomas at the edge of a receding Lake Mead (2012)

St. Thomas, Nevada
May 2014



St. Thomas Remains (2012)

St. Thomas, Nevada
May 2014



St. Thomas Remains with School House at lower left (2012)



Map of Northern Arizona (1873)



Map of Northern Arizona (2010)

Comparison of the two maps shows a significant error in the location and shape of the Colorado River by the 1873 cartographer who wouldn't have had access to John Wesley Powell's information that was first published in 1875, but would have been familiar with Lieutenant Ives 1861 maps. Also, note the proposed location of the Atlantic and Pacific Railroad across Arizona.