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A Power-ful Story

For years Big Cottonwood Creek supplied power to most of the canyon sawmills. At the end of the 1800's Robert Jones realized it might be able to supply power for Salt Lake Valley from the steepest area of the canyon, called *The Stairs* by early pioneers who buried logs crosswise in the road to help ox teams make the climb. So in 1893 Jones and others formed the Big Cottonwood Power Company. The Victorian-style plant they built in 1896 (located just blow Mile Marker 4) is still in operation, one of the oldest power plants in the country, and one of the first to transmit power long distance using alternating current rather than direct current.

At the beginning, Jones had to build a reservoir at Storm Mountain to supply a steady stream of water downhill to the power plant. Trouble set in when water covered the road, so an alternate road was put in above the reservoir. It was a steep road, called *Jones's Hump* by teamsters. Many vehicles had to turn around to back up the hill with the more powerful reverse gear. Jones originally wanted to put in a tunnel to lessen the grade, but found it was cheaper to make an open cut through the mountain. That dramatic cut through Storm Mountain was known as *Devil's Gate*. In the late 1960's, part of the old Jones' Hump road was blasted out (through solid rock) and the grade was moderated. Today it sits above the steepest grade in the canyon, sometimes called Torpedo Hill.

Another Victorian hydro electric plant sits at the mouth of the canyon, north of the water treatment plant. Known as the Granite Hydroelectric Plant, it's also listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Originally the two canyon plants supplied power to electric trolleys and street lights in the city. Salt Lake was one of the first U.S. cities to have a street light system, thanks to Big Cottonwood hydro-power!