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A Quick History of
**LAKE CITY
COLORADO**

by
Margaret Bates

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"From Booming Silver Camp to Tourist Mecca"

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To Daddy +
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by
Margaret Bates

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DEDICATION

To Bill
My husband and Favorite Fishing Pal
This Book is lovingly dedicated
by Margaret Bates

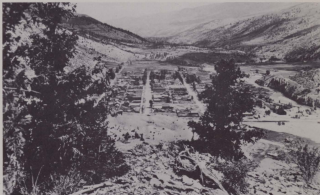
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COVER:

Famous Uncompahgre Peak, towering 14,306 feet above sea level, is one of the scenic highlights near Lake City. Uncompahgre is the tallest of the five peaks in Hinsdale County with altitudes over 14,000 feet. Photo by W. I. Hutchinson, U. S. Forest Service, Denver, from Denver Public Library Western Collection.



A view of Lake City as it appears today. Photo from the private collection of the Rev. Mark T. Warner, courtesy State Historical Society.



The town of Lake City is located in a picturesque valley completely surrounded by mountains. Tall cottonwood trees line the highway through the town. Denver Public Library Western Collection

INTRODUCTION

Lake City, Colorado, picturesque community in the heart of the Silvery San Juan Mountains, appeals to vacationers, historians and sportsmen alike. For the trout fisherman, the snowmobiler, the big game hunter, rock hound, photographer, history buff, camper or luxury-loving tourist Lake City and the spectacularly beautiful country surrounding it presents unlimited opportunities for enjoyment.



Lake San Cristobal, largest natural body of water in Colorado and one of the most beautiful, originated hundreds of years ago when the Slungullion mudslide dammed the Lake Fork river.

EARLY LAKE CITY



It all began almost a hundred years ago when Enos Hotchkiss made his rich strike of gold and silver ores, located the Hotchkiss Mine (later renamed The Golden Fleece Mine) and built the first log cabin in Lake City.

Prior to that time, on August 27, 1871, a group headed by Harry Henson had discovered the rich Ute-Ulay ore veins, but at that time all the lands now known as San Juan belonged to the Ute Indians, and mining operations did not begin until 1874 after the Utes ceded the land to the United States.

So Enos Hotchkiss was "the father of Lake City," and triggered the mining boom that was to last for many years and bring fortunes to a number of Colorado pioneers.

When Spring rolled around in 1875 Lake City had grown to the modest size of thirteen log cabins; but that was the year things really began to happen.

Lake City's first newspaper, *The Silver World*, was published June 19, 1875. It heralded as red letter days such important events as the first wedding in Lake City, the opening of the first sawmill, and the birth of the first child, all of which occurred during that year.

The first stagecoach arrived in July of 1875, and established a route of three trips weekly to Lake City from Saguache.

In 1876 the Ute-Ulay mine sold for \$135,000 and then the rush was really on. People of every race and nationality . . . Poles, Germans, Chinese, Negros, Italians, Irish, English, Japanese . . . began to arrive in Lake City by stage, wagontrain, horseback, muleback or on foot. Tents sprang up everywhere interspersed with log cabins in varying stages of construction, and by November of 1876 the town boasted of an astonishing number of businesses: fourteen general merchandise stores, seven saloons, two banks, three barber shops, three bakeries, two brickyards, two breweries, two drug stores, five blacksmith shops, four Chinese laundries, one newspaper, four hardware stores, six cafes, two billiard parlors, four sawmills, three boot shops, four meat markets, five stables, four hotels, one furniture store, and a number of overworked assayers and surveyors.

While the total population of Lake City at any one time never exceeded 5,000, many times that number lived for a time in Lake City during those early boom years. Lured to the West by fantastic tales of easy riches many a bank clerk banged his ledger shut and headed for Lake City with a slim grubstake and virtually no knowledge of the hardships to be endured, expecting to scoop up a few quick hatfuls of pure gold or silver and live happily ever after.



A birds-eye view of Lake City in boom days with close-ups of some of the buildings of the era, many of which are still in use today. Photo from the private collection of the Rev. Mark T. Warner, courtesy State Historical Society.

These, almost invariably, met with bitter disappointment and defeat, and were happy to escape from the rugged mining areas by any means available. The rich ore was there and the fabulous strikes continued, but even seasoned prospectors and knowledgeable mining men found that it took gruelling and often unrewarded labor, a certain amount of capital and planning, and a **WHOLE LOT OF LUCK** to reap the riches of the land.

Like all boom towns of that era Lake City also attracted the attention of the criminal element. But in one respect Lake City differed greatly from most Colorado boom towns. Almost from the first it attracted a generally higher class citizenry than many of the mushrooming mining camps. Lumbermen, ranchers, mining engineers, professional men and businessmen saw a real future in Lake City and moved there with the idea of making it their permanent home. Two churches were built and dedicated in the year 1876 . . . the Presbyterian church and the Episcopal church which are still active today, followed by the Roman Catholic church of St. Rose of Lima built in 1881, and the Baptist church in 1891.

The first school was started in January of 1876, paid for mainly by popular subscription, and in 1877 a rudimentary volunteer fire department was in operation.

Disquieting rumors of a possible Indian uprising in 1878 led to the formation of the Pitkin Guards comprised of 38 members. Actually the Utes, a peace-loving tribe, were generally friendly and helpful and displayed animosity only when their rights were violated by some of the more ruthless prospectors. So the Guards were never called into action, but their Armory became a focal point for community affairs. They remained active for many years and added color to the local scene with their drum and bugle corps and brass band.

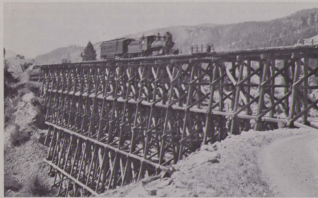
Progress continued at a rapid rate. The Lake City post office was established in 1875 and the arrival of mail via stage coach from Del Norte was always a big event. The first telegraph service was installed by Western Union in 1876. In 1877 the first library opened and by 1881 telephone service was operating between Lake City, Silverton and Ouray with connections also at Capitol City, Rose's Cabin, Mineral Point and Animas Forks.

In 1889 the Denver and Rio Grande Railroad completed a narrow gauge line into Lake City; daily service began between the town and Sapinero, thirty-six miles away, where connections could be made for continuing journeys.

Throughout the early boom days the backbone of Lake City economy was, of course, the mines which were being carved out of the steep mountainsides nearby at a rapid rate. Burro trains and wagons loaded with gold and silver ore streamed into town constantly and there the ore was reloaded into freight cars.



The Denver and Rio Grande Railroad linked Lake City to the outside world in 1889 and was a key factor in the development of the region for many years, but the line was abandoned in 1933 and the tracks sold for scrap. Photo from Denver Public Library Western Collection.



Countless ore trains as well as passenger trains chugged across this high bridge near Lake City in early days. Photo taken in the 1920's.

THE MINES

Hinsdale County produced more than ten million dollars worth of silver, gold, copper, lead and zinc in the first half century after Hotchkiss made his fabulous strike. The boundaries of Hinsdale County were established in 1874. It was formed from parts of Costilla, Conejos and Lake counties and named in honor of George A. Hinsdale, a former lieutenant governor.

In the boom days anything seemed possible and a group of industrialists founded Capitol City, ten miles up Henson Creek from Lake City with the serious intention of supplanting Denver as the capital of Colorado. Mansions were built and plans made, but the dream never materialized.

Ore poured into Lake City from Sherman, White Cross, Carson City, Rose's Cabin and other prosperous mining camps in the county. Names of the mines reflected the hopes and dreams of the founders: Big Casino, Child of Fortune, Hidden Treasure, Belle of the West, Pocahontas, May Flower, Ocean Wave, Czar and Czarina, and Black Hornet. Several of the mines also had their own large mills.

Prior to 1893 Silver was King in the Lake City area. While comparatively smaller yields of gold, copper and lead added to the general prosperity it was in silver that the large fortunes were being made. So in 1893 when Congress passed the Silver Act lowering the price of the metal from \$1.29 to fifty cents an ounce it was a staggering blow to the community.

However, production was at an all time high and the area rallied briefly. In 1895 gold production tripled in Hinsdale county, lead doubled, silver was mined in larger quantities to help compensate for the drop in price and 1895 was the peak year for Hinsdale County with mineral production totalling \$726,614.

But the slow down had begun. Lead continued to boost the local economy for several more years, but by the turn of the century the boom was over.

Many of the mines closed down, people moved on. By 1900 population of the county had dropped to 1,609 and a decade later it was only 646. In the hills the once prosperous mining towns had begun their slow deterioration into ghost towns. Some mining continued on a small scale for many years, but in the 1970 annual report by the Colorado Bureau of Mines the only mineral activity listed for Hinsdale County was: sand and gravel \$60,070.



The Ute and Ulay mines were developed more extensively than most of the mines in the region. Situated $3\frac{1}{2}$ miles west of Lake City on Henson Creek, the mines were located in 1874 by Joseph Mullen and purchased in 1876 by Crooke Bros. A smelter was erected for the treatment of ore and Crooke Bros. were responsible for the expansion of the Ute-Ulay area and other mining interests controlled by them. Photo (1895) courtesy Denver Public Library Western Collection.



Early photo of the Silver Cord Mine, courtesy Denver Public Library Western Collection.

SOCIAL LIFE

National holidays were celebrated with great vim and vigour in Lake City and on July Fourth especially the inhabitants went all out for a glorious celebration.

The mines lay idle that day as the miners from surrounding areas thronged into Lake City to participate in the contests, programs, parades, songs, dancing and feasting which were officially included in the entertainment as well as certain extra-curricular activities in the saloons and "red light houses" which were not.

The first Independence Day celebration on the entire Western Slope of Colorado was held in 1875 in Lake City just one short year after Hotchkiss built the first log cabin there.

As celebration time drew near the committee was chagrined to find that there was not a single American flag in town, but when the great day dawned Old Glory waved proudly from the rooftop of The Silver World building.

It had been fashioned from a pair of red flannel drawers, a blue flannel shirt, and some white handkerchiefs. Just who the "Betsy Ross" of Lake City was has been lost in antiquity, but the marathon celebration of that day was long remembered.

A parade, races and contests were held throughout the day, and brilliant fireworks illumined the night. A public dance and supper at the Armory climaxed the celebration. Supper was served at midnight but the dance continued till dawn of the next day.

At Christmas time programs of music and elocution were presented in the beautifully decorated churches and Santa Claus always arrived in the nick of time.

Washington's birthday called for a parade in which all school children participated. An abundance of American flags blossomed in Lake City after the original over-sight, and in the Washington Day parades each child gaily waved (or clouted his fellow marchers with) an American flag.

In 1883 annual Memorial Day observances began which included eloquent speeches followed by the inevitable parade to the cemetery where memorial services were held and graves decorated.

Men so far outnumbered women in those days that the arrival of a new "lady of quality" was an event of major importance and the men soon learned that the best way to meet these rare and marvelous creatures was to be properly introduced at a ball. And so the men of the town became adept at whipping up "A Grand Ball" at a moment's notice. Many a frightened female arriving at that "untamed wilderness" after a hazardous journey was astonished to find that she was to be guest of honor at a Grand Ball.

A drama club was organized in 1876 and local Lotharios swaggered across the Armory stage dying a villain's death or winning a hero's acclaim from a packed house.

First the I.O.O.F., then other lodges, installed local chapters and sponsored their share of social events, and the Firemen's Masquerade Ball became an annual event of great importance.

In 1884, according to The Mining Register, Lake City was gripped by "a very bad case of skating rink fever." A large roller rink was constructed in the center of town and enjoyed great popularity. Many non-skaters gathered at the rink nightly just to watch "the fancy fandangos" of the town mayor and other notables.

Sleighting parties, bobsledding, coasting and ice skating enlivened the winter months. A centrally-located fire hydrant was used to flood a large street section and form an ice rink. A warm-up shed was provided and the whole festive scene gaily illuminated by electric lights.

Elaborate entertainment palaces were built. One contained a shooting gallery in addition to an ornate ballroom and private card rooms. Billiard halls were popular and "a genuine German Beer Garden" was established on Henson Creek a short distance from Lake City replete with rustic bowers, outdoor elevated dance floor, and gay German music.

Traveling circuses, road shows, hypnotists and magicians, added Lake City to their circuits and the whole town always turned out for the unique spectacle of elephants standing in Henson creek and squirting water on each other.

To all this the ingenious and fun loving people of Lake City added a specialty of their own . . . TELEPHONE CONCERTS!

At that time telephone service was in its infancy, but Lake City was fortunate in being included in the one telephone line in the area with connections to Silverton, Ouray, Rose's Cabin and Capitol City. On the night of a scheduled concert everyone in these remote sectors gathered around the nearest telephone and on signal musicians at each station took turns performing their own specialty. Then all sang a grand finale in unison.

CRIME

Many of the notorious outlaws of the era are known to have been in Lake City in the early days. But after "casing the joint" such characters as Jesse James, Billy the Kid, Poker Face Alice, Bat Masterson and Soapy Smith seem to have concluded that the strong arm of the law was a little stronger in Lake City than in most boom towns. Sure, they rode through occasionally shooting up the town just to keep their images bright, but they are not credited with master-minding any major crime in the area.

But despite their absence, Lake City managed to have some very spectacular crimes, and most infamous of all was that of Alfred Packer, "the human cannibal."

Packer's saga began more than a year before Hotchkiss founded the community when he guided five prospectors over the mountains from Ouray and camped at the foot of Slumgullion Pass. His credentials as a guide should have been suspect from the beginning for he was serving a jail sentence in Salt Lake City for counterfeiting when his boasts about his vast knowledge of the San Juan region came to the attention of a prospecting party ready to leave for that country. They paid his fine, hired him as a guide, and apparently did not realize that Packer knew little or nothing of the rugged San Juan area until it was too late to turn back.

It was an unusually severe winter. Deep snow drifts and temperatures ranging far below zero made progress maddeningly slow even if Packer had known where he was going. Game was scarce, supplies soon ran out, and the six starving men tried to subsist on wild-rose pods sticking above the snow and an occasional rabbit split six-ways. By the time they reached the foot of Slumgullion Pass they had boiled and eaten their moccasins as a last resort and their plight was truly desperate.

Six weeks later Packer appeared alone at the Los Pinos Indian Agency, 76 miles from Lake City, and told a sad tale of losing contact with his fellow travelers in a blinding snowstorm. He "did not know" what had become of his companions, for he, starving and alone, had barely made it back to the agency. But his chief interest seemed to be whiskey, not food, and he looked healthy and well fed. He seemed to have a great deal of money to spend for whiskey and curiously enough paid for his drinks out of several different wallets. Suspicion grew when Indians returning to the agency brought in strips of human flesh found along Packer's trail, and a search party was organized for the missing men.



Alfred Packer,
"the man-eater."



Pioneer Grave at the foot of Slumgullion Pass, bears this inscription:

"This tablet erected in memory of Israel Swan, George Noon, Frank Miller, James Humphreys, Wilson Bell, who were murdered on this spot early in the year 1874 while pioneering the mineral resources of the San Juan Country."

The monument was erected and dedicated many years after the tragedy by the residents of Lake City. Photos from Denver Public Library Western Collection.

Bodies of the missing men were found at the foot of Slumgullion Pass. Four of them, Israel Swan, George Noon, Frank Miller and James Humphreys, were lying close together and had obviously been murdered in their sleep by blows from an ax-t pe weapon. The fifth, Shannon Bell, was found a short distance away, felled by at least two bullets. All showed evidence they had been victims of cannibalism.

Packer hastily concluded that the strategic time had come to move on and he disappeared for nine years, but the search for him never stopped. He was finally found in Wyoming living under an assumed name. At first he denied any knowledge of the slayings, but confronted with overwhelming circumstantial evidence, finally confessed that he had shot Bell in self defense. His story was that he had returned from a hunting expedition to find that Bell had gone berserk, had murdered the other four men, and then was trying to kill Packer when the latter fired in self defense.

But the evidence indicated it was more likely that Bell had awakened while Packer was committing the gruesome ax murders and was trying to escape when he was shot in the back by Packer.

Packer was convicted of murdering the five men, sentenced to hang, and construction of a gallows was begun.

After the trial Larry Dolan, an Irish saloon-keeper of some wit and considerable profanity, regaled his cronies with his version of the sentencing. Lake City was overwhelmingly Republican, and according to Dolan the judge sentenced "the man-eatin' son of a bitch" because "they was seven dimmycrats in Hinsdale County and ye eat five of 'em, God damn ye! I sentins ye to be hanged by the neck until ye're dead, dead, dead . . . as a warnin' ag'in reducing the dimmycratic populashun in the state."

Actually the justice, Judge M. B. Gerry, was an exceedingly well educated and reverent man. His real judgment was a masterpiece of dignified prose and bore not the slightest resemblance to Dolan's fantasy, but the saltier version caught on and was repeated over and over. Many years later, during the New Deal era, young Denver Republicans organized the Packer Club, and members were required to sign the following pledge: "I agrees to eliminat five Nu Deal Dimmycrats witch makes me a member of th' Packer Club of Colorado." And years later University of Colorado students gleefully celebrated the opening of "The Alfred Packer Grill" in Boulder.

Packer was never hanged but won a new trial through a legal loophole, and in 1886 was sentenced to forty years at hard labor in the state penitentiary at Canon City.

Eight years later the Denver Post took a sudden mysterious interest in Packer's plight, and the Post's sob-sister, Polly Pry, wrote sentimental front page stories demanding his pardon. It was the heyday of the Post's flamboyant editors, Bonfils and Tammen, and many readers suspected that they were employing their familiar tactic of using some obscure cause to harass a public official they had marked for oblivion. But the ruse worked and Packer was pardoned. At least one person believed the Post publicity . . . Packer himself . . . and he became a sort of hanger-on or unofficial bodyguard around the newspaper offices until his death in 1906 of natural causes.

Years later the residents of Lake City built a monument at the site of the Packer Massacre, dedicated to the memory of the murdered men, then celebrated the occasion with a magnificent fish fry with all the trimmings to which the public was invited.



Two years after discovery of gold in the region and one year after the founding of the town, the Presbyterian Church of Lake City was established. In 1877 the bell was brought by team and wagon from Pueblo to be installed in the church steeple. Today the church continues its active leadership in the community, and the old reed organ which dates back to earliest times is still used in the services. Photo courtesy State Historical Society of Colorado.

THE KILLING OF SHERIFF CAMPBELL

In 1882 Sheriff E. N. Campbell was shot and killed in the dead of night while trying to apprehend two men caught in the act of armed burglary. His deputy, Claire Smith, not only escaped unharmed but he had recognized the fleeing culprits as George Betts and James Browning, two local dance hall proprietors. Armed scouts were sent out to capture the men and they were arrested and jailed.

Talk of a lynching had been smouldering in the town from the moment word was received of the sheriff's death and now that talk was turned into action. Irate citizens held a midnight rendezvous near the dead sheriff's home where plans were made, then the procession moved with menacing certainty toward the jail. The executioners were masked and armed with guns.

Peace officers at the jail bravely faced the long line of rifles and tried to reason with the angry mob. One officer reminded the mob that Browning was only guilty of larceny, not murder, and pleaded for his life. His answer was a bullet that grazed his forehead and left a lifelong scar. Their situation was hopeless and soon they were disarmed. Sledge hammer blows rained on the jail doors and soon the two men, pleading for mercy, were dragged from their cells and marched to the Ocean Wave Bridge spanning the Lake Fork river where they were hanged.

Betts last request was a plea that his mother in her home faraway would never be told how he met his death. The two were buried in the Lake City cemetery where the markers to their memory, erected by their dance hall friends, remain to this day.



The Baptist Church, built in 1891, had a large and active membership when this picture was taken in 1898. Photo courtesy State Historical Society.

THE CASE OF HULDAH AND HER HAT

When the stagecoach left Lake City for Denver one windy day the only female passenger aboard was a young Swedish girl named Huldah. She was wearing a large broad-brimmed straw hat.

At the foot of a very steep hill the passengers were asked, as was customary, to get out and walk up the hill to spare the horses. As Huldah and her male companions complied, a freak gust of wind lifted her hat off her head and deposited it atop an inaccessible crag. Huldah pleaded with the men to retrieve her hat, but they assured her it was impossible and promised to buy her a bigger and better one as soon as they reached Denver. But then Huldah burst into tears and confessed that her life savings of \$1,000 was sewed into the lining of her hat. She had saved it through months of back-breaking work doing laundry for miners so that she and her sweetheart, Eric, could be married as soon as he arrived from the "old country," and he was already on his way.

Moved by her tears one of the men finally managed to snag the hat off the rock with the stage driver's whip and Huldah's gratitude was touching indeed.

At dusk the stage was held up by three masked men and the passengers were robbed of many of their belongings, but the loot fell far short of their expectations and the bandits began arguing among themselves about breaking open the government strongbox. Many desperados regarded the robbing of individuals as just good clean fun, but were reluctant to incur the wrath of the federal government by "tampering with the United States mails."

They had decided to take the risk however when a passenger named Bennett suddenly pointed at Huldah and cried, "That girl there has \$1,000 sewed in her hat." The additional amount satisfied the bandits and they rode off into the night. The government strongbox was safe . . . but Mr. Bennett was not!

The other men, infuriated by Bennett's betrayal of the girl, threatened to lynch him on the spot and he had to do a lot of fast talking to save his life. He promised to repay every cent to the girl in Denver the next day, and the other men finally agreed not to harm him but to guard him until he did just that.

The strongbox was safely delivered to postal authorities in Denver and then Bennett, accompanied by his guards, withdrew the money he had deposited in the strongbox . . . \$40,000! He not only repaid Huldah her thousand but also bought her an elaborate trousseau, and Huldah greeted her sweetheart in style when he arrived shortly afterwards to claim his happy bride.

HELL'S ACRES

On the western bluffs of Lake City the red-light district overlooked the town, but the town did not overlook the red-light district. It was commonly referred to by the men as "Hell's Acres," and was not referred to at all by the ladies of the town. In fact, since the district was located on Bluff Street, well-bred young ladies were strictly forbidden to ever speak the street's name.

The woman shortage was acute, and so the red lights glowed brightly and the madames and girls prospered daily and nightly. More than one miner not only found his solace but his bride in Hell's Acres. Some of these marriages appear to have been highly successful, but other brides returned happily to the bright lights after a brief fling at marriage in an isolated log cabin. Bending over the washboard, many a lady of the night quickly scrubbed away her fleeting desire to be an honest woman and headed hastily back to her alma mater for a post-graduate course.

The girls understood the hazards of a miner's life and when a regular customer failed to appear it was cause for real concern. Usually it turned out that the miner could not keep his rendezvous because of serious illness and often the lady of his choice went to his cabin and nursed him back to health, then resumed business as usual. Occasionally a girl was not so lucky and contracted a fatal disease. Then on her deathbed she would plead for a decent Christian burial. Ministers in Lake City were unusually compassionate for the era and willing to comply with the girl's last request, but in at least one instance a trustee of the church was not. He refused to open the doors of his church for the funeral of a fallen woman. His pastor transferred the funeral to another place where Christian services were held. The pious trustee, en route home in his buggy, was waylaid and soundly horse-whipped by two women who bore a marked resemblance to two alumnae of Hell's Acres.

CALAMITIES

"Fire" was a fearful word in the early days. Most of the buildings were of frame construction and were built very close together. When a fire broke out it often destroyed an entire block of buildings in one gigantic holocaust. Lake City had a number of disastrous fires and the downtown area was in a more or less constant turmoil of being rebuilt. The log cabin jail once burned to the ground leaving only the steel cages which are on display in front of the courthouse today.

In 1877 the Hough Fire Company was organized. At that time only crude hand-operated equipment was available. The townspeople dug wells at strategic locations and dug ditches from Henson Creek through the main streets of town and water was hand-pumped from these wherever fires broke out. The ladies of the community gave benefits to raise money for a large fire bell and the inhabitants turned out en masse whenever they heard its awesome tolling. Later the town purchased a hook and ladder wagon but the machinery was still hand-operated and fires continued to take a heavy toll.

Snowslides were less frequent but often more deadly as they roared down the steep mountainsides without an instant's warning. Mining activities accelerated the dangers of snowslides and a number of miners perished in the sudden avalanches. The slides were also a constant threat to the railroad and trains were sometimes blocked for hours while the tracks were cleared.

Mining accidents took their toll too, for safety precautions were inadequate and the miners as a whole were a reckless breed. Pneumonia was an almost certain death warrant in the high altitude, and any serious illness in a lonely mountain cabin was a fearsome thing to reckon with. But despite all the hazards most of the lusty Lake City inhabitants survived, and third and fourth generation descendants of several rugged pioneer families still live in Lake City today.



The picturesque Hinsdale County Courthouse, built in 1877, is still in use today. Photo from Denver Public Library Western Collection.



Carson City was one of the thriving mining camps of early days and was surrounded by more than a dozen prosperous mines. Photo Courtesy Vickers Dude Ranch.



Now Carson City has been a ghost town for many years. This photo was taken in 1960 by Robert Brown, courtesy State Historical Society.



The founders of Capitol City, ten miles from Lake City, had dreams of making it the capitol of Colorado which never came true. Only ruins remain today of the elaborate "Governors Mansion". Photo courtesy Sandra Dallas from Denver Public Library Western Collection.



Now a ghost town, White Cross was postal headquarters for more than 300 miners living in the vicinity at the turn of the century. The town was named for a natural quartz formation which forms a large white cross on the mountainside. Photo by Robert Brown, courtesy State Historical Society.

LAKE CITY TODAY

Lake City today is a trout fisherman's paradise and has recently been dubbed "the snowmobile capitol of the world."

For years after the boom was over Lake City slumbered. Population of the entire county hovered around the 200 mark. Cattle and sheep ranching and some dwindling mining activities were about the only sources of revenue. Then in the 1940's the eyes of Texas (and Oklahoma) focused on Lake City. New restaurants opened, new motels were built, old houses were remodelled into pleasant summer homes.

During the quiet years, the "old guard" of Lake City continued to hold the town together. They preserved many of the town's unique landmarks, worked for the good of the community and provided services for tourists on a moderate scale. The *quality* of Lake City people never diminished even though *quantity* did.

When Lake City was rediscovered by outsiders, they discovered a nucleus of dedicated townspeople, who along with other Coloradoans were eager to put Lake City back on the road to prosperity.

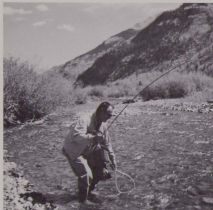
People visited Lake City and returned again and again. So many summer visitors came from the Lone Star State that Lake City was nicknamed "Little Texas." Now tourists come from every state in the union.

Today you can rent a jeep, a boat, a snowmobile, a riding horse or a pack horse, and see some of the most spectacularly beautiful scenery in the world. You can camp in lovely campsites overlooking Lake San Cristobal, or along the streams; rusticate in a log cabin, or live it up in a luxury motel. You may hunt rocks or big game; prowl through antique shops and curio stores; explore the ruins of old mining camps; study unique geological formations; dine in excellent restaurants; fish, hike, dance, picnic and enjoy the companionship of some of the friendliest people in the U.S.A.

Located in the heart of the magnificent San Juan Mountains, Lake City, county seat of Hinsdale County, is situated on the Lake Fork of the Gunnison River at the mouth of Henson Creek at an altitude of 8,684 feet.

It can be reached by State Highway 149 (from U.S. Highway 50 just west of Gunnison) or from Creede and U.S. Highway 160 via State Highway 149. High mountain lakes and over 500 miles of rivers and streams provide excellent fishing.

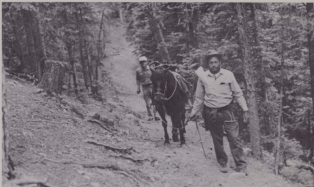
No one in Lake City worries about overcrowding or air pollution, for only about 4% of the land in the county is privately owned and the remainder is either national forestry land or controlled by the Colorado Bureau of Mines. In population density Hinsdale is the smallest county in the U.S.A., so it is often referred to as "tiny Hinsdale County."



A fly fisherman on Henson Creek nets a fighting rainbow. The wide riffles of clear water, which alternate with cascades tumbling into deep pools, make Henson Creek an ideal fishing stream. Most of the ten mile stretch between Lake City and Capitol City is posted for fly fishing only.



In "the snowmobile capitol of the world" winter tourists may explore the snowy hillsides alone or join group expeditions sponsored by the community. Photo courtesy Colorado Department of Public Relations.



Riding horseback along the beautiful wooded trails or packing into the back country are favorite pastimes. Photo courtesy Bill and Ruthana Hall.



Successful hunter examines his trophy. Photo courtesy Colorado Department of Public Relations.

From Lake City you can take a one-day jeep circle trail over Cinnamon Pass and Engineer Pass and look down from the top of the world on majestic vistas of mountains, lakes and glaciers. Along the way you will see many of the old ghost towns. Other jeep trails crisscross the area, and forests of evergreen and aspen, lakes and waterfalls, rock formations and wildflowers present ever changing vistas of beauty. Deer, elk, chipmunks and woodchucks are frequently spotted from the road and, more rarely, a bear or a bobcat.

The highway from Lake City to Creede is paved to the top of Slumgullion Pass and is an easy drive in a conventional car. It affords splendid views of Lake San Cristobal and Deer Lakes; and from Windy Point a spectacular view of jagged 14,306 foot Uncompahgre Peak and its sister peaks the Matterhorn and the Wetterhorn. In late September the aspen forests turn to the purest copper and gold and a trip up the Pass then is a never-to-be-forgotten experience.

The Fourth of July is still celebrated with the old-time vim and vigor. The Chamber of Commerce always hosts a dinner for big game hunters in October with up to 400 in attendance.

After the last shots ring out in November the town draws a few quiet breaths and then the snowmobile season begins. Organized parties trek over the mountains from Lake City to Creede or vice versa and successful completion of the journey always calls for an old-time celebration.

On the days when they are not snowmobiling winter tourists may enjoy the sport of ice-fishing, dropping their lines into holes cut in the thick ice and pulling out sizeable fish in the true Eskimo tradition; or they may have a go at skiing on a small scale by visiting the miniature poma-lift run on the edge of town which the natives financed for practice, and nobody takes too seriously.

In its 1972 roster the active Hinsdale County Chamber of Commerce lists a number of tourist accommodations: The Chalet, Crystal Lodge, Lake City Resort, Pleasant View Resort, San Cristobal Resort, Golconda Resort, San Juan Ranch, The Texan Resort, T-Mountain Ranch, VC Lodge, Vickers Dude Ranch, Alpine Village, Lone Pine Motel, G & M Cabins, Iron Kettle Cabins, Matterhorn Resort Motel, Silver Spur Motel, Town Square Cabins, Western Belle Lodge, and Wagon Wheel Courts.

Recently mining companies have been showing renewed interest in exploration and leasing of mining properties in the area and rumors persist that the once-fabulous mines may re-open some day. Meanwhile Lake City continues to be one of the most delightful vacation spots in the U.S.A.



Bighorn Sheep of the Rocky Mountains rarely pose for a photograph like this. Wily and elusive the Bighorns live in the highest parts of the mountains as far as possible from mankind. They jump and climb easily in the most dangerous places and can plunge down steep slopes at great speed. Photo courtesy Clarke and Kathy Buchanan.



A winter snow scene. Photo courtesy Dan and Louise Lynn.



The bears of Hinsdale County keep busy with a number of interesting activities. Another creature that is just as busy, but a lot more sociable is the tiny chipmunk. These frisky ground-squirrels often become so tame they will take food from a visitor's hand. Bear photo by A. G. Wallihan, chipmunk by W. D. Byers, both from Deuser Public Library Western Collection.

THE BEAR THAT WANTED TO BE PEOPLE

In early winter the bears sometimes get to feeling a little friendlier than the people.

One cold night County Clerk Jean Vickers heard her little dog barking up a storm outside. Glancing out her kitchen window she saw a bear reclining comfortably "just like a person" in one of the lawn chairs.

Each time the excited dog made a pass at the bear the latter took a token swipe at the dog, then continued to lol at ease. Jean debated momentarily whether to take the bear his pipe and slippers or call the game warden, but decided on the latter course.

Says Jean, an ardent conservationist, "I just wanted the game warden to move that bear back into the high country . . . I didn't want anybody taking a shot at him." But by the time the game warden arrived the bear had ambled off and the dog, unscratched, was dozing by the fireplace.

MORE ABOUT BEARS

Another bear story concerns a certain braggart who boasted frequently about what he would do if he ever met a bear face to face. He was doing some late Fall fishing in a dam when a bear sauntered up and gave him a chance to prove his point. Instead the braggart threw his rod into the water and jumped in after it, breaking his leg. The curious bear then moseyed peacefully back to the high country.

R.S.V.P.

One summer we took our Labrador retriever, Lance, with us to Lake City. We stayed at a resort with nine cabins on one side of the road and nine trees on the other. Each day Lance followed a zig-zag trail visiting each cabin and each tree impartially, and soon became the pet of the camp.

One day we returned from fishing to find this note under our door: "We are the people in Cabin 3. You don't know us, but we know Lance. Could he come down for a steak dinner around 6:30?"

Promptly at 6:30 Lance presented himself at Cabin 3 with a bouquet of mountain flowers tucked under his collar. We don't know how many steaks he ate, but he wasn't hungry for two days afterwards.

SLUMGULLION SLIDE

Geologists throughout the world have recognized the Slumgullion earthflow four miles south of Lake City as a classic example of an earthflow phenomenon.

They place its origin around the year 1270 A.D.

Windy Point, on Slumgullion Pass, affords a good view of the slide. There the legend reads: "Many years ago this unstable mass of mud, clay and rocks slipped from the ridge beyond and flowed three miles to the Lake Fork River. The slide dammed the river to form Lake San Cristobal. Slumgullion Slide is still moving toward the river."

The mudslide as it is commonly called is probably responsible for the unique name, "Slumgullion Pass." Early day miners often dined on a mixture called "Slumgullion Stew" which was yellowish in color, smelled bad and probably tasted worse. The mudslide is also yellowish in color and gives off an unpleasant odor on warm days.

The flow originated on the western edge of Cannibal Plateau where the elevation is about 11,400 feet. Geologists believe the original slide has now stabilized, but that a newer over-lying slide 2.4 miles long is still slowly moving. Hiking trails in the area afford different views of the phenomenon, and the downhill slant of the trees gives mute evidence of the moving earth.

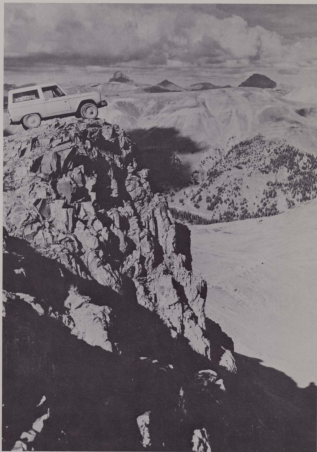
Lake San Cristobal, largest natural body of water in Colorado and one of the most beautiful, is one of the more spectacular achievements of the slide.

When did it start?

IT FINALLY HAPPENED

How often have you heard the expression: "Well, after all, my one vote isn't going to change the whole election?"

In Hinsdale County it did. In 1970 a county commissioner was elected by *one vote*. The loser demanded a re-count but the original tally proved correct. So in Hinsdale county where the year around voting residents still number only about 200 everyone takes his politics mighty, mighty seriously.



A trusty four-wheeler will go anywhere or almost anywhere but sometimes it is a good idea to pause and take a long look at the scenery! "Jeeping" around Lake City is always an exciting experience. Photo courtesy Colorado Department of Public Relations.



Escape from the "log calaboose" at Lake City was a laughing matter to early day desperadoes. So the local citizenry thoughtfully installed padlocked steel cages where criminals could meditate longer. These cages are now on display in front of the courthouse.



The little red caboose, on display in front of the county courthouse, is all that remains of the Denver and Rio Grande Railroad line that once hauled carloads of rich ore out of Lake City daily. The railroad tracks were torn up and sold for scrap in 1933.



The Silver World, first newspaper published in Lake City in 1875, folded long ago, but the building where the last issue was published still proudly bears its name. Today it is an artist's workshop.



Log houses were built to last in pioneer days. Some of them, remodelled, are still in use almost a hundred years later.

"REST IN PEACE"

Eloquent and flowery epitaphs were popular in early Lake City days. Here are some the visitor of today will find in browsing through the old cemetery:

"A little flower of love that bloomed . . .
but to die" (infant's grave)

"We trust our loss will be His gain,
And that with Christ, he's gone to reign."

"Sleep Brother dear and take your rest
God called you home . . . He thought it best."

"A place is vacant in our home
Which never can be filled
A precious one from us is gone
A voice we loved is stilled."

"Mark the perfect man and behold the upright,
For the end of that man is peace."



Wooden picket fences, long unpainted, surround some family plots. Others are guarded by iron fences.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

A former newspaper reporter, Margaret Bates is now a free lance writer. She and her husband, Bill, and their Labrador, Lance, live in Colorado Springs, Colorado. The couple has a grown son and daughter. Ten years ago the Bates family jeeped over Engineer's Pass and discovered Lake City. Since then they have spent as much time as possible there. An avid angler, Margaret Bates says, "If you see a woman in a funny-looking old felt hat fishing around Lake City, that will probably be me. Stop and say hello."

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"Tiny Hinsdale" — No county in the United States has a smaller population.

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