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The Colorado Cannibal, Alferd Packer

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THE GREAT INDIAN CHIEF OURAY

AND ALSO FEATURING

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EARLY DAYS

IN THE

GUNNISON COUNTRY

DUANE VANDENBUSCHE

$4.50

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Duane Vandenbusche is a professor of history at Western State College of Colorado where he has taught since 1962. He was born in Detroit, Michigan, received his Bachelor's Degree in history from Northern Michigan University, and his Master's and Doctoral Degrees from Oklahoma State University.

Vandenbusche has become an avid student of Western and Colorado History since coming to Gunnison. He has been a liberal contributor to THE COLORADO MAGAZINE with the following articles to his credit: "Life On A Frontier Post: Fort Garland," Spring, 1966; "Marble: Past to Present," Winter, 1969; "My First Year in the Gunnison Country," Summer, 1969; and "Man Against The Black Canyon," Spring, 1973. In addition, Dr. Vandenbusche, with Rex Myers, has co-authored MARBLE, COLORADO: CITY OF STONE.

Vandenbusche teaches Western and Colorado History and has directed several summer workshops dealing with the Far West, Western Colorado, Western Slope, and Gunnison country history. He has worked closely with his students at Western State College in writing the histories of many mining camps which once dotted the landscape.

Vandenbusche is an avid outdoor and sports buff with skiing the powder snow of the Rockies, river running, tennis, fishing, and hiking among his many activities. He is currently finishing a comprehensive history of the Gunnison country which will be published late in 1974.

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VANDENBUSCHE BOOKS

Western State College

Gunnison, Colorado 81230

EARLY DA

IN THE

GUNNISON COUNTRY

BY

DUANE VANDENBUSCHE

DRAWINGS BY JAN SITTS

Centennial Edition

Printer: B & B Printers, Gunnison, Inc., Gunnison, Colorado 81230

TO:

Grandfathers Briggs and Vandenbusche

in Memory of Days Gone By

CONTENTS

FOREWARD

The Gunnison country! The name had a ring to it even a hundred years ago. But for thè white man, the Gunnison country was forbidden fruit. Because of the Ute Indians in the summer and fall and the fierce elements in the winter and spring, the Gunnison country was a very dangerous land a century ago. The region looked the same then as it had for centuries before. The fast-flowing streams, the tremendous canyons, and the perpetually snow-capped mountains still dominated the landscape.

Then in 1874, Sylvester Richardson, an idealistic dreamer who had failed in almost every endeavor he had undertaken, led twenty settlers to the land of his dreams. Many had passed through the Gunnison country prior to 1874, but only a precious few had ever stayed for any length of time. The rugged geography and violent elements had seen to that. But Richardson was a stubborn man, with both tenacity and staying power, and despite many setbacks, founded the town of Gunnison amidst a sea of wilderness.

Gunnison languished as a small point on the map until 1879, when great mining strikes were made in the Elk Mountains and in other regions along the Continental Divide. The strikes brought thousands of argonauts streaming into the Gunnison country, all in search of their own El Dorado. The entry of the miners, in turn, led to toll roads, stagelines, railroads, and the removal of the Ute Indians from the region. By 1881, the Gunnison country was in the throes of a full scale boom and was heralded as another Leadville. Alas, the boom did not last, and by 1883, the Gunnison country was in the midst of a severe depression, its dreams of glory shattered.

This book describes those early, exciting days of the Gunnison country from the earliest residents, the Ute Indians, to the horde of white miners who streamed across the Continental Divide in never-ending numbers from 1879 to 1882. EARLY DAYS IN THE GUNNISON COUNTRY is the forerunner to another and much more extensive book on the Gunnison country which will be published within the next year. The current book has been written to commemorate Gunnison's 100th birthday.

Duane Vandenbusche
Gunnison, Colorado
May, 1974

CHAPTER I

THE END OF THE BEGINNING

The land today is much as it was 200 years ago when Spanish explorers passed through searching for wealth and a route to California. Rugged, 14,000 foot mountains, wild and turbulent streams, waving stands of high grass in the valleys, stubbled sagebrush in the foothills, canyons thousands of feet deep, buffalo and wild game running free, Ute Indians relaxing in the cool summers, and most of all, the quiet, beautiful serenity — all characterized Colorado's Gunnison country.

Cy Warman, the "poet laureate of the Rockies," described the Gunnison country in sentimental terms in 1900:

There are those who seek in other climes the joys they might have known.
Mid the mountains and the meadows of the land they call their own.
I would find the shady canons, where at night the gentle dew
Comes to kiss the rose and helitrope — when stars are all in view.
I would stand amid these mountains, with their hueless caps of snow,
Looking down the distant valley, stretching far way below:
And with reverential rapture thank my maker for this grand
Peerless, priceless panorama, that a child can understand.[1]

1 *The Gunnison News,* Industrial Edition, March, 1900, p. 1.

Technically speaking, the Gunnison country includes all of that land drained by the Gunnison River and its tributaries. Yet, because Gunnison was the hub of related regions outside of that description, the Gunnison country included much more territory. To the east, the top of Monarch Pass at 11,312 feet forms one of the limits; to the south, the early center of the San Juan country, Lake City holds forth. The western border is Cimarron, early cattle center and important Denver and Rio Grande railroad station. The northern perimeter halts at the rugged and unique town of Marble, located high in the Elk Mountains, over fifty miles from Gunnison.

The Gunnison country has always been a land of extremes. Snow has fallen in amounts exceeding 350 inches, causing mythical two-story outhouses[2] and twenty foot high clotheslines to be built in towns like Crested Butte. Fifty-six below zero has been recorded at the Taylor Reservoir to the northeast. The region has always been isolated, yet also well known. Here also, the calm, seemingly harmless waters of the late summer and fall can become raging torrents in the spring when the run-off from the mountains descends into the valley waters. The land is so violent, fur trappers virtually ignored it; so rugged that railroads skirted parts of it and failed in others; so tough that the Ute Indians moved out and spent their winters elsewhere.

The Gunnison country has a long and proud heritage. The Ute Indians were the first known people to possess the land, followed by the Spanish intruders, possibly as early as the 1500's. When the Spanish left the land, never to return, the door was left open for the fur trapper, the explorer, the surveyor, and the railroader. But the man who left a permanent impression on the Gunnison country and had the greatest impact was the grizzled, whiskey-drinking, optimistic creature from a thousand backgrounds — the miner. Others might come and go, but the miner never would. He is still trying to strike it rich in an age which has long passed him by.

2 Personal Interview with Michele Veltri, Crested Butte, Colorado, October 30, 1970. Realizing fully the uniqueness of their life style, and with amused contempt for less hardy souls, the Crested Butte people created for credulous tourists the two-story outhouse. Due to heavy annual snowfall, these toilets were supposedly equipped with an upper berth when the customary trail is blocked. What the innocent outsider really sees are family smokehouses, structures, which, fortunately for the jokers, bear a close resemblance to the real thing.

What memories the Gunnison country evokes! Ute Indians fighting pitched battles against the Plains Indians trying to invade their domain; Spaniards gazing upon stunning panoramas they had never dreamed of; John Gunnison surveying a railroad route and losing his life in the process; Ferdinand Hayden's "Rover Boys" surveying the Gunnison country and having the time of their lives doing it; the great mining rush of the late 1870's and early 1880's, and always — always the rivers, canyons, mountains, constant sunshine, and rolling hills that made up the land.

Tribes of Ute Indians first occupied the Gunnison country. After purchasing horses from the Spaniards in the mid-1600's, the Utes spent their summers in the Gunnison country hunting huge herds of deer, elk, and buffalo. The cooling winds of autumn gave the Indians an early warning of the snow and cold en route and sent them scurrying for cover in the less inclement Uncompahgre and San Luis Valleys. Although the land was unchallengingly Ute in the early days, by the late 1700's, events were already in motion which would lead to the decline and fall of the red men in the Gunnison country.

Short and muscular with a tendency to put on weight in middle age, the Utes were an isolated, peaceful people who, generally, caused the white man little trouble. They were dark skinned, and neighboring tribes referred to them as "Black Indians." The Utes of Colorado were divided into seven bands, comprising no more than 10,000 tribesmen. In the extreme southwestern section of Colorado lived the Southern Utes numbering 1,000 and consisting of the Weeminuche, Mouache, and Capote bands. Northwestern Colorado was the home of the Northern Utes, divided into three bands — the Grand River, Yampa, and Uintah. The Tabeguache or Uncompahgre Utes made up the final band and occupied the Gunnison country in the summer. This last band never numbered more than 3,000.

The Spaniards, ever searching for wealth in their Northern Provinces and always worried about English, French, and Russian threats to the land they owned, made several attempts to secure the provinces during the eighteenth century. In 1765, Governor Thomas Velez Cachupin appoined Don Juan Rivera as the head of an expedition to examine rumored mines in the La Plata Mountains not far from present-day Durango. Leaving Santa Fe in early summer, Rivera and his men marched

northwest to the foothills of the San Juan Mountains, took samples of ore, and then moved on to the Dolores River. From the Dolores the men crossed to the San Miguel and continued eastward across the Uncompahgre Plateau. The party soon hit the Uncompahgre River and followed it north until it joined the Gunnison near present-day Delta. Rivera's scouts explored far in front of him, and it seems very likely that they ventured into the eastern extension of the Gunnison country.

In 1774, taciturn, hard-bitten Juan Bautista de Anza, Indian fighter and frontiersman of Sonora, worked out an overland road from northwestern Mexico to Monterey in Spanish California. Two years later, in an effort to find a practical route from Santa Fe west to Monterey, Fathers Silvestre Escalante and Francisco Dominguez were ordered by the Spanish government to make a survey between the two points. Driving cattle along for food, the Escalante-Dominguez party passed through the Uncompahgre Valley, just twenty miles from the eastern extension of the Gunnison country, and came to within fifty miles of the Great Salt Lake in Utah. Realizing finally that Monterey was farther than they had thought and suffering intensely from the cold and snow, the party turned back to Santa Fe, its mission a failure.

Juan Bautista Anza was appointed governor of New Mexico in 1776 in an effort to clear up a chaotic situation that had developed in the Spanish Northern Provinces. The Commanche Indians had terrorized settlers during the previous quarter century and prevented any growth in New Mexico. Mid-August, 1779, found Anza leading 600 soldiers through the San Luis Valley to teach the Commanches a lesson. As he pushed on through the sage swells of the valley with the San Juans on his left and the Sangre de Cristos on his right, Anza soon observed that Saguache Creek flowed from an immense sag in the Continental Divide to the west — a sag so low as to make it appear that the San Juans had disappeared. The Utes explained that the sag really was Cochetopa Pass, "the pass of the buffalo." "It had always been, for Utes and animals both, the easy, all-weather gate to the glowing Gunnison River Valley which nestled between the Elk Mountains to the north and the San Juans to the south. Beyond were many well-worn trails to Utah."[3] Though

3 Marshall Sprague, *The Great Gates,* (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1964), p. 20

Anza ultimately crossed over Poncha Pass separating the drainages of the Rio Grande from the Upper Arkansas River, he never saw the Gunnison country.

Harassed by hostile savages, continually threatened by foreign powers in the New World, and a victim of its own vicious economic system, Spain never had serious designs on the Gunnison country. Soon, the Mexican War would wipe out the last vestiges of Spanish domination in North America and the wild and unpredictable "gringo" would fill the gap. Spain had had its chance in Western Colorado but by 1848 the chance was gone.

After fairly extensive Spanish penetration into western Colorado ceased about 1790, the region, including the Gunnison country, was explored by the famed mountain men in search of the skin of the beaver. Major Jacob Fowler and eight men left Fort Smith, Arkansas, in September, 1822, built a house at present-day Pueblo, and then moved south to the little Mexican hamlet of Taos in northern New Mexico. From Taos the next year, Fowler trapped toward the San Luis Valley with four of his men. On March 11, 1823, he reported that he had reached Wagon Wheel Gap, formed by the upper Rio Grande flowing down from Stony Pass seventy miles to the west. In this beautiful land, adjacent to the Gunnison country, Fowler met people daily, "Spanish peddlers in huge conical hats; other American trappers coming up behind him; short, fat, smiling Ute Indians."[4] North from the Gap was Cochetopa Pass, the primary Ute and fur-trapper gate from the Eastern Slope to the Western Slope. Both Fowler's account of the mountain men and Antoine Robidoux's fort near present-day Delta prove that the Gunnison country was covered thoroughly by the ever-moving men of the mountains.

Antoine Robidoux was born in Florissant, a suburb of St. Louis, in 1794. After seeing limited service in the War of 1812, Antoine was induced to enter the fur business by family friend August Choteau. Arriving in Santa Fe in 1824, Robidoux married a Mexican girl and became a Mexican citizen so he could obtain a trapping and trading license. By 1830, he was president of the town council in Santa Fe. Robidoux soon had a thriving fur trade with headquarters

4 *Ibid.,* p. 103.

in Taos. Around 1828, the Frenchman built a trading post, Fort Robidoux, on the Gunnison River just below the mouth of the Uncompahgre River near present-day Delta. "It was Colorado's first and America's second general store west of the Continental Divide, being antedated by Andrew Henry's log cabins across Raynolds Pass."[5] The fort served as a supply and trading center for the mountain men in the vicinity, including those in the Gunnison country, and was located on the north-south trailway used by trappers traveling from New Mexico settlements to the beaver-rich valley of the Green River. Later, the fort also supplied immigrants moving westward to California.

Robidoux freighted supplies through the Gunnison country to Fort Robidoux from Taos and the San Luis Valley during the 1830's. Though Cochetopa Pass was an easy route through the mountains, Robidoux soon learned the awful truth about the Gunnison country. The beckoning pass was merely a come-on to disaster. Twenty miles to the west, near present-day Sapinero, Robidoux ran into the treacherous and foreboding Black Canyon of the Gunnison River. There was no getting through this tremendous gorge where walls rose straight up for nearly 3,000 feet and caused near-continuous twilight during the day. The detour around the canyon to the south took Robidoux out of the gorge over "Son-of-A-Bitch Hill," into the valley of the Cimarron, and then over Cerro Summit before he finally had a good level road from present-day Montrose to Fort Robidoux. Twenty years later, John Gunnison echoed Robidoux's plight when he was forced to carry his wagons and fringe-topped ambulance over parts of Blue Mesa and Fitzpatrick Hill between Sapinero and Cerro Summit.

During the era of the mountain men, the Gunnison River was called the Grand by whites and the Rio San Xavier by Spaniards. Antoine Leroux, Bill Williams, Kit Carson, Charles Autobees, Tom Tobin, and "Uncle" Dick Wooton trapped in the Gunnison country during the 1830's and 1840's, attending annual rendezvous in the San Luis Valley and southern Utah. They were familiar with the mountains, passes, streams, and Indians of the Gunnison country. Antoine Leroux, later a guide on John Gunnison's expedition through the Gunnison country,

5 *Ibid.*, p. 331.

recalled that many people traveled over Cochetopa Pass in the winter because of little snow. He remembered that when there was heavy snow in the mountains on the Old Spanish Trail to California, people from Taos used Cochetopa Pass and the Gunnison country to get to that western paradise. Leroux recounted the story of Isaac Slover, William Pope, and eight members of their families, who in the 1830's, with two wagons, made the first trip to Taos from the Pacific Coast by wagon "crossing the Continental Divide over Cochetopa Pass and traveling down the present Gunnison to the Colorado River."[6]

Trouble beset Antoine Robidoux in the early 1840's. The Ute Indians had grown belligerent, the price of furs had fallen, and the beaver was much harder to locate in the Intermontane Corridor near Santa Fe. In 1844, Robidoux gave up and moved back to St. Joseph, Missouri. His leaving coincided with the close of the era of the mountain man and the fur trade. Robidoux left the New Mexico and Colorado mountains without shedding too many tears. The furs harvested in the Colorado Rockies had always been hard to come by. He knew that although the Gunnison country and the surrounding regions had been trapped and thoroughly searched for beaver, there had never been many found. As early as 1811 and 1812, Ezekiel Williams, a trapper for Manuel Lisa, who had trekked into the Arkansas River country of Colorado in those years, wrote letters to the MISSOURI GAZETTE implying what time ultimately confirmed about the Colorado Rockies and the Gunnison country. The Colorado Rockies "were much less fruitful from a fur-business standpoint than Wyoming's. The mountains were too high, the rivers too few and game too scarce for comfortable trapping and traveling. The Ute Indian population of Colorado was too small for much trade."[7]

Little is known about the Gunnison country from the end of the fur trade in the early 1840's to John Gunnison's expedition through the rugged country in 1853. Famed missionary Marcus Whitman, returning to Boston where urgent affairs of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions required his presence, passed through the Gunnison country and over Cochetopa Pass during the early snowy months of 1842, nearly losing his life in the deep snows of the pass. Three

6 Forbes Parkhill, *The Blazed Trail of Antoine Leroux*, (Los Angeles: Westernlore Press, 1965), p. 74.

7 Sprague, *The Great Gates*, p. 71.

years after Whitman's near fatal encounter with the Gunnison country, William Gilpin, later governor of Colorado, followed the missionary's route while returning to St. Louis from the Oregon Territory. Although pursued periodically by Indians on his trip, Gilpin wrote glowingly of the Gunnison country.[8] Aside from Whitman, Gilpin, and Ute Indians, only an occasional trapper and Mormon scouts looking for possible places to settle traversed the Gunnison country during the years from 1840-1853.[9]

With the mountain men and Spaniards gone from the Gunnison country, the territory now waited for a new drama to unfold — the real discovery of the Gunnison country by a new and strange type of people — the explorers and surveyors.

Clamor for a transcontinental railroad to bind East and West reached crescendo proportions by 1853. The best route to the West from the Mississippi River was the subject of angry, passionate, endless debate between North and South who were already hurrying to a tragic rendezvous. In March, 1853, Congress, bewildered by the route issue, passed a bill for four Pacific railroad surveys by the Army engineers to settle the problem forever. Placed in charge of surveying a central railroad route between the 38th and 39th parallels was Captain John Gunnison of the Army Topographical Engineers. Secretary of War Jefferson Davis chose Gunnison over Thomas Hart Benton's famous son-in-law, John C. Fremont, because of Fremont's anti-slavery views, his court-martial during the Mexican War, and his ill-starred attempt to find a central railroad route to the Pacific during the winter of 1848-49.

Forty-one years old, Gunnison was an experienced explorer with eleven years of wilderness surveying behind him. Only three years before, under the command of Captain Howard Stansbury, he had engaged in extensive exploration in Utah Territory, helping to map the Salt Lake region. Gunnison had been lucky to survive the Stansbury expedition. In the lush Laramie Valley of Wyoming, while running down and shooting buffalo for the fun of it, Gunnison shot his horse in the head instead of the buffalo at which he was trying to aim.[10] The horse fell dead and Gunnison was almost killed in the ensuing

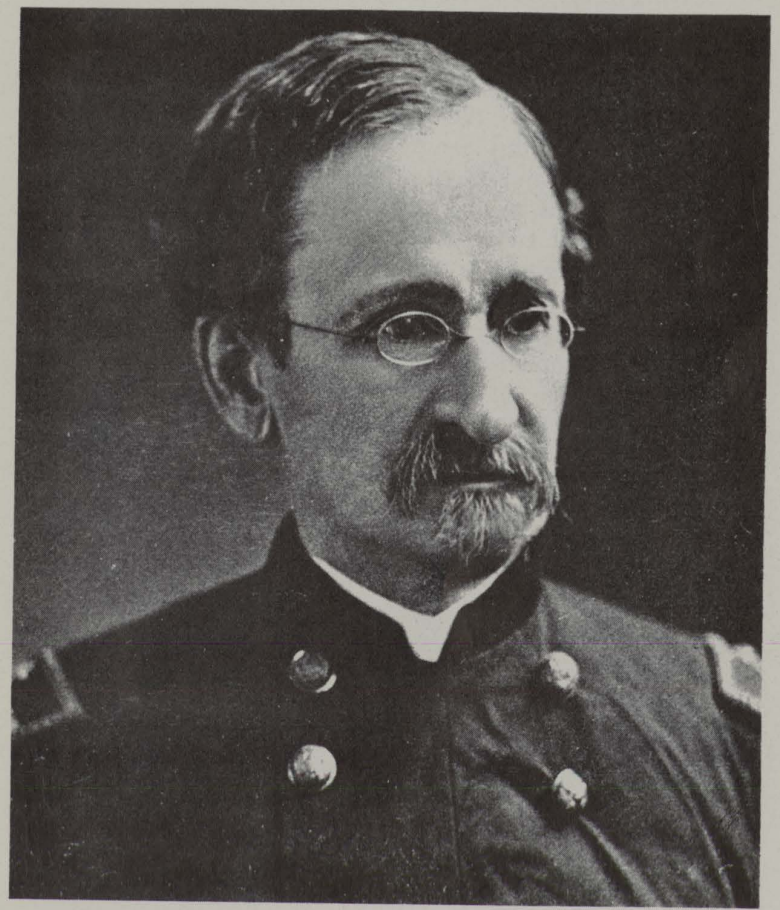
8 Robert Strahorn, *Gunnison and San Juan,* (Omaha: West Publishing Co., 1881), p. 3.

9 *Ibid.*

10 Sprague, *The Great Gates,* p. 145.

fall. The Captain's mapping and surveying missions had taken him from Florida to the West, but most important to Jefferson Davis, Gunnison was a military man, unconcerned with politics.

Gunnison was elated with his new assignment. The army captain was instructed to survey a railroad route through the Rocky Mountains crossing the Continental Divide at a point near Cochetopa Pass. Gunnison's expedition included an escort of thirty-two mounted riflemen, sixteen six-mule wagons, an



E. G. Beckwith, who took over command of the ill-fated Gunnison exploring expedition in October of 1853, after John Gunnison was killed by Indians in Utah. Courtesy of the National Archives, Washington, D. C.

instrument carriage pulled by four mules, and a four-mule ambulance, carrying medical supplies. In charge of the wagons was Captain Charles Taplin, a survivor of the 1848-49 Fremont disaster in the mountains northwest of Del Norte. The soldiers were commanded by Lieutenant Edward Beckwith, a New Yorker. Among the members of the scientific staff accompanying Gunnison were botanist Frederick Creutzfeldt, artist Richard Kern, and astronomer Sheppard Homans.

Leaving Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, on June 15, the expedition passed Bent's Fort on the Arkansas River in eastern Colorado in early August. After ten brutal days were spent dragging and roping wagons over La Veta Pass, the party finally broke out into the open on August 20 with Mount Blanca in the beautiful Sangre de Cristo Mountains and the surprising Great Sand Dunes in view. From the bottom of La Veta Pass it was an easy trip west to Fort Massachusetts, an isolated army post twenty-five miles east of today's Alamosa. With experienced guide Antoine Leroux now guiding them, the surveying party left the fort and swung north and west across the San Luis Valley with the 14,000 footers, Crestone Peak, Crestone Needle, and Kit Carson Peak in view. On August 29, 1853, the party camped at the present site of Saguache at the north end of the San Luis Valley. After a short detour with seven of his men over Poncha Pass to the Arkansas River, Gunnison started his wagons rolling up Saguache Creek toward Cochetopa Pass. The expedition crossed Cochetopa Pass, 10,032 feet above sea level, at noon on September 2.[11] Prior to crossing, Lieutenant Beckwith noted in his journal: "No mountain pass ever opened more favorably for a railroad than this."[12] From the top of Cochetopa Pass, Gunnison's party followed West Pass Creek and Cochetopa Creek into the Tomichi Valley.

Gunnison was now in a lush, mile-wide paradise filled with waving fields of grass, sparkling clear water, abundant game, and the spectacular Elk Range which jutted high into the air to the north. The expedition pushed past the confluence

11 Personal Interview with Dr. D. H. Cummins, Gunnison, Colorado, October 14, 1970. Dr. Lois Borland, Western State College professor, now deceased, did extensive work on the Gunnison expedition, and believed that Gunnison did not cross Cochetopa Pass but rather crossed further to the northeast over present day North Pass. Dr. Borland also felt that Gunnison, instead of following Cochetopa Creek, followed Razor Creek down to the Tomichi Valley near Doyleville.

12 United States War Department, *Reports of Explorations and Surveys, 1853-1854*, II (Washington: A. O. P. Nicholson, Printer, 1855), p. 45.

of the Tomichi and Gunnison Rivers just west of Gunnison and followed the swift flowing latter stream through the Gunnison Canyon and Kezar Basin. After a tough crossing of Cebolla Creek, the Gunnison party learned the bitter truth about the Cochetopa route. Directly in front of the explorers to the west was the precipitous cavern called the Lake Fork of the Gunnison. Before Gunnison had a chance to fathom the chances of crossing the canyon, his men brought news of another steeper canyon through which the Gunnison River forced its path. Gunnison and some of his men investigated and entered the half mile deep slit of schist called the Black Canyon at present-day Sapinero, hoping to find an easy route to the Uncompahgre along the Gunnison. They were bitterly disappointed. Ten miles of hiking only showed them perpendicular walls 2,500 feet high on both sides of the canyon, roaring, turbulent white water, and almost continual twilight.

Returning to the rest of the expedition, Gunnison and his guide, Antoine Leroux reported the bad news. The party must cross the Lake Fork and then parallel the Black Canyon westward. In the descent of the Lake Fork, the wagon wheels were locked and ropes were attached to the wagons, which the men held to prevent overturning. The crossing of the Lake Fork took from 2:00 P.M. on September 9 to 1:00 P.M. on September 10, the men cursing loudly at the vicious terrain. Finally out of the Lake Fork canyon, Gunnison swung southwest to avoid the Black Canyon, but soon ran into more trouble on Blue Mesa where his men had to clear roads and literally carry the wagons part of the way. The presence of the Black Canyon, Blue Mesa, Fitzpatrick Mesa, and the tough sagebrush hills west of the Lake Fork convinced Gunnison that a transcontinental railroad through that region would be impractical and prohibitively expensive.[13] Continuing west by southwest, Gunnison's party crossed Cimarron Creek, climbed over Cerro Summit at 7,909 feet and reached the Uncompahgre River on September 15. Journeying northwest now, the Gunnison party followed the Uncompahgre River past the present sites of Montrose, Olathe, and Delta and then paralleled the Gunnison to the present site of Grand Junction where the Colorado and Gunnison Rivers came together.

In Utah, Gunnison reached the Green River by October and continued west over Wasatch Pass to Fillmore on October

13 *Ibid.*, p. 56.

22. On October 25, the army captain divided his command and took eleven men to explore the vicinity of Lake Sevier. A party of emigrants had recently passed through the same region, quarreled with the Paiute Indians, and killed one of their number. Smarting from the death of one of their comrades and seeking revenge, the Paiutes closed in on the Gunnison party during the night of the 25th. The next morning while the twelve explorers were eating breakfast, they were surprised by a volley of rifle shots and arrows from the surrounding bushes. Gunnison fell, riddled by fourteen arrows, and was followed in death by seven of his men, including botanist Frederick Creutzfeldt and artist Richard Kern. Only four of the party escaped. The next day the mutilated bodies of the eight explorers were found with arms cut off at the elbow, entrails cut open, and limbs horribly chewed up by wolves.[14]

Thus ended, in an obscure section of Utah, the Gunnison part of the 39th parallel railroad expedition. Lieutenant Beckwith took command of the survey party, wintered it in Salt Lake City, and in 1854 concluded the exploration by moving through the Humboldt Valley, crossing the Sierra Nevada Mountains, and finally hitting the Sacramento River in California. Sadly enough, Gunnison's trip accomplished little. The passes explored by him were well known and used by 1853. Though Cochetopa Pass was, and still is, a natural gap for a railroad line, none have ever crossed it.

Lieutenant Edward Beale, heading west in 1853 to become Superintendent of Indian Affairs in California, was induced by Senator Thomas Hart Benton to examine the central railroad route to the Pacific. Beale accepted and took his cousin, Gwinn Harris Heap, with him. Heap kept a day-by-day account of the three months journey. The Beale expedition passed through Fort Massachusetts and the San Luis Valley before crossing Cochetopa Pass and moving through the Gunnison country in June. Beale experienced the same trouble crossing the Lake Fork and Blue Mesa that would plague John Gunnison a few months later.

The famed "Pathmarker of the West," John C. Fremont, after meeting with tragedy in an ill-starred 1848-49 winter expedition in the Colorado Rockies, found the Gunnison country more to his liking in 1853. Surveying along the 38th

14 *Ibid.*, p. 74.

parallel in an independent study for a prospective railroad route rivaling Gunnison's, Fremont crossed Cochetopa Pass on December 14 and followed the Gunnison River out of the Gunnison country en route to California.

Like Marcus Whitman before him, Captain Randolph B. Marcy of the United States Army got a taste of how tough the Gunnison country could be during the winter of 1857-58. Marcy was an officer under the command of General Albert Sidney Johnson, who was trying to suppress the Mormons during the "Mormon War" of 1857. Johnson, hit by the Mormons en route to Utah, was forced to hole up for the winter at Fort Bridger in present-day southwestern Wyoming. Desperately in need of livestock and supplies, Johnson sent Marcy and sixty-four men south to pick up the needed provisions from Fort Union, New Mexico. With famed scout Jim Baker leading the expedition, the party camped near Delta on the Gunnison River on December 8. The Marcy relief expedition soon ran into serious trouble as it moved east paralleling the Gunnison River on the way to Cochetopa Pass. Drifting snow deepened up to the men's waists, most of the sixty-six mules died, twelve men froze their feet, and soon all of the marchers were stripped to a blanket, their arms, and ammunition. Near the top of Cochetopa Pass, the desperate men ran into powder snow so light that the three or four in the lead were forced to lie down and crawl so that the snow would pack sufficiently for the men behind to walk. For twelve days the Marcy party lived on the meat of starved mules. In early January, unable to move any further, Marcy sent two men with the remaining three mules to Fort Massachusetts in the San Luis Valley for help. Eleven days later, the captain broke down and wept as a relief force from the fort arrived to rescue the expedition. Wiser now, and with complete respect for the Gunnison country, Marcy returned to Fort Bridger along the base of the Front Range to the Overland Trail and then west through South Pass.

The bone-chilling cold and prodigious amount of snow which plagued Marcy during the winter of 1857-58 also ran off a party of ten Denver cattlemen in 1862. The ten entered the Tomichi Valley in June to test the high, wide, and grassy Tomichi as a grazing area. Luckily, the Denverites had little trouble with the Utes on whose land they were trespassing, but by November they found themselves buried by massive early snows up to eleven feet deep. John Graff, a reporter for the

Grave and monument of John Williams Gunnison, for whom the town of Gunnison was named. Taken in Sevier County, Utah. Courtesy, Denver Public Library.

PHILADELPHIA PRESS, in the Gunnison country in 1882, reported: "they were glad to escape eastward with their lives on snowshoes, leaving their cattle numbering several hundred, to the mercy of the elements. Of the latter, all perished except a single mule which they found alive on their return the following spring."[15] The Gunnison country again had exhibited its lethal quality to the unwary and unprepared.

By the 1850's, Gunnison, Fremont, and Beale had given much publicity to the Gunnison country as part of the "Central Route to the Pacific." In 1858, the first major wagon train followed the route, heading west to east. The wagon train was made up of a military detachment under Colonel William Loring and included 50 wagons and 300 men. The train set out from Camp Floyd, Utah, on July 19 and, making its own road for most of the way, reached its destination, Fort Union, New Mexico, on September 13.

The day of the true explorer had come to an end in the Gunnison country by 1859. The mountainous terrain obviously was not a good place to build a railroad and the weather was much too severe for settlement. Besides, the Ute Indians owned the real estate. Still, there had been stories of golden bullets used by the Utes and of rich mines equal to any in the country. The miner, always optimistic, listened — his day was dawning.

Even before 1859, there had been evidence of isolated mining activity in the Gunnison country. A crudely constructed fort on a high timbered point near the dividing ridge of Needle and Razor Creeks, southeast of Gunnison, bore signs of a desperate fight between either gold seekers or white trappers and Indians.[16] The fort had been built of hastily laid stone capped by logs with sentinel outposts large enough to hold one man each. Lead from bullets had spattered the stone walls and embedded in the logs. Bullets taken from the aged logs were of an extremely old fashioned round form and of every calibre. The fort showed signs of extreme old age when first seen in 1879.

Other evidence of early mining activity in the Gunnison country was visible in Hot Springs Park near present-day Waunita Hot Springs where old rotten flumes used in placer

15 John Graff, *"Graybeard's" Colorado*, (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott and Co., 1882), p. 78.

16 *Gunnison News-Champion*, April 3, 1908, p. 5.

The famed "Pathmarker of the West," John Charles Fremont. After an ill-starred expedition in the Colorado Rockies during the winter of 1848-49, Fremont crossed Cochetopa Pass en route to the Pacific in December of 1853. Courtesy, Denver Public Library.

mining were discovered in the 1870's. E. A. Mitchell, a reporter for the GUNNISON NEWS-CHAMPION in 1880, interviewed an old timer who had worked as a placer miner on both upper Tomichi Creek and Washington Gulch twenty years before. The man told Mitchell that "both places bore evidence of having been worked long before that time."[17] Amazed, Mitchell investigated both mining sites, and in Washington Gulch found a dozen old tumble-down abandoned cabins near the placer workings. He was further startled at seeing tree stumps from eight to twelve feet high, the trees evidently having been cut on top of the snow some very hard winter, "probably 1849."[18]

Mining in one of the many ravines of the Gunnison country. The work was long and hard and the return in gold was often small. Courtesy, State Historical Society of Colorado.

William Gant, an old prospector and trapper before the outbreak of the Civil War, gave more evidence of early mining in the Gunnison country. Gant made a trapping and prospecting trip through the Crystal and Roaring Fork Valleys on his way to Fort Garland in 1859. As he prospected in the Crystal River Valley, the aged prospector found an old rusted gold pan which had been used many years before, near today's Prospect, three miles down Rock Creek from Marble. Richard Sopris,

17 *Ibid.*
18 *Ibid.*

future mayor of Denver, and fourteen companions hit the extreme northern fringe of the Gunnison country in 1860, exploring the mouth of Rock Creek (later renamed the Crystal River) from the Roaring Fork. Finding little valuable ore, the Sopris party moved west along the Roaring Fork, though not before naming Mount Sopris, majestically guarding the Crystal River Valley, for their leader.

Father John L. Dyer, Methodist missionary and famed "Snowshoe Itinerant," came to Colorado from Minnesota in 1861 to bring religion to the rugged and isolated mining camps of the Rockies. September found Father Dyer in California Gulch (near present-day Leadville) on the east side of the Continental Divide. After preaching a sermon to the miners there, the Methodist missionary followed an Indian trail and Lake Creek to the top of the Divide with white-capped 14,000 footers providing him with a remarkable panorama. As Dyer started down the west side of the Divide into Taylor Park, he reached Kent's Gulch, where one hundred miners lived. Preaching a sermon to the religion-starved miners, Dyer picked up twenty dollars of gold dust in contributions before leaving to close in on the heart of the Gunnison country. Moving northwest, heading for Washington Gulch in the Elk Mountains, the Methodist Father overtook a pack train loaded with food — with one exception. A lone burro carried an essential of the mountains — twenty gallons of whiskey. Immediately after crossing Spring Creek, Dyer passed into Deadman's Gulch where six unlucky miners had been killed by Ute Indians two years before. The Utes had pinned the men down in the gulch and attacked them for three days and nights before annihilating all six. Dyer saw the bones of several horses as well as the bones of the six whites which lay bleaching in the gulch.[19] Though the men had been crudely buried, the wolves had uncovered them. Only the surrounding pines witnessed the penalty the six white men paid for their trespass on Ute territory.

Dyer camped in Deadman's Gulch for the night, shivering from the cold and from what he had just witnessed. The next day found him winging toward his destination — Washington Gulch, north of today's Crested Butte. On September 24, 1861, Dyer entered the mining camp of Minersville, located near the

19 John L. Dyer, *The Snow-Shoe Itinerant,* (Cincinnati: Cranston and Stowe, 1891), p. 129.

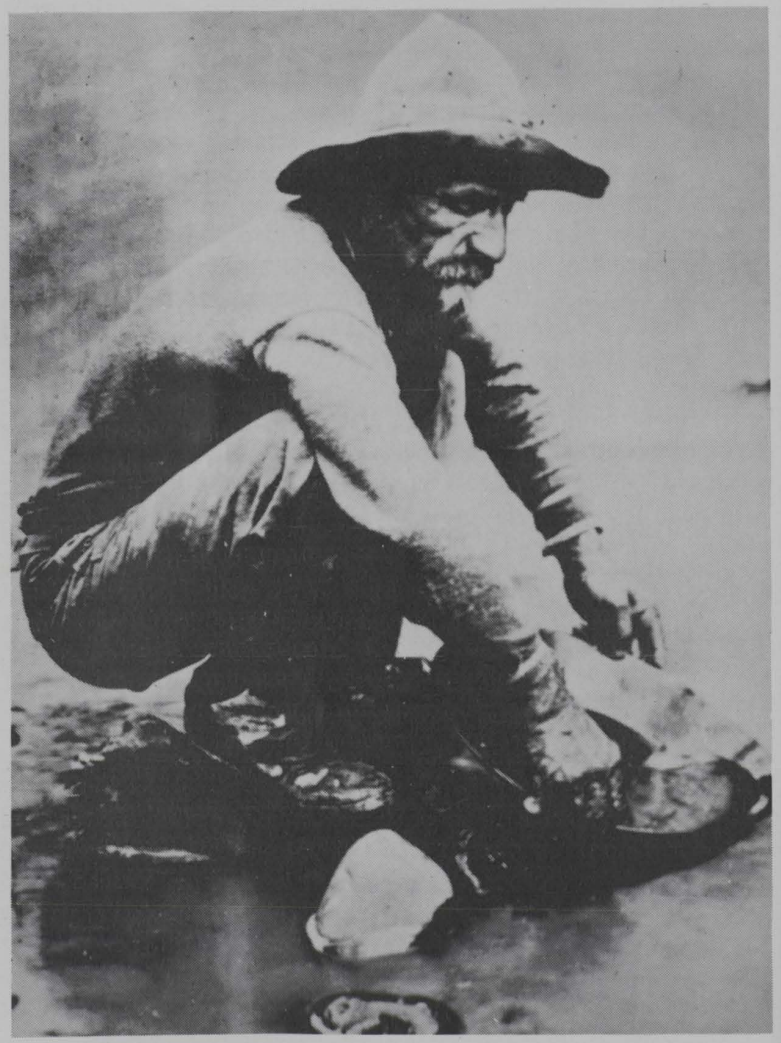
present remains of the old mining camp of Elkton. Dyer vividly described the scene as he entered the colorful mining camp. "One man was cutting and selling beef; others rolling logs down the hill; others covering their cabins; another building a chimney; and still others selling provisions and whiskey in a tent."[20] Because Dyer had arrived on a Sunday, he preached a sermon that afternoon. Standing in front of a tent, under the shade of a pine tree, the missionary preached God's word to the more than one hundred miners who attended. While Father Dyer was preaching, a mule reached his head into the tent and confiscated a loaf of bread, but alas, was caught red-handed. That night, Dyer preached to over 150 grizzled miners before a roaring fire which kicked crackling pine knots into the air. The following day the Methodist Father left the camp and headed back to California Gulch. He returned later in the year to prospect in Taylor Park and Washington Gulch but never returned to the first true mining camp in the Gunnison country.

Minersville had a camp population of 200 with at least that number of prospectors in the surrounding hills in 1861. The next year the camp did even better. A thousand prospectors swarmed into Washington Gulch and took out close to a million dollars in gold through placer mining.[21] But alas, the days of Minersville were numbered. "After the first year or two the placers . . . washed out and the place became deserted."[22] The Ute Indians had also become alarmed about the white invasion into their hunting grounds. In the summer of 1862 they slaughtered twelve miners in Washington Gulch, sending a tremor of fear up the back of every miner on Indian land in the Gunnison country. As the story spread to the eastern slope of the Continental Divide, exaggerated every time it was told, miners refused to risk their lives mining in the blood-christened country.[23]

Only a few hardy and brave miners continued to placer mine in Washington Gulch after 1862. They lived for months at a time on game and fish and were constantly harassed by Utes. The men built crude sluice boxes by hand and made from five to twenty dollars a day. Correspondent Robert Strahorn,

20 *Ibid.*, p. 130.
21 *Elk Mountain Pilot,* August 25, 1881, p. 2.
22 *Ibid.*
23 Ernest Ingersoll, *The Crest of The Continent,* (Chicago. R. R. Donnelley and Sons, 1885), p. 253.

traveling in the West in 1881 wrote: "These placers have been worked almost constantly, under all sorts of discouragements, with fair results ever since. The rifle went hand in hand with the shovel, and the skeletons often exhumed in these days of peace indicate many a thrilling chapter of unwritten history."[24]



Panning for gold in one of the many streams of the Gunnison country. The "pay dirt" was often elusive. Courtesy, State Historical Society.

24 Strahorn, *Gunnison and San Juan*, p. 4.

Washington Gulch was not the only scene of mining activity in the Gunnison country during the early 1860's. Jim Taylor in 1860 and Fred Lottis in 1861 led parties across the Continental Divide from Granite on the eastern slope and entered massive and beautiful Taylor Park on the other side of the range in a relentless search for gold and silver. Both parties found ore and mined successfully in the southern extension of the park.

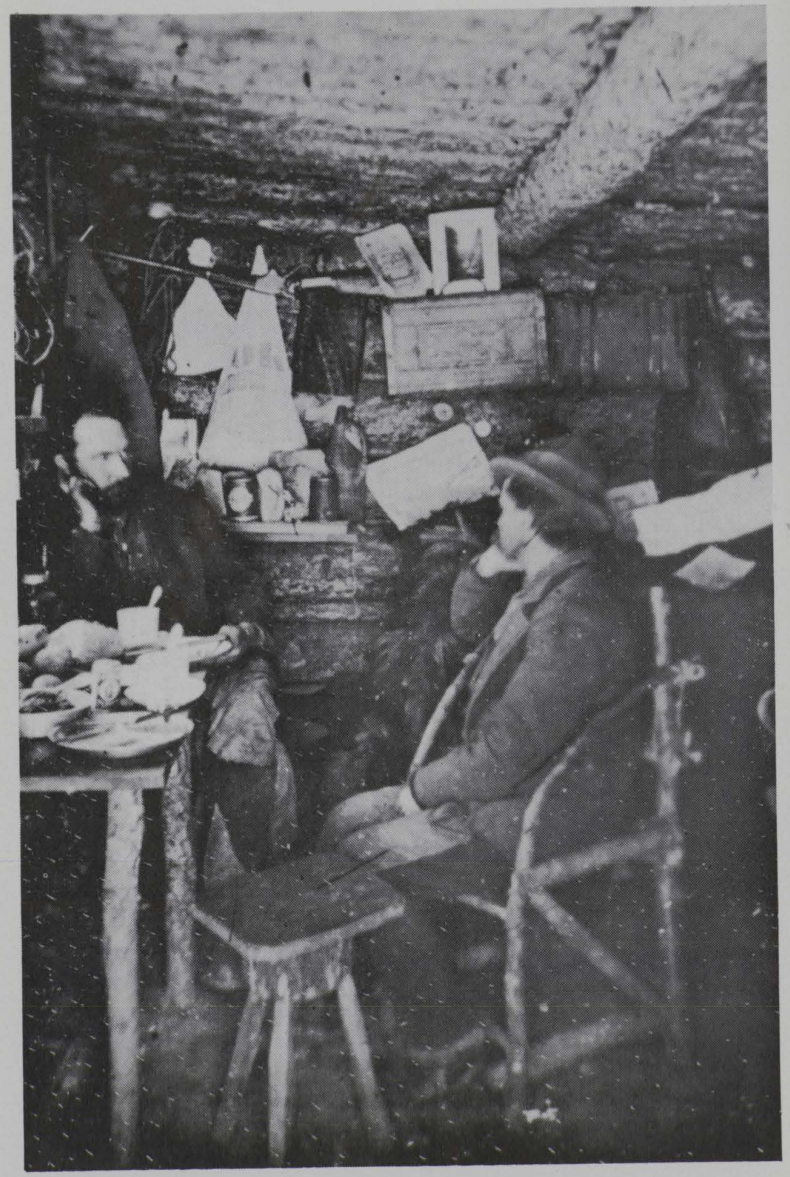
Twenty miles east of present-day Gunnison, Gold Creek grew up as a mining mecca at the same time as Taylor Park. In 1880, aged prospector Alexander Houseman told Colorado State Senator John F. Pearson of Pitkin that he had prospected for placer gold in the German Flats and Gold Creek country in 1860 and 1861. Houseman maintained that "according to the census taken at that time there were in the different gulches in this locality about 2,500 people."[25] Most of the miners had come over the Divide from Leadville and moved through Taylor Park before hitting Gold Creek.

The legend of "Snowblind Gulch" near the head of Tomichi Creek kept prospectors hunting for gold in that region throughout the 1860's and 1870's. According to the legend, two old prospectors discovered rich gold deposits in the early 1860's near the present site of White Pine. Whipsawing boards for flumes, the two washed out a pound of gold a day, but in their anxiety to mine as much as possible, failed to note the oncoming signs of winter. Too late, they tried to get out, but were caught in a blizzard, became snowblind, and perished. Thus began the legend of "Snowblind Gulch."

Although the legend makes good reading, it is only partially true. Mining activity had indeed taken place in Snowblind Gulch as evidenced by an old whipsaw pit, rotting sluices, and overgrown prsopect holes found in the late 1870's. But no pound diggings or golden bullets were ever produced; instead, gold in the quartz of neighboring hills was mined in paying quantities. The two miners who whipsawed the boards near the headwaters of the Tomichi did not leave their skeletons there, but were still alive twenty years later as two of the best prospectors in the state — Jim Taylor and John Hack.[26]

25 A. P. Nelson, *Gunnison County, Colorado*, (Pitkin: A. P. Nelson Mining, 1916), p. 47.

26 Strahorn, *Gunnison and San Juan*, p. 4.



A typical miner's cabin in the Gunnison country. The lack of a woman's touch in the cabin is painfully evident. Courtesy, State Historical Society.

Many small prospecting parties invaded the Elk Mountains between Crested Butte and the mouth of Rock Creek in the 1860's and 1870's, defying Ute Indians in their quest for wealth. Seven prospectors, led by Benjamin Graham, who had prospected on the East River side of the Elks in 1866, moved to the head of Rock Creek, near the present site of Schofield in 1870. The seven miners, ever on the alert for the Indian menace, set up a camp and discovered galena-bearing ores and anthracite. Though well within the Ute reservation, the men nevertheless built a cabin and made other improvements at the head of Rock Creek.[27] Despite efforts by the seven to conceal their work, the Utes discovered their camp in 1874, burned all buildings, and drove them out.

George and Lewis Waite, two unsophisticated Yankees, followed the Graham party into the Elk Mountains in 1872. The two prospectors examined Washington Gulch but found that the early miners had exhausted the placer gold. However, near present-day Schofield, the two brothers hit a rich vein of silver which cropped out on the surface of an unnamed peak next to Mt. Belleview. The two excited Easterners returned to Denver and had the ore assayed. It showed high quantities of gold and silver. Satisfied that they had struck a fortune, the Waite brothers returned to their strike, naming both the mountain and strike "Whopper." For the next eight years the Yankee prospectors, almost alone in the perfect wilderness, tunneled into Whopper Mountain, tumbling the ore on dumps and awaiting the development of the Gunnison country.[28] By 1879, the brothers had 600 tons of ore on the dump and had constructed a good wagon road to the new town of Schofield, only 400 yards away. The quiet snow-capped giants of the Elks — Gothic, Galena, Treasure, and Crystal Mountains provided the veil for the Waite brothers to work under.

In 1872, Jim Brennan, a miner from Denver, intrigued by the tales told about the mineral wealth in the Elk Mountains, led a small party of prospectors into the rugged range and found true fissure veins of enormous size.[29] The Brennan foray into the Elks and the ensuing wild tales of rich ore waiting

27 Duane Vandenbusche and Rex Myers, *Marble, Colorado: City of Stone,* (Denver: Golden Bell Press, 1970), p. 4.

28 Frank Leslie's, *Illustrated News,* July 10, 1880, p. 1.

29 Class of 1916, *Historical Sketches of Early Gunnison,* (Gunnison, Colorado: The Colorado State Normal School, 1916), p. 12.

to be mined led to the first scientific expedition into the Gunnison country. Dr. John Parsons of Denver, satisfied that the Gunnison country was indeed rich in mineral wealth, decided to find out how rich in July, 1873. Parsons hired thirty men, eight teams, and numerous pack animals, with the avowed purpose of exploring the Elk Mountains and the agricultural and mineral resources of the entire Gunnison country. Hopefully, he would be able to erect a reduction works on Rock Creek in the Elks.

One of the thirty men Parsons hired was Sylvester Richardson, geologist, wanderer, eternal optimist and a bit later, father and founder of Gunnison. At Saguache, in the north end of the San Luis Valley, Parsons met Otto Mears, who advised him not to travel through Ute territory without consulting Agent Charles Adams at the Los Pinos Agency. Luckily for the expedition, Chief Ouray consented to the white foray into the Elk Mountains. As the summer months of 1873 gave way to fall, the Parsons party arrived in the Elk Mountains and met the Waite brothers who were mining their Whopper lode. With the aid of forty prospectors already in the surrounding mountains, the Parsons group constructed a road to Rock Creek and from there to the Whopper lode. Parsons then began work on a blast furnace at the Whopper mine to test ore which had been dug from that fledgling hole since the preceding spring. Regretfully, the native sand used in the making of fire and red brick could not stand the heat necessary to melt the ore and the promising venture failed.[30] With the blast furnace a failure and with rich ore everywhere one looked, the Parsons employees succumbed to temptation, deserted their leader, and scattered over the Elk Mountains in pursuit of gold and silver.

Despite the few small mining parties in the Gunnison country, the Utes continued to menace gold-hungry miners who were willing to take any risk to find the elusive metal. Lieutenant E. H. Ruffner of the United States Corps of Engineers made a reconnaissance through the Gunnison and San Juan countries from May to September, 1873, checking on the temper of the Utes who were greatly agitated over a mining rush into the San Juan region of their reservation in the spring

30 *Ibid.*, p. 14.

of that year.[31] The army lieutenant hoped to prevent a war between the angry Utes and hard-to-discourage miners. The Ruffner party entered the Gunnison country along the Lake Fork of the Gunnison, passed through "The Gate," crossed White Earth Creek, and then was greeted at the Los Pinos Indian Agency by Agent Charles Adams and Chief Ouray. Before Ruffner completed his reconnaissance, he investigated the Cochetopa, Tomichi, and Ohio Creek Valleys, Washington Gulch, Spring Creek, and Taylor Canyon and Park. Luckily for the lieutenant, war was avoided when the Utes were induced to sell the San Juan part of their reservation in the Brunot Treaty of September, 1873. By that month, his job completed, Lieutenant Ruffner left the Gunnison country, crossing Red Mountain Pass over the Divide to the eastern slope.

The many tales of rich soil, lucrative furs, and mineral wealth in the Rocky Mountains, and especially Colorado, brought a public clamor for scientific surveys to examine the stories at the conclusion of the Civil War. This time, the virtues of the Rockies would be analyzed rather than their evils as a barrier to progress. Four major surveying expeditions were sent out: Clarence King's U. S. Geological Exploration of the 49th Parallel (1867-1872), Lieutenant George Wheeler's U. S. Geological Exploration Surveys West of the 100th Meridian (1871-1877), John Wesley Powell's U. S. Geological Survey of the Rocky Mountains (1873-1879), and Ferdinand Vandeveer Hayden's U. S. Geological and Geographical Survey of the Territories which covered Colorado from 1873-1875. The Hayden Survey concerned itself, in part, with the Gunnison country. The major work of the Survey was the mapping of 69,000 square miles of the Colorado Rockies during the summers of 1873, 1874, and 1875, a work which took them into the heart of the little known Gunnison country.

The Hayden Survey dominated the surveying field in the Rocky Mountains after 1872. It was the best known of the great surveys, had the largest amount of money at its disposal, hired the best scientists, and consistently maintained itself in the public eye through the eagerly awaited pictures of photographer William H. Jackson. Fredinand Vandeveer

31 Lieutenant E. H. Ruffner, *Report of A Reconnaissance in the Ute Country Made in the Year 1873,* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1874), p. 2.

Hayden, leader of the Survey, was an enigma wrapped in a riddle. A medical doctor by training, Hayden so loved the mountains and all that went with them, that he finally took down his shingle for good and turned to his true love — geology. During the 1850's, Hayden collected geologic specimens on the

Famed surveyor, Ferdinand Vandeveer Hayden on his horse "Patsy." Hayden's surveyors worked the Gunnison country during the early 1870's. Courtesy, Denver Public Library.

northern Plains and fascinated the Sioux Indians by his work. Once, a party of curious braves surrounded him and dumped the contents of his geological bag on the ground. It contained nothing but rocks. So, thinking Hayden crazy, they gave him a name that translated into "man-who-picks-up-stones-running" and let him go.[32] This was the man who would conduct the first scientific study of the Gunnison country.

Hayden was much different than his rival scientists in the field. He believed in a pragmatic approach to his scientific work, hoping to publish material about Colorado and the Gunnison country that would be of immediate use to anxious miners, settlers, and businessmen. To railroad promoters, English investors, and mining engineers, it was clear that the natural resources of the Gunnison country and surrounding region had barely been touched. They waited for Hayden to unlock the secrets of the Rockies. In 1873, the Gunnison country, poised, but demanding, awaited its future.

During the years it spent in Colorado, the Hayden Survey was never a single unit, but was always made up of six or more groups working widely apart, always according to plan. The work in the Gunnison country was no exception. Hayden himself led the first entry into the region in 1873, crossing the Sawatch Range over Lake Creek Pass and descending into beautiful Taylor Park to the west. The doctor-turned-geologist then moved southwest out of the park along Rocky Brook Trail, Spring Creek, and Deadman's Gulch. That route brought Hayden's party to Cement Creek which led to the narrow East River Valley and the present site of Crested Butte. The surveyors continued north following a zig-zag course back and forth across the Elk Mountains until they reached the present location of Gothic. There, Hayden left the East River Valley, crossed Schofield Pass, and descended Rock Creek until it flowed into the Roaring Fork near Carbondale.[33]

The Hayden trek over the Continental Divide and into the Elk Mountains in 1873 only gave the explorer a glimpse of the Gunnison country. The following year, one of his leading topographers, Henry Gannett, made a detailed study of the little known high country west of the Continental Divide.

32 Richard Bartlett, *Great Surveys of the American West,* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1962), p. 4.

33 D. H. Cummins, "Social and Economic History of Southwestern Colorado, 1860-1948," (Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation, University of Texas, 1951), p. 209.

Gannett, Dr. A. C. Peale, and six others penetrated the Gunnison country via the same general route followed by Hayden the year before. As they entered Taylor Park, the high and wide basin spread out majestically before them, and the men observed how the Gunnison River tributaries tumbled down from the passes of the Elk or Sawatch Ranges. During the unusually mild summer and early fall of 1874, Gannett and his men covered the Gunnison country like a blanket. Indefatigably, the rugged surveyors investigated the Ohio Creek Valley, Cochetopa Creek, the Gunnison and Black Canyons, Taylor Park, and then moved north to further investigate the Elk Mountains.

Gannett found few settlements in the Gunnison country in 1874. Those that he did find were very small and usually fleeting. The embryo town of Gunnison fought for survival in the wide reaches of the Gunnison Valley, its development hampered by its great distance from other settlements and the limited means of communication.[34] The only other settlements in the Gunnison country in 1874 were mining camps in the Elk Mountains and Taylor Park. Small camps, nomadic at best, were found on Texas and Batty Creeks in Taylor Park and in Union Park near the head of Taylor Canyon, all working placer gold deposits. Northwest of Taylor Park, on the south side of Treasury Mountain near the headwaters of Rock Creek, a small camp of miners worked quartz-lead deposits. Another small mining camp was located on O-Be-Joyful Creek during the summer of 1874 just as Gannett entered the Rock Creek region.[35] Gannett wrote: "The only practicable way of reaching the country with wagons is by a long detour to the south, via the San Luis Valley and Cochetopa Pass, as none of the passes in the Sawatch range are practicable for wagons."[36]

Gannett noted that although the only wagon trails ran from Gunnison up the Gunnison River and East River to the mining camps along Rock Creek, there were literally dozens of good trails criss-crossing the mountains and valleys of the Gunnison country. A major Ute trail connected the Los Pinos and White River Agencies, passing up Ohio Creek, over Ohio Pass and then descending Anthracite Creek before it rose again

34 F. V. Hayden, *Geological and Geographical Survey of The Territories, 1874,* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1876), p. 425.
35 *Ibid.*, p. 428.
36 *Ibid.*

along the North Fork and continued to its conclusion at the White River Indian Agency near present-day Meeker. His work finished for the year, Gannett rode out of the Gunnison country via Cochetopa Pass in October, 1874, having completed the most extensive study ever made of that fabled land.

William H. Jackson, famed photographer of the Hayden Survey, just missed getting some rare pictures of the Ute Indians at the Los Pinos Reservation in 1874. Arriving late in August, Jackson found seventy occupied tepees and the landscape dotted with Indian ponies.[37] Although he pleaded with Chief Ouray, the Utes refused to allow pictures to be taken, kicking the tripods out from under the camera, deliberately obscuring pictures, and throwing blankets over their heads. After four days of haggling, Jackson gave up in disgust and continued on his way to the San Juans with posterity the loser.

Hayden's "Rover Boys" finished their survey of the Gunnison country during the summer of 1875 by covering the region south of the Gunnison River and Tomichi Creek. They had produced maps, examined topography, investigated promising ore bodies, and were instrumental in publicizing the Gunnison country. Now their work was done. What memories Gannett, Peale, Jackson, and Ernest Ingersoll must have had to call on in their fading years. Through the mists of time must have come visions of the roaring Gunnison River in the Black Canyon, the spectacular white capped Elk Mountains, and the stunning basin across the Sawatch Range called Taylor Park.

As the lights of 1875 dimmed, the age of innocence passed in the Gunnison country. Now, ranchers, town promoters, miners, and speculators were enroute. The place would never be the same again.

37 Wiliam H. Jackson, *Time Exposure,* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1940), p. 227. Ernest Ingersoll, later a popular writer on Colorado, was also with the Hayden Survey and visited Los Pinos in 1874. His account of the Agency differed markedly from that of Jackson's. Wrote Ingersoll: "We came suddenly, at a turn in the road to a view of an immense collection of Indian lodges, with all their attendant herds of horses and crowds of women and children, spread below us on the green river-plain. The sight of six hundred lodges and three thousand savages, all together, was to me a most novel and inspiring one." Ernest Ingersoll, *Knocking Around the Rockies,* (New York: Harper and Brothers, Publishers, 1883), p. 88.

CHAPTER II

THE RED MEN OF THE GUNNISON

As the Gunnison country slowly opened during the 1870's, one great obstacle prevented permanent and lasting settlement — the Ute Indians. An unusual, fragmented tribe, the Utes roamed the valleys of the Rocky Mountains in isolated bands, as they had for centuries before. The oldest residents of Colorado, they had never achieved great importance because of their almost complete lack of tribal organization. This lack of centralized authority was fortunate for the gold-hungry miners who swarmed into the Gunnison and San Juan countries in ever increasing numbers during the 1870's.

The Utes were a doomed people at the conclusion of the American Civil War. Only 10,000 in number, with little central power, and dessicated by the white man's liquor, they were no match for either white prospectors who moved on to their reservation or the United States government which broke promise after promise in taking their lands. Quickly realizing the futility of trying to deal with each of the Ute bands, the

United States government insisted that all talks be carried on through one supreme chief. By 1868, a thirty-five year old Tabeguache Ute became spokesman for all seven Ute bands. His name was Ouray. Born in Taos, New Mexico, in 1833 to an Apache father and Ute mother, Ouray spent his youth working as a sheepherder for Mexican ranchers in present-day New Mexico. During these years, the young Indian became fluent in Spanish and reasonably proficient in English. At eighteen, Ouray ended his work as a sheepherder and came to western Colorado to become a full member of the Tabeguache band of which his father was now a leader. From 1851-60, he lived the typical life of the Ute brave — hunting, fighting the Plains Indians, and taking a wife.

While a young man in the early 1850's, Ouray married a Tabeguache squaw and sired a son. Five years later, while the men of the tribe were out hunting near present-day Fort Lupton, north of Denver, a Sioux war party raided the Ute camp and kidnapped Ouray's son, an event which was destined to take on great significance in later years. In 1859, a few years after his first wife died, Ouray married a sixteen year old Tabeguache maiden named Chipeta. During the United States-Ute Treaty of 1868, Ouray was recognized as spokesman for all seven Ute bands by the federal government. Ouray's hold on his people was always tenuous except for his own Tabeguache band. He usually accomplished his aims "through patience, diplomacy and the strength of his personality rather than by any power . . . he might have had as head chief of the tribe."[1] Ouray's stewardship was one of tragedy, for he presided over the inevitable demise of the Ute nation. When he died in August, 1880, the Utes had already signed a treaty which would move them out of their ancient Colorado home forever.

The first step in the removal of the Ute Indians from Colorado Territory came in 1863. Anxious to open the lush San Luis Valley to white farmers, Territorial Governor John Evans concluded a treaty at Conejos which gained the valley for the whites and moved the Utes to the Western Slope of Colorado. Within five years, ever-moving white settlers were clamoring for more land. In 1868, Indian Commissioner Nathaniel Taylor, Territorial Governor Alexander Hunt, and

1 Wilson Rockwell, *The Utes: A Forgotten People*, (Denver: Sage Books, 1956), p. 89.

famed frontiersman Kit Carson escorted representatives of the seven Ute bands, including Ouray, to Washington D.C. where a treaty further reducing Ute land was signed. By this treaty, all of the Utes were placed on a reservation which extended north from Colorado's southern border along the 107th meridian to the present site of Yampa, and then due west to the present Colorado-Utah border. The Treaty of 1868 left the Utes the western third of Colorado. Future Gunnison and Crested Butte lay just off the reservation to the east.

The Treaty of 1868 called for the establishment of two Indian agencies on the reservation. One was created for the Northern Utes on the White River not far from today's Meeker, and the other was established for the southern tribes on the Los Pinos River in La Plata County. As the Tabeguache Utes advanced westward toward the site of their new agency in the summer of 1868, they halted at a branch of Cochetopa Creek, twenty-five miles south and slightly east of future Gunnison and refused to go any further. To avoid trouble, the officer in charge directed that the agency be planted where the Utes wanted it.[2] Thus it was that the Los Pinos Indian Agency was planted off the reservation on a branch of Cochetopa Creek in the Gunnison country and not on the Los Pinos River deep in the San Juans. To avoid confusion and to conform to the name of the stream designated in the treaty, the tributary of the Cochetopa was named Los Pinos Creek.

In the spring of 1869, before the first agent had arrived at Los Pinos, Territorial Governor Edward McCook, accompanied by ten soldiers, a skeleton sawmill crew, and a portable sawmill for the new agency made a harrowing trip to the reservation. With Chief Ouray temporarily absent, Chief Shavano, no friend of the whites, was in charge of the Utes, including 800 warriors. Already in an ugly mood because of the loss of land the year before, the Utes were further incensed when the mill crew started cutting trees near Los Pinos for lumber to be used in agency buildings. McCook barely averted a clash with the Utes by telling them: "You may kill us and my ten soldiers

2 Ernest Ingersoll, *Knocking Around the Rockies,* (New York: Harper and Brothers, Publishers, 1883), p. 88 Ernest Ingersoll, who visited the Indian agency with the Hayden Survey in 1874, verified the story of the selection of Los Pinos Creek as agency headquarters in 1869: "it was supposed to be located on Los Pinos Creek near Ouray or the San Juans, but when the Indians refused to move, the officer in charge said 'Put it anywhere, and call it Los Pinos.' "

but there are ten thousand more behind us."[3] After the peace pipe was smoked, Shavano asked McCook and his party to watch a grand display of Ute warriors in full battle array. From a half mile away, 800 warriors burst out of the timber with rifles in their hands, their faces black with war paint, and their bronze bodies shining in the setting sun. Led by Shavano, with his war bonnet of eagle plumes streaming a full four feet behind him, the Utes rode directly toward McCook and his escort, yelling and firing their guns dangerously close to the standing men. Just as it looked as if the whites would be ridden down, the Utes split their charge and galloped past the stunned group back into the pines.[4]

Second Lieutenant Calvin Speer of the 11th United States Infantry became the first agent at the Los Pinos Agency, arriving, though not without difficulty, on July 31, 1869. The disgruntled Utes met the army lieutenant and his party at Saguache and refused to let them proceed further. With ninety lodges of Utes blocking his way, Speer was forced to use diplomacy as a weapon. After four days of haggling, in which he exhibited great patience, Speer was allowed to proceed to the site of the new reservation. Soon after his arrival, the army

Indian lodges at the Los Pinos Indian Reservation. Notice the goats in the foreground. Courtesy, State Historical Society.

3 Richard B. Townshend, *A Tenderfoot in Colorado,* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1923) p. 99.
4 *Ibid.,* p. 101.

lieutenant arranged for the construction of agency buildings. Around a 200 foot quadrangle, he supervised the building of houses for the agent, miller, carpenter, blacksmith, and resident farmer. Also constructed were a corral, mill, cellar, stable, warehouse, schoolhouse, and a combined carpenter and blacksmith shop. Ouray's house was built south and east of the quadrangle.

Travel to Los Pinos from Saguache,[5] the nearest supply center, was a hellish, nerve-racking job for those responsible for supplying the Utes. In the spring, the primitive road was a quagmire, and even during the summer and fall, the sixty mile trip over the Continental Divide with wagons was a tremendous task. Eleven hard days were needed to supply the Los Pinos Agency from Saguache, and often that schedule could not be met.[6]

The tranportation problem involving Los Pinos led to the establishment of a cow camp in 1871. The camp was located just west of the present site of Gunnison, near the juncture of the Gunnison and Tomichi Rivers. Josiah White, aided by James Kelley, was in charge of the camp the first year and was responsible for the first government livestock brought in. — 640 head of cattle and 1,160 sheep.

Tradition dictated that Indian agents in United States Territories be selected by different church boards throughout the country. The Los Pinos Agency was under the supervision of the Unitarian Church of Boston. In 1871, feeling that the military had the Utes well in hand, the Boston Unitarians recommended the appointment of Reverend Jabez Nelson Trask, a young Harvard graduate, to replace Speer as agent at Los Pinos. Trask had no real qualifications for the job, except that he had important family connections in the East. The new agent was filled with all the energy and idealism of youth which soon led to serious problems with his Ute wards.

5 *Ibid.*, p. 90. Saguache in 1869 was a tiny settlement of a half dozen Mexican and American houses along the banks of Saguache Creek.

6 Lois Borland, "The Sale of the San Juan," *The Colorado Magazine,* XXVIII (April, 1951), p. 111. John B. Lloyd, "The Uncompahgre Utes," (Unpublished Master's Thesis, Western State College, 1932), Part 3, p. 8. Alonzo Hartman, an original pioneer of the Gunnison country (covered in detail later in Chapter II), traveled from Saguache to Los Pinos with supply contractor Otto Mears in August, 1872, and agreed that the road indeed, was primitive. Discussing Mears' proglems in getting supplies to the agency, Hartman lamented: "All these things must be delivered at the agency over a road that was scarcely more than a trail so Mears must make and repair the road . . . before he could get over the mountains with the loads."

The young man arrived in Denver from the East in April of 1871 and, after reporting to Territorial Governor McCook, showed his peculiar temperament by walking the 250 miles to Los Pinos. Trask was a man of puritanical habits and sterling honesty, but his eccentric habits and complete lack of knowledge of the Utes proved serious obstacles to overcome. Sidney Jocknick, then a cook at the reservation, characterized Trask as: "an agent [who was in] indiscreet haste to civilize and Christianize the Utes all in a day."[7] His dress was so ridiculous as to bring smiles from even the usually placid Utes. Jocknick, no doubt with a smile himself, described Trask's attire as: "his swallow tailed coat of navy blue, with impossible brass buttons, trousers of like material but fashioned after the style in vogue about . . . 1848, skin-tight above and below the knees, and flaring out, funnel shaped at the ankles, . . . palpably ridiculous . . .; green goggles for eye glasses; a buck thorn walking stick, and an old fashioned beaver hat, with a devil of a broad brim for head gear."[8]

Trask's tenure as agent at Los Pinos was not only a tragedy, but also almost touched off a Ute uprising similar to the Meeker Massacre on the White River to the north in 1879. Sidney Jocknick recalled: "It was most . . . fortunate for Mr. Trask that the summer time of . . . 1872 witnessed the end of his erratic administration, otherwise his crude, arbitrary and ineffectual business methods would have assuredly landed him in an outbreak."[9]

Suspecting that all was not well at Los Pinos, the Unitarian Church investigated Trask's activities and found, among other things, that his bookkeeping was in total confusion, due more to ignorance and inexperience than dishonesty. Realizing that the young Harvard man was in over his head, the church recommended replacing him in the summer of 1872.

The new agent, General Charles Adams, whose real name was Karl Adam Schwanbeck,[10] made a complete housecleaning of all employees at Los Pinos with one exception — James Kelley,

7 Sidney Jocknick, *Early Days on the Western Slope of Colorado,* (Denver: The Carson-Harper Co., 1913), p. 34.

8 *Ibid.*, pp. 36-37.

9 *Ibid.*, p. 36.

10 Rockwell, *The Utes: A Forgotten People,* p. 85. Schwanbeck was born in Germany and because his real name was difficult to pronounce, took the English name of Adams. Adams was only a militia general, having been appointed head of one of the four military districts in Colorado Territory shortly after the close of the Civil War.

who was kept in charge of the cow camp. Adams proved to be an effective agent during his three year tenure. His background of many years experience with the Utes and other Indian tribes, acquired while serving in the military at Fort Union, New Mexico, served him well.

A heavy snow and driving wind greeted Alonzo Hartman as he arrived at the Los Pinos cow camp on Christmas day, 1872. The twenty-two year old native of Iowa had been placed in charge of the cow camp with James Kelley as his chief aide, Herman Leuders as bookkeeper, and Sidney Jocknick, the ex-cook from Los Pinos, as a cowpuncher. Hartman later vividly recalled his arrival and first winter in the Gunnison country:

> I rode a government mule from Los Pinos Agency to the government cow camp on the Gunnison river. It snowed all day and we were soaking wet when we arrived in camp, but Jim Kelly [sic] soon had a good blaze in the fireplace and some hot coffee, and we were soon O.K. Kelly [sic] and I spent the winter there without seeing anyone for over three months. We had 2,000 head of sheep and 3,000 head of cattle to take care of and the snow was getting deep, but we never lost a single one. We were busy boys riding every day and changing the cattle from place to place to keep them on the best feed we could find, and also to keep them well scattered, so that there would not be too many in one place at a time.[11]

Hartman, Kelley, and Jocknick shared bachelor quarters in one of several cabins constructed at the cow camp almost continuously from Christmas of 1872 until the fall of 1875 when the Utes were moved on to the Uncompahgre Reservation twelve miles south of present-day Montrose. Alone in the

11 *Gunnison News-Champion,* February 15, 1940, p. 7. Although several sources, including Wilson Rockwell, in *The Utes: A Forgotten People,* state that Hartman built the first cabin at the cow camp, and thus, the first permanent structure in the immediate Gunnison region, the fact that he had a cabin to come to on Christmas day, 1872, shows that this is not true. Betty Wallace, in *History With the Hide Off,* indicates that an old timer, L. H. Easterly, always claimed that two men named Wall and White built a squat log cabin at the junction of the Gunnison and Tomichi Rivers, two years before Hartman in 1870. The author believes that the best evidence points to Josiah White and Jim Kelley as the men who constructed the first cabin in 1870 as a shelter while caring for the first government stock. However, Mrs. Wallace is quite correct when she says: "This point . . . cannot be clarified, since no one saw much significance at the time in recording who built what and when."

Gunnison Valley, the three men braved up to five feet of snow on the level, thirty below zero temperatures, driving winds that lowered the chill factor to incredible depths, and the unbearable loneliness which was part of the job.

Alonzo Hartman stayed in the Gunnison country after the Utes left in 1875 and, with Sylvester Richardson, became one of the two great pioneers of that mountain region. When the Los Pinos Agency was moved to the Uncompahgre in 1875, Hartman fell heir to the cow camp cabin and corrals. He and Jim Kelley established a general store in one of the cabins and ran cattle close to Hartman's 160 acre homestead near the Gunnison and Tomichi River juncture.

Although supplies had to be brought in at great expense from Pueblo or Colorado Springs, "the store more than paid us, for people were beginning to arrive in the country in large numbers, especially since a big gold discovery at Lake City."[12] Hartman was appointed postmaster for the budding Gunnison region in 1876, and he and Kelley combined the store and post office into one. During the same year the two men moved closer to present-day Gunnison to be near the center of trade. At first, all Gunnison area mail came in from Lake City, but as more people poured into the San Juan country in 1876, a post office was established near the juncture of Del Dorado and Cebolla Creeks, three and a half miles southeast of present-day Powderhorn. The new post office was named White Earth because of the light color of the soil in the area. Following the creation of the new post office, Gunnison mail came to White Earth from Saguache. Kelley and Hartman carried the mail once or twice a week from White Earth to Gunnison until 1880, when the Barlow and Sanderson Stage brought regular service. Hartman remained postmaster for nine and a half years. During the early years, Hartman often was able to put all of Gunnison's mail in his vest pocket. When he retired in 1885, however, he was employing five clerks and making $3,00 a year.

Hartman turned exclusively to ranching in 1885, having parlayed his original homestead of 160 acres into one of the

12 *Ibid.,* March 7, 1940, p. 4; Lloyd, "The Uncompahgre Utes," part 3, p. 14. Describing his new venture, Hartman wrote: "Also started a store, a small affair—just things the Indians would like and also a few goods for miners and prospectors. Business was light for a year or two—when things began to move fast . . . . [I] found a good market at Lake City for my cattle and hundreds of Indians came from the new agency with their furs and skins and traded with me and I got tons and tons of the finest of their catch."

great ranches of the Gunnison country. Hartman's beautiful Dos Rios mansion southwest of town became the major landmark of the Gunnison region. By 1905, he owned over 2,000 acres, ran 2,000 cattle, and was firmly fixed as one of the top cattlemen in the state. The veteran rancher left the Gunnison country in 1926, a wealthy and aging figure. Hartman died in California in 1940 at the age of eighty-nine, his place secure as one of the great pioneers of the Gunnison country.

One of the first ranches in the history of the Gunnison country, located by Alonzo Hartman at Dos Rios in 1875. Collection of Bruce Hartman.

Soon after the Treaty of 1868, new encroachments were made on Ute lands in the San Juan country. Charles Baker, in 1860, had struck gold near present-day Silverton in the heart of the San Juan Mountains. In 1861, Baker platted Animas City in the beautiful lower Animas Valley, fifteen miles north of the present site of Durango. However, because of surface diggings which petered out, the start of the Civil War, and the continuous threat of the Utes, the great San Juan region was allowed to lay in splendid isolation for another decade.

The end of the Civil War and discoveries of major deposits of gold and silver ended the isolation of the San Juan country by 1870. By 1872, a new horde of prospectors threatened to fill up the near-virgin mountain wonderland. Approximately 200 miners forced their way on to Ute land in the San Juans by that year, and wild rumors of gold and silver for the taking

Gunnison Courthouse and Jail, August, 1881. The first three people in the first row to the left are Annie Haigler (later Mrs. Alonzo Hartman), Charlie Harper, and Louise Haigler. Farthest right in the first row is Sidney Jocknick, author of EARLY DAYS ON THE WESTERN SLOPE OF COLORADO. Alonzo Hartman is second from the left in the last row. Collection of Bruce Hartman.

threatened to bring in thousands more. Twice, government troops were sent in to drive the trespassers off reservation land, but it soon became clear that it would take a small scale war to expel the miners. Acting quickly in view of the serious situation, Secretary of the Interior Columbus Delano appointed a committee to negotiate the sale of the San Juan mineral lands from the Utes. In a meeting held at the Los Pinos Agency in August, 1872, attended by 2,000 Utes and white representatives Edward McCook, Agent Charles Adams, and Indian Commissioner Felix Brunot, the Utes angrily refused to sell.

Desperate now, the United States government invited a delegation of ten Utes, headed by Ouray, to Washington D.C. for a conference with the Indian Department, and also to meet with President Ulysses Grant. With Otto Mears along as interpreter, the Indians spent ten days in the capital and then were taken on a tour of several major eastern cities. The Indian party returned to Los Pinos on January 10, 1873, completing a sixty day trip. After this glimpse of the white man's power, the Utes were instructed to meet with a new commission in August of 1873 to further discuss the San Juan problem. By now, the Utes were ready to deal. The trip to Washington had convinced them that the white man's power was overwhelming; besides, they were not interested in the towering mountains and plunging gorges that the miner coveted. If the whites would agree to allow them to continue hunting in the San Juans, they might have themselves a deal. Slyly, to finalize the proposed agreement, Felix Brunot promised to find and return Ouray's son, kidnapped by the Sioux near Denver many years before.[13]

On September 13, 1873, the Ute Indians were forced deeper into western Colorado. By the Brunot Treaty of that year, the Utes ceded 4,000,000 acres of land to the United States — most of the San Juan country. The Indians were allowed to hunt on the land as long as they remained at peace with the whites. In

13 Rockwell, *The Utes: A Forgotten People*, p. 100. Despite yeoman efforts to find Ouray's son prior to the signing of the Treaty of 1873, Brunot failed. He did find out that the boy had passed from the Sioux to the Northern Arapahoes on the North Platte River, and then, after a number of years, had gone to the Southern Arapahoes. Soon after the 1873 treaty, Brunot fulfilled his promise to Ouray by arranging a meeting in Washington, D. C. between Arapahoe and Ute delegates as well as between Ouray and his son, Friday. At this dramatic, face to face meeting, Brunot tried to reconcile Ouray and the young brave, but despite much pleading, was unable to do so. Friday refused to believe he was a member of the hated Ute tribe and returned to the Arapahoes where he spent the rest of his life.

White and Indian negotiators at the Los Pinos Indian Agency in the 1870's. Courtesy, State Historical Society of Colorado.

return for the cession of the valuable mining lands, the Utes received $25,000 per year, with Chief Ouray getting an additional $1,000 a year as long as he remained chief and as long as the Utes remained peaceful. The Treaty of 1873 was one of historic significance in the history of Colorado. With the Utes gone, thousands of miners rushed into the San Juans and created Silverton, Lake City, Telluride, Rico, Ouray, Ophir, and dozens of other camps in every promising gulch and mountain valley. The end result was the opening of Colorado's silver-laden San Juan country.

Removal of the Ute Indians from the Los Pinos Agency to a new location had long been contemplated by government officials. The agency was not even located on the Ute reservation, but was far to the east of the boundary. Then too, the bitter cold and heavy snows of winter in the Gunnison country had always forced the Utes west to the Uncompahgre Valley in late October or early November. The short annual stay at Los Pinos prevented any progress in either agriculture or education.[14] However, the real reason for the Ute removal was to clear the way for the opening of the fabled San Juan and Gunnison countries. Thus, in 1875, the trails were once again crowded with Utes journeying west. Though Ouray wanted the new

14 *Ibid.*, p. 106.

Ute Indians posing for a picture at the Los Pinos Indian Reservation in 1873. Collection of Bruce Hartman.

agency to be located no further west than the Gunnison cow camp or the Cebolla Valley, he was forced to settle for the Uncompahgre Valley. There, in the sight of the San Juan Mountains, twelve miles south of present-day Montrose, the Uncompahgre Agency was constructed to serve Ouray's Utes

until they were forced out of Colorado six years later.[15] The Los Pinos Agency continued to serve the Utes as a sub-station from 1875 to 1879, when it was completely abandoned.

The Meeker massacre on the White River in northwestern Colorado in 1879 marked the final chapter of the Ute presence in Colorado. Nathan Meeker took over as agent of the Northern Utes at the White River Agency in 1878 and zealously, if foolishly, attempted to turn the nomadic Indians to the ways of a settled, "civilized" life. Though sincere and dedicated, Meeker was also incredibly naive and self-righteous. By September of 1879, the situation at the White River Agency had grown critical, forcing Meeker to ask the army for help. Major Thomas Thornburgh from Fort Steele, Wyoming Territory, responded immediately with a force of 150 soldiers. Alarmed at Thornburgh's advance, which looked like a declaration of war, the angry Utes ambushed the soldiers twenty miles north of the White River Agency, killing the major and thirteen of his men. For six days the survivors were pinned down, fighting for their lives. Finally, Colonel Wesley Merritt from Rawlins, Wyoming Territory, relieved the beleagured survivors and, with great haste, immediately pushed on to the White River Agency, where he found the mutilated bodies of Nathan Meeker and eleven agency men.

News of the Meeker massacre caused pioneers of western Colorado to live in mortal fear of a general Ute uprising. Preparations around Gunnison were especially feverish. Settlers of the Gunnison Valley gathered in town for protection, and traces of the earthworks thrown up at that time were still visible on the north edge of town as late as 1906.[16] Gunnison, which had grown and prospered throughout 1879, turned into a near-ghost town after the Ute massacre. "A panic seized the inhabitants and many fled for safety. When winter finally closed

15 Borland, "The Sale of the San Juan," p. 126; Jocknick, *Early Days on the Western Slope of Colorado,* pp. 81-96. Transfer of cattle and equipment over seventy-five miles of mountainous terrain from Los Pinos to the Uncompahgre Agency was a prodigious undertaking. The 1,200 head of government cattle were moved first. They were herded by Alonzo Hartman, James Kelley, Sidney Jocknick, and four other cowboys from the Gunnison Valley where the herd had been grazing to within seven miles of the new agency site. It took seven cowboys ten days to make the one hundred mile trip. Twelve men, four wagons, nine oxen, and one mule team took three weeks to move the sawmill to the new agency. To complete the evacuation of Los Pinos, hundreds of Indian ponies, heavily laden with Ute belongings, cleared the old reservation on November 20, 1875.

16 *Gunnison News-Champion,* February 2, 1906, p. 6.

in, scarcely a handful of people remained and this handful had its courage tested during the months that followed."[17] At Ruby Camp, twenty-eight miles to the northwest over Ohio Pass, there was near panic over a rumored Indian invasion, and 450 out of 500 men left the camp. Harry Cornwall, a mining engineer, recalled that the remaining men in Ruby Camp "built a large log cabin surrounded by a stockade and for several nights everyone slept inside with sentinels out . . . . "[18]

The entire state of Colorado was up in arms over the Meeker massacre. "The Utes must go" became the slogan of countless editorial writers throughout the state. The DENVER TIMES bluntly declared: "Either they or we must go, and we are not going. Humanitarianism is an idea. Western Empire is an inexorable fact. He who gets in the way of it will be crushed."[19]

January of 1880 found Ouray and other Ute representatives in Washington D.C. to take part in a Congressional hearing on the "Ute Indian Outbreak," conducted by the House of Representatives' Committee on Indian Affairs. Day after day, testimony was given by whites with congressmen firing hundreds of questions at key witnesses. Finally it was the turn of the Ute Indian nation. Far from their western homeland now, the cold and stony-faced Utes filled the hearing room with their strange, singing language that had to be translated into English. On March 6, with the hearing still not completed, Ouray and other leaders of the Ute tribes in Colorado yielded to the pressure of the white man and signed the fateful Treaty of 1880. By this treaty, the White River Utes were moved out of Colorado and on to the Uintah Reservation in northeastern Utah. The Uncompahgre Utes were assigned to a more limited reservation near the grand junction of the Colorado and Gunnison Rivers. Ominously, the treaty stipulated that if there was not enough agricultural land to go around in the new region, the Uncompahgre Utes would be located on other unoccupied agricultural lands in the vicinity or in Utah Territory. The Southern Utes were ordered on to unoccupied lands near the La Plata River in southwestern Colorado.

17 *Gunnison News*, Industrial Edition, March, 1900, p. 3.

18 Harry C. Cornwall, "The Gunnison Country, 1879-1886," Unpublished Manuscript, 1928, Western State College Library, Gunnison, Colorado, p. 9.

19 Quoted in Dudley Cornish, "The First Five Years of Colorado's Statehood," *The Colorado Magazine*, XXV (September, 1948), p. 221.

The hearing in Washington D.C. ended on March 22. The decision arrived at was the same as the decision made many years before in the office of the governor of Colorado, in mountain mining camps, in the hearts and minds of whites in Colorado, and in Denver newspaper offices —"The Utes must go." Congress approved the Treaty of 1880 on June 15, 1880, but before it could take effect, three-fourths of the Utes had to ratify the agreement. Six days later, President Rutherford Hayes appointed a five man commission made up of Chairman George Manypenny, A. B. Meachem, J. J. Russell, John Bowman, and Otto Mears to go to the Ute reservations and obtain the necessary signatures. The Uncompahgre Utes were reluctant to sign the treaty, however, because they feared they would be forced off their Colorado homeland and into Utah Territory. In August, while negotiations were going on to gain the needed votes, the Utes suffered an irreparable loss when their great chief Ouray died.

Although Ouray's unexpected death seemingly killed any chance of obtaining the necessary votes to ratify the treaty, the wily Otto Mears saved the day by paying the Utes two dollars each out of his own pocket to sign the agreement. Although Chairman George Manypenny was outraged at such methods and refused to endorse the treaty, he was later overruled by the new Secretary of the Interior, Samuel J. Kirkwood. Mears, who had paid $2,800 to the Utes, was reimbursed by the federal government in 1881 and thanked.

Eighteen days after the Ute signatures were secured, a sensational incident occurred in the Gunnison country which threatened to not only nullify the Treaty of 1880, but also start a major Indian war on the Western Slope. On the night of September 29, 1880, three freighters who had left Saguache bound for Ouray with a shipment of whiskey, made camp thirty miles west of the Los Pinos Indian Agency. They were John H. Jackson, his nephew Andrew, and a man named Mannell. At approximately 7:30 P. M., while the men were eating, two Utes, Johnson Shavano, son of Chief Shavano, and Indian Henry rode in and asked for food. Two other Indians with them chose not to stop, continuing toward their destination at Los Pinos. Although the white and Indian stories differ markedly at this point, most of the evidence favors the Indian version.

According to John Jackson, two drunken Indians barged into his camp, called the whites vile names, and demanded

food. When they were refused, Johnson fired a shot at the teamsters and fled toward the trail to Los Pinos. When the Indians were sixty yards away, the freighters fired back with Andrew Jackson's shot hitting Johnson. Indian Henry told a much different story. The Utes, he said, had ridden into Jackson's camp in peace and asked for food. The elder Jackson reached for his gun and angrily told the Indians to leave. A quarrel developed and the whites opened fire. The elder Jackson, using a revolver, shot Indian Henry in the arm and also shot Johnson's horse. Young Jackson, using a rifle, fired at the same time, hitting Johnson in the neck. The Indians spurred their horses toward the trail, but after riding sixty yards, Johnson fell from his horse mortally wounded.[20] Indian Henry continued on to find his other two companions and the three of them returned to recover Johnson's body. The three Utes then rode east to Los Pinos to sound the alarm.

There are many reasons for accepting the Indian version of the Jackson incident. Indian Henry told his story many times and it was always the same; Jackson's story changed almost every time he told it. Secondly, the Jackson party was transporting whiskey and it was not uncommon for freighters to indulge in a little "nudge" to clear the dust out of their throats on the trail. A lone miner who rode past the Jackson camp on the fateful evening of the twenty-ninth declared that a barrel had been tapped and the entire party was drunk. In addition, the Jackson party had been seen giving whiskey to some passing soldiers that evening.[21] The next morning, perhaps sober now and realizing the possible consequences of their action, the Jackson group left the trail to Ouray and moved west five miles to Cline's ranch, near the present site of Cimarron. Captain H. C. Cline, owner of the ranch, the oldest in the Cimarron country, was by necessity, on good terms with the Utes. His ranch served as a stage station for passengers coming to and from Ouray.

To say that the killing of Johnson Shavano in the Gunnison country was serious is to say that dropping a match into a powderkeg is dangerous. Before the case was closed, an Indian war almost broke out, the Colorado state election of 1880 was

20 *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs,* 1880, p. xxvi.

21 *Denver Daily Times,* October 11, 1880, p. 2; Jerome Johnson, "Murder on the Uncompahgre," *The Colorado Magazine,* XLIII (Summer, 1966), p. 212.

Ouray, Gunnison's neighbor to the west, in July, 1888. Courtesy, Denver Public Library.

affected, and the federal and state governments were dragged into a jurisdictional dispute which threatened to cause a clash between the army and state militia.

While the teamsters found temporary safety at Cline's ranch, an armed and furious band of Utes led by Johnson's father, Chief Shavano, confronted Indian Agent William Berry at his quarters at the Los Pinos Agency and demanded immediate punishment of the murderer. Berry, along with Ute Commissioner A. B. Meacham, two miners, Charles Holmes and Sam Hoyt, who happened to be at Los Pinos, and Captain Louis Stelle and fifteen soldiers from the nearby cantonment of the Twenty-Third Regiment, hurried cross-country to Cline's ranch. Ironically and conveniently, there were four companies of the Eighteenth Infantry Regiment under Major R. H. Offley camped near Cline's ranch. They were en route to Fort Garland from the Uncompahgre River.

When he arrived at Cline's, Berry placed Jackson under arrest and tried to calm Indian tempers. Whites in the immediate region were also furious with Jackson because he had endangered

their lives by killing young Johnson. The problem of what to do with the unfortunate freighter was a tough one. By the next morning the Utes were losing patience and were talking of killing all the whites in the region. To prevent an open war which would have meant the slaughter of many isolated freighters and miners in the Gunnison and adjacent countries, Berry compromised with the Utes. Jackson would be taken by Hoyt, Cline, Holmes, and Indian Henry to Gunnison where he would stand trial for murder. In return, the Utes would disperse. With the matter seemingly settled, Meacham and Berry started for the agency and the two army parties left for their camps. At 11:00 on the morning of October 1, 1880, the Jackson party left Cline's ranch for Gunnison. Four miles up the road they were surprised by sixty Utes who surrounded them and took Jackson prisoner. The badly frightened freighter was taken to a nearby bluff, shot once in the stomach, and rolled down a hill into a gully.

Rounding up cattle near Cline's ranch, later renamed Cimarron, near the junction of Cimarron Creek and the Gunnison River. This location is not far from where Johnson Shavano and Andrew Jackson were killed in 1880, nearly touching off an Indian war. Courtesy, Denver Public Library.

News of Johnson's death and Jackson's abduction created a near panic among whites in the Gunnison country. The entire region prepared for an expected Ute outbreak. However, when no attacks came, the fear turned to a bitter white fury against the Utes and Agent Berry, who it was charged, had deliberately sacrificed Jackson to save his own skin. The feeling in the embryo town of Pitkin in the Quartz Creek Valley, thirty miles from Los Pinos, was typical of the entire Gunnison country: "The feeling here is intense . . . the red devils will soon get their just deserts [sic] whether Uncle Sam approves or not. The general feeling seems to be for extermination or total banishment from Colorado [and] punishment for those whites who gave up . . . Jackson to the savages. Murder like this should be avenged in a manner that will strike terror to the hearts (if they have any) of all the red fiends that infest our border."[22]

With all towns and camps in the Gunnison country venting their rage on Berry, Meacham, Hoyt, Holmes, and Cline, as well as the Utes, matters soon went from bad to worse. Unfounded and untrue rumors that Jackson had been brutally tortured before being killed circulated. A report from Gunnison declared that the Utes had tied the freighter to a tree, scalped him, cut off his hands and feet, cut out his heart and hung it on a bush, and then burned the remains. Because Jackson's body was not found until mid-December, there was no way to disprove this wild rumor. While emotions were at a fever pitch, warrants were issued for the arrest of the five whites. More alarming was the report that 200 armed men from the Gunnison country were en route to Los Pinos to lynch the five culprits. Fortunately, the report was untrue.

Both the state of Colorado and the federal government claimed jurisdiction over Berry. "The Denver Daily Times feared that a conflict between state and federal troops might develop and described the situation as 'altogether alarming.'"[23] However, Secretary of the Interior Carl Schurz was more concerned about a possible war between the state militia and the Utes. "The Secretary was suspicious that a group of people in Colorado was trying to create a disturbance and thus provide an excuse for driving the Indians out of the state without waiting

22 *Gunnison Democrat*, October 20, 1880, p. 1.
23 *Saguache Chronicle*, October 22, 1880, p. 1.

for the treaty to be ratified."[24] Fearing for their lives, Berry, Meacham, and Hoyt, under arrest now, and accompanied by United States Deputy Marshall J. D. Smith, Aaron Bradshaw, and several Indian guides, proceeded to Denver in a circuitous, evasive route. The party moved north by horseback to Rawlins, Wyoming Territory, and from there, traveled by rail to Denver, arriving on November 2. With Cline in jail in Gunnison and Holmes having been jailed in Denver on October 26, all five whites were now in custody, charged with the murder of Jackson.

The furor surrounding the Jackson case had died down considerably by the time a grand jury met in Denver in May of 1881 to consider the evidence against the whites. After three days of testimony, the jury acquitted Holmes and Hoyt but indicted Cline, Berry, and Meacham. Though indicted, the three were never brought to trial. The federal government, which went through the motions of arresting and indicting the three men, never had any intention of seeing them convicted. It was only because the Republican administrations in Colorado and Washington had to give the appearance of bringing the men to trial lest they alienate Colorado voters and lose the election of 1880 that they were indicted in the first place.[25]

The Johnson-Jackson incident exhibited two views close to the hearts of whites living in the Gunnison country in 1880. The first was impatience with the tardiness of the federal government in removing the Utes from the Gunnison country and Western Slope. The Johnson-Jackson incident gave the whites a great opportunity to hasten the Ute departure. Secondly, the inhabitants of the Gunnison country represented the prevailing western attitude that only extermination of the Indians would bring peace to the region.

The Utes were a tragic people in Colorado as 1881 opened. The Meeker massacre, Treaty of 1880, Jackson incident, and the overwhelming desire of miners and farmers for the lands of the Western Slope dictated that the proud red men should leave their homeland forever. Colonel Ranald Mackenzie, with nine companies of infantry and six companies of cavalry, moved from Fort Garland in the San Luis Valley to the west

24 Johnson, "Murder on the Uncompahgre," p. 218.
25 *Ibid.*, p. 224

bank of the Uncompahgre River in the spring of 1881. His job was to insure the removal of the Utes to their new Uintah reservation, 175 miles southeast of Salt Lake City. The Utes stalled away most of the summer of 1881, still hoping against hope that they might remain on the Western Slope.

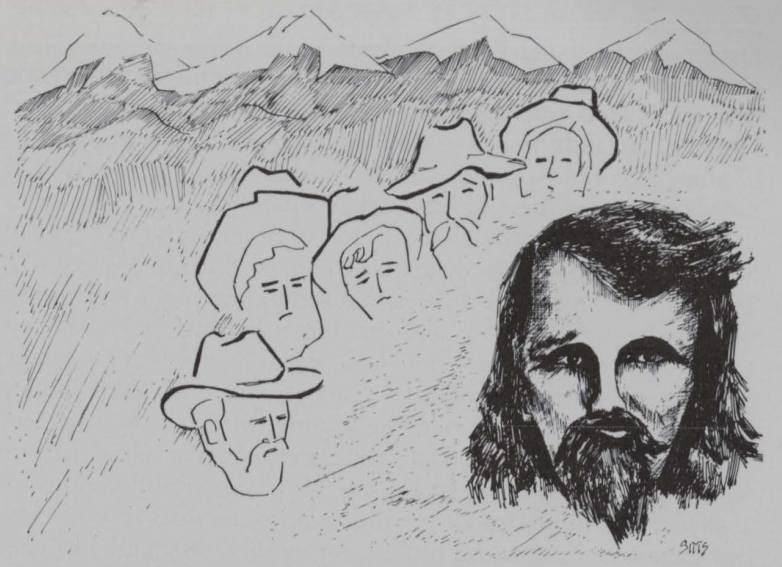
Tired of continuous Ute delaying tactics during 1881, Colonel Mackenzie finally lost patience and on August 27, ordered the Indians to make ready to leave their camp east of present-day Olathe. On that day, 1,458 Indians, driving 10,000 sheep and goats and 8,000 ponies ahead of them, moved slowly and without emotion down the Uncompahgre River. The Ute exodus from Colorado had finally begun. West and north they moved, first following the Uncompahgre and then the Gunnison to its grand junction with the Colorado. On the morning of September 7, 1881, the last of the Utes crossed the Colorado River and were on their way to Utah. "Cottonwoods were left smouldering by those revengeful to the very last."[26] Thus were the Utes forced from their Colorado hunting grounds, a sullen, silent people driven by the white man into the barren Utah desert. Their exodus was the final act in a drama which had been played since the 1860's. The Utes had been forced in succession from the San Luis Valley into the Gunnison country; then to the Uncompahgre Valley; and finally, to the barren, alkali sands of Utah.

"If one had stood on Pinon Mesa, what a march of a retreating civilization he could have seen. Here was the last defeat of the red man. Here the frontiers of white man met, crushing the Utes in its mighty embrace."[27]

White settlers, long envious of the rich agricultural and mineral lands on the Ute reservation, did not linger in occupying the Gunnison and Uncompahgre countries. The GUNNISON DAILY NEWS-DEMOCRAT reported: "Swarms of ranch-seekers are near the agency crowding in for the favorable locations on the Uncompahgre . . . . It is not known how soon the proclamation declaring the reservation open will be issued, but . . . for all practical purposes it is open now, and people scarcely wait for any formality before going in."[28] At five

26 Walker D. Wyman, "A Preface to the Settlement of Grand Junction," *The Colorado Magazine*, X (January, 1933), p. 27.
27 *Ibid.*
28 *Gunnison Daily News-Democrat*, September 3, 1881, p. 1.

o'clock in the morning on September 14, 1881, the United States Army gave formal permission for entry onto the old Ute reservation. It was nearly a year later, on June 28, 1882, that the federal government got around to legally opening the former Ute lands to settlement. At last the Gunnison country had been cleared of the Ute — the white man was now free to mold that virgin land to his own fancy.



CHAPTER III

CALL OF THE FRONTIER

The winter of 1873-74 in the Gunnison country was one of bitter cold and heavy snowfall. During that fateful winter, an event of unparalleled barbarism in the history of the West occurred in the southwest corner of the Gunnison country. Alferd Packer (he spelled his first name that way) was one of a number of prospectors who left Provo, Utah, in the late fall of 1873, excitedly heading for a new gold strike near Breckenridge in Colorado Territory. Other gold-seekers swelled the Provo group to twenty-one as it moved south and east into Colorado. On January 21, 1874, the prospectors reached the juncture of the Uncompahgre and Gunnison Rivers near the present site of Delta and were promptly surrounded by Chief Ouray's Ute braves. After satisfying the Ute chieftain that they were only prospectors and would soon be out of Indian territory, the twenty-one were invited to stay at the Ute winter encampment on the Uncompahgre until spring brought better weather. Half the party accepted the offer, but the rest, eager to stake claims near Breckenridge, wanted to push on.

In early February, O. D. Loutsenhizer, Mike Burke, George Driver and brothers, Tom and Isaac Walker, left Ouray's camp, hoping to reach the Los Pinos Indian Agency in the Cochetopa hills south and east of present-day Gunnison. The party soon became hopelessly lost in a blinding snowstorm near the mouth of the Lake Fork of the Gunnison. Wandering aimlessly and starving, Loutsenhizer and Burke separated from the other three men and by pure chance, ran on to an emaciated United States government cow which was part of the Los Pinos herd. The desperate men killed the weakened animal with jackknives, sucked the warm blood, and ate the meat raw. Three days later, the two reached the Los Pinos cattle camp where government cattlemen James Kelley and his aide Sidney Jocknick were waiting out the raging blizzard. Kelley and Jocknick hastily dragged a sled load of provisions to the other three half-dead survivors, one of whom pitifully clutched a coyote's skull in his arms and refused to give it up.[1] The five men remained at the cattle camp with Kelley and Jocknick for three weeks until they regained their strength. Then, they fought through deep snowdrifts and gale conditions to the Los Pinos reservation.

Meanwhile, back on the Uncompahgre, gold fever continued to burn, and on February 9, a second party left for the Indian agency, led by guide Alferd Packer. Packer was a morose, brooding, sullen figure, six feet tall and weighing about 175 pounds. His long black hair, coal black beard, and a high-pitched whining voice gave him a circus appearance. Packer was then thirty-two years old, a native of Pennsylvania. After serving a short seven month hitch in the Union Army during the Civil War in 1862, Packer received a physical disability discharge. Between 1862 and 1874, he worked as a ranch hand, guide, hunter, and finally, as a miner in Georgetown, Colorado. From there, he moved to Utah where he was started toward his destiny as one of the "twenty-one."

Six men made up the Packer party: Israel Swan, the oldest, in his sixties; Frank Miller, a German butcher; George Noon, a sixteen year old boy; Shannon Wilson Bell of Michigan; James Humphrey of Philadelphia; and Packer. Ouray cautioned the men to make their way along the Gunnison River to the government cattle camp where extra supplies

1 Sidney Jocknick, *Early Days on the Western Slope of Colorado*, (Denver: The Carson-Harper Co., 1913), p. 57.

could be obtained. The men expected to reach the camp easily enough and thus, took provisions for only seven days. Preston Nutter and James Montgomery, members of the "twenty-one," were trapping on Dry Creek, twelve miles south of Ouray's camp, when the prospectors went by on their second day out.[2] They watched until the six men disappeared into a mounting storm sweeping through the Uncompahgre Valley on February 10. It was the last time any of the six, save Packer, was ever seen alive.

What happened to the Packer party en route to the Los Pinos Indian Agency shall forever be shrouded in mystery. Sixty-six days passed without any sign of the men. Then, early on the morning of April 16, 1874, agency officials Stephen Dole, James Downer, and Herman Lauter looked up from their breakfast table to see a bedraggled figure coming down from the mountains.[3] With a Winchester carbine slung over his shoulder, Alferd Packer had returned to civilization. The exhausted prospector told a tale of intense suffering in the mountains. He explained that he had become snow-blind and footsore several days out from the Uncompahgre and his five companions had left him in camp with a few days provisions while they forged ahead to find the Indian agency. When they failed to return, Packer fought on alone, somehow survived the wilderness and weather, and, exhausted, struggled into Los Pinos. Packer's story was not an uncommon one in the mountains and was initially accepted.

Despite his ordeal, Packer was none the worse for wear and after resting a few days at Los Pinos, set out for Saguache on the northern fringe of the San Luis Valley, still hoping to reach Breckenridge in time to file some good mining claims. While in this rugged supply town for the San Juan and Gunnison countries, Packer aroused suspicion. Other members of the "twenty-one" had reached Saguache and thought it odd that a man who had to be grubstaked in Provo a few months earlier was now spending money like a drunken sailor. Also disturbing to Packer's ex-cohorts was his possession of Israel Swan's Winchester and Frank Miller's skinning knife. Otto

2 Paul Gantt, *The Case of Alfred Packer*, (Denver: University of Denver Press, 1952), p. 29.

3 *Ibid.*, p. 30.

Mears, famed "Roadbuilder of the Rockies," and then owner of a supply store in Saguache, became suspicious too, and induced his friend, General Charles Adams, Indian Agent at Los Pinos, to question the mysterious prospector.[4] Trapped in one inconsistency after another by Adams' questions, Packer broke down and made his "first confession." A few days out from the Uncompahgre, he declared, the party used up its provisions and lost its way. With no game to be found in the heavy snow, Swan, the old man, weakened and died and the others ate his flesh. A few days later, Humphrey died and his flesh was also eaten. After Humphrey's death, Packer took $133 off his body. Later, Frank Miller died accidentally while Packer was away collecting wood and the survivors ate him too. Soon after, Shannon Bell shot young George Noon, and was in turn shot by Packer in self defense.[5]

Few believed Alferd Packer's story, but a search party, led by Packer along the Lake Fork of the Gunnison, failed to uncover any trace of the five missing men. Nevertheless, General Adams ordered Packer arrested on suspicion of homicide and the man of mystery languished in the old adobe jail in Saguache for most of the summer of 1874. Suddenly, in late August, a break came in the Packer case. John A. Randolph, an artist sketching mountain scenes for HARPER'S WEEKLY, came across five bodies on a bluff overlooking the Lake Fork five miles east of present-day Lake City. No attempt had been made to conceal them. Swan's head had been smashed in by a hatchet and Miller's head was nowhere to be found. Testimony from those who examined the bodies implied that no struggle had taken place, that a bullet hole had been found in one of the bodies, that Swan's clothing had been ripped, possibly to find money, and that it was not clear if flesh had been cut from the bodies.[6] Alferd Packer, it was felt, was guilty of cannibalism, murder, or both.

On the same day that word of the grisly find reached Saguache, Alferd Packer escaped from jail. He had unlocked his irons with a key given to him by an unknown person and,

4 *Ibid.*, p. 32.

5 Robert W. Fenwick, "Alfred Packer: The True Story of the Colorado Man-Eater," *Empire Magazine*, (April 21, 1968), p. 8.

6 Gantt, *The Case of Alfred Packer*, p. 50.

under cover of darkness, slipped away. It was to be nine years before society caught up with the "Colorado man-eater."

March, 1883, found Jean "Frenchy" Cabazon, one of the original "twenty-one," peddling his household wares to ranchers along the road between Cheyenne and Fort Fetterman in Wyoming Territory. Near Fort Fetterman, "Frenchy" was introduced to a prospector named "John Swartze." Blinking his eyes in the dim light to be sure, "Frenchy" Cabazon knew that the nine year hunt for Alferd Packer had at last come to an end.[7]

Packer was arrested by Sheriff Malcom Campbell of Converse County, Wyoming, and returned to Lake City in Hinsdale County for trial. On April 6, 1883, District Attorney John Bell filed murder charges in Lake City District Court against Packer in the death of Israel Swan. Bell held back a trump card and did not press charges for the murder of Bell, Miller, Noon, and Humphrey.[8] Packer took the stand as a witness in his own defense and spent six hours describing the tragic events of the early months of 1874. The story he told differed markedly from his "first confession" nine years before. The drawn and wary prospector told of the six men boiling snow water to make a thick gravy from the last of their flour; of how a raging blizzard caused them to become hopelessly lost; and how roasted moccasins and rosebuds were eaten to stave off starvation. The party finally made camp near Lake San Cristobal, south of present-day Lake City, and Packer told how he was sent to the top of the next hill in an effort to spot the Los Pinos Indian Agency. In a barely audible voice, the weary prospector told the hushed courtroom of returning to camp after dark only to be savagely and suddenly attacked by a hatchet-wielding Shannon Bell. Turning quickly to meet the attack, Packer testified he shot Bell in self-defense and then finished him off with the latter's hatchet. It was only then that the horrified prospector saw the bodies of the other four men.[9]

7 Fenwick, "Alfred Packer: The True Story of the Colorado Man-Eater," p. 10.

8 The District Attorney did not charge Packer with the other four murders for two reasons: (1) he felt he had enough evidence to convict the "man-eater" of Swan's murder without further complicating the case, (2) if Packer was found innocent of the murder of Swan, he could be brought to trial again for the murder of the other four men without being placed in double jeopardy.

9 *Gunnison Tribune*, June 24, 1893, p. 2; Gantt, *The Case of Alfred Packer*, p. 56.

Alone now in the wilderness, Packer rifled the five men's pockets and devoured parts of their bodies to stay alive. But he maintained he was not guilty of murder. The jury did not agree. On April 13, 1883, three hours after retiring, the jury found Alferd Packer guilty of murder. The twelve man panel believed that all of the victims had been struck with a hatchet while sleeping and that Bell, upon being hit, got up and started to run, only to be shot in the back and finished off with hatchet blows. The jury further believed that Packer's sole motive in killing the five men was robbery.[10]

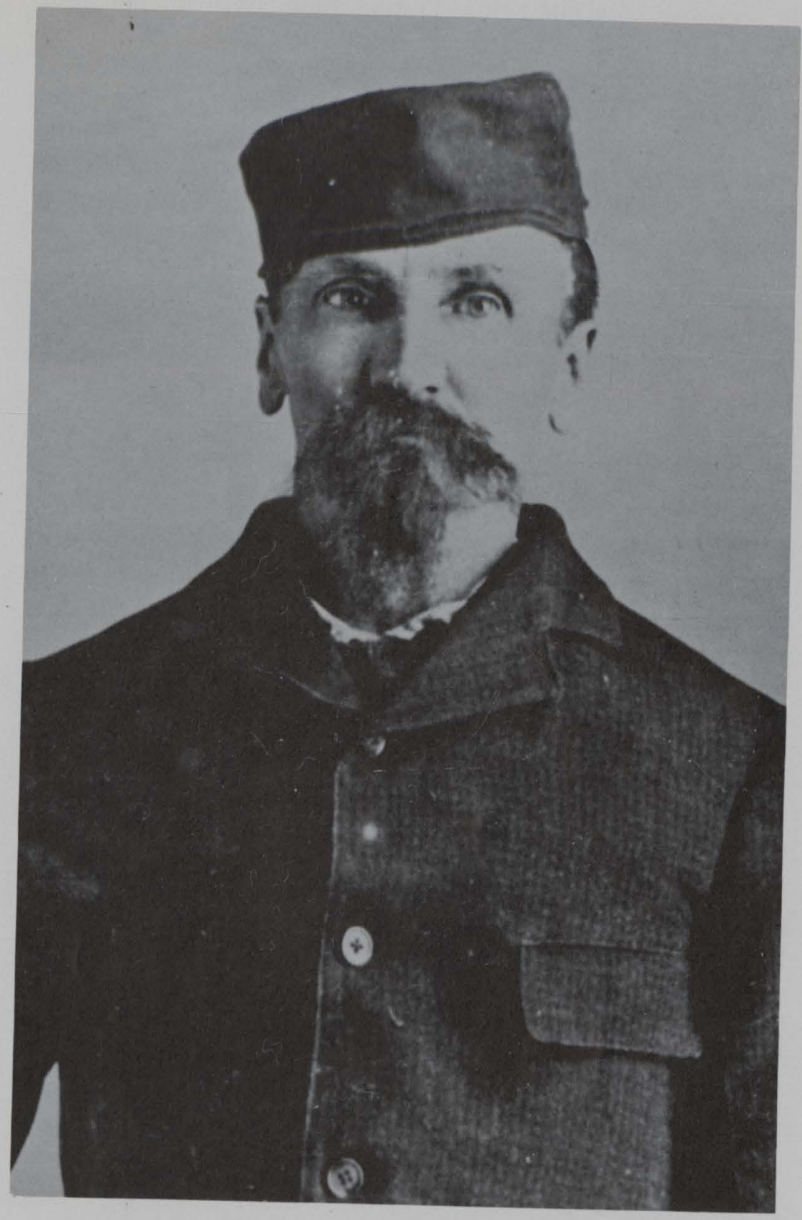
District Judge Melville Gerry, in a moving statement, sentenced Packer to hang on May 19 in Lake City. Larry Dolan, a Saguache bartender who had testified at the trial, was the first man uptown after the sentence had been passed. Dolan excitedly dashed into the nearest saloon and erroneously reported this popular version of the sentence:

> The judge says: Stand up, yah voracious men eating son of a bitch, stand up. They was sivin Dimmicrats in Hinsdale County, and ye eat five of them, God dam ye. I sintins ye t'be hanged by the neck until ye're dead, dead, dead, as a warnin' ag'in reducin' the Dimmicrat population of th' state.[11]

Because feeling ran very high against Packer in Lake City, he was turned over to "Doc" Shores, the famous Gunnison sheriff, and locked up in the Gunnison jail to await his execution. The hangman, however, was to be denied. Packer's defense attorneys seized upon a technicality in the state laws and successfully appealed his conviction to the Colorado State

10 Gantt, *The Case of Alfred Packer*, p. 63. Many wild tales have been told regarding the Packer case, but perhaps the wildest of them all appeared in the *Gunnison Tribune* on June 24, 1893. The paper reported: "Another party ultimately found the camp with the remains of his 5 friends butchered like beeves, with their flesh hanging on the limbs of trees to jerk in the sun."

11 This grossly distorted and wild version of the Packer sentence spread rapidly throughout the West and soon became a favorite conversational topic. It does great injustice to Judge Melville Gerry, a Southern gentleman of the old school and an excellent jurist. Paul Gantt, in *The Case of Alfred Packer*, gives the actual wording of the sentence as handed down by Judge Gerry.



The "Colorado Man-Eater," Alferd Packer, as he looked in prison years after his infamous crime. Courtesy, Denver Public Library.

Supreme Court in October, 1885.[12] The now famous "man-eater" was tried again in August of 1886, this time in Gunnison, on a change of venue before District Judge William Harrison. The trial was short and a replica of the first one. The now gaunt prospector was tried and convicted on five counts of manslaughter. Judge Harrison sentenced the taciturn and stone-faced Packer to eight years in prison on each of the five counts, for a total of forty years. On August 7, 1886, Sheriff "Doc" Shores took Alferd Packer to the penitentiary at Canon City where he was to spend the next fifteen years of his life.

Convict number 1389 was a model prisoner for almost fifteen years at Canon City. After a number of appeals to the State Parole Board failed during that period, Packer received support from an unexpected quarter. Polly Pry, a beautiful and dynamic blonde sob sister reporter for the DENVER POST, waged a vigorous editorial campaign on behalf of the San Juan cannibal. The campaign paid off. On January 7, 1901, Governor Charles Thomas pardoned Packer on the condition that he remain in the state of Colorado for the rest of his life. Packer died in 1907 at the age of sixty-five and was buried at Littleton. Thus, the curtain was finally drawn on one of the Gunnison country's most bizarre and baffling mysteries. Robert Service, in his CREMATION OF SAM McGEE, perhaps best captured the meaning of such strange occurrences on the frontier when he wrote: "There are strange things done, in the midnight sun, by the men who moil for gold."[13]

12 Gantt, *The Case of Alfred Packer,* p. 81. Colorado was still a territory when Packer committed murder in 1874. Although the territorial legislature had established death as the penalty for murder in 1868, a succeeding legislature in 1870 amended it by inserting: "the death penalty . . . shall not be ordered . . . unless the jury shall in their verdict of guilty also indicate that the killing was deliberate or premeditated . . . ." In the famed Gallotti case of 1876, the defense successfuly argued that by pleading guilty, there was no possibility of a jury being installed. No jury meant no verdict and no finding of deliberation or premeditation. Thus, the death penalty could not be imposed on Gallotti. In 1881, five years after Colorado attained statehood, the state legislature repealed the 1870 murder statute to plug the Gallotti loophole. Unfortunately, the legislature again blundered by not including a "savings clause" which would have reserved the right to try those charged with murder before the repeal of the 1870 law (between 1870-1881). Thus, Packer's lawyers successfully argued that the repeal made the 1870 law non-existent and that the 1881 act could not be made retroactive to apply to him. The State Supreme Court, therefore, reversed the death sentence against Packer in October of 1885. However, the court ordered that the "man-eater" stand trial again, this time for manslaughter. As the Colorado statute on manslaughter had never been repealed (and thus had no need for a savings clause), Packer could legally be charged with that crime.

13 *The Best of Robert Service,* (New York: Dodd, Mead and Co., 1953), p. 531.

The Packer tragedy was typical of the frontier in early day Colorado. It showed vividly what could happen to a man caught in the throes of nature. However, for every Alferd Packer, Colorado turned out dozens of builders during the rugged and wild years when it was still a territory. One of its best was an indefatigable dreamer from the banks of the Hudson River in New York.

The West has always been built by men of vision, men willing to take any chance or risk to attain great wealth or to fulfill a dream. For Sylvester Richardson, it was a dream. Richardson was born at West Camp on the Hudson River in New York in 1830. His grandfather had fought with General Washington during the Revolutionary War and his father helped operate the "Underground Railroad" in the exciting years preceding the Civil War. Richardson's youth was spent in New York but during the 1850's, he accompanied his family to Sheboygan Falls on the edge of the frontier in Wisconsin. There, he taught school, gave singing lessons, and worked as a carpenter.[14] Restless even then, Richardson and his wife, Elizabeth, moved west in 1860 to what soon would be known as Colorado Territory, hoping to strike it rich with "59ers" who remained from the great rush of the year before.

Working as a teamster, wagonmaker, and rancher in Denver almost continually from 1860 to 1872, Richardson was never satisfied. As a rancher, he was a joke. In the summer of 1861, he built a fence out of oak brush around a clearing to keep his cattle penned up. When winter arrived, he ignored the nearby forest and used up the fence piece by piece for firewood. Though Richardson was physically in Denver, his heart and mind were across the Continental Divide on Colorado's Western Slope. The restless visionary had already talked with the great old-time trappers and miners of the West — James Beckwourth, Charles Baker, and Kit Carson among them — and they told of a Gunnison country which "seemed almost incredulous."[15] Richardson also heard stories of miners who had challenged the rugged Elk Mountains over the Continental Divide and come away with fabulous wealth.

14 Class of 1916, *Historical Sketches of Early Gunnison,* (Gunnison, Colorado: The Colorado Normal School, 1916), p. 11.

15 *Gunnison Review,* May 15, 1880, p. 1.

Finally, Sylvester Richardson could stand it no longer. When Dr. John Parsons organized an expedition to explore the Elk Mountains and the Gunnison country in 1873, the excited Richardson eagerly signed on as a geologist. After the Parsons expedition broke up in late summer, Richardson joyously set out alone to explore the Gunnison country. His travels first took him to the Rock Creek region which he examined very thoroughly, becoming the first man to discover the immense and valuable marble deposits on Whitehouse Mountain. Wheeling back to the south, Richardson discovered valuable carbonates on Spring Creek and massive coal deposits on Ohio Creek. Before his exploration activities came to an end in late October, the transplanted easterner had walked 600 miles, covering nearly the entire length and breadth of the Gunnison country. As he headed back to Denver with a pack train in the fall of 1873, Richardson's eyes swung over to the sparkling clear Gunnison River, the fertile Tomichi Valley, and the towering and majestic Sawatch Range; his body felt the cool and invigorating air of the Gunnison country. Sylvester Richardson was already envisioning a great city — maybe in the future even the capital of Colorado . . . .

The Panic of 1873, which cancelled plans for another Parsons expedition into the Gunnison country the following year, did not deter Richardson from his dream; neither did the presence of the Ute Indians who owned much of the Gunnison country and adjacent regions. Richardson also ignored the inaccessibility of the area behind the then considered impenetrable twin barriers of the Sawatch and San Juan Mountains. His mind was made up — he would plant a settlement in the Gunnison country.

The early months of 1874 found Richardson exclaiming the virtues of the Gunnison country to prospective settlers in Denver. He pictured the Gunnison Valley as the hub of a huge wheel with potentially great mining and agricultural regions surrounding the proposed townsite, forty to fifty miles in every direction.[16] All roads, said Richardson, would lead to Gunnison. The tall visionary's enthusiasm was infectious and on February 15, 1874, a joint stock company made up of thirty members was created. The company was capitalized at $6,000 and sold shares for $100.

16 *Ibid.*, May 22, 1880, p. 1.

Sylvester Richardson led twenty idealistic settlers out of Denver on April 20, 1874, heading to the land they yearned for — the Gunnison country. The 300 mile trip was fraught with difficulties. One day out of Denver the party was caught in a driving snowstorm. After waiting ten days at the Riley ranch, between Denver and Colorado Springs, for the storm to blow itself out, the group headed west with its ranks depleted by some faint-hearted members who returned to Denver. The caravan made its way through Colorado Springs, over Ute pass, and then descended into South Park where it followed the the south-flowing Arkansas River. From the Arkansas, the party crossed over Poncha Pass to Saguache and by May 10, had crossed Cochetopa Pass to within eight miles of the Los Pinos Indian Agency.

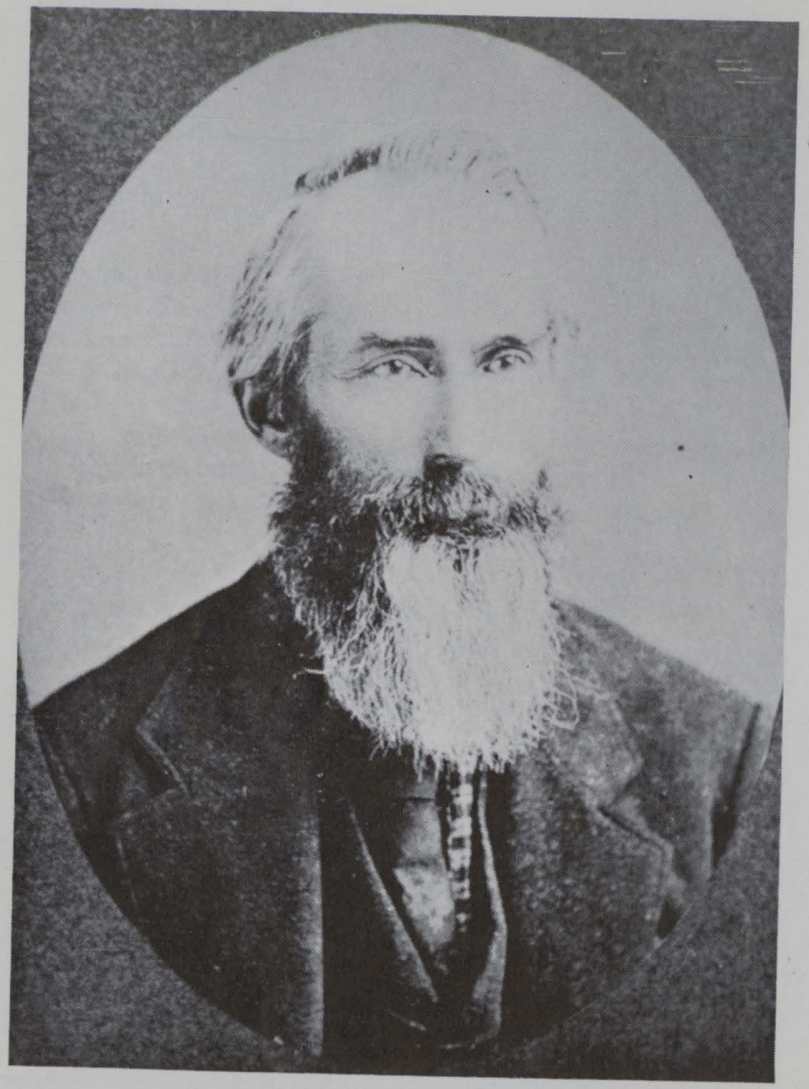
By now, the stock was badly weakened, feed was tough to come by, and hundreds of Utes could be seen everywhere. After a short conference with Agent Charles Adams at the Los Pinos Agency to gain permission to continue their westward trek, Richardson and his fatigued party pushed on, finally making camp on the east bank of the Gunnison River on May 21. A survey taken by colony member Arthur Niles showed that the future site of Gunnison was located a few miles east of the 107th meridian and thus, outside of the Ute reservation.[17]

The happy members of the Richardson force spent two days exploring the surrounding terrain and getting used to their new home. Then, every member of the group drew by lot for quarter sections of land which were surveyed one quarter mile wide and a mile long, until thirty sections were taken. The swath of land extended from the Gunnison River east to near today's Main Street and included all the land presently between Gothic and San Juan Avenues.[18] Twenty roughly hewn cabins were started during the summer of 1874, with Richardson building the first, but few progressed very far.

17 *Ibid.*, May 29, 1880, p. 1.

18 *Ibid.* In writing "The Gunnison Country: History of Its Settlement and Development," in the first seven issues of the *Gunnison Review* in May and June of 1880, Richardson declared: "Each member drew by lot one hundred and sixty acres of land which was surveyed out, one quarter mile wide and one mile long, extending from the bluff to the river, until about thirty one-quarter sections were taken and built upon." Richardson obviously means the land was surveyed from the bluff AND Gunnison River extending one mile east, as there is no possible way one could find a mile of land between the bluff and the river.

Richardson's colony proceeded very well until mid-summer when dissension broke out over the platting of the town and the location of a bridge across the Gunnison River. Two men, Kirkpatrick and Hutchinson, induced one third of the colony



Sylvester Richardson, the idealistic founder of Gunnison. Collection of Mrs. Vevarelle Esty.

to give up their memberships and accompany them to Washington Gulch where major mining strikes were supposedly being made daily. The rest of the Richardson colony weathered this storm and survived into 1875.[19]

During the winter of 1874-75, Richardson, assisted by Valentine Schmeck and P. S. Oatman, brought Oatman's unused sawmill from Trinidad to Gunnison over La Veta and Cochetopa Passes. While in Trinidad, Richardson picked up the Joseph Dixon and Charles Tingueley families, and they accompanied him back to the Gunnison country where they made their new homes. The sawmill was located north of town on Mill Creek and, by January of 1875, was in running order. Joe Dixon ran the mill with help from six workmen. All lived in cabins near the mill. Richardson and one Wesley Conner finished the bridge across the now-receded Gunnison River just south of the Palisades in January of 1875.

Only some twenty-odd people, scattered over a twenty-five mile radius, stayed in the Gunnison Valley during the winter of 1874-75. Of the group which had started out from Denver in April, only Richardson remained. All the rest had abandoned the colony or had returned to Denver for the winter. Among the twenty were a Yates and Greenwood, first settlers on the Tomichi;[20] Alonzo Hartman, James Kelley, and Sidney Jocknick at the Ute cattle camp not far from the juncture of the Tomichi and Gunnison Rivers; Charles Tingueley and Joe Dixon from Trinidad; Valentine Schmeck and Jesse Benton, instrumental in setting up the sawmill; James Mowbrey, Fred Pfefer and George Towers, prospectors who wintered over; and the indomitable Richardson. As the wind whistled through the Gunnison Valley and temperatures dropped to twenty-five below zero, the twenty stalwarts huddled in their drafty log cabins and waited for the spring of 1875 to dawn.

Alas, 1875 was a time of trial in the Gunnison country. When Richardson returned to Denver in April to bring back the old settlers, only three returned with him — Tom Griffith

19 *Ibid.*

20 *Ibid.*, June 5, 1880, p. 1. Little is known of Yates and Greenwood. They evidently were not members of the Richardson colony of 1874. Richardson first met them while transporting the sawmill from Trinidad to the Gunnison country in November of 1874. His only mention of the two men was: "here we found two men who had actually settled and made improvements—Mr. Yates and Mr. Greenwood—who prided themselves in being the first settlers of the Tumitchi Valley, which they were in fact."

and the Outcalt brothers, John and William. However, several new pioneers cast their lots with the Gunnison country, helping to fill the void caused by the loss of the old settlers. August Mergleman settled ten miles to the west of Richardson's settlement on the Gunnison River; John Cox and John Doyle settled on the upper Tomichi to the east; and William and George Yule entered the Gunnison Valley with a herd of horses in August planning to make a living by raising the animals.

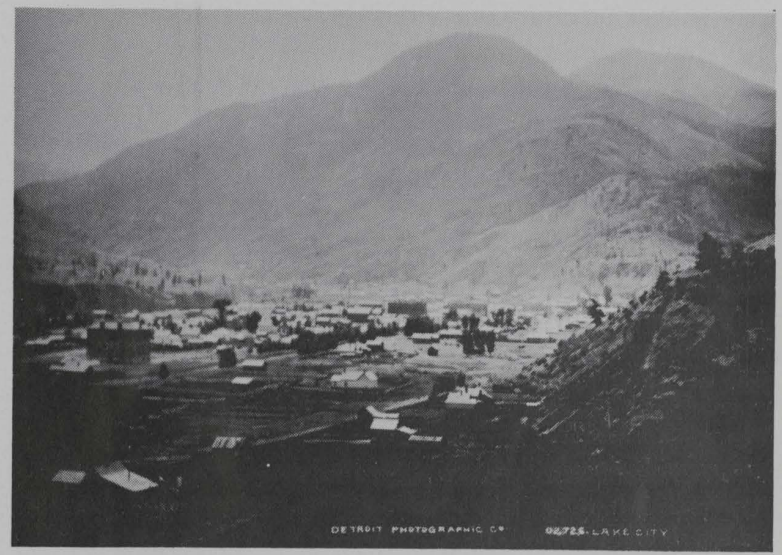
Yet, the close of 1875 found the Gunnison country without any increase in population and with little hope of any in the future. The great San Juan region was now the center of attraction, "and a number of the leading characters at Saguache, fearing that if Gunnison should become the center of attraction . . . they would be cut off by nearer routes to the east . . . told numerous lies, and were prodigious in their endeavors to make emigrants to the Gunnison believe that to get there they must go to Lake City and then they would be on the Gunnison.[21] Saguache merchants also exaggerated the snowfall and cold weather of the Gunnison Valley and emphasized that the settlement was on Ute land and frequently subjected to attack by the Indians. More trouble came in July when high water took out the very valuable bridge across the Gunnison. To make matters even worse, Valentine Schmeck was forced to shut down his sawmill in mid-summer for lack of business. As 1875 passed into history, gray clouds appeared on the Gunnison horizon.

The spring of 1876 found the Gunnison country nearly deserted. Most emigrants were continuing to by-pass the region for the Ouray and Lake City booms to the southwest. The Schmeck sawmill on Mill Creek was sold and moved to Lake City where it did a thriving business. In June, the Crooke brothers of Lake City leased Richardson's Mount Carbon coal mine up Ohio Creek and shipped large quantities of the coal to their smelting works, sixty-five miles away.[22] This proved

21 *Ibid.*, June 12, 1880, p. 1.

22 *Ibid.*, June 19, 1880, p. 1. Richardson had discovered the coal deposits in 1873, not far from present-day Baldwin while on the Parsons expedition. During the summer of 1874, he determined to make a more extensive study of the deposits near the head of Ohio Creek. However, due to a severe back injury incurred while unloading timber, he was unable to make the study. In his absence, Richardson sent William Clark, who located the Mount Carbon coal mine. The Gunnison Coal Company was immediately formed to take advantage of the rich deposits but soon failed for want of adequate funds. Pearl Casey, in the *Gunnison News-Champion* of July 20, 1939, declared that the Crooke brothers hauled 300 tons of coal overland to the Lake City smelter in 1876.

to be a double blessing for the Gunnison country because it necessitated the building of a good wagon road from the coal banks to White Earth, forty-five miles to the south near where Del Dorado Creek entered White Earth Creek (Cebolla Creek today). Unfortunately, due to bad management and a change in the smelting process at Lake City, the mine was shut down before summer turned to fall. The new road proved a boon, however, allowing ranchers to haul hay and surplus produce to Lake City at a substantial profit.



Lake City, Gunnison's San Juan neighbor and promising silver camp, photographed by famed William H. Jackson during the boom years. Courtesy, State Historical Society of Colorado.

Alonzo Hartman and James Kelley, veterans of the Ute cattle camp, started their previously mentioned small store at Dos Rios ("two rivers") on the Hartman homestead in 1876 in the hope that the Gunnison country would soon grow. "At that time there was no thought of a town and the only customers who came to the little wayside store were the ranchmen and Indians with occasionally a prospector who had wandered into the region."[23] The Gunnison post office, with Hartman as

23 *Gunnison News*, Industrial Edition, March, 1900, p. 13.

postmaster, was located at the small store during the summer.[24] Through rain, snow, and sleet, Alonzo Hartman trekked the twenty-eight miles to White Earth once a week to pick up the mail which came in by wagon or snowshoe from Saguache. Although 1876 was not a vintage year, the Gunnison country did receive some prominent new settlers. Ed Teachout and Amby Hinkle settled in the Ohio Creek Valley and Robert Stubbs started ranching south of Gunnison near the gulch that today bears his name.

Colorado proudly entered the Union as the Centennial state in August of 1876, and during the following winter, the legislature organized massive Gunnison County. The new county was cut out of Lake County and made up a whopping 10,600 square miles of land. The new governmental unit extended from the Continental Divide in the east to the Utah border in the west. As the Western Slope developed during the 1880's, Gunnison County was cut down to a more reasonable size. Pitkin County was carved out of the northern sector in 1881 and Montrose, Delta, and Mesa Counties further reduced the Gunnison unit in 1883. Today, containing 3,000 square miles, Gunnison County is still one of the state's largest.

Governor John Routt designated Gunnison as county seat during the winter of 1876-77, and the following spring, appointed a full slate of county officers. Among the first officials appointed were David Smith, county judge; S. B. Harvey, county clerk; Amby Hinkle, sheriff; James Kelley, treasurer; with Lyman Cheeney and W. W. Outcalt as county commissioners. The first town company naturally followed the organization of the county in the spring of 1877. The company was destined to be short-lived; a lack of finances, management, and people spelled its doom before the year had ended. Richardson built the first cabin on town company land, "the lonely appearance of which for the next year and a half caused many queer remarks and much jesting by people coming to Gunnison, who could only see one rude-unfinished, unoccupied cabin, when they expected to find the town of Gunnison, which was so plainly marked on the map of Colorado."[25] In October, the first county election was held. John Parlin, a dairyman from Maine who settled at

24 *Remembrances of Pioneer Days in the Gunnison Country*, p. 72. Kelley and Hartman dissolved their partnership in late 1876 with Kelley retaining the little store and Hartman getting the former's cattle, "as he [Kelley] didn't like the business."

25 *Gunnison Review*, June 19, 1880, p. 1.

the juncture of the Tomichi and Quartz Creeks, Jack Howe, for whom Howeville or Jack's Cabin was named, and J. A. Preston were elected county commissioners. Kelley and Harvey retained their jobs as treasurer and clerk, and George Yule completed the important slate of officers by winning election as sheriff.

Despite the San Juan excitement which continued unabated in 1877, more ranchers continued to filter into the Gunnison country. In addition to John Parlin, C. E. Crooks settled on the Tomichi ten miles east of Parlin's ranch, and P. T. Stevens settled on the Gunnison, ten miles west of the townsite.

An invasion of grasshoppers during the fall of 1877 threatened the very existence of the Gunnison settlement. The dangerous insects destroyed all the fall crops and laid eggs which, when hatched the following year, destroyed all the crops again. Chief Ouray told Richardson that the grasshoppers were the first he had seen in Colorado in eleven years.[26]

Grasshoppers were not the only menace Gunnison country ranchers had to contend with. Isolation, the unknown, and few resources made ranching a deadly enterprise during the early years. Without a railroad, surrounded by high and dangerous mountains, hampered by bad roads, few good bridges, high water, massive snows, and incredible cold, the farmer and rancher struggled for survival during the 1870's. Willows and sage brush covering the bottom and mesa lands were cleared, irrigation ditches were plowed and dug, fences were built, and huge barns and cattle sheds were constructed. Soon, as if by magic, hay and grain fields and large herds of cattle appeared all over the valleys of the Gunnison country. Early day crops of grain were threshed by the primitive flail or tramping, but as the grain fields grew in size and number, threshing machines were brought in. Rancher Matt Arch's six-horse thresher, used in 1887, was the first in the Gunnison country.

The year 1877 closed with a gloomy outlook staring the Gunnison country in the face. The prospect of a full crop of grasshoppers in 1878, the continuing San Juan and Ouray excitements, and no indication of any business activity "proved the most discouraging of any year since the first settlement was made by the old colony."[27]

26 *Ibid.*

27 *Ibid.*

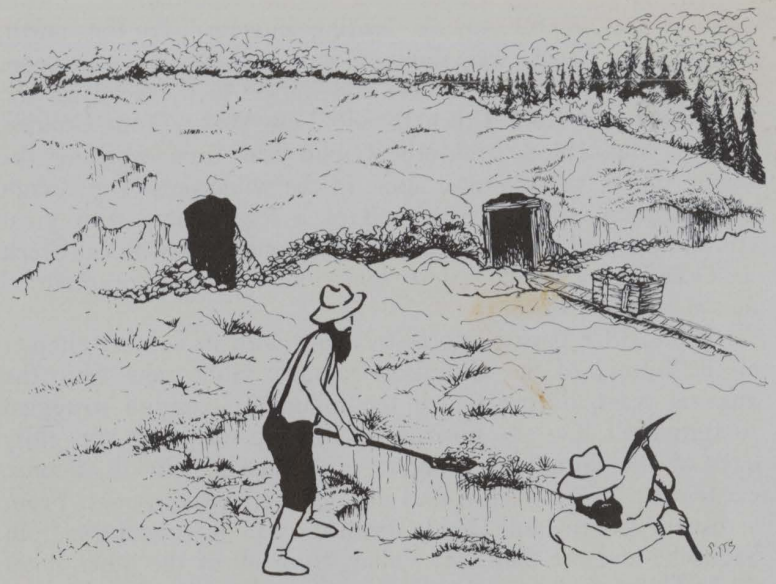
The winter of 1877-78 brought an omen of better things to come in the Gunnison country. Warm and pleasant weather prevailed throughout and spring appeared early. During the winter, a preliminary survey was made for a proposed Mount Carbon, Gunnison and Lake City Railroad with Gunnison rumored as the headquarters. However, by 1878, the San Juan boom began to ebb and the plans were scrapped. East of the the Continental Divide, below majestic Mount Massive, the carbonate camp called Leadville began to boom in 1878 with reverberations felt throughout all Colorado. The great rush to Leadville had a major effect on the Gunnison country. As early as 1878, a sprinkling of miners spilled over the Divide, flushed with the hope of attaining great wealth. The following year, the Leadville boom foreshadowed the great rush to the Gunnison country. For, if major strikes had been made east of the Divide, and in the San Juans to the southwest, was it not logical to assume that the Gunnison country, in the middle of these two great mineral regions, held great wealth too?

Hauling ore down to the smelter in 1885 in the northern regions of the Gunnison country. Collection of Mrs. Loel Carr.

Already in 1878, mining activity had increased in the Gunnison country, led by those who were eager to be in on the ground floor when the expected strikes took place. Colonel William F. Hall, a top newspaperman, sensing a rush, came to Gunnison from Lake City in the spring of 1878, and soon

became one of the town's leading citizens. To the north, Washington Gulch was showing increased activity and more claim work. Additional miners had moved to the heads of the East River and Rock Creek to join Lew Waite, Tom Croider, Dudley McLochton, and others who had been working the region for six years, almost alone in the wilderness. The Rough and Ready Company, composed of a few miners with great enthusiasm and little capital, moved south from Rock Creek to O-Be-Joyful Creek where sensational finds were reported at the close of 1878.

Thus, 1878 passed into history and with it, another chapter of the history of the Gunnison country. Gone now were the anxious years, during which the mountain paradise struggled to find itself. On the horizon as 1879 opened were the glory days of the Gunnison country — expansion, growth, booms, excitement, great wealth, and even greater expectations. From across the Continental Divide, from the San Juan country, from Saguache and the San Luis Valley, from all of the other states of the Union, and from foreign countries they came — all roads led to the Gunnison country as spring made its entry in 1879.



CHAPTER IV

HO FOR THE GUNNISON

Like a giant locomotive gathering steam, the rush to the Gunnison country started slowly in 1879 before assuming crescendo proportions in 1880. Ute Indians, extreme weather conditions, and the Leadville and San Juan excitements had allowed the Gunnison country to bask in splendid isolation before 1879, but now those conditions had changed. The Utes had been forced to give up much of their land, the weather was said to be no worse than that in the San Juans, and many prospectors, disgusted because most of the good mining land had been staked out in Leadville and the San Juans, spilled over into the Gunnison country.

The initial rush to the Gunnison country in 1879 was not a massive migration which filled up the entire country — it was rather concentrated in six major regions which held out the promise of great wealth. Taylor Park, a high mountain valley, thirty miles long, ten miles wide, and well over 9,000 feet in elevation, was one of the first districts to lure prospectors into the Gunnison country. Located across the Continental Divide and accessible by Lake, Cottonwood, and Tin Cup Passes from

the east, the park had been visited briefly nearly twenty years earlier by the Jim Taylor and Fred Lottis parties. When the placer gold was exhausted, the miners moved out of Taylor Park and wrote it off as an important mining region. However, by late 1878, the Leadville excitement led miners to believe

Hardy miners loaded up and ready to move out to the mines above Taylor Park in the early 1880's. Courtesy, State Historical Society of Colorado.

that silver, rather than gold, might exist in great quantities across the Divide.

The quest for silver brought prospectors swarming over the mountains and into Taylor Park during the late spring of 1879. A reporter for the ROCKY MOUNTAIN NEWS declared: "During the last week of my stay in Leadville it seemed as if the whole town were going to 'the Gunnison,' and the day I left I counted not less than fifty outfits headed for that country."[1] Two promising towns immediately sprang up in the park only two and a half miles apart. Hillerton was located on Willow Creek by a party led by Edwin Hiller of Denver. By mid-summer the town had a post office, sawmill, 1,000,000 pounds of freight, and a nearly-completed smelter. Two and a half miles away to the south, also on Willow Creek, Virginia City rivaled its booming neighbor. The town filled up with 2,000 miners during the summer, but the fierce winter which hit early that year sent all but 150 fleeing black across the Continental Divide.

Areas adjacent to Taylor Park were also affected by the rush of '79. After some preliminary investigations along Quartz Creek during the fall of 1878, a party from Lake City, led by Frank Curtis, returned in the spring of 1879, and located a townsite which was appropriately named Quartzville for the quartz found in the vicinity. When assays on some of the ore samples ran as high as $2,000, two lodes — the Red Jacket and Seventy-Six — were quickly located. "The news of the discoveries spread like wildfire, and parties of men are coming in hourly from every quarter," reported the ROCKY MOUNTAIN NEWS.[2] Quartzville was soon renamed Pitkin in honor of Governor Frederick Pitkin and became one of the Gunnison country's most important towns.

Sixteen miles west of Hillerton on Spring Creek another exciting little camp started blooming during the continuing, pell-mell rush of 1879. Spring Creek mining camp welcomed its first prospectors as early as 1876, but the stark, forbidding region where six lives were snuffed out by Ute Indians in 1859 was enough to keep out all but the stout-hearted in the years that followed. The little camp was given a major boost in 1879 by Leadville prospectors who crossed Lake Pass, resisted the urge of Taylor Park, and continued west to locate

1 *Rocky Mountain News*, May 28, 1879, p. 4.
2 *Ibid.*, May 22, 1879, p. 4.

one of the great mines of the Gunnison country — the Doctor. The estimated 300 miners in Spring Creek City during 1879 deserted the camp and scampered for cover in early November when the fiery blasts of winter blew in.

Further north, at the entrance of the rugged Elk Mountains, news of two great silver discoveries quickened the hearts of eager prospectors across the Continental Divide. Gothic, at the juncture of East River and Copper Creek, and Ruby, located to the west, in the midst of the dark Ruby Range, soon attained great prominence among mining men in the Rocky Mountains. The silver searchers reached the Gothic region in May and June of 1879, and in a small meadow protected by majestic Gothic Mountain, laid out their town. By July, Gothic was alive with excitement as tents and newly constructed cabins appeared out of nowhere. Though its 9,400 foot elevation and violent winter weather scared off most of the prospectors by November, Gothic's reputation as a promising mining camp foreshadowed a great rush during the spring of 1880.

Ruby was reached by hastily constructed wagon roads over Ohio Pass from the south and from the Coal Creek camp of Crested Butte to the east. One hundred and twenty prospectors attacked the Ruby Range as early as May in 1879. Although the Ruby Chief was the first mine located, the Forest Queen and Ruby King, Ruby's most famous and productive properties, were not discovered until July. Although Ruby was potentially the richest town in the Gunnison country, it also appeared to be the least fortunate. The fledgling town and its mines were inside the Ute Indian reservation as established by the Treaty of 1868. That meant that the miners were trespassers and that any land titles or mining claims would be invalid. The illegal location also made Ruby a very dangerous place in which to live.

Near the headwaters of Tomichi Creek as it began its winding descent toward a union with the Gunnison River, was the last great mining region hit by the rush of 1879. White Pine, Tomichi, and North Star all sprang up within four miles of each other during the spring of 1879 to take advantage of rich lead and silver carbonates near the surface of the land. Old rotting sluice boxes, rusted miners' tools, and remains of diggings found by the onrushing miners showed they were not the original pioneers of the region. The miners of 1879 came from Monarch Camp, scrambling up a small branch of

the South Arkansas River and crossing the Continental Divide over today's Old, Old Monarch Pass.[3] On the west side, as spring brought life again to the Gunnison country, they built White Pine, North Star, and Tomichi. As in all other mining sections of the Gunnison country in 1879, the ominous threat of winter high in the Rocky Mountains forced most of the miners to leave by November.

Junction City, later renamed Garfield, on the east side of Monarch Pass, in 1883. Many settlers of the Gunnison country crossed the Continental Divide just to the west during the exciting days of 1879-1880. Courtesy, Denver Public Library.

In the midst of all the excitement during 1879, two towns not directly affected by the rush, quietly bided their time and waited for the spring of 1880. Crested Butte, the gateway to the Elk Mountains, and Gunnison, strategically located at the juncture of the Gunnison and Tomichi Rivers, were destined to become the two most important towns in the Gunnison country, even though neither were directly dependent upon gold or silver.

Crested Butte was the jumping off point for parties moving into the rugged Elk Mountains. The town first sprang up as a struggling camp in 1878, serving as a way-station for miners

3 Marshall Sprague, *The Great Gates,* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1964), p. 250.

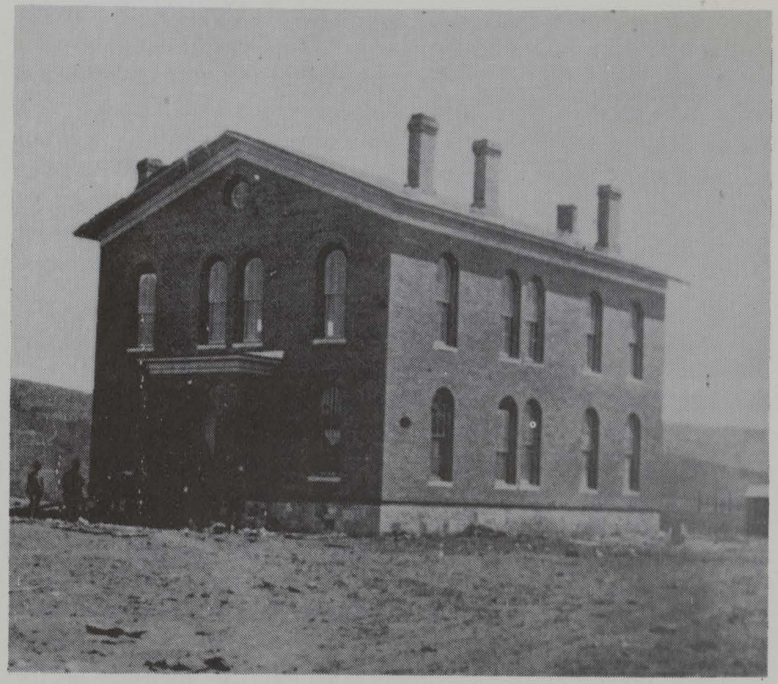
en route to the surrounding mountains. Howard F. Smith of the Iowa Mining and Smelting Company, hearing of rich strikes in the Elks, excitedly crossed the Continental Divide from Leadville in 1878, bringing with him the first sawmill of the Slate River Valley. The mill proved more valuable than all the metal in the region because the miners needed lumber desperately for mine props and cabins. Smith was the first to realize that Crested Butte was destined for great things because of its location, and also because of phenomenal anthracite and bituminous coal deposits in the vicinity.

Sylvester Richardson's Gunnison, which had been struggling for survival since 1874, finally began to assume its status as the metropolis of the Gunnison country in 1879. Richardson in 1880 reminisced: "Thousands rushed in and prospecting went on on such a scale as was never seen before. The country filled up rapidly, and now that there was no longer any doubt as to Gunnison becoming a business point, measures were taken to organize an entire new town company . . . ."[4] The major routes of entry into the Gunnison country — Marshall Pass and Cochetopa Pass across the Continental Divide, and the Lake City road which provided access from the San Juans — all led to Gunnison.[5] Gunnison eagerly awaited the melting of the snows during the spring of 1880. Then it could achieve its station as the major supply and smelting center of the Gunnison country.

The rush of 1879 came to an end in the Gunnison country as November arrived. The days became shorter, the rain turned to snow, and the temperatures plummeted to numbing levels. Without good roads, handicapped by few supplies, and unequipped to work little developed mines in the deep snow and freezing cold, the miners recrossed the Continental Divide and headed home. Yet, home was really in the Gunnison country now and the exodus would be but a brief one. The

4 *Gunnison Review,* June 19, 1880, p. 1.

5 The Lake City road referred to was a branch off Enos Hotchkiss' Saguache-Lake City Toll Road built in 1874. The branch ran from Gunnison past the present airport and angled southwest along the foothills of the Gunnison River. The road swung further away from the river and headed south at Willow Creek until it came to Big Springs near today's Nine Mile Hill. From there, the road followed the route of present Highway 149 until it reached a point near today's old Powderhorn Post Office. From there, the road ran west to "The Gate" and then swung south to again parallel present Highway 149 into Lake City. William M. Brown, "The History of the Cebolla-Powderhorn Country," (Unpublished Master's Thesis, Western State College, 1935), p. 11.



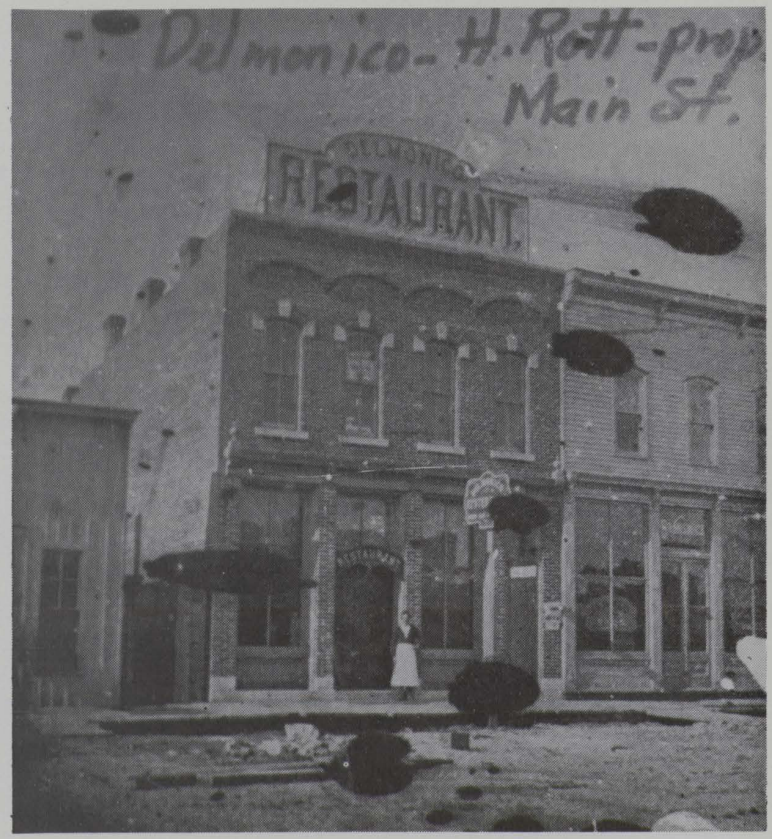
Gunnison Courthouse shortly after construction in 1881. Notice the rather isolated appearance of the structure then. Collection of Bruce Hartman.

groundwork had been laid for the development of the Gunnison country by the rush of '79. During that brief, exciting, uncertain time, approximately 10,000 prospectors flocked into the Gunnison country hoping to hit their own private bonanzas.[6] Frank Fossett, caught up in the excitement of the '79 migration

6 Accurate figures on the total number of people who ventured into the Gunnison country in 1879 are almost impossible to arrive at. Only one newspaper, the *Hillerton Occident,* was in publication then and few travelers or prospectors wrote accounts of their wanderings in the Gunnison country. The *Chicago Inter-Ocean,* with no reporters in the region, wildly declared: "It is estimated that during the summer of 1878 and 1879 nearly twenty thousand prospectors visited the Gunnison . . . . "Robert Strahorn, a reporter for the *New York World,* who did cover the rush of 1880, looked back on the year previous and wrote: "In the spring of 1879 the famed Gunnison rush began with 20,000 men participating in discoveries at Ruby Camp, Gothic, Crested Butte, Tin Cup, Hillerton, Roaring Forks and other camps." The author believes the 20,000 figure was based on rumor and that it is too high. Based on the poor roads which ran into the Gunnison country, the early winter which prevented latecomers from entering, and the fact that Gunnison did not grow substantially as a supply center in 1879, the author believes that the actual number of people in the Gunnison country in that year was closer to 10,000.

and the prospect of an even greater rush in 1880, wrote that the Gunnison country "has been the scene of a great mining excitement. The rush that set in there late in the spring from Leadville compared with the wildest previous stampedes." He continued: "one thing is evident, mineral veins have been found. How rich or important they will prove remains to be seen."[7]

During the winter of 1879-80, "Gunnison country" was on the lips of prospectors all over the United States. Eastern newspapers were filled with glowing reports of the new

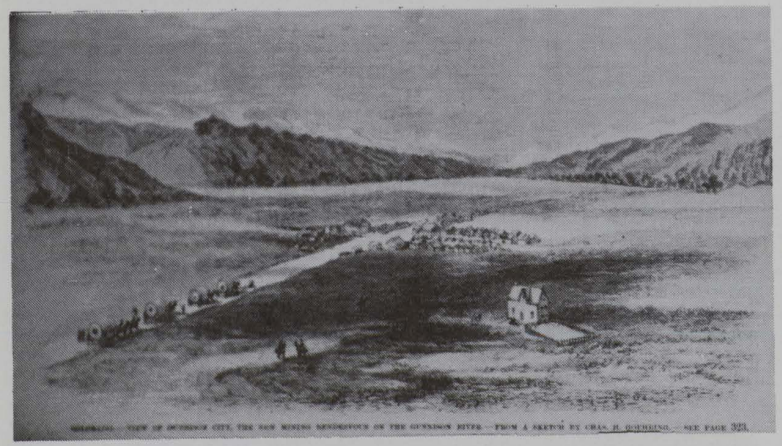


The famous and early Delmonico Restaurant on the Main Street of Gunnison in 1880. Collection of Bruce Hartman.

7 Frank Fossett, *Colorado: Its Gold and Silver Mines,* (New York: C. G. Crawford, Printer and Stationer, 1879), p. 501.

"Leadville" of the West, and appetites of both capitalist and poor man were whetted. "Following as it did the Leadville boom, report of the new Eldorado received wide and easy credence. The fame of Gunnison spread from coast to coast."[8] In Colorado and the West, prospectors were afflicted with a fever that can only be brought on by great expectations. Available maps were pored over, men who knew anything about the Gunnison country were interviewed, mining tools and supplies were purchased, and routes of travel memorized. Like a boy about to go to the circus for the first time, every miner was ready long before the Gunnison country would permit visitors. A reporter for the DENVER REPUBLICAN wrote:

> "To the Gunnison" is the all absorbing subject of thought and talk in Denver as well as on the remotest borders of the country, just now, and one is almost inclined to believe that if only one half of those go who build castles in the air about the Gunnison, or in other words, are talking about taking up claims there as soon as spring opens, there will be such a rush that the country cannot hold them. At all events the Gunnison excitement is the prevailing epidemic at present . . . .[9]



A romanticized view of Gunnison during the mad rush of 1880. Courtesy, Denver Public Library.

8 Alice S. Spencer, "Newspapers in Gunnison County, 1879-1900," (Unpublished Master's Thesis, Western State College, 1932), p. 1.

9 *Denver Republican,* February 28, 1880, p. 4.

The DENVER REPUBLICAN's comments were echoed by the COLORADO SPRINGS GAZETTE which enthusiastically stated: "From what we see and hear, we have reason to believe the wild rush for Pike's Peak in '59 is likely to be repeated this spring with Gunnison County as the objective point."[10]

Like water bursting through a weakened dam, thousands of prospectors swarmed across the Continental Divide and into the Gunnison country as early as March in 1880. Many were the routes they followed coming in. Many of the miners launched frontal assaults on the Continental Divide from the Eastern Slope. Some of the prospectors left Twin Lakes on the eastern side of the Divide and crossed steep and rugged Lake Pass at 12,226 feet, descending into Taylor Park by following Red Mountain Creek. Others left Buena Vista along the Arkansas River and followed Cottonwood Creek as it fell eastward from the top of the Divide. At the top they crossed beautiful Cottonwood Pass and descended into Taylor Park following Pass Creek and Bull Gulch for most of the downward trek. Further to the south, still another road was followed across the Divide and into the massive park to the west. Prospectors heading for Virginia City or Hillerton scorned roundabout Lake and Cottonwood Passes and instead, used the more direct Tin Cup Pass. These parties followed the Chalk Creek Valley around the south side of towering, 14,000 foot Mount Princeton before reaching north Chalk Creek and moving with it to near the top of the pass. The Tin Cup Pass trail then descended along East Willow Creek into Virginia City.

For those desiring entry into the Quartz Creek Valley, slightly lower but equally rugged passes created a formidable barrier. Instead of following the north fork of Chalk Creek into Taylor Park, Quartz Creek prospectors wheeled south at St. Elmo and followed main Chalk Creek. Moving past the thriving mining town of Romley, the prospectors soon turned west and crossed Altman's Pass at 12,000 feet. This pass, under which the famed Alpine Tunnel was built in 1881, led the miners to middle Quartz Creek which they followed into Pitkin. A few prospectors crossed over Williams Pass just south and east of the Altman crossing and then also followed westerly flowing middle Quartz Creek into the midst of the Quartz Creek Valley.

10 *Colorado Springs Gazette,* April 11, 1880, p. 4.

The supply town of Saguache, seventy miles southeast of Gunnison, in the very early days. Courtesy, State Historical Society of Colorado.

The easiest, though longest route into the Gunnison country, was over Cochetopa Pass which crossed the Continental Divide at 10,032 feet. The route took prospectors on a wide sweeping arc from South Arkansas City (today's Salida) south over Otto Mears' Poncha Pass road to Saguache, a major supply center and jumping off point to the Gunnison country.[11] From Saguache, the traveler angled south and west over Cochetopa Pass, a low lying depression through the Continental Divide, which had been crossed earlier by Ute Indians and Spaniards, as well as by Antoine Robidoux, John Fremont, and John Gunnison. From the top of the pass, the road generally followed a Cochetopa Creek-Tomichi Creek drainage into Gunnison.

The great roadbuilder of Colorado, Otto Mears, was responsible for still another pass road into the Gunnison country. Because he foresaw an impending rush to the new mining region, Mears in 1878, ran a branch off his Poncha Pass road five miles

11 Alamosa was also a large supply center because of the Denver Rio Grande Railroad which arrived in 1878. However, freight from that valley town still had to pass through Saguache en route to Gunnison. The roads from South Arkansas City and Alamosa to Saguache were both maintained rather well. From Alamosa to Gunnison via Saguache and Cochetopa Pass was 135 miles. From South Arkansas City to Gunnison via Poncha Pass, Saquache and Cochetopa Pass was 125 miles. There is little doubt that most of the migrants who entered the Gunnison country from Leadville, Denver, or Pueblo in 1880 came over the South Arkansas-Saguache-Cochetopa Pass route. *Saguache Chronicle,* May 1, 1880, p. 1.

south of South Arkansas City and hacked out the winding Marshall Pass Toll Road which crossed the Divide at 10,846 feet. The road followed Poncha Creek on the east side and Marshall Creek on the west side until it ran into the Tomichi at the future site of Marshalltown or Sargents.

Marshall Pass had been uncovered in unusual fashion in 1873. In late November of that year, Lieutenant William Marshall, a member of the Wheeler Survey, an army sponsored expedition into the Rockies, was camped in the San Juan Mountains not far from present-day Silverton. While camped in that stunning region, Marshall came down with one of the "worst toothaches that ever befell a mortal. My mouth became so sore and swollen that I could not open it nor move my jaws."[12] Living on thin gruel and losing weight fast, Marshall desperately needed to get to the nearest dentist 350 miles distant in Denver. Starting out with packer Dave Mears (no relation to Otto), Marshall racked his brain for a quicker route to Denver than over reliable but not very direct Cochetopa Pass. From earlier observations made around Cochetopa Pass and Tomichi Creek, the army lieutenant dimly recalled a low lying depression across the Divide somewhere in the vicinity. Much searching and four days of fighting through fallen timber, heavy snow, and fierce winds finally brought Marshall and Mears to the top of the little known and barely perceptible pass. Despite blowing snow and freezing conditions, the two men remained a day and a night on top of the pass taking temperatures and barometric readings and sketching a profile of the region. Completing their scientific observations, the two rugged mountaineers started down the east side of Marshall Pass, and "at the end of the six days spent in plugging through snow and floundering over tangled logs and picking our way along untrodden paths, many times along dangerous precipices, we found ourselves in fairly open country, where the going was comparatively easy."[13]

12 Thomas Dawson, "The Godfather of Marshall Pass," *The Trail,* XIII (September, 1920), p. 9.

13 *Ibid.,* p. 9. Richard Bartlett, in his brilliant *Great Surveys of the American West,* states that: "Six days after leaving the summit they arrived in Denver ahead of their main party that was coming in by way of Cochetopa Pass." This is not correct. As stated in the text, Marshall and Mears took six days to *get off the pass* (emphasis mine) and into open country. Then, according to Marshall: "Mears and I pushed on to Denver, and, notwithstanding all the obstacles, arrived there in advance of our main party . . . ." Richard Bartlett, *Great Surveys of the American West,* (Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1962), p. 372.

Collecting toll on one of the many rugged toll roads of the Gunnison country in the 1880's. Collection of Bruce Hartman.

Marshall and Mears arrived in Denver six days ahead of the main party which was en route over Cochetopa Pass. The two men had cut 125 miles off the usual route between Denver and the San Juan area. This was of great significance to business and railroad men interested in a shorter route to the San Juan country. Thus, one of the great passes of Colorado was discovered

because of a throbbing toothache and lack of an available dentist.

The last major route into the Gunnison country crossed over Old, Old Monarch Pass at 11,523 feet in elevation.[14] This road roughly followed the South Arkansas River drainage to near the top of the pass on the Eastern Slope and stayed near curving Agate Creek into the Gunnison country on its descent. Many prospectors, anxious to be first in the race to the headwaters of Tomichi Creek in 1880, fought their way over the pass from Garfield and Monarch, foregoing the less direct Cochetopa Pass, to stake their mining claims. This mass movement created a demand for a wagon road, and in the summer of 1880 a good road was built to handle the increasing traffic into the Gunnison country.

The rugged passes along the Continental Divide exacted a heavy toll as prospectors streamed into the Gunnison country in 1880. "The winter of 1879-80 was the most severe of any ever experienced in the Gunnison country. Deep snows prevailed all over the county, and the winter not only commenced a full month earlier than usual, but it continued late the following spring, causing much inconvenience to the inhabitants . . . ."[15] The heavy snow, intense cold, and fierce winds sent many prospective miners scurrying back to the east side of the Divide. Yet, most of these hardy and never-say-die men ignored the snow, avalanches, wild and high rivers, freezing rain, muddy and almost impassable roads, Ute Indians, and the nervous fear of the unknown, to press on to bonanzas they were sure awaited them.

Miners entered the Gunnison country by every conceivable mode of transportation. Some came in via prairie schooner or wagon drawn by the trusty, if temperamental mule; others rode in on horseback; and most trudged in on foot laboriously carrying their mining tools and supplies on their backs.[16]

14 Sprague, *The Great Gates,* p. 405. Today's Monarch Pass, which is part of Highway 50, replaced Old Marshall Pass in 1939. The old road is still a good gravel road, open during summer and fall, and is located just north of the present highway. Old Monarch Pass replaced Old, Old Monarch Pass, which once served as the old wagon road, in 1922. Dr. John C. Johnson, a member of the first Western State College faculty in 1911, crossed Old, Old Monarch Pass several times after that year and states that Old, Old Monarch crossed the Continental Divide approximately one mile to the north of Old Monarch Pass. Interview with Dr. John C. Johnson, Denver, Colorado, June 22, 1971.

15 *Gunnison Review,* June 26, 1880, p. 1.

16 Betty Wallace, "Six Beans in the Wheel," (Unpublished Master's Thesis, Western State College, 1956), p. 41.

Melvin A. Deering, one of the early pioneers in the Tomichi Valley, recalled those exciting days: "people began arriving in great numbers, some on foot carrying a roll of blankets, some with a burro packed; others in wagons, in fact, every conveyance imaginable. The road was literally lined with them. They would first go to Gunnison, then scatter out over the mining regions . . . . Provisions, machinery and equipment of every kind must be hauled in on wagons drawn by horses, mules and oxen which made progress very slow . . . ."[17]

As early as late February and early March of 1880, the line of prospectors drawn to the Gunnison country lengthened. The DENVER REPUBLICAN reported:

> The spring tide of travel to the Gunnison swells . . . . They say one can't get in here, and the truth is one ought not to get in here for a month or six weeks yet. Still the fact remains that people do come here, and are likely to continue to come in constantly increasing numbers. There are not comfortable accommodations for one-half the people here now, and board is very scarce and high. There is not a mine within thirty miles of this place, and yet people come here to be in the charmed country of "the Gunnison" often without knowing where to strike out for, or what to do.[18]

Eleven days later the same paper laconically commented: "The road from here to Saguache is lined with teams bound for 'the Gunnison.' Nobody thinks of coming or going any other way, except the mail carrier, who alone goes by way of White Earth on horseback. The road between Saguache and here is quite bad now, being terribly cut up by teams transporting heavy machinery."[19]

From Parlin, on the Tomichi, a PUEBLO CHIEFTAIN correspondent looked on in disbelief as the line of migration continued to move ever westward from the Continental Divide. After counting 250 teams bound for Gunnison, Ruby, and Gothic the day before, the reporter disclosed: "One would think that there must be an end of this procession, but the end is not yet, for far away on the Saguache road, there is a long line of white wagon covers."[20]

17 Conrad Schader, *Tin Cup, Colorado*, (Denver: Lynn Publications, 1953), p. 69.
18 *Denver Republican*, March 19, 1880, p. 2.
19 *Ibid.*, March 30, 1880, p. 2.
20 Junius Henderson, et al., *Colorado: Short Stories of Its Past and Present*, (Boulder, Colorado: University of Colorado, 1927), p. 82.

Gunnison in August of 1881. The picture was taken from the top of the courthouse looking west and only shows one quarter of the town. The Gunnison Brewery is visible in the center of the picture. Collection of Bruce Hartman.

G. T. Ingham, a visitor in the Gunnison country in 1880, was also impressed with the continuing migration across the Divide. He recalled: "The greatest excitement seemed to prevail in all this section in regard to the great Gunnison country, and hundreds of miners and prospectors, on foot, and loaded down with their packs, containing blankets, tents and cooking utensils, were constantly passing, bound for Virginia City, Pitkin and Gunnison . . . ."[21]

A reporter for the SAGUACHE CHRONICLE, watching the never ending line of people swarming into the Gunnison

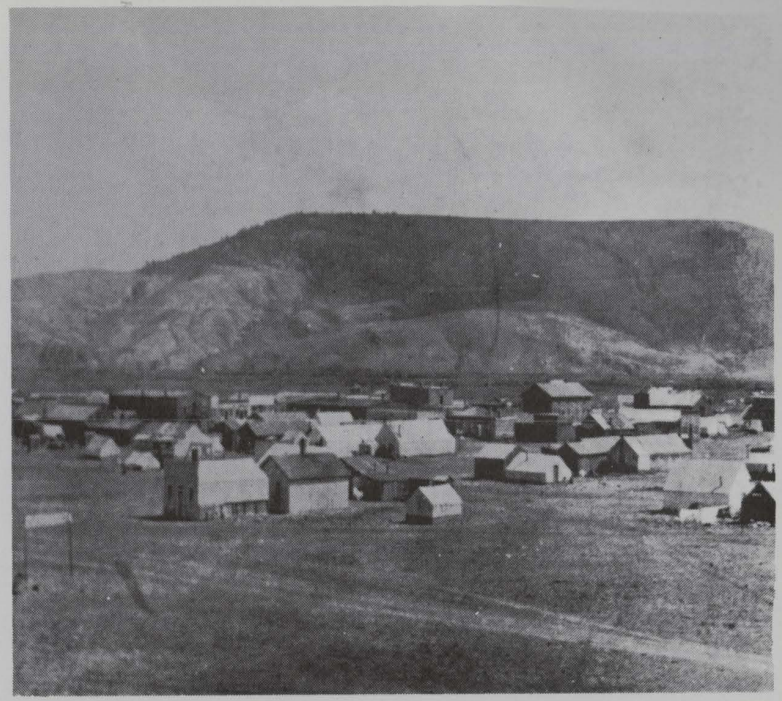
21 G. T. Ingham, *Digging Gold Among the Rockies*, (Philadelphia: Hubbard Brothers, 1888), p. 279.

country day by day during the height of the rush, was further astounded: "In seeing these pilgrims come to the mountains, one is reminded of scenes which frequently occurred during the war, that of the fleeing of the people from the advance of a victorious army. A large number of people arrive here daily. They come in all kinds of conveyances, on wagons, on horses, mules, burro's and some even on foot bringing with them women and children, dogs, cats, tents, arms and baggage of every kind, so that today Gunnison is nothing more than a field of tents, that is, there are more tents than buildings."[22]

Most of the supplies and heavy machinery needed in the mining camps of the Gunnison country were freighted in from either Saguache over Cochetopa Pass or from South Arkansas City over Marshall Pass. In Saguache, a steady stream of traffic left daily for Gunnison, giving that little town the honor of being the chief supply center for its neighbors to the northwest. The SAGUACHE CHRONICLE reported: "Fourth Street was nearly blockaded with heavy freight trains, mostly bound for the Gunnison country."[23] South Arkansas City could not compete with Saguache as a supply center, but was extremely important as a jumping off point into the Gunnison country. The Barlow and Sanderson stage ran from South Arkansas over Marshall Pass and brought a continual flow of settlers into the new El Dorado to the west. The SOUTH ARKANSAS MAIL exclaimed: "Travel to the Gunnison country is increasing rapidly. Sanderson and company sent out three coaches Thursday morning and two this morning, all loaded to capacity."[24]

N. P. Babcock, a recent arrival from New York, and new editor of the GUNNISON NEWS-DEMOCRAT in 1881, summarized the influx of thousands of people into the Gunnison country the year before. He reported: "All roads apparently led to the great Gunnison country in those stirring days of the early Eighties, following the Leadville boom in 1879. Over a tract fifty miles wide and one hundred miles long, mining camps sprang up. Prospectors and adventurers poured in via Cochetopa from the San Juan region in the south and over the South [Monarch] and Marshall Passes . . . . The city

22 *Saguache Chronicle,* May 29, 1880, p. 4.
23 *Ibid.,* July 10, 1880, p. 3.
24 *South Arkansas Mail,* June 26, 1880, p. 2.



Early day photo of Gunnison taken from the schoolhouse during the summer of 1881. Notice the pasture sign on the left portion of the photo. Collection of Bruce Hartman.

of Gunnison was to be not a second Leadville, but a second Denver."[25]

The East was also affected by the Gunnison mania. Helen Hunt Jackson, famed Western crusader and writer, exclaimed: "During . . . 1880 there were frequently to be seen in the Colorado newspapers and also in the leading ones of the Eastern States, accounts of new and wonderful discoveries of precious metals and minerals in Gunnison County, Colorado." Mrs. Jackson declared that the excitement was not so intense and sudden as that which followed the Leadville discovery, "but it was sufficient to send thousands of men swarming into the 'Gunnison country,' . . . and to bring into existence in less than a year scores of brisk, bustling, 'bonanza' mining towns.

25 N. P. Babcock, "From Park Row to Early Colorado," *Scribner's Monthly,* LXXVII (April, 1925), pp. 378-79.

'On to Gunnison,' was the cry throughout the mining population of the state."[26]

All roads led to Gunnison during the early spring months of 1880. From a sparsely populated, lonely, isolated, sagebrush hamlet containing only a small collection of log huts, board shanties, and tents, Gunnison was transformed into a roaring boom town overnight. An estimated 25,000 people crowded into the Gunnison country during the mammoth rush of 1880 and nearly all of them passed through the central point of Gunnison at some time during their travels.[27] Though Gunnison itself never had more than 2,000 residents at any one time during 1880, saloons, merchandise stores, and freighting outfits did a booming business with the transient population passing through. Between May 15 and August 15, 1880, over 200 houses went up in Gunnison, and one continually heard the refrain of the tap, tap, tap of the carpenter's hammer. "Embryo merchants, town-lot speculators, bonanza saloon men, gamblers, and the Jezebels did a flourishing business. The town was wide open and booming."[28]

"The long row of tents and the bright campfires stretching along the east bank of the Gunnison, made a spectacular panorama during the summer nights of 1880, and the continuous braying of hundreds of burros disturbed the peace of the sleep-inclined all through the night."[29] By the middle of May, at least 500 people were tenting immediately west of town with

26 Helen Hunt Jackson, "O Be-Joyful Creek and Poverty Gulch," *Atlantic Monthly,* (December, 1883), p. 754.

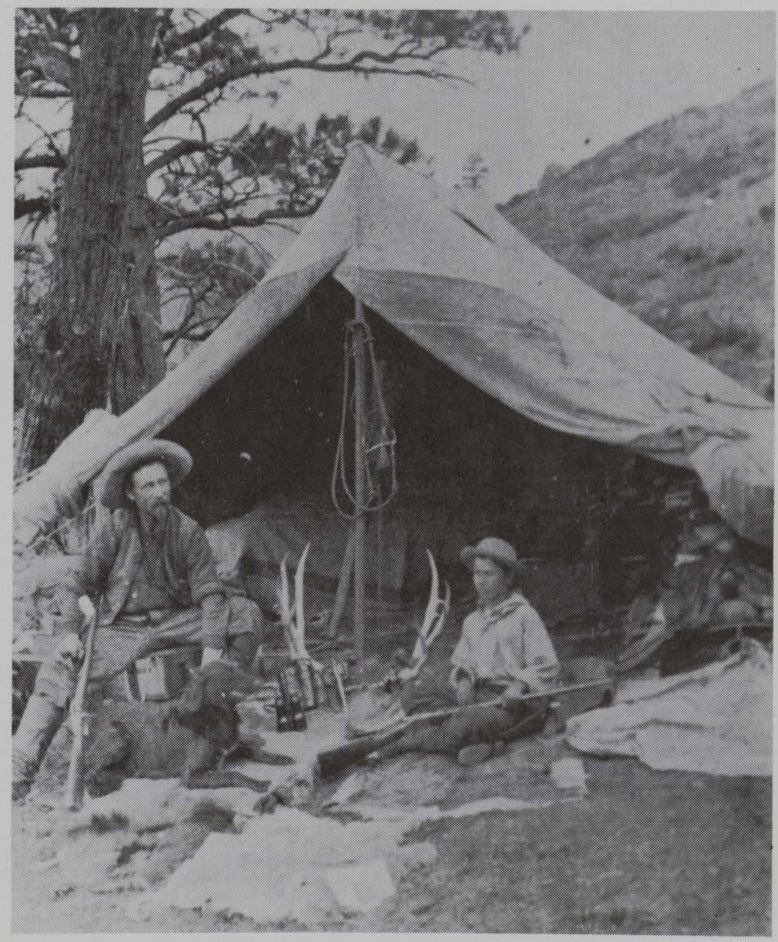
27 Athough it is impossible to correctly ascertain the number of people who entered the Gunnison country in 1880, newspaper and personal accounts indicate the number was substantial. Even allowing for inflated figures, the author believes the correct number lies somewhere in the neighborhood of 25,000. John E. Phillips, early day editor of the *Elk Mountain Pilot* of Irwin, and later, Crested Butte, looking back on the rush of 1880, supported that figure when he asked: "What could we do with 25,000 people crowded into the county, roaming up and down the valleys, climbing over the mountains, looking for something they could not find—a fortune." Frank Fossett, writing about the Gunnison Country in 1880, suggested: "nearly 40,000 people will summer in this Gunnison region, where but a few hundred passed the preceding winter." However, this was merely a guess as to what Fossett thought might occur, rather than what did, and the author believes this figure to be exaggerated. It is important to remember that the 25,000 people were scattered over a wide, area, rather than concentrated in one locality. Also noteworthy is the fact that many of the 25,000 did not stay long. "Reminiscences of the Gunnison Country," p. 80; Frank Fossett, *Colorado: Its Gold and Silver Mines,* (New York: C. G. Crawford, Printer and Stationer, 1880), p. 568.

28 M. C. Poor, *Denver, South Park and Pacific,* (Denver: Rocky Mountain Railroad Club, 1949), p. 441.

29 Class of 1916, *Historical Sketches of Early Gunnison,* (Gunnison, Colorado: The Colorado State Normal School, 1916), p. 23.

more arriving by the hour. Boston baked beans made up the staple food, selling at forty-five cents a can. Men sat along the town streets and cooked their meals over a fire between two stones while exchanging the news of the day with passers-by.

1880 marked the fulfillment of a prophecy made by the idealistic Sylvester Richardson six years previous. Gunnison, indeed, could now be compared to the hub of a wagon wheel,



Famed hunter and miner, "Oregon Bill," and young cohort at "home" in a tent near the head of the Black Canyon, not far from Sapinero. Collection of Bruce Hartman.

with roads representing the spokes running up and down the streams and through the canyons in all directions like the points of a compass. The people of the Gunnison country never doubted for a moment that they were living in one of the greatest mineral regions in the world. Ernest Ingersoll, a member of the Hayden Survey in the 1870's, and frequent visitor to the Gunnison country thereafter, remembered the optimism held by Gunnisonites who boasted:

> Why it's certain-sure the greatest country that lies outdoors. It's as big as half a dozen of your States back East. It has the richest mines of gold and silver. It has hills of coal and forests of timber. It has kingdoms of grass for cattle, empires of valleys howling and weeping to be ploughed, and rivers just ready to strike because there ain't millwheels enough (and never can be) to keep 'em busy. It has iron and clay and marble, and a climate that would make you think the islands of the blessed lay right down the creek there. And scenery? Great Jupiter! There's just scenery till you can't rest.[30]

It was a motley and eager multitude of argonauts who assembled in Gunnison waiting for the snows to melt in the spring of 1880. Many of the men showed a lack of naturalness, a forced appearance as of familiarity showed by a bride and groom on their honeymoon. One found it easy to spot the tenderfoot who stood out like a sore thumb in comparison with the veteran prospector with furrowed, sun-browned face, the always observant eyes, and the restless, impatient nature. Piles of merchandise were scattered everywhere and the owners discussed new discoveries and inquired about the best way to reach the outlying camps which were blocked off by mud, slush, and snow. Furniture and beer barrels, canned goods and iron safes, clothing, tents, giant powder, ox teams and mule teams, horses and donkeys, and men — "some in their shirt sleeves, others in heavy ulsters, merchants and doctors, lawyers and prospectors, adventurers and tramps, a hustling, untiring mass — formed such a picture as is seen but once in a lifetime and when seen remains in the memory forever."[31]

30 Ernest Ingersoll, "The Gunnison Country," *The Manhattan,* II (May, 1884), p. 405.

31 T. J. Forhan, "Reminiscences of Ruby Camp," *Camp and Plant,* No. 36 (January 9, 1904), p. 606.

The Buck Hose Company, financed by Elisa Buck, Gunnison businessman, on Gunnison's Main Street in 1882. Collection of Bruce Hartman.

The miner was always extremely independent and his own man in the early days of the Gunnison country. Thousands came into Gunnison and surrounding towns, not to stay, but merely to obtain supplies and then move on into gulches, ravines, and mountains in their relentless search for precious metal. Ernest Ingersoll, familiar with the habits and characteristics of the miner of the Gunnison country, wrote:

> Hundreds of men come to the town with the approach of warm weather, buy a small stock of provisions, take them upon their back or pack them on a donkey, and disappear, bound for the lonely mountains. No one knows them, and the cases are few where any one is remembered well enough to be recognized a week later. If they get back all safe in the fall they merely pass through town on their way out; if they do not return nobody notices it. Moreover, it does not follow because a man is a resident in a mining centre — a man of humble rank socially, I mean, a laborer — that he is

missed if he disappears. It is his habit to go away and come back again; nobody knows him except on the street, or in the brief companionship of some job-work, and nobody cares. [If the miner was struck down by a snowslide, and many were, the chances were that his body would lay hidden until spring] . . . but that no curiosity will be aroused as to his disappearance from his usual haunts. Furthermore, when he is found, it is very likely no one can identify him by more than a name, as to whose genuineness no evidence exists.[32]

A name like "Frenchy," "Reddy," or "Three-fingers" would be all that anybody could remember concerning the unfortunate miner. Though men in Gunnison country mining camps formed real friendships, no questions were asked concerning one's background. "In fact each takes it for granted that the other (like himself) has much to conceal, and would very likely lie about his history if he were asked questions."[33] When the miner volunteered a name, the assumption was that it was a false one. "So, returning to original methods, comrades apply a term that expresses some characteristic, and by that only is a man known to those who meet and drink and fight with him during his transitory sojourn in their locality."[34]

The heavy snows which hit the Gunnison country in November officially ended the rush of 1880. The wild, irrational and exciting days came to a temporary halt as most miners beat a hasty retreat across the Continental Divide to avoid the rigors of a mountain winter. Others, more hardy types, stocked in supplies and prepared to hibernate until spring dawned anew in 1881.

There are many reasons, some rational and some irrational, to explain the massive migration which shocked the Gunnison country in 1880. There is no doubt that the increased lack of opportunity for individual prospectors in Leadville after 1879 sent many argonauts winging west to have a look at the increasingly acclaimed mining region across the Divide. With most of the good-looking land claimed, and with increased capital and equipment needed to mine the ore, the lone

32 Ingersoll, "The Gunnison Country," p. 571.
33 *Ibid.*, pp. 571-72.
34 *Ibid.*, p. 572.

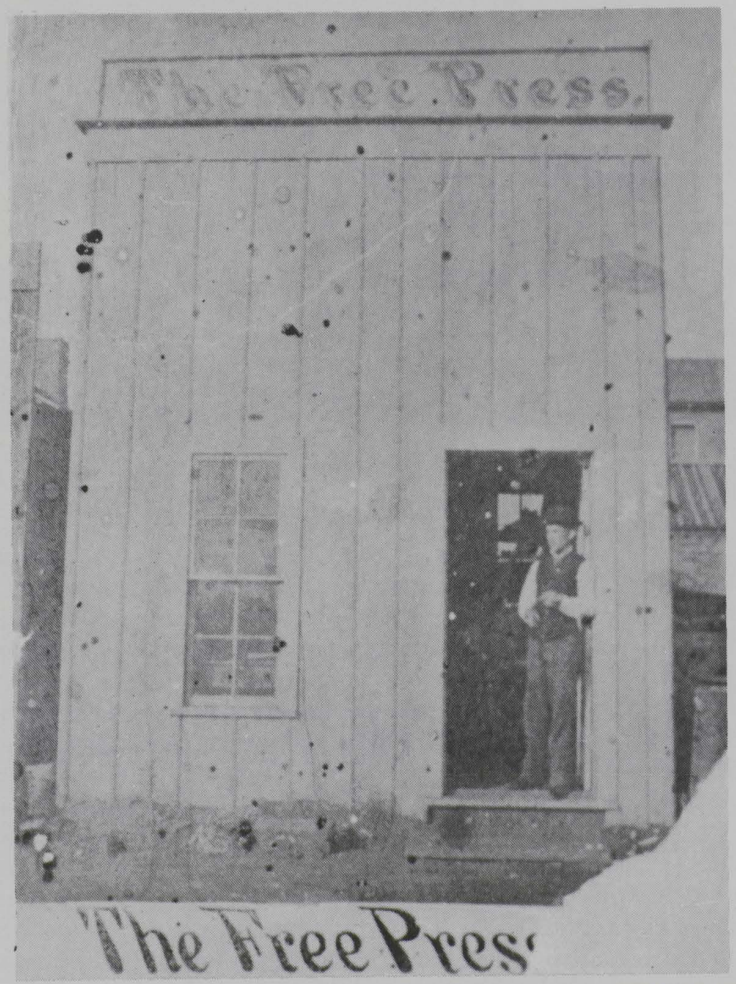
prospector realized he was on his way out in Leadville. Throughout the history of the West this had always been the way it was. With few regrets, the prospector gathered his tools and supplies and struck west, over the Divide. There, he had heard, was a rich, virgin mining land, even greater than that of Leadville. To hell with Leadville — Ho for the Gunnison!

Gunnison from Smelter Hill looking west in 1886. Visible on the left of the picture is the Moffet Smelter. Collection of Bill Mauer.

The miners who entered the Gunnison country in 1879-80 were not unaware that the region was located on a direct line between Leadville and the rich San Juan mining district. If precious metal existed in great quantity in those two regions, then there was a very good chance it also existed in the area in between. As usual, the miner's instinct was good, even if his rationality was not. Today, geologists have determined that almost all of the mining districts in Colorado are clustered in a generally narrow but somewhat irregular strip of land that extends southwest across the state from the mountains near Boulder to the San Juans near Durango. This strip is known as the Colorado Mineral Belt and has been the source of more than $3,000,000,000 in gold, silver, lead, zinc, tungsten, fluorspar, and molybdenum. The curving mineral belt contains all the major mineral mining districts of Colorado, including the Gunnison country, with the exception of some uranium

districts near the western border and a few gold-silver regions localized at isolated volcanic centers such as Cripple Creek and Silver Cliff.[35] When veteran mining men heard of strikes in the Quartz Creek Valley, Rock Creek, and Taylor Park in the late 1870's, their suspicions were confirmed — rich pockets of wealth **did** exist in the Gunnison country.

Then there was the psychology of the miner as another reason for the rush over the Continental Divide. The miner



A very old picture of one of Gunnison's earliest papers, THE FREE PRESS, in 1882. Collection of Bruce Hartman.

never needed much reason to join in a rush; a letter, advertisement, spoken word, restlessness, or discontent was enough to send him on his way. A transient and wanderer by nature, he was always looking for the gold at the end of the rainbow, and even more important, he was always sure he would eventually find it. When the news of strikes in the Gunnison country penetrated the Continental Divide and reached the miner's ear, he was on his way — only death could stop him now.

Behind the miner, like flies following a trail of sugar, came the people who filled up the Gunnison country — freighters, merchants, speculators, editors, saloon and hotel operators, ministers, and railroad builders. All initially had one thing in common — they were dependent on the miner for their existence.

And so the rush of 1880 passed into history with the great years of the Gunnison country still in the future. The rush had been wild and tumultuous and had made "Gunnison country" a term that excited the imagination of miners across the country. A great mountain kingdom had begrudgingly given up some of her secrets, but there were many more which remained locked in the rugged and forbidding mountains across the Continental Divide. The versatility of the Gunnison country in coal, silver, marble, and gold, and the possibility of other great discoveries, foreshadowed a great future. During the winter of 1880-81, miners, freighters, speculators, and investors feverishly made plans to unravel more of the Gunnison country's secrets as soon as the mountain streams started flowing again. One very important question still had to be answered; how rich was the Gunnison country?

35 Ogden Tweto and P. K. Sims, "Pre-Cambrian Ancestry of the Colorado Mineral Belt," *Geological Society of America Bulletin*, LXXIV (August, 1963), p. 992.

CHAPTER V

TRAILS TO TIMBERLINE

Before the mournful cry heralding the coming of the railroad in the Gunnison country in 1881, the braying of the burro and the loud, profane epithets of the crusty bullwhacker colored the air. Transportation was primitive as thousands of men stormed into the much heralded mountain region. Jack trains carrying ore, horses and mules pulling freight wagons, prospectors with their burros, six and eight-horse teams pulling stagecoaches in the summer and sleighs in the winter, mail carriers and missionaries at the mercy of the elements skiing off the top of Rocky Mountain passes — these and other like scenes are stamped forever on the early history of the Gunnison country.

The hardships faced by the early prospectors and settlers of the Gunnison country on primitive roads and trails before the advent of the railroad defy description. Such roads as existed caused even preachers to mumble under their breath. Loud and many were the complaints uttered by residents of Ruby Camp, Gunnison, Tin Cup, Gothic, and other early mining

settlements. The roads were quagmires after the spring thaw, dusty and rocky in the summer, frozen and bone-jarring in the fall, and often impassable with the heavy snows of winter.

A burro train leaving an unnamed mining camp of the Gunnison country to bring needed supplies to miners deep in the mountains. Courtesy, State Historical Society.

The story of early transportation in the Gunnison country, as in southwestern Colorado generally, is the story of the toll road. Rugged mountains, steep gorges, and river valleys could be breached only by roads built by private enterprise. Although toll roads were chartered in Colorado as early as 1861, not until 1875 were they thrust toward the Gunnison country. The Brunot Treaty of 1873, easing the Utes out of the San Juan, and Sylvester Richardson's colony on the Gunnison in 1874 foreshadowed the appearance of the toll road in the Gunnison country.

Prior to and immediately after 1873, toll roads were constructed to the perimeters of the San Juan and Gunnison countries. The two major approach routes came from the Rio Grande towns of Alamosa, Monte Vista, and Del Norte, and from the Arkansas River towns of Canon City and South Arkansas City. The Del Norte and Antelope Park Toll Road

Company was chartered in July of 1873. From Antelope Park, the road was pointed toward the heart of the San Juans. However, not until the Utes were removed could it be built.

Toll road building on Colorado's Western Slope reached its peak between 1875 and 1880. With the San Juan and Gunnison countries open for settlement, toll roads were constructed with lightning speed and, most often, with more enthusiasm than skill. In 1869, Otto Mears, owner of a general merchandise store in Saguache, built a rough wagon road to the Los Pinos Indian Agency, fifty-five miles to the west, so he could freight in supplies to the Ute Indians.

As the San Juan opened up as an important mining center following the Brunot Treaty of 1873, miners and merchants clamored for a good wagon road into the region. To meet this demand, the Saguache and San Juan Toll Road Company was chartered in March of 1874. Otto Mears was one of the stockholders in the company and he built the road as far as Indian Creek. Mears then gave way to Enos Hotchkiss, who completed the road to Lake City by way of the Lake Fork of the Gunnison. While working on the road near present-day Lake City, Hotchkiss discovered the rich Golden Fleece mine. The road, which was to have been built through Burrows Park to Silverton, was temporarily forgotten and as spring dawned in 1875, the booming mining town of Lake City appeared out of nowhere.

Del Norte, south of Saguache and closer to Lake City, had been beaten to the punch by its northern neighbor with the building of the 1874 toll road. To regain supremacy as the top freighting and supply center in the lower San Luis Valley, Del Norte took the lead in constructing the Antelope Park and Lake City Wagon Toll Road. Building from Antelope Park, not far from present-day Creede, J. T. Phillips built west by northwest, crossed Willow and Clear Creeks, spanned the divide over Slumgullion Pass, and entered Lake City from the south in October, 1875. By August of the following year, Barlow and Sanderson stages were running from Del Norte to Lake City.

Although many early Gunnison settlers were drawn off by the Lake City excitement of 1876, no road joining the two infant camps had been built. However, in June of that year, the Crooke brothers of Lake City, needing coal for their smelting works, leased Sylvester Richardson's Mount Carbon coal mine near the head of Ohio Creek. The new proprietors worked the

mine extensively and shipped large quantities of coal to their works in Lake City. The opening of the Mount Carbon coal mine led to the construction of a good wagon road from the mine down Ohio Creek to Gunnison. From Gunnison the road angled southwest to White Earth near Cebolla Creek thirty miles away before swinging west to "The Gate" on the Lake Fork of the Gunnison. From that massive gap, the road uneventfully followed the Lake Fork to Lake City. The total length of the Mount Carbon-Lake City wagon road was eighty miles.[1]

Del Norte on the Rio Grande River, one of the major supply towns for the Gunnison country before the coming of the railroad. Courtesy, State Historical Society of Colorado.

Otto Mears was responsible for the next major road in the Gunnison country. The removal of the Ute Indians from Los Pinos to the Uncompahgre Agency, twelve miles south of present-day Montrose in 1875, necessitated the building of a new road to the agency. Otto Mears was awarded a contract to carry supplies to the Utes and was also awarded a separate government contract to carry the mail from Lake City to Ouray via the Uncompahgre Agency. Never one to linger, Mears built the Lake Fork and Ouray Toll Road in 1875-76. The new

1 *Gunnison Review*, June 19, 1880, p. 1. Although bad management and a failure in the smelting process forced the Crooke brothers to shut down late in 1876, there now was a good road to Lake City. Gunnison Valley ranchers took advantage of the road by hauling hay and other surplus produce to Lake City at a handsome profit.

route of travel began at a juncture of the Saguache and San Juan road near Barnum on the Lake Fork and swung northwest across Blue Mesa. Descending from the mesa, the Mears road hit the present site of the Halfway House and followed today's Highway 50 for approximately nine miles. The toll road then headed west from a point near where Cimarron Creek and the Little Cimarron join. A branch of the road continued northwest to present-day Cimarron, then known as Cline's Ranch. As the Lake Fork and Ouray Toll Road headed toward the Uncompahgre Agency, it moved past Diehl Point, crossed Beaton Creek, and roughly followed Onion Creek to the Indian agency. From the agency, the toll road paralleled the Uncompahgre River straight south to link up with Ouray, twenty-five miles away.

The Lake Fork and Ouray Toll Road covered one hundred miles, conquering high mesas, gulches, and swollen streams along the way. The "Pathfinder of the San Juans," Otto Mears, divided the seventy-five miles from the Uncompahgre Agency to Lake City into three sections with cabins and corrals located every twenty-five miles. To insure prompt delivery of mail, Mears used dog teams, accompanied by a man on skis. The tactic worked beautifully until the soft snow of spring caused delays. As winter set in during the fading months of 1875, Mears placed bushy sticks in the snow at various points along the road, enabling mail carriers to follow the same trail after each snowfall. Eventually, the road became packed from continuous use. If a carrier were unfortunate enough to slip off the road, he sank to his neck in the deep and fluffy snow.[2]

As the aspen leaves turned a brilliant yellow and orange during the fall of 1879, rich ore was unearthed in the Gunnison country. This was the signal Otto Mears had been waiting for. On April 4, 1879, just before the forthcoming spring invasion of miners, he incorporated the Poncha, Marshall and Gunnison Toll Road. The new road connected with Mears' Saguache to Nathrop Toll Road over Poncha Pass which had been built twelve years earlier. The new sixty mile toll road started at Mears Station on the east side of the Divide and crossed stunningly beautiful Marshall Pass, almost 11,000 feet in the

2 Wilson Rockwell, *The Utes: A Forgotten People*, (Denver: Sage Books, 1956), p. 108; Sidney Jocknick, *Eary Days on the Western Slope of Colorado*, (Denver: The Carson-Harper Co., 1913), p. 241.

clouds, before descending the west side to the site of present-day Sargents on the Tomichi. From the Tomichi, the Mears road leisurely wound its way west through the Gunnison Valley thirty-two miles to Gunnison, then struggling to survive.

South Arkansas City, later renamed Salida, one of the jumping off points to the Gunnison country in the early 1880's. Courtesy, Denver Public Library.

The Marshall Pass Toll Road made money from the start as thousands of people swarmed into the Gunnison country in 1879-80. Otto Mears was offered and turned down $175 per day to rent his toll road.[3] Though some accounts indicate that the Marshall Pass road was well graded and cared for, this was hardly the case.[4] Mrs. Carrie Strahorn, who with her husband, Robert, made the trip over the pass to Gunnison in August, 1880, depicted the ride as a terrifying ordeal. Seventeen passengers were wedged into the Barlow and Sanderson stage as the driver gave the whip to his horses and ascended the east side of Marshall Pass. Eleven occupied the three seats inside the coach while the other six perched precariously on the roof.

3 *Solid Muldoon*, May 28, 1880, p. 1.

4 David Lavender, *The Big Divide*, (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Co., 1948), p. 145.

Along with the seventeen passengers and driver, the stage carried a heavy load of mail, baggage, and express.

The stage was hardly out of Poncha Springs when trouble began. The rolling motion of the coach made two passengers violently ill. An anxious Mrs. Strahorn commented: "I was riding backward on the front seat and a man and woman on the respective ends of the seat facing me had their heads out the window incessantly to dispose the last weeks ration and there was but little cessation the whole day long."[5] Near the top of Marshall Pass, the back wheel of the stage struck a boulder and knocked two men off the top of the stage and into a gulch. One was uninjured but the other unfortunate victim had a severely sprained or broken ankle. In great pain, the injured man was sent back to Poncha Springs when the down stage met his. Mrs. Strahorn's nerves were barely eased before "the driver ran too close to the mountainside, when there was a steep pitch and again we were saved from destruction by one of the heaviest men grabbing a well-rooted sapling and holding it fast until the wheels dropped to a level again."[6]

Finally, the stage reached the top of Marshall Pass, but amazingly, problems continued. Heading off the top of the 10,846 foot pass, the stage locked wheels with a freight wagon, turning the wagon over and spilling all the freight. The furious freighter gave the stage occupants a lesson in four-letter words until they had his wagon reloaded. Hurrying now, because of the unexpected delays, the stage driver gave the whip to his six-horse team. He was anxious to cross two partially washed out sections of road before dark. The leathery coachman explained to the passengers that when he told them to lean a certain way, they must do it, and quickly. One of the passengers, a rugged old mountaineer who had seen much danger during his life, exclaimed: "I am no tenderfoot, but an old mountaineer, used to danger and exposure, but this trip beats all, and my thoughts have been with home and God all day."[7]

One dangerous washout was passed at six o'clock in "safety and thanksgiving." But now darkness closed in and with it, an ominous quiet except for the rolling noise of the stage wheels.

5 Carrie Strahorn, *Fifteen Thousand Miles by Stage*, (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1915), p. 215.
6 *Ibid.*, p. 216.
7 *Ibid.*, p. 217.

"The quiet was soon broken by another warning from the driver and all leaned to the north, but our time had come, and in spite of all efforts we went over rattlety-bang-smash-crash, coach, bodies, baggage, mail, treasure box, and tools, in a heap and all in the dark."[8] Miraculously, no one was seriously injured even though the coach had turned over on its side with passengers forced to escape through the side door. The now-frantic Mrs. Strahorn regarded the ill-fated stage as some evil spirit. She recalled:

> We did not attach any blame to the driver, for he did the best that could have been done. But we did blame the owners of that road for our day of misery . . . . In the 3000 miles of stage travel that we had had up to that time we never spent such an unhappy day when every moment was in anticipation of disaster . . . . Nothing would have tempted us to return that route to Poncha unless on horseback or afoot. [The trip finally ended at the Gunnison Hotel at midnight.] I gave a quick searching glance at the house to make sure it would stand until morning, then hastened to the quiet of our own room for a few hours of rest.[9]

The furious race between the Denver South Park and Denver Rio Grande Railroads to be first into the booming Gunnison country in 1881 enabled Otto Mears to sell his Marshall Pass Toll Road at a handsome profit. After operating the road for eighteen months, Mears sold out to General William Palmer's Rio Grande early in 1881 for $13,000.[10] Much of the Rio Grande track over the pass was laid following the Mears toll road. Palmer's frantic efforts to reach the Gunnison country before the ill-fated Denver South Park paid off. The Rio Grande entered Gunnison in August, 1881, almost a year ahead of the South Park which encountered overwhelming problems trying to tunnel through the Continental Divide between St. Elmo and Pitkin.

8 *Ibid.*, pp. 217-18.
9 *Ibid.*, p. 220.
10 Robert Athearn, *Rebel of the Rockies*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1962), p. 106. Both David Lavender in *The Big Divide* and Wilson Rockwell in "Portrait in the Galley, Otto Mears Pathfinder of the San Juans," *Denver Westerner's Brand Book* (1967), state that Mears received $40,000 for the road. While no conclusive evidence exists regarding the true amount of sale, $40,000 does seem like an exorbitant figure for a sixty mile road, especially in 1881.

Otto Mears had given the initial impetus to toll road building in the Gunnison country by 1879. Now, as if by magic, toll roads sprang up all over that booming mountain region. Between 1879 and 1881, fifty-four toll roads were chartered in the Gunnison country. Half that number were definitely built and used. Many others were only partly constructed or existed in name only. The following chart shows the complete list of toll roads chartered in Gunnison County, starting with the first in 1876 and ending with the last in 1894.

GUNNISON COUNTY TOLL ROADS — 1876-1894

Toll Road	Incorporation Date	Capitalization	Price Per Share
South Arkansas and Gunnison Valley Toll Road	March 1, 1876	$ 12,000	$ 50
Marshall Pass and Gunnison Toll Road	August 3, 1877	15,000	100
Helena, Alpine and Elk Mountain Toll Road	January 22, 1879	15,000	100
Chalk Creek and Elk Mountain Toll Road	March 24, 1879	20,000	10
Poncha, Marshall and Gunnison Toll Road	April 4, 1879	25,000	25
Leadville, Twin Lakes and Gunnison Toll Road	May 9, 1879	100,000	10
Alpine and Quartzville Road	June 7, 1879	7,500	100
Monarch and Gunnison Toll Road	June 14, 1879	25,000	100
Tomichi and Quartzville Road	June 17, 1879	2,500	25
Alpine and Chalk Creek Turnpike	July 26, 1879	30,000	10
Taylor River and Gothic City Toll Road	August 2, 1879	3,000	100
Mount Carbon and Coal Creek Toll Road	August 11, 1879	10,000	100
Fairview and Tomichi Toll Road	August 13, 1879	1,000	25
Maysville Toll Road	August 15, 1879	20,000	10
Pioneer Toll Road	September 3, 1879	1,000	50
Gunnison and Grand River Toll Road	September 3, 1879	3,000	50
Maysville, Hot Springs and Pitkin Toll Road	October 27, 1879	25,000	10
Slate River and Crested Butte Toll Road	December 3, 1879	3,000	30
Buena Vista and Gunnison Toll Road	January 19, 1880	50,000	100
Alpine and Pitkin Toll Road	January 26, 1880	25,000	10
Pitkin and Ohio Wagon Road	February 16, 1880	2,500	10
Copper Creek and Maroon Toll Road	February 24, 1880	10,000	100
Virginia and Roaring Fork Toll Road	March 5, 1880	50,000	25
Tomichi Toll Road	April 10, 1880	10,000	10
Mount Carbon and Grand River Toll Road	April 19, 1880	5,000	50
Gunnison, Lime, Lumber and Toll Road	May 4, 1880	10,000	50
Chalk Creek and Tomichi Toll Road	May 28, 1880	10,000	10
Crested Butte, Gothic and Rock Creek Toll Road	June 8, 1880	5,000	100
East River Toll Road and Bridge	June 23, 1880	1,500	100
Slate River, Gothic, and Rock Creek Toll Road	June 28, 1880	50,000	100
Alder Creek Toll Road	July 19, 1880	10,000	10
Ohio City and Carbonate Mountain Toll Road	July 20, 1880	10,000	20
Taylor River and Spring Creek Toll Road	August 19, 1880	20,000	5
Big Spring Toll Road	August 21, 1880	25,000	100
Black Sage and White Pine Toll Road	September 6, 1880	250,000	100
Western Colorado and Grand River Toll Road	September 8, 1880	50,000	10
Clear Creek and Gunnison Toll Road	September 24, 1880	3,000	10

Toll Road	Incorporation Date	Capitalization	Price Per Share
Virginia City and Union Park Toll Road	October 12, 1880	5,000	20
Crested Butte and Gothic Toll Road	October 12, 1880	10,000	10
Alpine and Shavano Toll Road	October 29, 1880	25,000	10
Ohio Creek and Hot Springs Toll Road	November 11, 1880	20,000	10
Anthracite Toll Road	November 11, 1880	600	10
Pitkin and Ruby Toll Road	January 31, 1881	50,000	25
Pitkin, Virginia City and Garfield Toll Road	February 2, 1881	50,000	20
Ohio City-Dutch Flats-Garfiled Virginia City Toll Rd.	February 4, 1881	50,000	25
Hot Springs and Crooksville Toll Road	February 21, 1881	25,000	10
Pitkin, Fairview and Hots Springs Toll Road	February 21, 1881	30,000	25
Slate River and Rock Creek Toll Road	March 8, 1881	5,000	25
Pitkin and Virginia City Toll Road	April 8, 1881	———	10
East River and Spring Creek Toll Road	April 26, 1881	8,000	10
Indian Creek and Gunnison Toll Road	April 29, 1881	20,000	100
Gunnison and San Juan Toll Road	May 9, 1881	3,000	10
Schofield and Sheep Mountain Toll Road	May 11, 1881	8,000	10
Gunnison and Antelope Forks Toll Road	May 19, 1881	5,000	10
Aspen, Maroon Creek and Gothic City Toll Road	August 20, 1881	20,000	10
Gunnison and Lake Valley Toll Road	October 25, 1881	100,000	100
Monarch and Gunnison Toll Road	January 3, 1882	Omitted	
Red Mountain and Ashcroft Toll Road	January 3, 1882	Omitted	
Ashcroft and Crested Butte Toll Road	February 14, 1882	50,000	5
Crested Butte, Ashcroft and Gothic Toll Road	March 3, 1882	20,000	25
Gunnison and Lake Fork Toll Road	April 27, 1882	20,000	100
St. Elmo, Tin Cup and Taylor River Toll Road	June 21, 1882	10,000	20
East River Toll Road	June 6, 1883 (ext. of earlier road)		
Legal Tender Toll Road	August 24, 1883	10,000	10
Aspen, Ashcroft, and Taylor Range Toll Road	July 19, 1886	5,000	10
Goose Creek Toll Road	April 6, 1894	10,000	100

In addition to the sixty-five roads mentioned, there were many others built by neighboring counties which touched or indirectly affected the Gunnison country.[11] Add to the toll roads the dozens of mining and wagon roads in the Gunnison country, and one gets an accurate picture of a mining region literally criss-crossed by a maze of transportation routes.

Toll road companies received their charters from the state of Colorado upon agreeing to meet specific requirements. The company, after determining the general route of the road, hoped to demonstrate possession before a competitor moved in. "The country was wide open and the theory was that the first arrival on a site was the rightful claimant."[12] The charter given

11 D. H. Cummins, "Social and Economic History of Southwestern Colorado, 1860-1948," (Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation, University of Texas, 1951), pp. 417-22. The chart on toll roads was taken from Dr. Cummins' extensive study of southwestern Colorado.

12 Paul Harrison, "Toll Roads in Colorado," *Denver Westerner's Brand Book*, XVIII (1962), p. 317.

to a company specified the length and route of the road and restricted toll gates to a maximum of one every ten miles. The toll was prescribed by the county commissioners for two years. After receiving a charter, the toll road company was required to spend $500 on the road and start work within ninety days on penalty of forfeiting all rights. Toll rates were posted at each gate. If the roads were not kept in good repair, complaints could be made to the county commissioners or justice of the peace. Although complaints were numerous, little was ever done to punish toll road owners.

An infuriated Thomas Hookey, superintendent of the Hidalgo Town and Mining Company located north of Crested Butte, chastised the Gunnison county commissioners for their failure to require improvements on the toll road near O' Be Joyful Creek in 1882. "I am instructed by my company to write you on the subject and urge you to do something so as to place the road in a condition that wagons, carriages, and heavy loads can get up without being smashed to pieces in the various gullies or ruts as mine was last autumn."[13] Hookey was not alone in his denunciation of Gunnison country toll roads. Complaints about high toll rates and the failure of companies to maintain their roads were common.

The silver mining camp of Pitkin, at the mercy of toll road companies like many other camps, loosed a broadside against the owners of the Alpine and Quartzville (Pitkin) Toll Road Company in 1881. The news organ of the camp, the PITKIN INDEPENDENT, reported: "The freighters and others who travel the Alpine toll road are murmuring ominously about its terrible condition . . . . The road is certainly as bad as it can be, and the remark of a gentleman, whose mode of expression is more forcible than polite, that it is 'a damned outrage!' will be endorsed, profanity and all, by the straightest haired Christian who travels it for a living."[14]

Many towns of the Gunnison country felt their futures threatened by impassable or neglected roads. Citizens of Ruby Camp in the northern sector of the Gunnison region were up in arms in July, 1880, because of the indifference of the

13 "Roads and Bridges, 1880-1905," Gunnison County Courthouse Records.
14 *Pitkin Independent*, July 9, 1881, p. 3.

Gunnison-Ruby Toll Road Company. The rather isolated silver miners bitterly protested: "The growth of our camp has been impeded and its interests injured by the negligence and carelessness of those men whose duty it has been to make a good . . . road . . . between our camp and Gunnison City . . . . [The road] has prevented many from coming to our camp and has been the cause of many locating elsewhere."[15] Miners from the Spring Creek region found themselves in a similar situation in May of 1884, with the road out of their camp filled with snowslides and timber "so that it is impossible for pack animals or teams to pass trough to the camp . . . . It will be July or August before the snow slides melt and even then the rock and timber will have to be removed: as it is we are helpless and cannot get any supplies into the camp or ore out to the smelter."[16]

Good roads were an indispensable tool of growth in the Gunnison country before the advent of railroads. Individual miners, fledgling mining camps, towns, and even the entire Gunnison mining region were at the mercy of the roadbuilders. If roads were kept up reasonably well, then supplies could be brought in and ore taken out; if roads were not accessible, the entire future of the mining region was clouded. An indication of how critical good roads were to the Gunnison country was evident at a large and enthusiastic meeting held at Crested Butte in May of 1884. The meeting was held to discuss opening the Pearl Pass road to Ashcroft and Aspen to the north. A petition which followed protested: "It is this way, it [Crested Butte] being nearer for them, whereas at present the trade from these points now goes to Leadville and other points at a greater distance . . . . [It] is understood also that a jack train of three hundred now running to Granite would be transferred to this route provided they could get through on the road, besides a number of mines are ready to start operation just as soon as provisions can be had."[17]

John Hallowell, a geologist investigating mines in the Gunnison country in 1882, compared toll road operators to highway men. Hallowell traveled by toll road from Crested Butte to Elkton via Washington Gulch during the summer of '82 and found "to my disgust, that I had paid toll to travel over

15 "Roads and Bridges, 1880-1905," Gunnison County Courthouse Records.
16 *Ibid.*
17 *Ibid.*

a road on which the toll-road company had not expended one dollar . . . . for sweet charity's sake let us think that the toll-gate keeper has misunderstood his instructions, that the matter will be corrected, and that this kind of road-agents work will be stopped."[18]

Toll and other roads in the Gunnison country were not only inconvenient — they were also dangerous. Especially dangerous was the feared Schofield to Gothic Toll Road which was used in the early 1880's. From the top of Schofield Pass at 10,700 feet, one descended to a precipitous road which hung suspended on the side of a cliff past Emerald Lake. The road was ill kept and had no turnouts or passing lanes. Besides being very steep, the road was only seven to eight feet wide instead of the required ten feet. "The bank is very precipitous and dangerous . . . . Teams are frequently caught and the one below must back out. Hundreds of people had to carry their goods in on their backs because of the bad condition of the road."[19] Anyone driving a four-wheel drive vehicle from Gothic to Crystal today can appreciate the hair-raising ride freighters and miners must have had in the 1880's when the road was narrower and in much worse condition.

Contrary to popular opinion during the 1880's, the building and maintenance of a toll road was no easy task, especially in the Gunnison country. Boulders had to be removed, trees cut down, stumps blasted out, and stream crossings provided. Steep banks had to be cut down and some primitive grading or smoothing of the roadbed was essential. Construction of such a road in the Gunnison country was accomplished almost entirely by hand. To maintain such a road was more frustrating and difficult than the actual building. Roads were never secure in the Rockies because of mudslides, rockslides, heavy snows, and fearsome flash floods which tore down gullies wiping out everything in their path. Great damage also resulted from alternate freezing and thawing in the spring. Coupled with these dangers was the always prevalent "white death" — the terrifying avalanches which hit without warning. Because the season was short and the weather severe, few toll road entrepreneurs ever made much money.

18 John Hallowell, *Gunnison, Colorado's Bonanza Country,* (Denver: Colorado Museum of Applied Geology and Mineralogy, 1883), p. 19.

19 "Roads and Bridges, 1880-1905," Gunnison County Courthouse Records.

The treacherous and unpredictable mountain roadways demanded respect from every person who passed over them. Danger always lurked in the wings. The danger always prevalent on the mountain roads of the Gunnison country was borne out recently by two tragic accidents which claimed eighteen victims. Nine people were killed on July 6, 1970, when the vehicle in which they were riding left a steep and treacherous four-wheel drive road near Crystal and plunged one hundred feet into the Crystal River. Just over a year later, on September 11, 1971, a Gunnison schoolbus, carrying the junior varsity football team to Salida for a game, went out of control heading down Monarch Pass and crashed at Garfield, killing eight players and their coach.

Despite the ever-present danger on the mountain roads of the Gunnison country, travel continued unabated. In many cases, roads made or broke a mining camp. Much low grade ore was mined in the Gunnison country, demanding the strictest economy. Hundreds of thousands of tons of ore were mined and treated where the margin of profit was less than a dollar per ton. The saving of money on transportation was often the difference between whether a mine made it or not. Taylor Park and the Rock Creek Mining District (the region between Gothic and Crystal) were examples of mining regions that suffered greatly from inadequate transportation.

Grades on mountain roads rarely exceeded twelve percent and only then when no other alternative was available. Twelve percent was the maximum grade that freight traffic could handle, although there were some exceptions. Where much heavy freighting was attempted on steeper grades such as the famed twenty-seven percent grade near the Devil's Punchbowls between Schofield Pass and Crystal, terrible accidents were common. Freighting on the mountain roads of the Gunnison country depended on the grade, type of material being hauled, distance involved, and the always fearsome elements. On a good dry road, four animals averaging 1,300 pounds could haul 6,500 pounds up a twelve percent grade at one and a half miles per hour. Descending, the animals could haul all that a wagon could hold which was rarely more than 16,000 pounds.

Despite the fact that a twelve percent grade could be traveled, an eight percent grade was far more economical for freighters. Besides obvious advantages, it was much safer, roads were not damaged as badly by rains, melting snows, or braking,

repair bills on harnesses and wagons were lessened, and the strain on the horse or mule was greatly reduced. Tremendous obstacles were encountered in trying to keep mountain roads open. Avalanches in the winter took a terrible toll in lives, despite efforts to build roads away from natural slide areas. Nature continually loosed avalanches in seemingly safe locales, costing many a good man his life. Once a slide covered a road it was next to impossible to clear it until late spring or early summer due to ice, snow, rocks, trees, and debris which piled up in one enormous tangle.

Whenever possible, roadbuilders in the Gunnison country located their roads on slopes facing south and east to allow the sun a greater opportunity to melt and settle the snow. Drainage was a very important consideration when building the rugged and dangerous roads high in the mountains of the Gunnison country. The outside of the road had to be built high to force water to the inside bank where it could be carried to diagonal drains running across the road. This prevented the water from washing away the outside bank or running down the ruts and enlarging them dangerously through erosion. The inside bank next to the road was also critical. If left vertical, water and debris would eventually collapse the bank and block the road. A favorite expression among early residents in the Gunnison country was: "Nothing pays like the first cost in road-building."

The batter or ingredients which went into making the road bed determined how long it would last and how safe it would be. Unfortunately, many roads of the Gunnison country were built with vertical banks on the inside, along with terrible batter for the road bed. Boughs, sticks, boulders, rocks, and clay covered the road. The destructive forces of nature soon went to work on such a batter. Ice and water wore down the inside bank, the trash foundation settled, and the road sank, sloping outward. Water found its way through loose material and undermined the road bed, creating holes or invisible death traps. Unless the road was rebuilt, it rapidly became impassable.[20]

Roads were not the only important ingredient involved with transportation in the early days of the Gunnison country. The rugged little burro carried mining machinery, lumber, and supplies into the mining camps and, on the return trip, carried

20 James Abbot, "Mountain Roads," *Department of Agricuture Report, 1900,* p. 189.

ore out to be smelted. The sure-footed and courageous burro[21] was able to penetrate into seemingly impenetrable regions of the Gunnison country. Though stubborn, funny-looking, and slow, the burro was almost totally necessary to any mining region before the advent of railroads. In the exciting, booming days of 1879, 1880, and the first half of 1881, thousands of tons of ore were freighted by burro over the Continental Divide to the nearest railhead on the Eastern Slope.

Long jack trains were a common sight in the mountains of the Gunnison country during the days when the country was young. The miners of Taylor Park, more isolated than most, depended entirely on jack trains in the early 1880's. Over Cottonwood and Tin Cup Passes they came, strung out in single file, carrying needed supplies.

West and north of Taylor Park, in the primitive and isolated Elk Mountains, the agile and sure-footed burro insured the future for struggling mining camps like Gothic, Schofield, Crystal, Galena, and Snowmass City. In Gothic in 1884, "The streets are filled with trains of burros, loaded with packs of provisions for the mountain camps . . . ."[22] Prior to 1887, when the great silver camp of Aspen was finally reached by the Denver Rio Grande Railroad, long lines of 400-500 jacks could be observed on top of East Maroon and Pearl Passes bringing silver ore to the nearest railhead in Crested Butte. Gothic was a stop on the East Maroon trail and "appears quite lively . . . when the constantly passing pack trains to and from Aspen chance to get here at once."[23]

Most jack trains in the Gunnison country operated in the remote and isolated northern sector. The Taylor Park, Spring Creek, Rock Creek, Quartz Creek, and Ruby-Irwin mines were inaccessible among the high and rugged Elk Mountains which form the Continental Divide. Only burros could transport ore out of mines located in dangerous and precipitous terrain. One of the best examples of an inaccessible mining region was the

21 Burros and mules differ in many respects. A burro, ass, or donkey is smaller than the mule with a dark stripe running along his back and another crossing over the shoulder. The burro usually carried loads on his back along jack trails. The mule is a hybrid animal obtained by crossing an ass and a horse (usually a male ass and a mare). Mules weighed from 1,150-1,400 pounds and were not given heavy tasks until they matured around the age of five.

22 Ernest Ingersoll, "The Gunnison Country," *The Manhattan,* III (May, 1884), p. 412.

23 *Gunnison Review-Press,* July 16, 1887, p. 2.

foreboding Dark Canyon located across the Ruby Range near the headwaters of Middle Anthracite Creek. With steep canyon walls to the north and south and the rugged Ruby Mountains forming a barrier to the east, miners were forced to pack their ore out by jack train over dangerously steep 12,200 foot high Angel Pass. It was a fearsome task to pack the ore over the pass and down Poverty Gulch six miles to the Denver Rio Grande railhead at Anthracite, but carload after carload of rich ore found its way to smelters.

The great silver town of Aspen on the Roaring Fork, with Aspen Mountain in the background during boom times in the 1880's. Before the railroad came to this great camp, much of Aspen's ore was shipped to Crested Butte located on the Denver Rio Grande Railroad. Courtesy, State Historical Society of Colorado.

Jack trains were also used extensively to transport ore from Snowmass City, high up in Lead King Basin on the north fork of Rock Creek, and from such rich mines as the Black Queen near the town of Crystal. The ore had to be shipped by long jack trains along treacherous Crystal Canyon, past the Devil's Punchbowls and Emerald Lake to Gothic, and finally to Crested Butte.

Thus, the courageous little burro had his day high in the Rockies during the earliest years of the Gunnison country. The little animal became legendary for his feats of courage and endurance. George Darley, famed Presbyterian minister of the San Juan during the early excitement there, never ceased to be amazed at the flexibility of the burro. Darley incredulously recalled: "In the winter of '79 a man brought a burro from Mineral Point, at the head of the Uncompahgre River, over Engineer Mountain, to the head of Henson Creek, on snowshoes. He made the shoes of sole leather and taught the burro to use them. It was slow work, yet he succeeded in getting his 'jack' across the range. This may sound 'fishy,' but it is true. Where a burro . . . cannot go, no other creature need try."[24]

Someday, the Gunnison country may fittingly erect a memorial to one of its great benefactors — the rugged, much maligned, but faithful burro. With little lineage, like most of the hard-rock miners he served, the trusty little animal saved the day in the rugged and high mountains of the Gunnison country. More than a few isolated mining camps owe their existence to him.

The early years of the Gunnison country were also years of the freighter. Plowing through mud in the spring, braving clouds of choking dust in the summer, shaking to pieces on frost-covered roads in the fall, and making like Santa Claus on sleighs in the winter, the freighter, like the burro, brought desperately needed supplies to the Gunnison country. The freight he carried was almost as valuable as the minerals sought by the miners. His was not a romantic occupation and he was not a romantic figure. Usually dirty, wary, foul-mouthed, and despised by miners and merchants who paid high prices for supplies, the freighter was a much-maligned figure on the mining frontier. Many were the problems he faced. Bad roads, snowstorms, avalanches, freezing weather, breakdown of wagons, the necessity of caring for horses and mules, and the extreme isolation on the road — all made the freighter's job less than attractive.

The freighter plied his trade in all but the most isolated and inaccessible mining camps of the Gunnison country. In those

24 George Darley, *Pioneering in the San Juan,* (Chicago: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1899), pp. 61-62.

regions, only the jack train flourished. The great days for the freighter in the Gunnison country lasted from 1879 to late 1881 — during the mining boom and before the railroads. There were never enough freighters during those hectic years, and accordingly, freight rates skyrocketed. Yet the days of the freighter were numbered. "The decline of the mines and-or the coming of the railroad meant a sharp reduction in business."[25]

Early days of freighting in the Gunnison country. This huge boiler is being taken into the Quartz Creek country around Pitkin by a twelve horse team. Courtesy, State Historical Society.

The greatest single freighter in the Gunnison country was Dave Wood. Born in 1851 near Mount Gilead, Ohio, Wood moved to Westport, Kansas, with his family four years later. Colonel Sam Wood, Dave's father, was an ardent abolitionist and organized the 6th Missouri Cavalry to fight the South during the Civil War. Young Dave served as a bugler and orderly in his father's company for seven months while only ten years old before being discharged by the Secretary of War.

25 Duane Smith, *Rocky Mountain Mining Camps,* (Bloomington: Indiana Uni-Press, 1967), p. 70.

In 1876, Wood started a livery stable in Pueblo. From this beginning grew a major freighting business.

As early as 1877, Dave Wood constructed a road over Cottonwood Pass and into Taylor Park so he could haul freight from Colorado Springs to the then booming San Juan country. Before the arrival of the Denver Rio Grande in the Gunnison country in 1881, Wood was the largest entrepreneur on the Western Slope. From ends-of-track his freighters carried thousands of tons of supplies and machinery into starved mining camps. On a single day in 1881, Wood's freighters took out 400,000 pounds of ore from surrounding mining camps while bringing in 100,000 pounds of supplies for the isolated communities. At his peak in the early 1880's, Wood had 500 head of horses, mules, and oxen at work in the Gunnison country. The GUNNISON REVIEW reported: "He has the largest and most complete freighting outfit in the state, and has better facilities for shipping goods promptly and handling heavy machinery than any other man in the Gunnison country."[26]

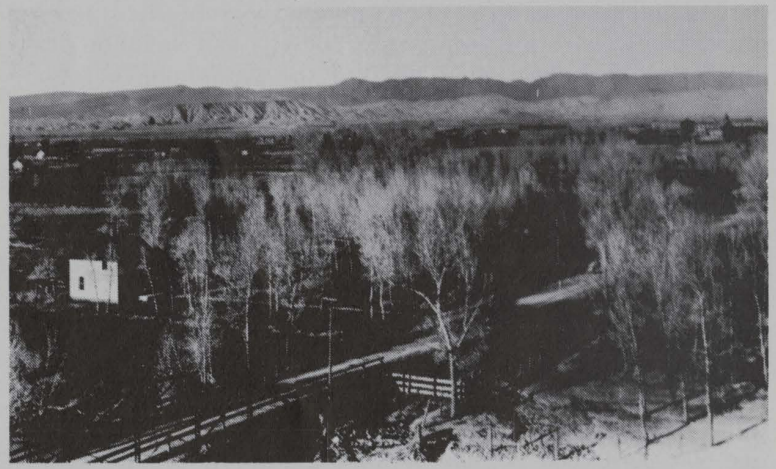
Wood's name became a household word in western Colorado during the 1880's. He had ample capital, large warehouses, the best wagons and drivers, the best stock, and was thoroughly dependable. This great freighter completely dominated the freighting business in the San Juan, Gunnison, and Uncompahgre countries during the heyday of the mining industry in Colorado. In Gunnison, Wood's massive machinery warehouse was located only a few rods north of the Denver Rio Grande track at 10th and Bidwell. Adjoining this building was a grain warehouse, twenty-four by sixty feet and usually full of grain. During 1880 and 1881, it was not uncommon to see 300,000-400,000 pounds of mining machinery and supplies stockpiled in the first warehouse awaiting shipment to the San Juan and Gunnison mining camps. Wood's freight bills during those years occasionally reached $1,000 per day.[27] However, with an average gross of over $70,000 a month by the end of 1881, the great freighter was not overly concerned with his freight bill.

Dave Wood built up a considerable fortune from his freighting business, but alas, the silver panic of 1893 all but wiped him out. Wood lost an estimated $250,000 and never

26 *Gunnison Review,* December 31, 1881, p. 3.
27 *Ibid.,* April 1, 1882, p. 4.

recovered from this financial disaster. The great freighter of the Gunnison country died in 1944 in Grand Junction at the age of ninety-three. He was buried in Montrose.[28]

Taylor Park, nestled under the Continental Divide, was the scene of much of the freighting in the Gunnison country. Most of the freighters traveled over 12,000 foot Cottonwood and Tin Cup Passes as they crossed the Divide. It was not unusual to see fifty six-mule teams, each pulling two wagons, winding their way through the breathtakingly beautiful mountains east of Taylor Park. "Twenty-four horse teams were [also] not rare. They pulled a two-wagon load holding as much as a box car and were guided entirely by jerk lines."[29] The road from Jack's Cabin north to Gothic along the East River was daily filled with freighters bringing needed supplies to the north country.



Montrose, an early Denver and Rio Grande Railroad town, in the 1880's. Courtesy, Denver Public Library.

28 *Montrose Daily Press,* March 10, 1944, p. 6. Wiped out in the Panic of 1893, Wood lost not only his freighting business, but also his silver mines. After that disaster, the old freighter became a farmer in the Dallas Divide region, not far from Ridgeway, and also developed some mines there. At his death in 1944, Wood was survived by his wife, three daughters, and three sons. The old freighter had one motto which he lived by: "Always be on the side of and for the rank and file of the people." He conducted his huge freighting business with extreme care, and few complaints were ever made against his company. There is little doubt that Dave Wood's passing cost the Gunnison country one of its truly great men.

29 Betty Wallace, "Six Beans in the Wheel," (Unpublished Master's Thesis, Western State College, 1956), p. 55.

Peering down at the mules and wagons from the high bluff just south of Gothic, one imagined a snake following the meanders of the East River.

Valiant efforts were made to build a good freight road from Crested Butte and Gothic to Aspen across the mountains in 1881 and 1882, but to little avail. From Crested Butte, one road followed Middle Brush Creek, skirted 13,000 foot Teocali Mountain, crossed Pearl Pass at 12,700 feet, and then descended along Castle Creek to Ashcroft and Aspen. The section of road which led to Pearl Pass from Crested Butte was not particularly difficult, but the eighteen mile descent into Aspen was a freighter's nightmare. Crossing massive slides of slag rock, clinging to narrow roads carved out of stone, and contending with ominous gorges, the freighter never had a chance to relax. Although some freight did move over Pearl Pass until 1884, the road soon deteriorated into a jack trail.

Bowman, a stage stop at the north end of Taylor Park just before starting up rugged 11,900 foot Taylor Pass, was a mid-point on the St. Elmo to Aspen run during the early 1880's. The section of road from Bowman across the divide into Aspen was a freighter's hell, every bit the equal of the Pearl Pass route. Seemingly vertical at various places, the road was also filled with huge rocks and boulders and bottomless mud holes. Yet, travel was always heavy between St. Elmo and Aspen, with forty freighting outfits and numerous jack trains plying their trade between the two points.

If summer freighting was bad in the Gunnison country, winter was intolerable. Heavy snows, driving blizzards, avalanches, and complete "white outs" took their toll of men and animals. In most of the Gunnison country, freighting came to a complete halt until gentle, warming breezes announced another spring.

No matter that freighting and mining came to a virtual standstill during the winter months in the Gunnison country — the mail must go through! Scorning the worst of winter storms, the brave and hardy mail carrier shouldered his heavy pack again and again and, on ten to fourteen foot skis, skied across the rugged Rockies. There was no better example in the Gunnison country of a completely brave and fearless man than the mail carrier. There was also no better example of a more welcome figure in the isolated, news-starved camps of the region.

The carrier in the frontier of the Rocky Mountains straps the mail sack on his back, puts on his Norwegian snowshoes, and, with a long guiding pole, starts on his weary climb over the range. Usually there is a crowd at the postoffice to wish him good luck. Only men of known strength and courage can do this work, for twenty-five pounds of letters, papers, and packages become very heavy and burdensome in climbing the mountains . . . . With a compass in his hand, he carefully feels his way along the precipices and dangerous places, and often the storm is so severe and blinding that he is compelled to find shelter under some friendly cleft or dig for himself a bed in the snow banks . . . . On reaching the summit of the mountains the carrier shoulders the pole, and, placing his snowshoes close together, begins his descent. The old-timers on the trails will go down the mountain with the swiftness of the wind, a mile a minute . . . . The perilous trip brings him to some little mining camp nestled in the mountains. What a joyful greeting he receives![30]

The Gunnison country was often isolated by the snows of winter. Skiing provided the only means of transportation. These skiers are from Eureka in the neighboring San Juan region. Notice the twelve foot skis. Collection of Mrs. Loel Carr.

30 *Colorado Graphic,* April 18, 1891, p. 1.

The greatest and most durable mail carrier of the Gunnison country, and one of the greatest of the Rocky Mountains, was the legendary Alex Parent of Tin Cup. Parent was born in Canada, moved to the timber country of Wisconsin as a young man, and in 1880, found his way to Taylor Park where he hoped to strike it rich mining. While working in a tunnel on West Gold Hill that same year, he tried to rescue a supply of mine explosives from a burning candle placed carelessly nearby. A box of partly filled caps exploded, throwing brass splinters through Parent's left hand, permanently crippling him. Though finished as a full time miner, the rugged Parent now started moving toward his destiny as a legendary mail carrier in the Gunnison country. For most of thirty-eight years, from 1880-1918, Parent carried the mail over the Continental Divide between St. Elmo and Tin Cup, as well as through Taylor Park, as far as Dorchester.

It was not unusual for Parent to start on his lonely trek with a horse and toboggan at three o'clock in the morning while the snow was still hard enough to walk on. But most of the time, he traveled alone, with the mail on his back. Braving storms, freezing cold, and bone-tiring treks across the Continental Divide, Alex Parent rarely missed getting through. With Tin Cup slipping badly as a mining town in 1918, Parent sadly made his final run from St. Elmo. For the next twelve years, the old mountaineer served as mayor of the once-thriving camp of Tin Cup. With his death in 1930, the Gunnison country lost one of its unsung heroes.

Parent was not alone as a durable and dependable mail carrier in the Gunnison country. There were many others. Al and Fred Johnson, two brothers from Crystal, carried the mail seventeen miles on skis to Crested Butte in the 1890's over some of the most dangerous terrain in the Gunnison country. Then, there was Louis Barthell of Gothic, who carried the daily mail on skis eight miles along the East River between Gothic and Crested Butte during the bitter cold winter of 1879-80. Showing his incredible endurance and staying power, Barthell once carried a five gallon can of coal oil and a fifty pound sack of flour along with his regular mail bag from Crested Butte to Gothic.[31]

31 *Gunnison News-Champion,* November 14, 1929, p. 6.

Although dwarfed by such large western stage companies as Butterfield, Wells-Fargo, and Holladay, the Barlow and Sanderson line found its place in the sun in the Gunnison country during the exciting days from 1880-1882. Bradley Barlow and Jared Sanderson had been friends for some time before entering into a partnership to run stagelines west of the Mississippi in 1860.[32] Although they first confined their operations to Missouri and Kansas, Barlow and Sanderson soon expanded, extending lines into Denver by 1865 and Santa Fe by 1866. With Barlow in Vermont negotiating mail contracts with the Post Office Department and Sanderson running the stage operation in the West, the company flourished. When silver was discovered in the San Juans in the 1870's, Barlow and Sanderson extended their stageline into south-central Colorado.[33]

By the late 1870's, Barlow and Sanderson had a network of stagelines running all over Colorado. The company had branch lines into Pueblo, Colorado Springs, and Canon City, and when word came of rich strikes in Leadville and the San Juans, additional stages were sent deep into the mountains. By 1880, Barlow and Sanderson had 5,000 mules and horses in constant use on stagecoach runs through Colorado and northern New Mexico. The two operators employed over 1,000 men and grossed over $1,000,000 a year. When the Gunnison country experienced a great mining boom in 1880, Barlow and Sanderson extended their lines westward over Marshall Pass with branches leading to the Elk Mountains to the north and Lake City to the south. Over a network of primitive, rugged, and dangerous roads in the Gunnison country, Barlow and Sanderson carried passengers, mail, and freight.

Gunnison rejoiced in July, 1880, when the first Barlow and Sanderson stage rumbled into town from South Arkansas City. Thirty-two dusty passengers were deposited in that bustling

32 *Gunnison News,* June 12, 1880, p. 3.

33 Morris Taylor, *First Mail West,* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1971), pp. 123-24. There is little personal information available about either Bradley Barlow or Jared Sanderson. Their contract gave Kansas City as their place of business but it is doubtful that Barlow spent much time there or on the line. He continued to serve as cashier of the Vermont National Bank in St. Albans and as treasurer of Franklin County in 1867. In 1868, he was elected to the Vermont legislature from Frankin County. Ten years later, he was elected as a Republican representative to the Forty-Sixth Congress. Barlow died while staying with relatives in Denver in 1889. Jared Sanderson ran the stage operation in the West while his partner lobbied in the East and proved to be a fine businessman. The record is unclear as to when Sanderson retired from staging in the West, but it was around 1885. He was a very old man when he died in Boulder, Colorado in 1915.

haven. In a matter of weeks, the new stageline had established headquarters in West Gunnison and was sending stages winging to a half-dozen promising mining camps located in every direction from Gunnison.

As 1881 dawned, Barlow and Sanderson stages were running into every major mining camp of the Gunnison country. A double daily line ran from Gunnison to the summit of Marshall Pass where connection was made with the incoming Denver and Rio Grande Railroad. A daily line ran to Alpine across the Continental Divide, connecting with the Denver and South Park Railroad; another daily connected with Lake City and Ouray, and two daily lines ran into Gothic, Crested Butte, and Ruby to the north. The GUNNISON REVIEW reported: "The various lines carry from fifty to sixty passengers each way daily."[34]

During the tumultuous days of 1881, when the Gunnison excitement was at a fever pitch, ten to twenty Barlow and Sanderson stages arrived daily, "the heavy wheels of those vehicles thundering over the loose boulders in our streets making a terrible racket. Often, two or three stages a day would arrive and depart from this city to the end of track . . . ."[35] Gunnison residents often cursed as they were wakened in the middle of the night by the rumble of the heavy coaches rolling into town to deposit passengers at one of many thriving hotels.

The trip into or out of Gunnison on the Barlow and Sanderson stage was never uneventful, as Mrs. Carrie Strahorn so vividly explained later. The passengers were jammed tightly together inside the stage. Rough roads kept one in mid-air part of the time, and the dust was suffocating. The roads were usually steep, narrow, and winding and often were filled with boulders or partially washed out by run-off caused by heavy rains. "At such times it requires some nerve to ride behind a span of six when at some sharp turn in the road, the leaders dash out of sight . . . and the stage perhaps takes a sudden tilt toward the brink."[36]

Yet, the harrowing rides of summer never equalled winter sleigh rides for excitement. Pollard and Chapin opened a Crested Butte to Aspen stageline on January 12, 1886, via Gothic and East Maroon Pass. The sleighs were: "new, elegantly

34 *Gunnison Daily Review-Press,* August 22, 1882, p. 1.

35 *Ibid.*

36 Wallace, "Six Beans in the Wheel," p. 59.

upholstered, four seated, double boot bobs of the finest make, liberally furnished with robes and raps [sic] to make the trip not only comfortable but pleasant."[37]

M. F. Rittenhouse, who crossed the Continental Divide by sleigh from St. Elmo to Tin Cup in 1884, remembered a less pleasant experience. With five other passengers, Rittenhouse

Schluter and Spengel Groceries and Hardware Store shortly after the Gunnison boom began in 1880. Collection of Bruce Hartman.

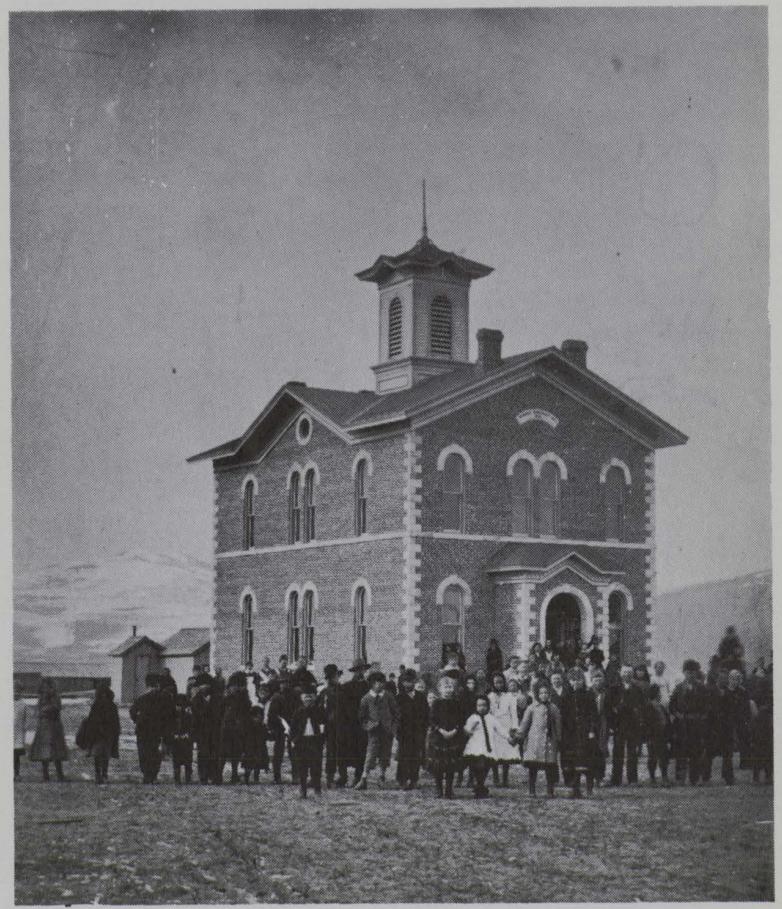
37 *Gunnison Review-Press,* January 16, 1886, p. 1.

traveled by sleigh above timberline where the road was marked by a line of poles planted at intervals of two to three rods. The poles were needed because of fierce winds which covered the road with drifts as quickly as the sleigh passed. The road from Tin Cup Pass ran seven miles into Tin Cup and was covered by three to four feet of snow. A frightened Rittenhouse declared: "The contest seemed to be for the mules of the rear team to get into the forward sleigh, and the forward sleigh to get out of their way. Had the forward sleigh upset . . . or a mule stepped outside of the beaten track, the rear sleigh would certainly have succeeded in passing over his rival, for we were not more than 20 or 30 feet apart, both teams running at their utmost speed."[38]

The coming of the Denver Rio Grande and Denver South Park Railroads into the Gunnison country in 1881 and 1882 marked the end of a profitable and exciting two years for Barlow and Sanderson. Nostalgically, the GUNNISON REVIEW in 1882 lamented: "Now the Denver and Rio Grande road has almost wiped the stage line out of existence. In a few weeks more the last of the old familiar stage coaches that have for so long thundered over the ranges, through the canyons and down the valleys will disappear from our streets."[39]

The day was bright and windy on August 22, 1882, when the last Barlow and Sanderson stage left Gunnison, never to return. The stables on New York Avenue, across from Cuenin's Hotel, were strangely empty. Another era had passed in the history of the Gunnison country. A few companies continued to run stages in the more isolated sectors of the Gunnison country where the railroads did not reach, but the great days were now in the past. Alas, the stageline which had played such a vital role in the Gunnison high country was gone. The advent of the iron horse had driven it out, a victim of progress. And now, with the sound of the lonely whistle crying out in the mountains, ears perked up in the Gunnison country. A new era was at hand. The railroad was coming. The early days of the Gunnison country were now only a memory.

38 Conrad Schader, *Tin Cup, Colorado,* (Denver, Lynn Publications, 1953), p. 16.
39 *Gunnison Review,* June 10, 1882, p. 6.



Gunnison's first public school in 1881. There were a combined total of 185 teachers and pupils. Collection of Bruce Hartman.

EPILOGUE

One era ended and another began when a snorting narrow gauge engine arrived in Gunnison in August of 1881. Never again would the Gunnison country be as isolated and alone as it had been during the often frightening days of the 1870's. The Gunnison country was not even close to submission as 1881 gave way to 1882, but at least a foundation had been laid. Yet, as always, the past had left its mark on the present and would influence the future. The heritage of the Utes, unnamed Spanish explorers, mountain men, gold hungry miners, and men like John Gunnison, Sylvester Richardson, Otto Mears, and Alonzo Hartman had marked the Gunnison country forever. The foundation that had been laid was a firm one. L. G. Denison brilliantly depicted the debt owed to the pioneers of the Gunnison country:

> And so you and I, in the days that are dim,
> Can look back at the bridges we built for him.
> An empire we founded, our members were few
> When the country was wild and primitively new.
> The trails we have blazed that others may see
> And find the way built by you and me—
> The road and bridges, o'er chasms and streams,
> Were built for others with no selfish means.
> What measure of thanks, in the twilight of life,
> Do the pioneers get for that early strife?
> Do they ever think of the days we spent
> In work and hardships unselfishly lent?
> It matters not, for we confidently knew
> That the foundations we laid when the country was new—
> The bridges we built in the days that are dim—
> Were good and strong that we built for him.[1]

[1]Quoted in Arthur W. Monroe, SAN JUAN SILVER, (Montrose, Colorado: Arthur W. Monroe, 1940), p. vii.

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