
Development of Irrigation in the Arkansas Valley

JOSEPH O. VAN HOOK*

There is a remarkable contrast between the scene that was viewed by Pike and Long on their journeys through the Arkansas Valley of Colorado in the first quarter of the nineteenth century and the cultivated fields that extend along both sides of the river from Pueblo to the Colorado-Kansas line at the present time. Not even a Mexican *acequia* greeted the American explorer whose official report, in 1820, fastened upon the high plains the name "Great American Desert."¹ It is a far step from the *acequias* of *El Pueblo* to a great irrigation canal such as the Fort Lyon or the Bessemer. This transition is the most important factor in the economic development of the valley from Pueblo to the State line.

The limited allotment of space necessitates restriction of the scope of this article; hence, the progress of irrigation development is followed only to the early nineties. It was during this period that the change mentioned above was wrought.

Irrigation in the Arkansas Valley is approximately a century old. The inhabitants of *El Pueblo*, an agricultural settlement situated on the Arkansas a few miles above Bent's Old Fort, are known to have practiced irrigation as early as 1839.² This was a temporary settlement, in which a few Americans had joined a

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¹Map accompanying the report of the Major Long expedition. See Edwin James, *Account of an Expedition from Pittsburgh to the Rocky Mountains*, etc.

²Farnham's Travels, in R. G. Thwaites, *Early Western Travels*, XXVIII, 173.

larger number of Mexicans. Napesta, or "the Pueblo," another mixed settlement at the mouth of "Fontaine qui bouit," was established by men whose chief interests were trapping and barter; but irrigation was practiced here in a small way.³ Ceran St. Vrain claimed to have farmed land on the Vigil and St. Vrain grant, probably on the Huerfano River, in 1847, but this settlement likewise was of temporary nature.⁴

Charles Autobees is thought to have been the first permanent agricultural settler in southeastern Colorado.⁵ J. B. Doyle and "Uncle Dick" Wootton established temporary ranches at the mouth of the Huerfano in the early 'fifties.⁶ In 1859 Alexander Hicklin settled on the Greenhorn, on a claim derived from the Vigil and St. Vrain grant.⁷ Irrigation was practiced on all of these ranches.

The farmers of Fountain City, under the leadership of Josiah F. Smith, took a ditch out of Fountain Creek near its confluence with the Arkansas, in the spring of 1859, and began preparations to supply gold-seekers with grain.⁸ Two years later a number of farmers began the project that was known locally as the "Cornmeal Ditch," but officially as the Arkansas Valley Ditch. The local name was derived from the fact that the men engaged in the construction of the ditch had to subsist largely on a cornmeal diet.⁹ This ditch, constructed at a cost of approximately \$20,000, appears to have been the first co-operative enterprise of considerable magnitude in the Arkansas Valley. It was ten and one-half miles in length and was said to be capable of irrigating about 4,000 acres.¹⁰ The headgate was about eighteen miles below Pueblo, at a point opposite the ranch of "Uncle Van" Boone.

The records of the United States Land Office at Pueblo show that, with comparatively few exceptions, the lands entered during the 'sixties and 'seventies were located on streams from which water could be taken for irrigation purposes. As a rule, farmers had

³F. Ruxton, *Wild Life in the Rockies*, 223; F. Parkman, *The Oregon Trail*, 300.

⁴*Colorado Chieftain*, March 30, 1871.

⁵Frank Hall, in his *History of Colorado*, III, 487, says that Autobees started his settlement in 1849. "Uncle Dick" Wootton, who had a ranch on the Huerfano in 1854, says that Charles Auterby was his neighbor then.—H. L. Conard. "Uncle Dick" Wootton, 303. Capt. R. B. Marcy was at the mouth of Cherry Creek (site of Denver) in May, 1858. He writes, in *Thirty Years of Army Life on the Border*, 263: "There was at that time but one white man living within 150 miles of the place, and he was an Indian trader named Jack Audeby, upon the Arkansas." Charles Autobees, age eighty, died at his home on the Huerfano in June, 1882.—Newspaper clipping in "Dawson Scrapbooks," I, 373. The data in this note was kindly furnished by Dr. L. R. Hafen.

⁶Conard, "Uncle Dick" Wootton, 295-96, and Baskin, *History of the Arkansas Valley*, 765-66.

⁷D. W. Working, "The Hicklins on the Greenhorn," in *Colorado Magazine*, IV, 186.

⁸Baskin, *op. cit.*, p. 766; *Colorado Chieftain*, July 7, 1876.

⁹*Colorado Chieftain*, February 16, 1871, p. 1.

¹⁰*Ibid.*

to rely upon their own individual effort and resources, or, at best, upon the co-operation of one or two neighbors. There is abundant evidence of this fact. A front page article in the *Colorado Chieftain* of October 30, 1873, reads in part as follows:

The tides of immigration have flowed along the valleys of the rivers and smaller streams; the immediate bottom lands have been possessed and brought under cultivation by means of easily constructed and comparatively inexpensive irrigating canals.

But agriculture spreading from riverside to the rim of the higher plateaux, has been arrested by reason of the greater difficulty and expense of irrigation. In other words the agriculture of this region has reached its limits by the ordinary means under the control, or within the power of the farmer.

Right here the footsteps of the emigrant from the east, seeking a home have been stayed. . . . To turn the mighty river from its course and lead it by canals along commanding slopes that flank its natural course is far beyond the limits of his purse, and he turns away disheartened and seeks other lands or other employments. . . .

In the spring of the following year the *Colorado Farmer* stated, in reply to eastern inquiries, that farming in the Arkansas Valley (Colorado) was entirely by means of irrigation.¹¹ It was asserted, also, that

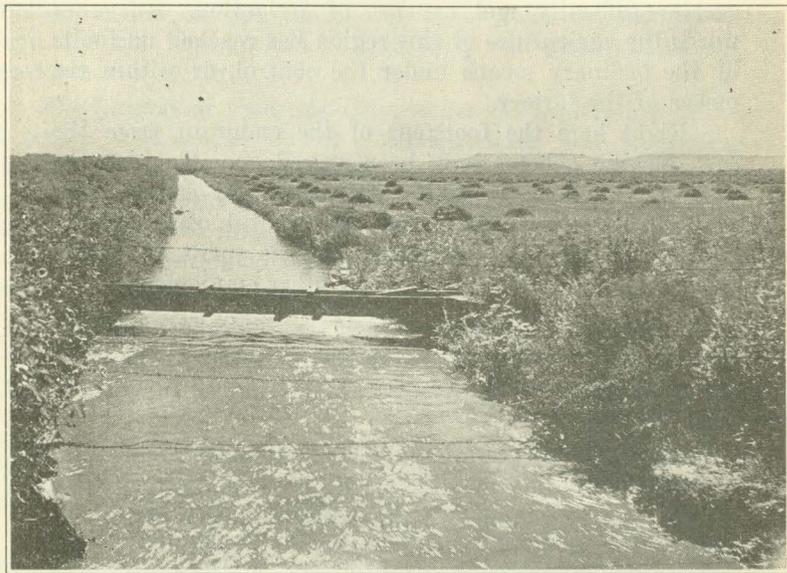
Only that portion of the lands in Colorado lying contiguous to, and on each side of the streams, designated as valleys, can, on account of the extreme aridity of the climate, be cultivated. It is practically impossible to put water upon the great plains proper, so far as present experience goes, on account of their elevation, not taking into consideration the want of a sufficient supply in the streams for such a purpose.

In the *Biennial Report of the State Engineer to the Governor of Colorado for the Years 1883 and 1884* (p. 19), irrigation development prior to 1870 is described as follows:

The ditches were small and short . . . each ditch being generally constructed by the water user to suit his own requirements. These ditches had usually excessive grades, falling with the surface of the country, along the toe of the slope of the table lands, bounding the valleys, and the irrigation was in consequence confined to irregular areas,

¹¹*Las Animas Leader*, March 27, 1874, p. 1.

often to very small patches of ground, scattered along the sides of the stream, as the valleys would permit. The agricultural settlements were in the valleys, close to the banks of the streams. The uplands, locally known as "mesa," or table lands (now considered the best farming ground) were not, at that time, thought to be productive, even if water was put upon them . . . This style of farming was gradually improved upon during the next ten years [1861-1870], but was still confined to the bottom lands, in wider valleys, and irrigated by individual ditches.



IRRIGATION CANAL IN ARKANSAS VALLEY

This report is corroborated by "old-timers" who have lived in the Arkansas Valley since the 'seventies. As recently as September 18, 1932, Mr. George A. H. Baxter, of the Granada community, gave the writer an account of early homesteading in that portion of the Arkansas Valley, where Mr. Baxter has lived for about sixty years. He mentioned specifically the ditch that was taken out by "Jake" Stover in 1872, and extended by Stover and the elder Baxter in 1874—the Sisson Ditch of the present day. Reports of the State Engineer for the period 1883 to 1890 indicate that there were several hundred individually owned or small cooperative ditches in the valleys of Fountain Creek and of the St. Charles and Huerfano Rivers.

The question of water rights presented no serious obstacle while there was land contiguous to the streams for all comers and a sufficiency of water for all users; but such a condition could not maintain indefinitely. In the middle seventies there was a complaint that later settlers had taken up land in advantageous positions (near the mountains) and were "hogging" the water supply.¹² The position of the newcomers at Colorado Springs in relation to the older settlers on Fountain Creek was cited as an instance of this. The *Colorado Chieftain*, our authority for the above statement, observed that the question of water rights was "assuming considerable importance" and was likely to make an unprecedented amount of work for the courts.¹³ It asserted that the legislature had dodged the responsibility of enacting laws relative to such rights, "fearing to produce endless litigation, injurious to the interests of our territory and its citizens." Since disputes were arising which would have to be arbitrated in some manner, the *Chieftain* advocated priority of water rights to the first settlers on the streams, the prohibition of excessive use of water, and right-of-way across intervening lands for settlers whose lands were not contiguous to the streams.¹⁴

At this point, it is well to review briefly some of the legal aspects of irrigation development, before entering upon the discussion of the major canal projects. Part of what the *Chieftain* was demanding in 1874 had been enacted by the Territorial legislature as early as 1861, but, apparently, was not being enforced in its entirety. This act provided free use of water to all claimants of land along streams, granted right-of-way across intervening lands for ditches, and forbade unnecessarily large or wasteful ditches.¹⁵ The revised law of 1872 gave priority of water rights to persons owning land contiguous to streams, but continued the right-of-way provision of the act of 1861. It provided, also, for district supervisors and required ditch owners to construct bridges over ditches that cut public highways.¹⁶ The provisions of Article XVI, sections 5 and 6, of the Constitution of Colorado, declare the "water of every natural stream not heretofore appropriated, within the State of Colorado," to be public property and dedicated to the use of the people of the State, and that the right to appropriate such waters for "beneficial uses shall never be denied." Priority of appropriation is declared to give the better right; but, in case of insufficient supply for all purposes, preference is given first to domestic purposes, secondly to agricultural purposes, and finally

¹²*Colorado Chieftain*, July 16, 1874, p. 2.

¹³*Ibid.*

¹⁴*Ibid.*, October 30, 1873, p. 1.

¹⁵*Session Laws*, 1861, pp. 67-69.

¹⁶*Colorado Chieftain*, March 21, 1872, p. 1.

to manufacturing purposes. These provisions are, of necessity, the basis of all subsequent legislation relative to water rights.

The State legislature, at its first session in 1876, took up the matter of regulation of water usage, but succeeded only in enacting a measure that was vague in its meaning and difficult to enforce.¹⁷ The present system of State administration of water rights had its origin in the acts of 1879 and 1881. These acts, taken collectively, created the office of State Hydraulic Engineer and prescribed his initial duties; started the process of creating water divisions (the Arkansas division being No. 2) and water districts; created the office of Water Commissioner and prescribed the functions of same; and provided for the determination of priority of appropriation by judicial decree.¹⁸ Subsequent measures have developed more elaborate administrative machinery, but the system has remained substantially the same. Of the ten water districts created by the act of 1879, nine were in the South Platte division. Ditches taken out of Fountain Creek and its tributaries, in El Paso County, constituted district No. 10. By 1884, the governor had created sixteen additional districts, including five in the Arkansas Valley. These were No. 11 (Chaffee County), No. 15 (Custer and part of Fremont County), No. 16 (ditches out of Greenhorn Creek), No. 19 (the upper Purgatoire Valley) and No. 26 (valley of the St. Charles, except Greenhorn Creek). By 1890, water districts had been created throughout the whole extent of the Arkansas Valley, with approximately the same boundaries as obtain at the present time (Nos. 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 66, and 67); but no "decretal orders regarding priorities" had been issued for the districts east of Pueblo County (Nos. 17, 18, 19, 66, and 67).¹⁹ Meanwhile the office of Division Engineer had been created, with provision for more direct supervision of the water commissioners.

The Arkansas Valley division lagged far behind the South Platte division in the matter of setting up the machinery for the administration of water rights. Except on the upper reaches of the Arkansas and in its tributary valleys near the mountains, there was no immediate demand for priority decrees. It was rather generally assumed until the late 'eighties that the main stream of the Arkansas was quite sufficient for all ditches actually constructed or then in prospect. But the numerous large enterprises projected between 1887 and 1890 created much concern for priority rights, and there was a rush for judicial decrees. A "Tabulation of Major Decrees," representing twenty-three ditches taken out of

¹⁷General Laws of Colorado, 1877, p. 518.

¹⁸The Fourth Biennial Report of the State Engineer to the Governor of Colorado, pp. 25 ff (Part I), contains a compilation of irrigation laws to 1888.

¹⁹Fifth Biennial Report of the State Engineer, pp. 222-223.

the Arkansas River between the Bessemer headgate and the State line, shows that eight of these canals had appropriated only 331.46 second-feet of water prior to 1884, whereas the twenty-three had appropriated a total of 5,815.23 second-feet before the end of 1893.²⁰ The remaining space allotted will admit of but a very brief sketch of the history of a few of these major canal projects.

Three early projects, not included among the twenty-three mentioned above, deserve some consideration. The first of these was a co-operative enterprise in Nine Mile Bottom, where irrigation was practiced with considerable success in the 'sixties. In fact, Nine Mile Bottom, situated in a bend of the Purgatoire River some twenty miles from its confluence with the Arkansas, was the chief local source of supply of agricultural products throughout the later 'sixties and early 'seventies.²¹ Not until 1888, however, was a ditch constructed on a scale capable of supplying the water demand of the entire bottom. This ditch, having its headgate at the old Vorce place, was but four miles long in 1888, and had been constructed at a cost of \$12,000.²² The present Nine Mile Canal, with its rather substantial headgate and its increased length, is quite an improvement over that of 1888. The other two enterprises, to which reference is made in this paragraph, were launched in the vicinity of Pueblo. The first of these was designed to bring a water supply to the city of Pueblo and to irrigate a considerable area between the Arkansas and Fountain Creek.²³ The ditch was constructed by the Arkansas Water Company. It tapped the Arkansas at the lower end of Rock Canon. The length of the main ditch was thirteen miles. The capital stock of the company, which had been purchased by local subscription, had to be increased from \$40,000 to \$70,000 in May, 1873. In spite of this strategic move, the company encountered serious financial difficulties. To make matters worse, the supply of water for domestic purposes was not at all satisfactory; hence, the ditch was sold by Sheriff Ellis to a Denver speculator, and the people of Pueblo voted a bond issue of \$120,000 for the installation of a Holly system of water works.²⁴ Meanwhile the Central Colorado Improvement Company had been busy with a ditch enterprise, costing about \$75,000, designed to convert the South Pueblo townsite into "a veritable Garden of Eden" and to irrigate about 20,000 acres of the company's Nolan Grant land.²⁵ This was a forerunner of the big Bessemer irrigation project, which did not materialize until 1890.

²⁰Copies of this "Tabulation of Major Decrees" may be obtained from C. W. Beach, Division Engineer, at Pueblo.

²¹Las Animas Leader, August 23, 1873, p. 3.

²²La Junta Tribune, February 23, 1888, p. 3.

²³Colorado Chieftain, July 31, 1873, p. 3.

²⁴Ibid., November 12, 1874, p. 3.

²⁵Ibid., January 1, 1874, p. 1.

The first large-scale project of a permanent character, destined to figure prominently in the agricultural development of the valley, was the Rocky Ford ditch. It has a priority of 111.76 second-feet dating from May 15, 1874. This and subsequent priorities give it a water right second to that of no other ditch east of Pueblo. The original ditch, constructed by Geo. W. Swink, J. W. Potter, Wm. Matthews, Asahel Russell, and others, was taken out of the south bank of the Arkansas about four miles west of the present town of Rocky Ford and extended to Timpas Creek, a distance of approximately ten miles.²⁶ In 1887-1888 the ditch was enlarged and extended to a total length of sixteen miles. In 1890 it irrigated 7,968 acres, a considerable percentage of which was planted to alfalfa.²⁷

The Fort Lyon canal is listed in the State Engineer's report for 1885 and 1886 as the Arkansas River Land, Town, and Canal Company ditch, with appropriation dating from December 25, 1883. It was taken out of the Arkansas (on the north side) about two miles west of La Junta, in land that was once part of the Cheyenne and Arapaho reservation. In the spring of 1886 it extended to Sand Creek, a distance of about twenty miles. At this point T. C. Henry, who lies in an obscure grave at Abilene, Kansas, caught the vision of a great canal extending to the Kansas line, a distance of 113 miles. He pushed the work vigorously, securing in 1887 an additional decree for 597.16 second-feet of water, bringing the total to 761.80 second-feet. In 1890 this canal was reported capable of irrigating 40,600 acres. Prior to this date, Henry had advocated the impounding of flood waters of the Arkansas in reservoirs;²⁸ however, the great storage reservoirs of the Fort Lyon system belong to the period subsequent to 1890.

Henry was not through when he had built the extension of the Fort Lyon canal. He conceived a grander scheme for highline canals both north and south of the Arkansas, bringing about two million acres under irrigation.²⁹ That south of the river did not, under Henry's direction, proceed beyond the paper stage. In the late 'eighties, however, he became keenly interested in the projected Bob Creek canal, which was to conduct water from the mouth of Chico Creek to the Kansas line, bringing over a million acres of potentially fine agricultural land under irrigation. In November, 1887, an official of the Missouri Pacific (or Pueblo and State Line) Railroad Company, owner of the canal charter at that time, reported that water rights were being sold as far east as

²⁶*La Junta Tribune*, May 27, 1886, p. 2.

²⁷*Report of the State Engineer for 1889 and 1890*, p. 317.

²⁸*La Junta Tribune*, December 20, 1888, p. 2.

²⁹Both the *Colorado Chieftain* and the *La Junta Tribune* mention Henry's ditch proposals frequently in the late eighties.

Lamar with the promise of water for spring planting.³⁰ This promise was not to be fulfilled; but Henry believed in the exaggerated possibilities of this proposed canal, and in December, 1889, we find him promising farmers of the Arlington Springs neighborhood water for spring planting in 1890.³¹ He actually started the construction of this canal in 1889; but the scheme was far too grand. It became the Twin Lakes canal of the present day, which does not adequately supply the lands under it as far east as Crowley, Ordway, and Sugar City.

Space will barely permit the mentioning of other important ditches with appropriations antedating 1890. The Catlin (out of the Arkansas in S. 24, T. 22 S., R. 59 W.) has a priority dating from December 3, 1884. It was extended at intervals during the 'eighties. In 1890 it was reported to be forty-five miles long (including the Fairmount extension) and capable of irrigating 21,335 acres.³² The Bessemer canal, thirty-five miles long and capable of irrigating over 20,000 acres, was completed in 1890 at a cost of \$450,000. The Rocky Ford Highline canal (headgate in S. 17, T. 21 S., R. 61 W.), fifty miles long and capable of irrigating 30,000 acres, has a priority decree dating from the early 'eighties. Other ditches deserving consideration, if space would permit, are the Town Ditch of West Las Animas, the Las Animas Consolidated, the Amity, the Holbrook, the Lamar, the Fort Bent, and the Otero. And these by no means complete the list.

Prior to 1890 the famous Kansas-Colorado water suit had been instituted. Ditches, actually constructed or projected, were laying claim to more water than the Arkansas could supply. The era of great storage reservoirs had been ushered in. Men of vision were beginning to think of the possibility of bringing water from beyond the mountains to the eastern plains. New towns along the Missouri Pacific were dreaming of growth that was never to be realized.

It might be an exaggeration to say that the Arkansas and its tributaries are to the Arkansas valley what the Nile is to Egypt. Without irrigation, however, such towns as Lamar, Las Animas, and Rocky Ford would be as Arlington, Chivington, and Sheridan Lake.

³⁰*La Junta Tribune*, November 24, 1887, p. 3.

³¹*Ibid.*, January 4, 1890, p. 2.

³²*Report of the State Engineer for 1889 and 1890*, p. 315.

Experiences in a Mushroom Mining Camp in Colorado, 1896-97

T. H. PROSKE*

The early history of Colorado is full of tales of mushroom mining camps, each of which has its peculiar circumstances. But as I have learned from my own experience, most of these little excitements were nothing more nor less than an overflow of enthusiasm from camps that were real producers. Of these, no doubt, Cripple Creek had the greatest overflow, and among the mushroom booms following the real finding of values in Cripple Creek was West Creek and Puma City (Tarryall), the latter in Park County.

I was among those who rushed to West Creek, saw it boom and burst, and like others there simply was waiting for another "new find" when word came to us that promising prospects were being discovered at Puma City. So hitching up the old gray mare, my partner and I drove over to Puma City. This partner was an old timer who had been in the Leadville boom and later came to Denver and was associated with Parson Tom Uzzell. His name was Tom Bell.

Puma City had been laid out on a placer claim by a Mr. Charles Gilman, who was busy selling lots and boosting every prospect that was being reported to him by such prospectors as were at that time scouring the "Puma Hills" looking for those fabulous extensions of veins which existed in the Cripple Creek District, and which, according to the best knowledge of that time, were supposed to extend into the South Park section.

Mr. Gilman, after some conversation, asked me to locate in Puma City. He offered me a town lot free, and said what they needed more than anything else just then was a good reporter to write up all about the wonderful strikes that were being made, and asked me to undertake that work. So I located there and every evening I would meet the various prospectors that made his office a place of meeting and they would fill me up with glowing accounts of their prospects, all of which I would write down, and one day I would send these in to the *Rocky Mountain News* and the next day to the *Denver Republican*, the two daily papers of Denver. These papers never failed to publish every word that I sent to them, and so Puma City began to grow and attract people from everywhere.

Among the first to locate in Puma City was a man known as Mexican Pete, who had a saloon on the main street. Not long after

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I started as a reporter, among others who came was a gambler named Jim Gregg. Jim was looking for a place to open up his games. He talked with Mexican Pete and they agreed that Jim Gregg was to rent space in Pete's saloon for his tables, so Gregg went back to Cripple Creek to get his tables. But while there he met another fellow who asked him about Puma City, and when informed by Gregg that he intended to open up his games there, this man asked to go with him. They went to Puma City together and this man bought two lots and let a contract to build a much larger building than Mexican Pete had. When Gregg went in with this other fellow Mexican Pete became very angry. Naturally, he lost most of his trade to the larger establishment, and this made him madder still. He demanded that Gregg pay him the agreed rental, and started out to collect it. He made several demands on Gregg, who tried to keep him in a good humor and put him off at the same time.

In the meantime a couple of dance halls were opened up in Puma City. Gregg had quite a large following of what we called at that time "tin-horns." These were lesser gamblers who worked for Gregg. It was Gregg's custom to take his gang about 7:30 every evening and patronize both of the dance halls before opening up his games in his own place. It so happened that Tommy Bell and I had a house tent that was located between these two dance halls, and we always knew when Gregg and his gang were on their way to the second dance hall, as they would frequently stage an impromptu war dance around our house tent, firing their guns and trying to frighten Tommy and me out of our wits. Sometimes they would shoot holes through the stove pipe of our stove.

Among those who came to Puma City was a man named Balcom, a United States Deputy Mineral Surveyor. As he was the son of a Methodist minister back in Illinois, his church training was complete. At times before Tommy Bell came and stayed with me permanently, Balcom would batch with me, and he never failed to say grace and to pray on retiring and on arising from bed. He decided that it was up to him to give the town some chance to practice religion, so he conducted such services as he could under the circumstances. At about that time there was a parson who made the rounds of the various mining camps—Father Dyer, they called him—and Balcom got him interested in Puma City, and so he came to look after religious interests here.

Mexican Pete continued to nurse his grudge against Gregg, and knowing that Gregg always went to the one dance hall first every evening, decided to try and collect from Gregg with a 30-30

Winchester rifle. This first dance hall was a two-store building with an archway between, one side for the dancing, the other for the bar, and the entrance was through the barroom. Pete came in and as there was a dance in progress, he stopped at the end of the bar to talk with the barkeeper. Soon the dance was over, Gregg and his gang came into the barroom with the girls and the barkeeper went to serve them. One of Gregg's men pointed to Mexican Pete and said, "Look who is here." At that Pete dropped down behind the end of the bar and took aim at Gregg and fired. The bullet burned both shoulderblades of Gregg and caused him to half turn around, facing Pete, who fired again. The second bullet grazed the flesh in Gregg's neck. After firing these shots, Pete made a jump for the door, which was open, but before he could get out three bullets hit him, one from Gregg's gun and two from the guns of his gang, and Pete fell dead on the platform in front of the building. Gregg went about all night. He had on a light overcoat and it was surely riddled from the rifle shots.

The sheriff and coroner came down from Fairplay next day and Gregg and two of his men were put under arrest. A preliminary hearing before a Justice of the Peace was held and as there was no shorthand reporter there, all the testimony was written in long hand, a very slow job. But when it was finished Gregg and his men were bound over to the District Court and at a later trial all were acquitted.

Father Dyer, when informed of the shooting, said that none of the mining camps he had ever visited ever amounted to anything until they had a shooting and no doubt this was a good omen for Puma City. No doubt now they would find some good ore. But we never did, and Puma City is a ghost city today.

source materials of the intriguing fur trade period in the Far West. Many of these frontiersmen were prominent in their day and their occupation but the caprices of Clio have, after the lapse of years, left them almost unknown. It is our purpose in a series under the above title to retrieve and assemble, in so far as is possible, the scattered fragments of information relating to the lesser known Mountain Men.

Louis Vasquez

Louis Vasquez, youngest child of Benito and Julie Papin Vasquez, was born in St. Louis October 3, 1798.¹ His father, of Spanish extraction, was born in Galicia, Spain, in 1750 and came to St. Louis with Governor Piernas in 1770. At this time St. Louis and the Louisiana country west of the Mississippi was owned and governed by Spain. Benito Vasquez took an active part in matters affecting the life of St. Louis, being Captain of militia, a farmer and trader. In the absence of the Governor he frequently acted as Commandant of the village. Julie Papin, a French girl from Canada, whom he married on November 27, 1774, became the mother of his twelve children.²

Of the childhood and youth of Louis Vasquez little is known. Considering the time and place, he had a fair education, as his letters testify. His father died when he was twelve years old and young Louis appears to have been taken under the wing of his eldest brother, Benito Jr., whom he addressed in extant letters running from 1824 to 1842 as "*Chere Parin.*"³

Louis Vasquez was a member of the fur trading expedition which was led up the Missouri River by Gen. W. H. Ashley in 1823 and may have been with the Andrew Henry party that ascended the river the preceding year.⁴ By December, 1824, he was back in St. Louis.⁵ Although we cannot follow his movements in detail during the next few years, he was undoubtedly engaged in trapping and the fur trade in the Rocky Mountains. He is said to have been employed by Smith, Jackson and Sublette,⁶ who succeeded Ashley and Henry in 1826 and continued the conduct of the mountain trade for four years. On December 10, 1832, he

¹Old Cathedral Church Register, St. Louis, and *Collet's Index to Instruments Affecting Real Estate, St. Louis, Mo.*, Grantors, Vol. I, Pt. 3. This data was kindly furnished by Miss Stella M. Drumm, Librarian of the Missouri Historical Society.

²*Missouri Historical Society Collections*, IV, 12.

³These letters, written in French, are in the Missouri Historical Society library. Photostat copies are in the library of the State Historical Society of Colorado. Miss Ernestine S. Andre of Denver kindly translated them for me.

⁴H. C. Dale, *The Ashley-Smith Explorations*, 86.

⁵See his letter of December 8, 1824, written from St. Louis.—Vasquez Collection, Missouri Historical Society.

⁶Dale, *op. cit.*, 310.

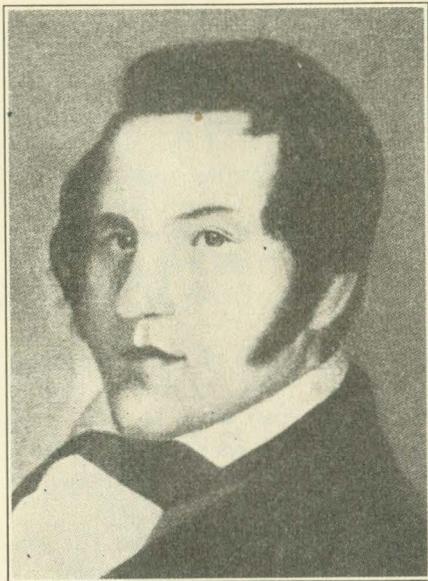
Mountain Men

LEROY R. HAFEN

The early history of the Rocky Mountain West was made by a rather distinct breed of pioneers known as the Mountain Men. During the three decades from about 1815 to 1845 these Americans blazed the trails of the Far West.

Full length biographies have been written of a number of these men—Kit Carson, Thomas Fitzpatrick, Jedediah Smith, Jim Bridger, Jim Beckwourth, Jim Baker, Dick Wootton and Joe Meek. A number more are fairly well known through journals, diaries and reminiscences. But a host of others remain who are less adequately known. Their names flash up from the fragmentary

signed a document at St. Louis stating that he was going to the western mountains and that in case of death his property was to go to his brother Benito.⁷ He accompanied Robert Campbell to the summer rendezvous of 1833 on Green River and is then spoken of as "an old mountain man."⁸ On the return trip from the rendezvous Vasquez was placed in charge of the mules and cattle, taking them by land to the mouth of the Yellowstone River, while Campbell took the furs in boats down the Bighorn and the Yellowstone.



LOUIS VASQUEZ

During the winter of 1833-34 Vasquez traded with the Crow Indians, from whom he succeeded in securing thirty-one packs of robes and furs.⁹ In the spring he was attacked by the Blackfoot Indians and two of his men, Bourdon and Hebert, were killed.¹⁰ Summer found him again at the mountain rendezvous on Green River.

From Hams Fork in the Green River valley he wrote his brother Benito on July 9, 1834, giving certain instructions and informing him that he would remain in the mountains through the winter. With an eye to long winter evenings, he added this post-

⁷Vasquez papers, Missouri Historical Society.

⁸Elliott Coues, *Forty Years a Fur Trader*, 15.

⁹*Ibid.*, 42-62.

¹⁰Letter of Louis Vasquez dated Hams Fork, July 9, 1834.

script: "If you could procure for me a few novels Mr. Campbell [who was to come back in the fall] would be pleased to bring them to me."¹¹ This note, together with the general character of his well written letters, indicates that Vasquez was far above the average Mountain Man in point of education.

The following winter found Vasquez at a trading post which he styles "Fort Convenience." From this place, on December 30, 1834, he wrote a letter to Benito and sent it down by Andrew Sublette. He wrote in part: "* * * I am in good health. * * * Tell Emilie not to worry about my health; tell her that the God of men who are above reproach is with me and besides I have nothing to fear." A certain Miss Tinten having been mentioned to him, he replies: "I assure you, there is nothing to it. The name alone disgusts me. In truth I like all the girls but love none of them. * * * Assure poor old Emilie¹² and her poor children of the sincere attachment I have for them. Tell them that it will come out that they will carry their name with honor. Tell Thomas [probably the son of Benito Vasquez] to work with courage and Pike [son of A. F. and Emilie Vasquez] also. Tell them that I have no heirs and that I hope to make a fortune. Write me in care of the company. Address your letter to Fort William (Black Hills) [forerunner of Fort Laramie, present Wyoming] and if I do not come down I will write you my intentions."¹³

The location of his "Fort Convenience" is somewhat of a mystery, as we have not found it mentioned elsewhere in fur trade material. I am inclined to think that it was the temporary post hitherto unnamed but known to have existed about five miles north of present Denver and opposite the mouth of Clear Creek. In pioneer days this stream was known as Vasquez Fork because of the location of the Vasquez post at its mouth.¹⁴

Vasquez returned to St. Louis in the summer of 1835 and while there leased his 77½ acres of land in St. Louis County to his brother Benito for a term of ten years for ten dollars, it being

¹¹*Ibid.*

¹²This is probably his sister-in-law, Emilie Faustin Vasquez, wife of his brother, Antoine Francois (Baronet), who had been interpreter for Capt. Z. M. Pike on the explorer's famous expedition into the Southwest in 1806-7. A. F. Vasquez had died of cholera in 1828 while agent among the Kaws, according to Frederick Chouteau in *Kansas Historical Society Transactions*, VIII, 423.

¹³Vasquez letters.

¹⁴Frank Hall, a Colorado pioneer of 1860, says in his *History of Colorado*, I, 169: "In this valley [South Platte] we have the record of four conspicuous stations [trading posts], the first built by Louis Vasquez in 1832 opposite the mouth of Vasquez Fort (Clear Creek), four miles below Denver. It was formed of cottonwood logs and, like all its contemporaries, garrisoned by hunters and trappers." Hall knew A. Pike Vasquez, nephew of Louis Vasquez, in early Denver and probably got this data from him. The date "1832" is probably incorrect. A. Pike Vasquez was one of the first businessmen of Denver. The *Rocky Mountain News* of Feb. 1, 1860, speaks of the store "presided over by A. Pike Vasquez, who began trade near here in 1836, as an employee of his uncle—old Col. [Louis] Vasquez—at his fort six miles below this city [Denver]. He says he never looked out on the plain without seeing countless herds of buffalo."

understood that the lease was "made for the sole use, benefit and behoof of the said Benito and his children, and not for the profit" of others.¹⁵

During the autumn of 1836 Vasquez was again in the mountains engaged in the fur trade. With him was his nephew Pike and Andrew Sublette, the latter apparently in partnership with him. In a letter to Benito written from "Platte River, Oct. 9, 1836," Vasquez says that Sublette is going down with a part of their robes. "I am well, also Pike. * * * I pray you treat Sublette as you would me for my sake. He is a good youngster. * * * Pike writes his mother. * * * Write me by Sublette this winter."¹⁶

Vasquez brought his furs down to St. Louis the next spring and there packed them for shipment to New York.¹⁷ While in St. Louis he obtained on July 15th a trading license from William Clark, Superintendent of Indian Affairs at St. Louis. The license was issued to "Louis Vasquez and Andrew W. Sublette, trading under the style of Vasquez & Sublette" with 22 men. A similar license was issued to them June 30, 1838.¹⁸

Vasquez and Sublette came to the South Platte valley and erected the adobe trading post, Fort Vasquez, the ruins of which still stand beside the cement highway about one mile south of Platteville, Colorado. The principal wall of the fort was most probably built in 1837. James P. Beckwourth, who accompanied Vasquez and Sublette to this post in the summer of 1838, says: "We staid one night at Bents Fort, on the Arkansas, and then moved on to our destination on the South Fork of the Platte. Here we erected suitable buildings within the fort for our proposed trading, and, among others, a barn, which we proceeded to fill with hay for the coming winter."¹⁹ Beckwourth worked as a trader for Vasquez and Sublette for two years and claims that with his help they made thousands of dollars and cleared themselves of debt.²⁰ The less romantic business papers, however, tell a different story. Vasquez and Sublette were losing money, as were practically all traders at the time. The best days of the fur trade had passed; the silk hat had knocked the bottom out of the beaver fur market.

Vasquez and Sublette sold out their fort and business to Lock and Randolph in 1840 or 1841. The latter became bankrupt through mismanagement and various losses—including the loss of

¹⁵Vasquez papers. This document is in English.

¹⁶Vasquez papers.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, letter of June 18, 1837.

¹⁸I found these documents in the Indian Bureau archives, Washington, D. C., "St. Louis Supt. File, C 316."

¹⁹T. D. Bonner, *The Life and Adventures of James P. Beckwourth* (De Voto edition), 292. Beckwourth says (p. 312) that Vasquez and Sublette disposed of their business in 1840, after three years of business.

²⁰Bonner, *op. cit.*, 293, 300, 312. Beckwourth's tendency to exaggeration regarding his own exploits is well known.

45 horses and mules stolen by the Sioux—and in 1842 evacuated Fort Vasquez and quit the country.²¹ Vasquez and Sublette held the note of Lock and Randolph for \$800, which they were unable to collect.²² W. L. Sublette, in writing to Sir William D. Stewart to borrow \$12,000, says: "Vasquez and Sublette made a rather sinking business of it. Brother A. W. Sublette is now on the farm."²³

Arranging with Robert Campbell to take care of his business obligations, Vasquez set out from St. Louis in August, 1842, with James Bridger, a fellow Mountain Man for twenty years past, to trade in the mountains. They took a company of 30 or 40 men and were fitted out by the American Fur Company.²⁴ Just before setting out Vasquez wrote his brother: "The company has given me good advantage and good profit. They advance me the merchandise delivered in the mountains at 50 per cent in advance on the New York price. * * * I leave to make money or to die. * * * There is no mortgage on the habitation."²⁵

We next see Louis Vasquez at Fort Bridger, present Wyoming, as a partner of Bridger. The two old Mountain Men are not only prosecuting the fur trade but are maintaining a trading post for overland emigrants. Practically all the travelers passing over the Oregon and the California trails after 1842 stopped at their fort and many narratives give glimpses of the post and its proprietors. Most of this data has been assembled in J. C. Alter's *James Bridger* (1925) and in R. S. Ellison's *Fort Bridger, Wyoming, a Brief History* (1931). Hence we shall not repeat the material here.

Just when Vasquez was married is not clear. It was probably in 1848 or shortly before. He married an American woman from Kentucky, whose maiden name was Land. She had one or more children before her marriage to Vasquez. Hiram Vasquez, stepson of Louis Vasquez, says that he and his mother were taken out to Fort Bridger in 1848.²⁶ There they lived for a number of years.

W. G. Johnston met Vasquez in June, 1849, and thus describes him: "Mr. Vasquez was a fine portly looking gentleman of medium height, about fifty years of age, and made an impression of being intelligent and shrewd." Johnston was conducted through the fort by Mrs. Vasquez, who invited him to sit on a chair and treated him to fresh buttermilk. He comments: "Mr. Bridger, with a

²¹R. B. Sage, *Rocky Mountain Life*, 208.

²²Letter of Robert Campbell to W. L. Sublette, dated May 23, 1842.—Sublette Collection, Missouri Historical Society.

²³Sublette Collection, dated September, 1842.

²⁴*Ibid.*

²⁵Vasquez letters.

²⁶Hiram Vasquez, "Experiences at Fort Bridger, with the Shoshones and in Early Colorado," in *Colorado Magazine*, VIII, 106.

taste differing from that of his partner (who has a white wife from the States) made his selection from among the ladies of the wilderness."²⁷

William Kelly, who visited Vasquez in June, 1849, writes: "He is a Frenchman, the partner of Mr. Bridger in the fort or trading post, which they established many years since, making a large fortune in bartering their baubles for skins and valuable furs."²⁸ Another characterization is from Col. A. G. Brackett: "In the palmy days of 1849 and '50, Mr. Bridger had a partner named Vasquez, a Mexican, who put on a great deal of style, and used to ride about the country in a coach and four."²⁹

Not content with trading possibilities at Fort Bridger, Vasquez extended his business to Salt Lake City, opening a store there in 1849.³⁰ At one time he also maintained a flatboat ferry on Green River, charging toll for conveying wagons across the river.³¹

Vasquez appears to have remained in business at Fort Bridger until 1855, when he sold the fort—or at least his interest in it—to the Mormons. The Mormon Church Historian's Office Journal has this entry under date of October 18, 1858: "Louis Vasques, of the firm of Bridger and Vasques, executed a bill of sale of Fort Bridger, and acknowledged receipt of \$4,000 on Aug. 3, 1855, and \$4,000 this day (Oct. 18, 1858)."³² Bill Hickman states: "The post was then [1857], and had been for two years owned by the [Mormon] church, and in possession of Mr. Robinson, who had had charge of the same from the time of its purchase, I having been one of the carriers of the heavy load of gold it took to purchase said place with the stock and goods thereon."³³

Vasquez appears to have left the mountains in 1855, immediately after selling his interests at the fort. Hiram Vasquez states: "Mother had folks in Missouri and wanted to go back there. We returned to St. Louis when I was eleven or twelve. We went the Platte route. The buffalo were around us for fourteen days; there

²⁷Quoted in J. C. Alter, *James Bridger*, 208-9.

²⁸*Ibid.*, 205.

²⁹*Collections of the Wyoming Historical Society*, I, 68. The parentage of Vasquez helps to explain why one calls him a Frenchman and another a Mexican.

³⁰Nov. 21, 1849. Louis Vasquez, associated with James Bridger at Fort Bridger, opened a branch store in Salt Lake City. He sold sugar at three pounds for \$2.—*Millennial Star*. This note is from J. C. Alter. When Capt. Howard Stansbury visited Fort Bridger in August, 1849, Vasquez was in Salt Lake City.—Stansbury, *Exploration and Survey of the Valley of the Great Salt Lake of Utah*, 76. On the homeward journey the next year the Captain met Vasquez and Bridger at their fort and received assistance from them.—*Ibid.*, 228.

³¹Hiram Vasquez, *op. cit.*, 107.

³²Quoted in Alter, *op. cit.*, 257.

³³*Brigham's Destroying Angel* (edited by J. H. Beadle), 118. Hiram Vasquez says that one room or part of a room at Fort Bridger was the safe. He remembers seeing a pile of gold in it.—Interview had with Mr. Vasquez by me in July, 1930. The gold he saw was probably the purchase price of the fort.

were millions of them. Father had a brick house in St. Louis, on Hickory Street."³⁴

In 1859 "A. Pike Vasquez & Co." had a provision and grocery store in Denver. The business was owned in part by Louis Vasquez.³⁵ He no doubt financed his nephew in the project, but did not personally come out to Denver. Louis Vasquez was living at Westport, Missouri, in September, 1859, where Jim Beckwourth visited him before coming to Denver to be employed at the Vasquez store.³⁶

Hiram Vasquez says: "Father bought a brick house in Westport and we had a farm ten miles south of Kansas City and one mile east of the state line. . . . Felix Bridger was about my age. We were raised together. He was the son of Jim Bridger by a Flathead squaw. . . . In Missouri Bridgers lived within two miles of our place. From town out, there was William Bent's place, ours, and then Bridger's."³⁷

Vasquez and Bridger, who had trapped beaver, fought Indians and pioneered the West together for nearly half a century, spent their declining years as quiet neighbors on their Missouri farms. Before a fire on long winter evenings they must have re-fought the Blackfeet with many a hairbreadth escape, waded the streams to tend their beaver traps, or rollicked at the gay summer rendezvous on Green River. And perhaps a wind from the Rocky Mountains would on occasion blow down the chimney and lade the smoke from hickory hearth logs with an odor of pungent pine, while dimmed eyes of Mountain Men saw buffalo hump-ribs, fixed on sharp sticks, spitting at the fire.

Vasquez died in September, 1868, and is buried in the Mount St. Mary's Cemetery at Kansas City.³⁸ Bridger was planted beneath his apple tree on the farm in 1881; later to be removed to the cemetery in Kansas City. Both would no doubt rest more peacefully in a clump of aspen or beneath the spruce or pine that guards some unfrequented pass in the western Rockies.

³⁴*Colorado Magazine*, VIII, 107.

³⁵W. N. Byers, "History of Colorado," in *Encyclopedia of Biography of Colorado*, 20. See also advertisements in the *Rocky Mountain News*, Dec. 1, 1859, and on following dates.

³⁶*Ibid.*, Dec. 1, 1859.

³⁷*Colorado Magazine*, VIII, 107-8.

³⁸Data through Dr. Nollie Mumey of Denver from Rev. John J. Doyle, Secretary of the Mount St. Mary's Cemetery, Kansas City, Missouri.

A Preface to the Settlement of Grand Junction¹ The Uncompahgre Utes "Goes West"

WALKER D. WYMAN*

From a desolate desert inhabited by lizards and prairie dogs, to an enterprising city of ten thousand people has taken Grand Junction, Colorado, just fifty-one years. Two generations away from log cabins with dirt floors and sod roofs is this Western Slope city which has recently celebrated its golden jubilee. Half a century since Indian tepees dotted the valleys of the Colorado River and its tributaries, sending heavenward spirals of sagebrush smoke wafted by the winds off Pinon Mesa. Hardly the span of life of a man since the White Father at Washington decreed that the Indian of this region must give way to the white man.

The history of the settlement of the "West" is prefaced throughout by the removal of the Indian. The first white settlers in any frontier community were pulled to that particular area in search of the "better" life which the physical and social environment were supposed to afford. This was often done without considering the consequences of trespassing upon Indian land; hence open hostilities with the original owners became a part of the history of westward expansion. A far-away federal government, stimulated into activity by western senators and military imperialists, constantly shifted its policy to meet the exigencies arising when the red and white frontiers clashed. To control and direct the flow of population into the West was a difficult task, an impossible task. So they purchased the Indian titles, gave generous annuities in exchange for possession of the land, and tried to interest the red man in agriculture so as to make him "take root" in his allotted reservations.

The Ute Indians were the "first families" of Colorado, so far as the white emigrants were concerned. But these first families were not so fortunate as the first white families of Virginia. For instead of amassing fortunes and becoming political and social leaders in the fabric of society, they sold their heritage for a mess of pottage and were pushed over into the Uintah Basin in Utah.² There they live today, those who remain, in the fashion characteristic of many of our first families who happened to have the wrong pigment in their epidermis.

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¹This is chapter one of a study of the settlement of Grand Junction, Colorado.

²This includes only the White River and the Uncompahgre Utes.

Beginning in 1863 negotiations paved the way for the ultimate removal of the Utes from the Rocky Mountain region. By 1880 they had been pushed to the western slope, and located in three different agencies—in southern Colorado, in the Uncompahgre area, and on the White River.³ There were some 2,900 of them, most of whom were successfully resisting the new policy of making them agricultural and "civilized."⁴ It was quite well agreed on the part of the clergy-agents located among the Utes that in "weaning them from their migratory or roving habits and inducing them to permanently locate [sic] homes for themselves and families, lies the solution of the problem of Ute civilization. . . . Like children, the Utes need kindly but firm and honest treatment for their successful government."⁵

However, by the latter part of the 1870s, even if peace did reign on the western slope of the Rockies, there was a growing sentiment that the Utes must go. As early as 1878 a bill had been drafted for Congress expressing that feeling.⁶ Homeseekers had begun to turn their eager eyes toward this new El Dorado. The vibrating frontier town of Gunnison, located in the Gunnison River valley, was famous by 1879 as an outfitting center for the newly developed mining regions. It looked wistfully toward the "Grand" valley, and with a speculative eye, for there lay a potent supply of vegetables and grain for hungry miners and burros.

But it was the "Meeker Massacre"⁷ at the White River Agency which gave the dramatic touch to the Ute land desire, set fire to the tinder of emotional intensity, and aroused the final outburst of resentment which rang throughout the mountain area in the four pregnant words—"The Ute must go."⁸

Troops were moved to this western frontier to quell a probable uprising in 1880.⁹ Pioneers "flooded the Governor of Colorado with telegrams offering their services for war. Multitudes in and about Denver—old soldiers, gray-haired frontiersmen, and tenderfeet—were ready to go."¹⁰ In the treaty of that year,¹¹ the Un-

³Agnes E. Spiva has treated the history of the Utes from 1863 to 1880 in her study, *The Utes in Colorado, 1863-1880* (Master's thesis, University of Colorado, 1927).

⁴*House Executive Document*, 47th Congress, 1st Session, No. 1, Part 5, Volume X, pp. 332-333.

⁵*Ibid.*, 46th Congress, 2nd Session, No. 1, Part 5, Vol. IX, pp. 121-122.

⁶Spiva, *op. cit.*, pp. 85-86.

⁷For accounts of this massacre see Sydney Jocknick, *Early Days on the Western Slope* (Denver, 1913), pp. 178-202; and the report of the Secretary of Interior in the *House Executive Document*, 46th Congress, 2nd Session, No. 1, Part 5, Vol. VI, pp. 16-19.

⁸See C. B. Goodykoontz's chapter "The Settlement of Colorado" in *History of Colorado*, Vol. II, edited by J. H. Baker and L. R. Hafen.

⁹"Report of Brigadier-General [Jno.] Pope," Headquarters of the Missouri, Ft. Leavenworth, Kansas, September 22, 1881, in *Secretary of War Reports* (1881), Vol. I.

¹⁰Spiva, *op. cit.*, p. 113.

¹¹*House Executive Document*, 46th Congress, 3rd Session, No. 1, Part 5, Vol. IX. This treaty was not ratified until the following year.

compahgre Utes relinquished all their former reservation in that mountain area, and were to be allotted forty-acre farms in the Grand valley, "if sufficient quantity of agricultural land shall be there; if not, then upon such other unoccupied lands as may be found in that vicinity and in the Territory of Utah." The residue of the land, in case they located there, was to be open to settlement. The San Juan tributaries were to remain the home of the Southern Utes.

The White River bands, who had behaved in such an unorthodox manner in the "Meeker Massacre" (and who had been invoked to do so by the lack of tact and patience on the part of their agent, Nathan P. Meeker), agreed to go.¹² They were to be removed by the Department of War to the Uintah Basin—ever toward the west and the setting of their sun.

The committee appointed "to secure the ratification of the agreement [an Act of Congress, June, 1880, providing for relinquishment of the existing claims] and to execute the provisions of same," set about the business of removing the Uncompahgre Utes to the Colorado (or Grand) valley near the junction of the Gunnison.¹³ Surveyors had already begun the task of laying off the forty-acre farms for them. Probably seeing that eventually the Indian would have to give way to the white man (for ere long the D. & R. G. Railroad from Ogden, Utah, to Denver, Colorado, would run through here bringing in its wake a wave of population), the committee really stretched the treaty provisions and found it convenient to believe that the Utes would be happier on the agricultural lands in the Uintah Basin.¹⁴ There was dissension in the committee, but the Secretary of the Interior upheld those who would wind up the Ute problem once and for all. He probably feared border warfare. And, after all, he must have reasoned, what does it matter to a Ute whether he is in this or that state, in a valley or a basin? It did not, he concluded.

Thus it was decreed that the Utes must go, in a fine interpretation which could have been done only by those with power and authority. Perhaps destiny itself had a hand in the matter. "Horses, wagons, agricultural implements and stock cattle sufficient for their reasonable wants and also saw mills and grist mills

¹²They left for the Uintah Basin before the Uncompahgre Utes left in late August. See report of Pope, *cit. ante*.

¹³*House Executive Document*, 46th Congress, 3rd Session, No. 1, Part 5, Vol. IX, p. 101. The members of the committee were: George W. Manypenny, Alfred B. Meacham, John B. Bowman, John J. Russell, and Otto Mears.

¹⁴In the spring of 1880 the commissioners, the agent, W. H. Berry, and a delegation of chiefs made a journey down the Colorado River and vicinity to locate the new reservation if *satisfactory* agricultural land could be found. It was not found, so they went on to the Uintah Basin. There they found *satisfactory* agricultural land. Grand Valley farmers would dispute this verdict today. Just how much pressure was brought to bear on the Ute chiefs is unknown. Bribery, or other manipulation, might be suspected.

as may be necessary . . ." were to be furnished.¹⁵ The removal was to be made as soon as possible. The year of 1881 must not be filled with border tragedy.

Accordingly Commissioner Otto Mears went to the new reservation one hundred and seventy-five miles southeast of Salt Lake. After contracting for the buildings and seeing the new agency become a physical reality, he left to see the removal of the Utes. He left behind him there on the Green River not far from old Fort Bridger, a warehouse, blacksmith shop, agency building, carpenter shop, medical house, doctor's residence, employee's houses, and corrals—all built or in the stage of construction.¹⁶ Everything was ready for the grand reception of the red man—everything but the red man himself.

In the spring of 1881 Colonel R. S. Mackenzie, "a splendid officer and a gentleman and he was never known to question an order given him,"¹⁷ had nine companies of infantry and six companies of cavalry assembled in the Uncompahgre region.¹⁸ Brigadier-General John Pope started for the region himself, but was forced to abandon the trip because of the Apache outbreak in Arizona.

The Utes idled away the summer because "of the fact that removal was anticipated early . . . , and it was the expressed desire of the department [of Interior] that no seed should be planted . . ." However, the *twenty farmers* of the band did plant a small amount of corn, potatoes, and squash.¹⁹ This unsettled condition brought considerable gambling, horse-racing and other light forms of amusement.²⁰

Still the Indians "demurred, desiring they might be located in the Uncompahgre valley . . ." They hesitated to leave the land of their fathers. They asked leave of time for the fall hunt, and for more time to gather in the stock. On August 22, 1881, their agent, W. H. Berry, called them to council, telling them to make ready for the exodus within the next three days.²¹ Three weeks' provisions were promised them; the agency and certain property would be removed to their new home at once; and those who had

¹⁵*House Executive Document*, 46th Congress, 3rd Session, No. 1, Part 5, Vol. IX, p. 101.

¹⁶Otto Mears in an interview given in the *Denver Tribune*, October 17, 1881, reprinted in the *Gunnison Review*, October 29, 1881.

¹⁷Taken from a letter to the writer from Thomas B. Crawford, Ouray, Colorado, dated August 25, 1930. Mr. Crawford was one of Grand Junction's earliest settlers.

¹⁸*Report of the Secretary of War*, Vol. I, p. 50; also Pope's report, *cit. ante*.
¹⁹Report of W. H. Berry, agent of the Uncompahgre Ute, September 10, 1881, in *House Executive Document*, 47th Congress, 1st Session, No. 1, Part 5, Vol. X.

²⁰*Ibid.*

²¹*Ibid.*

made improvements were to be compensated for them upon their arrival in the Uintah Basin.²²

Still the Utes dallied. They demanded payment for improvements before leaving. Some said they had heard that stock could not live around the Green River. The agent gave them another twenty-four hours to consider. But the next day they refused to make the westward trek. Then Colonel Mackenzie was placed in full charge of them. On the twenty-third day of August the Colonel reported to his superior officer that the Utes had refused to comply with the agent's orders to move. Brigadier-General Pope wired these instructions:

"You will use no military force against the Utes unless called upon in writing to do so by the commissioners or the agent, stating that they cannot move the Indians without military force. If such application is made, you will assume charge of the matter yourself, giving such orders and taking such action as you yourself will consider best, being careful to use no more force than is necessary to accomplish the object . . ."²³

Acting upon these orders Colonel Mackenzie had a pow-wow with the chiefs at his cantonment. The agent reported that after learning that they were under his (Mackenzie's) charge, and hearing from him good and friendly advice as to their peaceable compliance with their agreement, they concluded at once to remove, "thus showing that they had no serious objection to moving."²⁴ Furthermore, since "certain unprincipled whites . . . had poisoned the minds of the Indians against removing by representing in every way possible the action of the department and their agent, it is not to be wondered that the Indian, naturally suspicious as he is, should endeavor to remain in the valley or country to which they were so fondly attached."²⁵

But the Colonel's report to headquarters differs. According to that, he gave his orders to the Ute chiefs and punctuated them with the threat of force if necessary, and "would take from them every gun and pony they possessed,"²⁶ if the move was not immediately made. He gave them one day to palaver and decide.²⁷ Observa-

²²Brigadier-General George Cook of the Military Department of the Platte, reported that the month of August was employed in selecting the route to the new reservation. "I have selected the route from Park City, Utah, as the most practicable one at present, and supplies are being forwarded to the new posts as rapidly as possible," he reported on September 29, 1881. At that time four companies of the Sixth Infantry were stationed at the new agency, and the new post had been designated as Fort Thornburgh, where "the command will be comfortably settled before the winter sets in." *Report of the Secretary of War for the Year 1881*, Vol. I, pp. 112-113.

²³Pope's Report, *cit. ante*.

²⁴House Executive Document, 47th Congress, 1st Session, No. 1, Part 5, Vol. X, p. 79.

²⁵*Ibid.*

²⁶Statement made to the writer by William McGinley, early settler of Grand Junction, in September, 1930. Mr. McGinley resides in that city today.

²⁷Pope's report, *cit. ante*.

tion posts were set up on the gentle hills which rose along the side of the Uncompahgre River near the present day Olathe. Bloodshed was expected for many Indians were armed—a good gun had long been worth a good pony, and it is said that upon one instance cartridges sold for one dollar each.²⁸ Soldiers, eager for action and tired of "fooling" with the dilatory redskins, made ready to wheel into action on the morning of August 27. Mackenzie had turned the control of them back to the agent on the day before. Three weeks' rations were issued. Boats had been placed at the Grand and Green Rivers. Two hours were granted for the procession to start.

And thus the long drawn-out caravan began the thirteen-day march along the old Indian trail—all "apparently cheerful and happy" reported the sympathetic agent—amid a profusion of autumn color and genuine Indian beauty. Slowly and sullenly they filed along the Uncompahgre, down the Gunnison to the Colorado, and then westward on that sprawled-out river toward their new lands and home. Fourteen hundred fifty-eight homeless Indians, including squaws, bucks, braves, and children, driving ahead of them over 10,000 sheep and goats, riding, leading, or herding 8,000 small ponies, made their way down the historic river, indifferently drinking in the beauties of the late summer sun playing on the mountains.²⁹ Chief Colorow, famous for his profound stubbornness and resistance to this removal, was the last to leave the valley—a dull, prosaic dash of copper at the end of a long Indian sentence.

On the morning of September 7, 1881, the last of the Utes were past the junction of the Colorado and Gunnison Rivers. Cottonwoods were left smouldering by those revengeful to the very last.³⁰ But the tepees were packed on the backs of the ponies for the last time, the goats and sheep were ahead for their last grazing in Grand valley. 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. What a sight to see the vanquished shift from the last scene of action. Probably restless children with hair disheveled, following the drifting sheep. Yelping dogs, scenting the trail, eyeing suspiciously the river banks, occasionally chasing fruitlessly a bounding rabbit or a chattering prairie dog. Bucks mounted on ponies, scouting for enemies and game. Old men, who had forsaken the chase, obediently falling in line on their horses to lead the squaw of their households, who in spite of a century of riding perhaps appeared ungraceful in the saddle.

²⁸Statement by McGinley.

²⁹Otto Mears in interview, *cit. ante*.

³⁰Letter of Crawford, *cit. ante*.

La Plaza De Los Leones

(Forerunner of Walsenburg, Colorado)

LOUIS B. SPORLEDER*

The Plaza is said to have had its inception in 1859 or 1861. The exact date does not concern us here, for our purpose is to give a glimpse of the village as it existed between 1870 and 1875. At that time the old regime still prevailed, even to the tilling of the soil by the motive power of oxen and the use of an iron-tipped forked stick as a plow. The story of the Plaza should not be written in a cold, critical way, because all the country of the Huajattolla ("Breasts of the World"—the Spanish Peaks) is so filled with the substance of legends, romance and strange, odd stories, that descriptive sketches should possess a touch of the romantic spirit. A distinterested and apathetic relation of mere cold facts would not do justice to the task. Such a narration would not be a true picture of the peculiar ideality of the conditions which once prevailed here, conditions redolent of a mode of life that will never return.

The nature of a landscape is easiest approached when it is of a moderate dimension. When we view the vast proportions of a great mountain, a desert or the ocean, abstract reflections begin—and the purely aesthetic pleasures are less apprehended, or vanish altogether. The Cuchara valley, in which the Plaza de los Leones rested, could be taken in at a glance; it was a picture in its frame.

In viewing the scene, as I so often did in the old days, the impression on my mind was always one of intense pleasure. Harmony prevailed—where now I see only discord. Life was fresh and young, all nature-forms saturated with the unimpaired vigor and beauty of an unsullied natural existence. Clear and clean ran the water of the river, its banks bordered by a vegetation of tropical richness. Trees grew straight and tall from the rich, black soil, and fruit of every kind hung low on little trees and gleamed in colors from the lesser bushes. One tree, with a huge grape-vine twined through all its branches, I remember particularly. This monarch measured no less than four feet in diameter, and the vine at its base was thick as a man's thigh. Somewhat isolated from groves and forest, these two great plant-forms had been given the chance of an unrestricted freedom in their growth; they had attained the limit of earthly perfection. Tubs full of grapes were picked from this vine each year.

*Mr. Sporleder, prominent citizen and pioneer of Walsenburg, contributed to the *Colorado Magazine* of May, 1932, an article entitled "A Day and a Night on Spoon River."—Ed.

The character of the landscape was altogether pastoral. An idyllic simplicity rested over the valley; no harsh noises, no speeding trucks and cars—peace and repose only—and the manifold voices of nature. The men and women who lived here in that remote period of time appreciated the beauty of the valley, perhaps unconsciously, for they were a simple, most of them, and illiterate folk. They made no attempt to clear the land; the beauty of the valley remained unimpaired. Only what nature offered in arable land was used; natural openings and deep indentations into the forest were cultivated to pumpkins, corn and garden stuff. Small grain was planted on the higher levels.

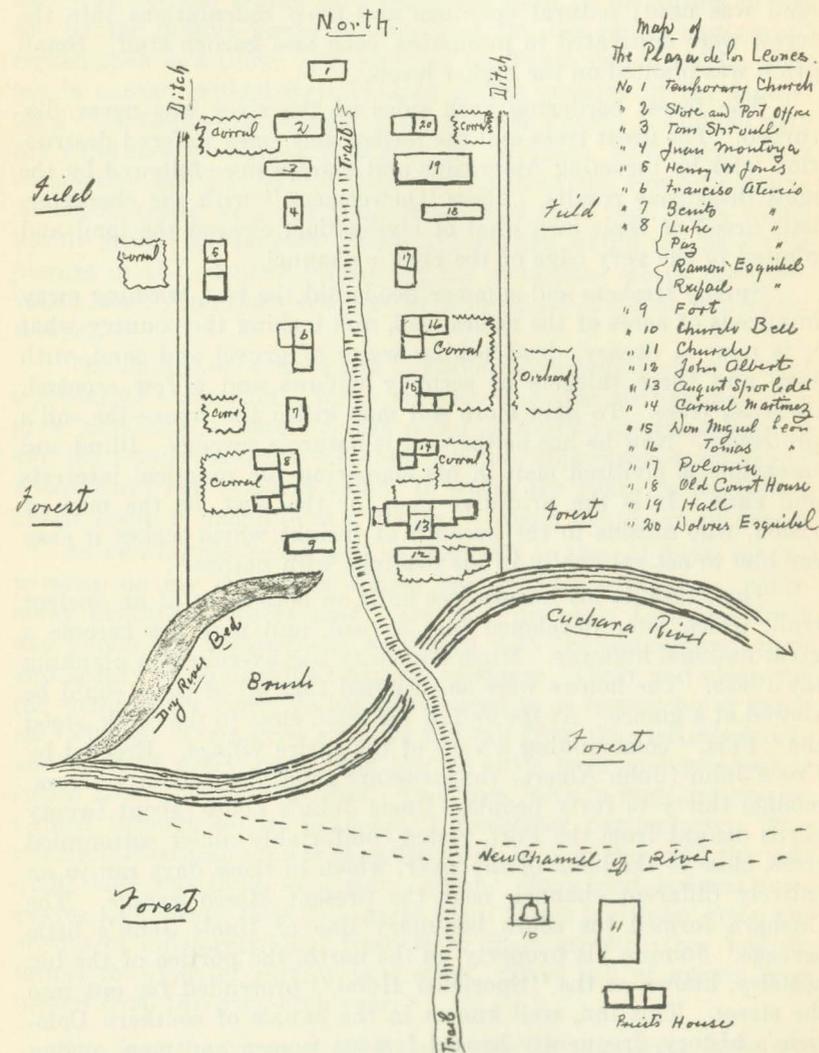
The forest bordering both sides of the river was never disturbed. The great trees and the bushes and vines suffered destruction later by incoming Americans and Europeans—followed by the most disastrous results. These "newcomers," with the characteristic greed of their own kind of civilization, cleared the land and plowed to the very edge of the river's channel.

Spring freshets and summer floods did the rest, washing away hundreds of acres of the richest soil, and making the country what it is now—a dreary, dead-looking waste of gravel and sand, with here and there thickets of scrubby willows and a few crooked, dwarfish trees. To gain more soil man killed the trees—the soil's protectors. Now he has neither—it is nature's revenge. Blind and insensible is civilized man in his clamoring for practical interests and ends. It is the primitive man, or the poet, or the man of vision, who attains to the breadth of insight which makes it easy for him to act rationally in his dealings with nature.

The Plaza de los Leones was built on both sides of an ancient trail, which later developed into a road, and now has become a great national highway. Much ingenuity was exercised in planning the Plaza. The houses were so disposed that all of them could be viewed at a glance. At the end of the trail, close to the creek, stood the "Fort," commanding a view of the entire village. Erected by Uncle John (John Albert) the structure could conveniently accommodate thirty to forty people. Uncle John's house, about twenty yards distant from the Fort, rested comfortably under cottonwood trees, close to the bank of the river, which in those days ran in an entirely different channel, near the present Mosco garage. The Cuchara formed the south boundary line of Uncle John's little acreage. Joining his property on the north, the portico of the big hostelry, known as the "Sporleder Hotel," protruded far out into the street. This inn, well known in the annals of southern Colorado's history, frequently housed famous women and men, among them General Palmer, Governor Hunt and Helen Hunt-Jackson.

In the latter's writing interesting facts pertaining to the place and its personnel are mentioned.

North of the hostelry, on the same side of the street, lived Carmel Martinez and next to his house Don Miguel Leon, of whom more will be said later. Other buildings extended to what is now Seventh Street. The last building of consequence was the "store"—proudly called so by the owner.



SKETCH OF LA PLAZA DE LOS LEONES

This adobe structure is still standing, although now hidden from view by a false front. Not far from the store, looking south, could be seen the long, rambling adobe house of Joseph Bourcy, a Frenchman who claimed the land west of the Plaza. This was one of the first substantial dwellings erected in the village. Henry W. Jones, descendants of whom are still living in Walsenburg, built this house in the year 1866. Mr. Jones remained on the Cuchara only two years; it was he who sold his squatter's right to Mr. Bourcy for a yoke of oxen and one hundred sheep.

The writer has drawn a sketch (ground plan) of the Plaza as well as his memory permits—but he does not vouch for absolute correctness of the details (shown on opposite page). The older readers have the privilege to reconstruct and group the separate particulars so as to bring them into a harmonious whole according to the image they themselves have formed.

Life, as I already indicated, was idyllic in the first two decades of the Plaza's existence. When the rising sun gilded the tips of the big trees or the round knob south of the creek, the people began to stir. Smoke rose from chimneys, girls carried water and men chopped wood. The live stock in the corrals back of each house became noisy; lambs bleated and calves bawled. A half hour later, after milking, the different herds and flocks were driven beyond the fields and gardens to graze, in charge of young boys, some of them pure Indians. One exception must be mentioned. In his travels on the Pacific Coast old Don Miguel had found an abandoned Chinese lad whom he adopted and made a member of his family. This little "Pagano" (heathen) was baptized and made thereby into a Christian, a procedure very gratifying to the old gentleman, who was a devout Catholic.

Amiable children, in the early days of the Plaza's life! Boys doffed their hats to all elders; girls remained silent until spoken to. With but few exceptions the children were well-behaved and suitably trained. The girls assisted in household duties and the boys herded the stock.

Parents discouraged idleness, triviality and laziness—yet was there much time for play, especially the game of "Pelota," a kind of shinny. Often whole villages were pitted against each other and the game was played for hours at a time. Popular, too, were horse and foot races, activities which developed hard muscles and a keen eye. Altogether, life began and was lived under the happiest auspices. Up to ten years of age children ran stark naked, not alone in summer, but also on pleasant days of winter. The Mexican pioneers were a hardy lot. The old Indian custom of rolling babies naked in the snow remained in use until the railroads en-

tered the country. Old and young observed the rules of cleanliness in a way most scrupulous, and the clear water of the nearby river offered the opportunity of bathing almost every day in the year. The writer particularly remembers "Lupe," Mr. Bourcy's squaw, who never failed to take her ablution after a day's toil—right where the trail crossed the river, seemingly unconcerned of those passing by. This mode of life, and much exposure to the elements, made men and even women absolutely weatherproof.

Food? Simple, but of the best for young and old. Goat's milk, fresh eggs, mush, tortillas (cakes) of wheat or cornmeal, and plenty of mutton and calabash. During the cold season the families met and employed themselves in selecting seed for next year's crop, weaving, spinning, or making *Zapatos y Chinelas* (shoes and slippers).

Their talk? Conversation was generally mild and free from what could harm the children. Sometimes real gruesome tales were told, stories of witches, devils and the exploits of bandits. Banditry was condoned frequently—when a just cause had driven a good man into bad ways. Espinoza and Juan Chiquito proved no exceptions. It is natural that a mass of legendary "lore" gathered around these two names in the course of time. Transgressions changed to deeds of valor, murder to acts of self-defense, and robbery to dealing out a simple justice.

As Carlyle says: "Men live by believing something." So these two notorious characters became objects of a sort of "hero worship," for the very simple reason that aside from "Hidalgo" there were no others to extoll. The misdeeds of Espinoza and Juan Chiquito were sanctioned—because the imagination of the people had shaped them differently. And then, also, most of the people in the world, old and young, rich or poor, ignorant or intelligent, get into a habit of fooling themselves. It seems easier to believe the unlikely, the improbable, and even the impossible. And may the reader remember that the old-fashioned bandit never robbed at home; rather was he a philanthropist who sympathized with the poor and contributed to them a part of his loot—with the result that he was loved and honored by the poorer people of his own community.

Amusements were not wanting; much dancing was done to the music of two violins and a guitar. Old Francisco Apodaca, who vigorously strummed the latter instrument when slightly tipsy, composed, and in a cracked voice sang couplets which caricatured certain individuals, to the great delight of the crowd. A little fighting enlivened these dances once in a while, but sometimes ending in a tragedy. Cock fights took about the same position as the

movies today. Much gambling was done. Mexicans and Indians indulged in "Monte," Americans preferred poker, of course, precedence was given to whist by the Germans, who played the game mostly at home.

Kan-yat-che, chief of a band of southern Utes, and an inveterate gambler, generally did his playing at the trading post, mostly with his own people, occasionally though also with the storekeeper—who was no slouch in the art of gambling.

The "Trader" had bought an overcoat (probably from a deserting soldier), bright blue, with plenty of shining brass buttons. Kan-yat-che coveted the coat. The man of trade had a strong hankering for the Indian's well-tanned buckskins, but no satisfying *Cambio* (exchange) could be arranged.

Finally the two decided upon a game of chance, with the result that our Indian chief won the garment, which he donned immediately, although it was in the heat of summer.

The following year the Indian visited the Plaza again, but the coat now looked quite shabby. For all that, Kan-yat-che strutted the street proudly, for he had added to his wardrobe a tall hat, decorated with numerous feathers. Kan-yat-che possessed strongly marked traits, pre-eminently a dramatic mode of delivering his words, and a keen sense of humor. Were he alive today he would probably act as a character in some wild west film play.

One member of Kan-yat-che's band gave the young daughter of the trader a great scare. She was the sole occupant of the house that morning and had faithfully obeyed the instructions of her mother "to keep the doors latched and closed." A pot with beef in it gently simmered on the stove; the door to the kitchen was firmly latched but the window wide open! Through it the pleasing odor of soup drifted into the nostrils of a wandering Indian slightly under the influence of liquor. Results? Entrance through the window and the purloining of a liberal hunk of meat from the pot. No other damage done, but the little girl, as long as she lives, will remember the incident.

The natives had neither clocks or furniture. Doubled-up mattresses, covered with brightly colored blankets, served as divans. Meals were dished out on the hard earthen floors. Generally speaking, honesty prevailed and locks on doors were not necessary. In fact, a door lock with knob or a latch were objects of curiosity—very few Mexicans knew how to manipulate a lock, latch or key.

The people had no need of learning such as ours. Their lives were linked to other nature-forms only. They knew nothing of the history of the world and cared not to know. But they were

not indifferent; not a day passed on which they were not of some service to each other.

The young received their instructions, and if these fell short of present standards they did no harm. Both boys and girls grew up but remained children of nature. Cares they had none, but neither had they any of the intellectual graces. An erotic love only—warm, intense—and a deeply felt piety possessed all their souls. Boys married at sixteen, girls often when less than fourteen. Most of the marriages turned out blissfully happy, although the puritan ideal of connubial relationship was not generally observed. Little deviations from the path of a prescribed morality frequently occurred—to be overlooked or silently condoned. Once in a great while the green-eyed monster, jealousy, deprived a young man or woman of all reason. Then by the good offices of Cruzita, wife of Don Miguel Leon, peace and good will were restored.

It is natural that unreasonable superstitions stalked among these primitive people. A hailstorm was usually considered the evil work of a witch, and if such a *Bruja* became known, it meant a severe punishment. In one instance lightning had stricken a lad and left him horribly crippled. The blame in some way became attached to "Polonia," an inoffensive but rather queer old woman. At a midnight meeting an assembly of men decided to banish or rather drive her forcibly away, which in this instance meant sure starvation, or a succumbing to the elements or wild beasts. Old Miguel protested, at first without apparent result, for the wild and blood-lusty crowd yelled "revenge."

Soft-spoken words do more good sometimes than vociferous shouting. Don Miguel argued, slowly, mildly, but with the conviction of one who knows he is right. "Do you believe, you men here assembled, that God would permit lightning's power to be placed in the hands of an ignorant and feeble old woman? Do you really believe lightning obeyed her and that she directed the bolt which struck Francisquito's body? Were this so, then she is more powerful than God and henceforth we must direct our prayers to her and not to our 'Tata Dios.'" Much commotion and clamor followed, but when the hubbub ceased Don Miguel had gained his point—Polonia remained in the village and was not further molested.

Don Miguel Antonio Leon, after whom the Plaza was named, is not to be considered as one of the first settlers. It is said that members of the Atencio family erected the first buildings in 1859, on land which is now incorporated under the name of Walsenburg. These first brush houses and "Jacals" (Indian hut or wigwam) were built to give shelter to the herders who cared for the flocks.

No permanent settlement existed in the Cuchara valley previous to 1859, although the country had been used, off and on, for summer grazing. In 1861 Daigre and Francisco settled permanently near the old Spanish fort, where now thrives the little town of La Veta. John Delaware (Don Juan de Olivero, a Portuguese gentleman who later married Fred Walsen's sister) had charge of their large herd of cattle. In the latter part of October, 1862, Antonio Jose Vallejos, Juan Ignacio Jaquez, Jose Mariano J. Valdes, Andres Roybal, Rafael Esquibel, Desiderio Valencio and the brothers, Salome and Euzequio Jaquez, drove their herds into the lower Cuchara valley and for the first time wintered there. The season was too far advanced to permit building, but in 1863 substantial houses came into existence in several places on the river.

Among these the village of "Oso" (Bear), four miles west of Walsenburg, took a prominent place. Hermanes Plaza, now completely destroyed, stood near what is known as the "Red Camp." Herman Pineda, Juan Beaubien, Nemecio Lucero and Gregorio Ruis were the originators of that settlement. Tequisquite, a picturesque village, was built on the bluff south of the Walsen mine, where large springs gushed from the earth, supplying the villagers right at their door with an abundance of clear, wholesome water. Tequisquite was founded by Agapito Atencio, Lorenzo Atencio, Policarpio Trujillo and Jose Maria Vigil-Valdes.

In 1866 each of these three settlements could probably boast of a larger population than the small Plaza which finally grew into the city of Walsenburg.

In the same year this, the least of the settlements on the river, first became known as the "Plaza de los Leones." Besides Mr. Leon, Roman Montes Vigil, Francisco Atencio, Evaristo Gonzalez, Captain C. D. Hendren, Henry W. Jones, Antonio Maria Gonzalez, Gabriel Vigil, Agapito Montoya, Jose Antonio Martinez, Carmel Martinez and John Albert were the outstanding men of the future city.

Time went on. By the year 1870 all the villages on the creek, including Cuchara Plaza, about six miles down the valley, flourished and prospered. Large quantities of grain ripened in the fields, sheep and cattle grew sleek and fat on the rich pasturage; cash came into the country, brought by men who purchased land rights and invested in live stock. The Plaza de los Leones rapidly outgrew the other settlements on the river. Political parties were organized and in the same year Fred Walsen opened a trading post. The Reverend Father Percivault started a private school and erected the first, if only a temporary, church.

Between 1870 and 1875 a number of Germans settled in the

Plaza or vicinity—mainly through the efforts of Mr. Walsen. August Sporleder is remembered as the keeper of a famous inn or hostelry. Doctor Rothe dispensed advice and medicine to the sick and ailing. Karl Otto Unfug, who read, wrote and spoke four languages, raised horses and later became county clerk. William and Henry Schulze, highly cultured, farmed and raised sheep for a living. William Harmes developed a tract of land successfully and for the first time demonstrated that superior crops can be raised in Huerfano County. Alexander Levy tied up with Fred Walsen. Herman Risch and his brother, Ernst, constructed furniture out of common native lumber. The articles were manufactured with such skill and care that some of them are still in use at the present day. Herman Duhme founded a newspaper, the *Huerfano Independent*, and his brother, Frank, engaged in fine horse breeding.

Edward Haldy entered the cattle business and John Story did mountain farming, proving that corn can be raised even in the higher altitudes. Herr Vorlander, a rather eccentric gentleman and an engineer by profession, gained fame as a foot-racer; he outran Mexicans and Indians. The two Schmitz brothers from Cologne on the Rhine bought a ranch, but remained in the county only a short time. There were other Germans, perhaps as deserving as those mentioned, but their lives lacked public observation and their deeds remain unmarked.

On the south side of the Cuchara River in tranquil, peaceful solitude, a glade opened its portals to the sun and the blue sky. A place of repose and restful silence, inviting the eye to gaze in wonder upon the rich and varied plant-forms, so profuse in days of yore. There, so the good Father Percivault decided, "We shall build a church." A little away from the bustling village, yet close enough to keep in touch with its affairs.

Through the efforts of Ben Arnold, a French-Canadian, the structure stood whole and finished a year later, even to a deep-toned bell, which Mr. Walsen had graciously donated to the new house of worship. Both the church and the domicile of the father represented that ancient style of architecture now seen only in the older villages of our neighboring state, New Mexico.

Six years and no more worshipped the people in this new "House of God," and then came the catastrophe (a flood) which destroyed the building completely. In its construction an irreparable error had been made! The foundation upon which the adobe walls rested should have been higher! A prolonged rain caused the river to rise above its banks, with the result that the walls

softened and collapsed. The priest's house stood on higher ground and escaped destruction.

A cross was placed on the site of the altar, rank vegetation covered the ruins for a few years, and then the ground became too valuable to leave untilled. Plows and harrows leveled the soil and growing crops replaced the cross and the ruins of the Plaza's fine old church.

No doubt the reader is anxious by this time to learn more of Don Miguel. Meager indeed are the facts and details of his life. He never spoke of himself or of the past—unless interrogated. Born in 1799, he was an old man when he settled in the Plaza which bore his name. He lived the life of a simple peasant, farming and breeding sheep and goats for his living. Although illiterate, he yet possessed a great store of homely knowledge, much more than the average man of his time. By sheer instinct he learned something of "evolution," that is, he perceived in the cosmic drama a constant change in all life-forms; in other words, he recognized in nature the adaptive influence of environment upon life.

Laboriously he dug up a number of young plum trees, the kind which once grew so profusely in the "bottoms." He transplanted these into a little orchard back of his house. The writer of this sketch remembers the remarkable results old Miguel obtained a few years later. The trees then had trunks from six to eight inches in diameter; they stood in straight rows with richly colored fruit upon them—twice the size of those that grew wild in the forest.

Don Miguel Leon, in the prime of his life had become associated with French-Canadian traders and trappers. Far and wide he wandered, almost unbelievable it appears, but his trapping expeditions extended to the limits of the North American continent. With his Canadian partners and friends he journeyed to the shores of the Hudson Bay and beyond as far as the Great Slave Lake. He visited Montreal and probably Quebec. He mentioned a *Barco de vapor* (steamship) and said the water was salty, unfit to drink.

In these two old French towns he observed a social order one hundred years ago which has vanished now—its romance existent only in propagandistic travel literature. Quaintly the old man spoke of things he saw and heard there, but without an understanding of what these things really meant.

He was a lover of music and told me repeatedly that the melodies Canadians played or sang "were still in his head." Even the primitive music of the natives entranced him completely; he became oblivious to everything that occurred. Then I saw a look in his eye which bespoke of a presence not of this earth.

My old friend Miguel trapped with Challifou (also known as Brown) and went with him to the mouth of the Columbia River on the Pacific Coast. He witnessed the rebellion in New Mexico, and with St. Vrain and Wootton helped to pacify the country. Men of a gentle soul such as he was are not likely to receive much public recognition. It is the swashbuckler who gets most of the public's attention. Don Miguel was a silent man and piety penetrated deep into his heart. His very presence exhaled peace and tranquillity and I doubt if he ever harbored an evil thought.

I think myself back fifty, sixty years. Of an evening devoid of all commotion. A sunset flames in molten gold; a few drops of glistening rain falls from a white, billowy cloud. Tinkling bells announce the coming of Senor Leon's flocks. Tremulously sweet, sounds the reed flute of one of his Indian boys. A sad, simple melody in minor key, embellished with flourishes and birdlike trills. Drab and brown stand two rows of houses on the single street. Drab and brown the houses—but life so colorful.

Squat on their haunches sit grizzled old men on the shady side of the house, smoking, talking. Naked children playing, laughing, shrieking. Not much money—food in plenty—corn and beans, peas and pumpkin, mutton, beef and buffalo meat. No superiors, no stooping. No stringent laws, arbiter is each one of his own life.

Don Miguel walks slowly down the street. I see his kind face before my inner eye—gentle, restful features, wrinkled, coppery brown. Not a word is spoken—but his thoughts I read—like open pages of a book. The eyes of the old man rove over the creatures now crowding through the gates into the night's safety of the big corral. Then his eyes wander and find the great Sangre de Cristo Mountains, where the golden orb of the setting sun is slowly sinking. "The symbol of my life, now soon ending." That is what the old man is thinking.