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Ranching in Northeastern Colorado in the Early Eighties

R. E. ARNETT*

It was early spring, 1882, and as I was approaching my twenty-first birthday, I thought it time to start out and do something for myself. I had been raised in the stock business with my father and had saved up quite a bit of money; naturally I wanted to continue along that line.

I had an older brother, who was working for the Pawnee Cattle Company, with headquarters at Atwood, near Sterling, Colorado. I had talked the matter over with him, and he said there was some fine stock country back in the hills northwest of Sterling, but the Iliff Cattle Company claimed all the range on the north side of the Platte River from a few miles east of Greeley to the east line of Colorado, running 25,000 to 75,000 head of Texas cattle on this range.

We decided to go in together and try to file on some land in the hills northwest of Sterling. We got acquainted with one of the old cowhands of the Iliff Company, who had served his usefulness and was out of a job. He knew the country from A to Z. He said he would show us all the best part of the country, which had plenty of live water such as springs that never failed and water holes that seldom went dry.

So we got a buckboard, a light, four-wheeled vehicle, having long slender oak slats in place of springs or body, just the thing for driving fast over the prairie. Also a tripod, compass and a team and with the above mentioned cowboy we started out to survey what land we wanted to locate.

The corners of the quarter sections of the land were marked by four holes dug about two feet square, six or eight feet apart, forming a square, the dirt being thrown in a heap in the center of the four holes. There were no stones in that country for markers, and wooden pins would not last long.

By finding one such corner and sighting through the compass, we could get an object about where we thought the next corner ought

*Mr. Arnett lives in Boulder today. In the preparation of the story he was assisted by Mrs. Arnett.—Ed.

to be. We would then get in the buckboard, one man keeping his eye on the object ahead, another one driving and the third one counting the revolutions of the front wheel, on which was tied a white rag. So many revolutions made a mile. In that way we could survey a lot of ground in a day. We never had much trouble in locating a corner, if it had been marked in the first place.

After having surveyed most of the country, we decided on what part we wanted. I then returned to Boulder to get my outfit, which consisted of four horses and two wagons of the old Leadville freighting type. The wagon boxes were about five feet deep and sixteen feet long, with bows over which I put a cover of canvas. The wagon beds were put on three-inch running gears, the freight wagons being too heavy. One I loaded with horsefeed, the other with stove, bedding, tent and plenty of grub. I went by way of Greeley and Pawnee Buttes, which took about five days, to where we had decided to locate, about 125 miles northeast of Boulder.

I put up my tent, plowed several furrows around the tent, wagons and other stuff, waited for a quiet day with no wind, to burn off the grass inside of the plowing to protect me from a prairie fire.

The day came—not a breath of air stirring—so I started to burn the grass inside of plowing. The fire seemed to start a whirlwind, which soon got out of control. In a few minutes everything I had was on fire, wagons, bedding in the tent, three hundred posts, hay and grain. I had a man working for me. We had put a well down and there was about a foot of water in it, which we drew with a windlass. When we started to pull water the bucket came off in the well. I let the fellow down with a rope and it was with the greatest effort possible that I was able to pull him up again with the windlass, after which we managed to get one bucket of water, when the bucket came off again and we had no time to fool with that any longer. So the helper ran into the tent to put the fire out in there. He grabbed up a pillow and began beating out the fire. The fire had burned off a corner of the pillow, which he did not notice, and the feathers flew like a cyclone every time he would swing it over his head to beat out the fire; the air was full of feathers and smoke. We finally succeeded in beating the fires out without much damage, but we surely were about exhausted from breathing so much smoke and working so fast and furiously. We were thankful to get out alive and without much loss.

I homesteaded on Horsetail Creek, which had water in it only when it rained; then it would draw water for thirty or forty miles back in the hills. At its mouth, where I located, lay about a hundred acres of the finest blue stem grass you could ever wish to see. I grubbed out the sagebrush in the meadow and the first year I put

up about 100 tons of hay. The blue stem grass, when ready to cut, looks like a wheat field. After a heavy rain it would self-irrigate.

There were a good many wild horses in that part of the country, some very good ones that were descendants of horses that got away from the emigrants. A man called "Wild Horse Jerry," I have forgotten his name, made it a business to capture them. His method was to walk them down. He would start after them along in the latter part of April or early part of May, when the new grass started, before there was much nutriment in it. He would stake his saddle horses at several of the different water holes with long lariats so they could get plenty of grass and water, until the time came

R. E. ARNETT, 1883

when he wanted them. He would then take a man with him, a buckboard, horses, saddles, bridles and grain for the horses, and grub for himself and man, and start out.

He would start a bunch of horses ahead and would probably not see them more than once or twice a day for the first few days. Then, as the wild horses began to tire, he would get a little closer every day. He did not let them rest night or day. After a few days, when they were pretty well worn out, he would take to his saddle horses that he had staked along the way and drive them into corrals which he had constructed for that purpose. He then would rope them, put a strap around one front foot with about a two-foot

log chain on it. They could not run with this encumbrance and in that way he could drive them anywhere he wanted. He used to secure a good many fine horses for which he would get from $150 to $200 each. He had about 300 head of horses, most of which he had caught. Jerry was killed a number of years ago. Who did it no one knew. He was shot near his home east of Greeley, Colorado.

The wild herd came by my place one day. Among them was a little black colt about 9 days old that had played out and lagged behind. I went and carried him home. I took a wire, heated it and burned a hole through a piece of wood about three or four inches long and fitted it to a quart bottle and fed him milk several times a day. I had a cow that gave plenty of milk and he did well. In a short time one of my mares had a colt. I had quite a time getting her to adopt this one, but she finally did, and he made quite a nice pony.

My brother continued with the Pawnee Company for a time, while I was to settle on the homestead. Accordingly, I built a dugout in the hillside. The main room was 22 by 15 feet, facing south. Then I dug a bedroom off the main room, 8 by 10 feet, put a ridgepole through the center of each room, with boards to form a roof, covered that with about 18 inches of clay dirt, put a wire fence all around it to keep the stock from breaking through and tumbling down on me some fine night. All you could see of the dugout from any direction except the south was the stovepipe sticking out of the hilltop. It made a very cool place in the summer and warm in the winter.

About six miles from my dugout was a fine spring. I decided I wanted that, so one day I was putting up a claim shanty at this spring when the foreman of the Iliff Cattle Company rode up and wanted to know, "What in hell are you doing here?"

I told him I was just putting a filing on this quarter section, to which he retorted, "You have lived in that dugout so long, you have gone crazy. You belong in Pueblo." To which I replied, "You just put me there, if you think so."

He continued, "This is one of the first places Iliff settled on twenty years ago, in 1865." "I don't care if he did," I replied. "He may have *settled* on it, but he never *filed* on it. Why, there isn't a stick or stone to show that he ever lived anywhere near." One word brought on another until things got pretty hot around there. It was no place for a preacher's son. Finally I said, "I'll give you just ten days to get a filing on the Butte Ranch, you're so damned smart."

This Butte Ranch was about twelve miles from the spring. The Iliff Company had bought it to get a fellow out of the country. It was a beautiful place with a small stone house, barn, corral, and a

meadow irrigated from a spring. In deeding the land to the Iliff Company, they deeded it in another township. We discovered this when we were running out the land, but said nothing about it.

In about ten days the foreman drove by my place, but never spoke. He had a surveyor with him. Not long after that my brother came down from Denver, where he had been on business. While in the city he met the foreman of the Iliff Cattle Company, who requested my brother to apologize to me for what he had said at the claim shanty, and thanked me for telling him about the Butte Ranch. So that was the end of that episode.

When I left my home in Boulder to go to this country, there was a man by the name of Rogers, who had what they called a "soldier's right," something like a homestead right. He said to me, "If you find a place for my filing, I will sell it to you right."

There was a spring about four miles from where I lived that ran to the Platte River, about twenty miles. On the place was a little one-room stone house, and a corral, but no filing on it. I thought, "Here is the place for Rogers' filing." I wrote Rogers and he came down. I took him up and located him on the place. The improvements belonged to a judge in Denver, who had a few head of cattle, but it looked as though he had abandoned the place. I got word soon after that he was coming up this creek with the "roundup," just over the hill from my dugout.

I got on my horse and rode over, hunted him up and told him I would pay him for the improvements. To which he swore, saying, "No G—D— man that walks the face of the earth can have that place." I replied, "O. K., I am willing to pay you for your improvements." And I got on my horse and rode away. In about three weeks I got a letter from him, saying that if I would send him $300 he would be glad to give me a bill of sale. I sent a check for the amount and paid Rogers for his filing. And that ended the second episode.

There were great chalk or sandstone cliffs about eight miles from where I lived. They formed a perfect horseshoe around 45,000 acres of fine pasture land, with several springs.

The Iliff Company had fenced across the ends of the horseshoe, which gave them all this land for pasture, mostly for their horses. They had no filing on this land. There was one spring in there I wanted. So I put a filing on that. What I was planning was to put sheep in that country. I needed places to move them from time to time. I thought now I had all the range I needed for the time being.

Sterling was a small place then of about 250 people. It was supposed to be a temperance town. Every lot sold had a proviso that if liquor was sold on the premises it would revert to the former

owner. The proprietor of a drugstore there sold whiskey by the quart. They would arrest him, take him to Greeley, and fine him $250 or $300, which was a very cheap license for him. Then he would come back and go right on selling booze as before. When the "roundup" would get near, the boys would come to town to celebrate and then they surely would wake up the sleepy little town.

My dugout got to be the stopping place for the cowboys going between Sterling and Cheyenne. Sometimes I would have as many as six or eight, and believe me we had some lively times.

One evening a couple of fellows pulled up to the dugout, each riding a pony and leading a packhorse, with grub and bedding. They wanted to know if I knew where the "roundup" was. They said they were cowboys and were looking for the "roundup." They didn't strike me as cowpunchers, but I told them the "roundup" was coming up Cedar Creek, about two miles from there. They then asked if they could stay all night. I said, "Sure, put your horses in the barn. You can sleep in here" (meaning the dugout).

After we had had supper, they told me they were detectives from Denver, looking for a man with a herd of about twenty cows. They asked me if I had seen anything of such an outfit. I told them where they would find them, about six miles to the northwest of my place, at a spring that belonged to me.

I had talked with the dairyman a few days before. He said he intended to start a dairy at Sterling. I thought that it was strange, as he had come in from the Sterling way. It turned out he had mortgaged the herd and then driven them out of the country.

The next day the detectives went to his camp, but found no one at home. The dairyman would hide out during the day, so the detectives went again at night. They got the man and a boy about sixteen or eighteen years old, and brought them to my place for the night. "If the boy wants to go out in the night," they said, "let him go. We do not want him. He is only working for the dairyman."

So that night we put the dairyman in my bedroom to sleep. The boy I put next to me in my bed near the door. There was only one way to get from the bedroom and that was over us. When things got quiet I woke the boy, gave him a couple of dollars and directed him to Sterling and he beat it. He must have gotten an awful wetting, for it began to rain soon after he left.

The next morning the dairyman wanted to know where the boy was. I told him he slipped out when we were all asleep. The detectives left that day with their man for Denver after hiring cowboys to take the dairy herd back to Denver. The dairyman got ten years in the penitentiary.

About this time I went in the sheep business with a man by the

name of George Gunn, who was an old cattleman in that country, and another man, William Babcock, who used to be a merchant in Boulder. Gunn and Babcock went to New Mexico, bought 10,000 head of sheep at $1 per head, and drove them overland to this country. When they got to Sterling we divided them. Gunn got 5,000, Babcock got 2,500, and I 2,500. Babcock had no place for his sheep, so we took them along to my place.

I herded sheep for six weeks, and had them about starved to death, and I was almost as crazy as the proverbial sheep herder. You have to know how to handle sheep, if you want them to do well, and I was a "greenhorn" at the business. Finally I got a half-breed Indian and Mexican sheep herder to take charge of them, and you should have seen them fatten!

There was plenty of grass but I was afraid to let them spread out for fear of losing some of them. There was one black sheep to every 100. That was the way we counted them. If all the black sheep were there, it was pretty certain that all the others were there. The Mexican would let them out of the corral at sun-up, they would feed along until they came to a spring about noon, take a drink and lie down. When the sheep got ready to feed again, the Mexican would go around on the farside of them, and head them for home. By dark he would bring them in looking like barrels, they were so full.

About a year after I had taken the sheep into this part of the country, the foreman of the Iliff Cattle Company met me in Sterling, and asked me what I would take to get out of the country. Off hand, I replied, "Ten thousand dollars."

"Will you take fifty mares that are in the horse pasture near your place on the deal at $50 per head?"

"Yes," I replied.

"All right, you can get ready to move," said the foreman.

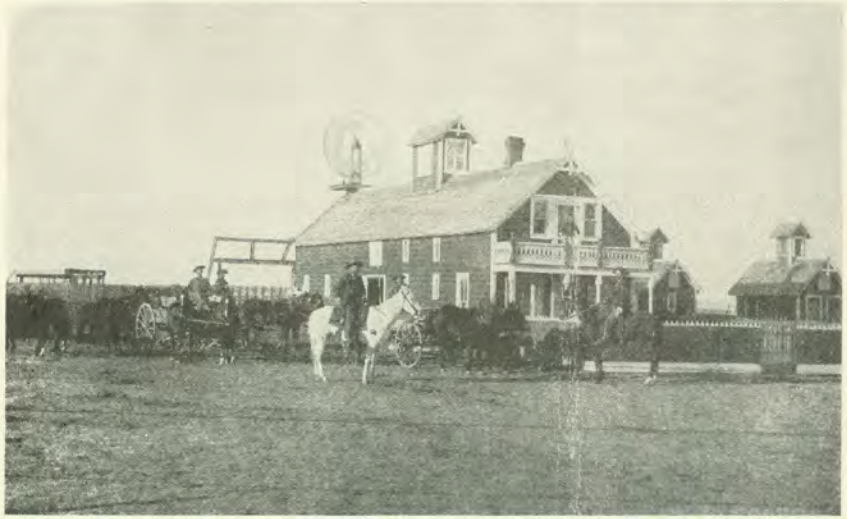
I knew all their horses, as I had seen them many times. They had crossed their saddle ponies on Norman stallions, with the result that many of them were too large for their use. I got several mares that weighed from 1500 to 1700 pounds.

I prepared at once to move, Babcock taking his 2,500 sheep and moving over to Cedar Creek until after lambing time, which was not far off. We then bought the old Wisconsin Ranch on the south side of the Platte River about three miles from Crook Station, which was in early days just a stage station. I took my sheep there but kept my horses on the north side of the river.

Along in June the river would get quite high. Whenever I had to cross it, which was every day or two, I rode a little pony. She would get along all right until we struck quicksand, which we did every time we crossed. But she would tread water until we

would get out. All that you could see of her was her head and neck above the water when she was swimming. I would put on rubber boots, take the stirrups up to her sides, stand up in the stirrups and would seldom ever get wet.

One night we had quite a heavy shower and the river was much higher than usual the next morning. It was necessary for me to cross the river this morning and I told the man who worked for me to hitch the team to the running gears of the wagon and get on one of the horses. I knew they could swim the river with the wagon. I went on ahead on my pony and he followed with the team. It seemed the night before, when we had our shower, they had had a water spout on what they called Cedar Creek. They said the water



ARNETT RANCH NEAR STERLING, 1885

came down in the creek bed twenty feet deep. Babcock had his sheep on this creek bottom and the flood carried off every sheep he had, 2,500, also the herder's horse. All the herder saved besides himself was his saddle.

George Gunn, whose ranch was at the mouth of this creek, had 2,500 sheep in the corral at the ranch, the other 2,500 he had a few miles up the creek. The flood carried away all of them. When the boys at his ranch below woke up, the water was up to their bed. They got out and sat on the roof of the house in the rain until morning. The sheep in the corral kept piling up and smothering each other. There were two Mexican goats trained to lead the sheep in crossing streams. They were wise enough to keep on top of the sheep as they piled up. At last they got on top of the sod wall and

in the morning were walking on the ridge of the barn roof—the only things alive of those animals. The flood broke both Gunn and Babcock financially. About two miles of railroad track were washed out.

The next morning just as I, on my pony, and my helper with the team and running gears, had gotten about midway into the Platte River, here came dead sheep, antelope, calves, bridge timbers, railroad ties, sections of railroad, etc. We were kept mighty busy dodging these. If any of the timbers had hit us, that would have been the end of us. I reached the opposite shore safely on my pony, but looking back, I saw my man was in trouble. One of the horses would not swim. The water rolled one horse over the other and the man was swimming after them. I called to him, "Let them go and save yourself." He was a good swimmer and husky. He kept after them until they struck a sand bar. He got hold of their bridles and held their heads out of the water and called to me for help. I got on my pony and swam to him.

By this time the river was out of its banks, but we managed to get the horses untangled from harness and wagon, got them and the wagon onto an island in the middle of the stream. The water kept coming up until it got about two feet over the island.

I didn't care about the team. My main worry was trying to figure out how I was going to get the man off the island. He had about decided to take hold of my pony's tail and she would swim out with both of us, when I heard some one calling for help. I looked up and there was my sheepherder over on the bank of the river in water knee-deep, calling for help. I feared he had cramps and might fall and drown. So I jumped on my pony and started, forgetting we were on an island. All of a sudden my horse went off the island head first in about ten feet of water. I was thrown off my pony, but as she came up I grabbed for the cinch strap and you bet I held fast to that until the pony swam out with me. I surely would have drowned had I not been able to catch that strap, for I had on hip rubber boots and they were full of water.

Before I got to the sheepherder, he calmly walked off. He had become panicky. That was all. The man on the island was able to swim to shallow water. The team remained on the island. In about three days the water subsided and we were able to get the team and running gears off the island.

Soon after the flood I thought it about time to go back home and see my people and my "best girl," as we used to call our sweethearts. So I put my saddle on the horse that would not swim, led the other one, and started for Boulder, a 200-mile ride, intending to sell the team. I didn't want a horse that would not swim. They were large horses, weighing 1500 to 1600 pounds each.

I got as far as Valmont, four miles from Boulder, when a man called to me saying, "Do you want to sell those horses?" "Yes," I replied.

"What do you want for them?" he asked. "Two hundred and fifty dollars," I said.

"I'll give you four young mares for them. They are just over here in the field. Come and take a look at them."

"It's a trade," I said, after looking them over, "if you will keep them without any cost to me until I go back to the ranch, which will be in a few days."

The deal was closed. After several days' visit with my people and the promise to my sweetheart that I would return soon and take her back with me to the land of promise, I returned to the ranch at Crook, bringing the four young mares, riding one and leading the others.

Soon after my return we sold the Wisconsin ranch and bought 8,880 acres on the north side of the Platte River, at $4 per acre, from the state, $1 per acre down, and twenty years in which to pay the balance. The land strung along for about fifteen miles from Iliff to Crook.

My brother and I decided to build a ditch to secure priority rights, and the following March we started the tremendous undertaking. We had a big tent with a coal range in which we burned "buffalo chips." They made a very good fire, but would choke the stove up quite often. Sometimes the thermometer would drop as low as 20 to 40 degrees below zero, so cold the grub would freeze on the table. Then we would grab a plate of food, stand around the stove and eat our meals. We never took off our clothes when we went to bed—just our boots. We put them under the covers so they would be warm in the morning. We slept on the ground.

We built the ditch thirty miles long. Got in debt $1,000 per mile, or $30,000. It was a tremendous undertaking for us and we did not know just how we were going to come out, but my brother was several years older, and a natural plunger and nothing worried him greatly. He expected to make a big fortune out of the new venture. I was younger and not so venturesome and did not approve of going so heavily in debt. However, we worried along, hoping to be millionaires some day. That very thing might have happened, if all had gone well, as you will see later in the story.

We now had a fine start in horses and sheep, and soon found it necessary to build a big barn, with living quarters overhead.

Just to show how things change, when the dry land settlers flocked into this country about this time, the stockmen had to close out their holdings in three or four years, the drylanders had about starved out and abandoned their places.

One of the big stock companies had what they called their "Home Ranch." It consisted of a two-story frame house, sod barns, and corrals, and 10,000 acres of meadow land, all fenced with four-board fence. They knew if they abandoned this place, it would all be carried off by settlers, so they talked one of their cowhands into buying it. When he told them, "You must know I have no money." They said, "We will deed it to you and take a mortgage back. You needn't pay interest until you are able." Their object was to have him take care of the place until they could sell it.

The second dry land boom came on and there was a great demand for bottom land, of which this 10,000 acres consisted. This cowhand sold off $60,000 worth of the ranch, paid the $10,000 which he owed, and kept the balance of the land. I had not seen nor heard of him for twenty years until one day in 1917. I was spending the winter in Long Beach, California, when I met a man in the lumber business whom I used to know in Sterling. Occasionally I would drop into his place of business.

One day who should come along but this same old cowhand who sold the ranch land near Sterling.

"Well, well," I said, "where in hell did you come from?"

"Oh," he replied, "I sold 1,000 steers the other day for $100,000, so I thought I would give the wife a little vacation, and here we are.

"I have another 1,000 head of two-year-olds I am feeding. I have 2,000 acres of that land you had at Crook all in alfalfa, for which I have refused $200 per acre."

I understand lately this cowhand got above his business, went into the banking business, got caught in the crash and is now broke. And so it goes.

When the dry land settlers began to flock into that country the second time, they did not take time to fence their land and would shoot the legs of the stock that got onto their property. Then Nebraska had a herd law saying that if your stock got over the line in Nebraska the farmer could impound them and it would cost 75 cents per head to get them out. That was duck soup for the farmers. They would run the stock from Colorado over the line into Nebraska and hold them for the ransom. One day I got word from the sheriff that a certain farmer had twenty-seven head of our horses.

I sent a couple of cowhands to get the horses and gave them the money to pay for them. They got to the farmer's ranch about midnight, let the horses out of the corral, then got the farmer out of bed and told him they had come after Arnett's horses. When the farmer came out, there were no horses in sight. The boys made him believe they were sore.

One of the boys said, "What will we do about being run away over here, thirty miles, for nothing?" The other one said, "Let's hang him to that pole over the gate post."

They put their rope around his neck and threw it over the pole. All the while the farmer was trying to apologize. Finally the boys said, "If you promise not to bother the Arnetts' horses any more, we will let you off this time." It is needless to say that those farmers never bothered our horses again.

But others did get a bunch of ours in the pound over at Sidney. I sent the boys after them. They stayed around town until midnight, sawed out a panel of the fence and brought the horses home. That was the last of the horse trouble. I never even heard anything further about it.

I started one day to go over to Sidney from the ranch at Crook. I had to go across the prairie thirty miles. I was going to trade horses for sheep. It got dark on me, so I headed for the first lights I saw. It was in October and pretty cold. I finally reached the place where the lights were, rode into a gate of what I thought was a corral. The first thing I knew some one said, "Halt!" And there stood a soldier with a gun pointed at me. Well, I halted. I was riding a mule. Instead of getting into a corral as I thought, I discovered I was inside of a government fort.

The guard called the officer out. He took my mule by the bridle and led him up in front of the light of the window of the officers' quarters. He questioned me, wanting to know how I got in. I told him at a certain gate. "Wasn't the guard there?" he asked. To which I replied, "No."

My mule happened to be smaller than the government mules, and besides he had no U. S. government brand on his hoofs. It looked for a while as though I would stay all night in the guardhouse, but after I put up a good story, they led my mule out of the fort, showed me the lights of Sidney and I lost no time in getting there. The sheep I went to see had the scab, so I didn't trade for them.

I decided to take another trip to my home town, and fulfill my promise to my sweetheart. We were married on August 8, 1885, and after a two weeks' honeymoon I took my bride to Crook, where I had made arrangements to live with the station agent and wife, until such time as we were better equipped to take care of a bride on a big ranch. And here a funny thing happened.

We had a gang of men putting up hay. In being around the tent in which they were living, I managed to pick up a louse, or "crumb" as we called them. They used to say that we were not

American citizens until we had lice. Well, one morning after I had gone to oversee the haying, my bride woke up and discovered a big fat louse crawling on her arm. When she told me about it that evening, I said, "I am glad to know you are an American citizen." This little incident was slightly embarrassing to a bridegroom, however.

After a few months we went into Sterling to live, as things were not moving our way very fast, and we were already so heavily involved we decided to put the ranch up for sale in Denver.

The Studebaker brothers, manufacturers of the Studebaker wagons and buggies in Illinois, had a big horse ranch over on the Kiowa, which was overstocked and they wanted more range. They heard of our place and one of the brothers who looked after the livestock interests came out in his private car with his foreman. He had his car switched onto a sidetrack at Iliff, and lived in it for about ten days, while he was looking over the range we controlled.

We were to get $100,000 for three-fourths of the whole. The Studebaker brother said, "I will take it and go home and arrange for the money, and will be back in ten days."

This caused great rejoicing for the Arnett brothers. Everything was bright and rosy now, but it did not last long. Just three days after he left, we received a wire saying this brother had died of heart trouble. A letter followed in a few days stating that Mr. Studebaker looked after the ranch interests and now that he was gone, they would have to close out their ranch.

That was a pretty severe blow to our ambitions. To see so much money in sight just when we needed it so badly, and then have it disappear so suddenly, almost gave the Arnett brothers heart failure, too.

There are three towns on that land today, Crook, Iliff and Sedgwick. At $100 per acre that land is worth $880,000.

After this deal fell through I turned over the ranch to my brother to dispose of the best he could. I had a wife and had to get out now and make a living. For a time I sold Studebaker wagons in Sterling.

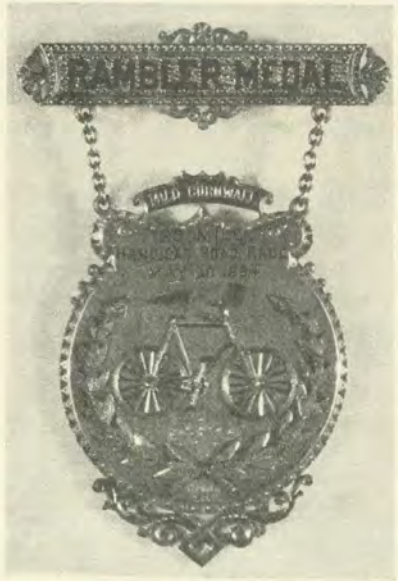
Just about that time my brother made a turn with the ranch. After paying up all debts, we had about one hundred head of horses left. I turned my interest in them over to my brother. In the meantime my folks had written me to come home and help them in the hotel which they were running, as their clerk had just left.

We said "good-bye" to the millionaire prospect and soon were back in my home town without a penny.

Milo Cornwall and the Rambler Road Race Medal of 1894*

ROBERT G. BOSWORTH

The medal for the Rambler Road Race of 1894, which it is my pleasure to offer to the State Historical Museum, was won by my cousin Milo Cornwall and was found among the possessions of my aunt, Mrs. W. T. Cornwall (May K. Bosworth), who died recently at the age of ninety-one years. The whole family of Cornwalls were great devotees of the bicycle in the "Gay Nineties," belonging to two or more cycle clubs and participating in "runs" up to one hundred miles—"Century Runs," as they were then called. My



MILO CORNWALL'S GOLD MEDAL
Won in the 25-Mile Handicap Road Race of May 30, 1894

mother has a photograph of Mr. and Mrs. Cornwall in their riding togs and with their cycles. Mrs. Cornwall was considered very daring, if not imprudent, because she wore ankle-length bloomers—the first in Denver to do so.

Almost every "boy" who is now fifty years of age or more will remember his youthful desire for a Rambler cycle. As I

*In presenting the Rambler Road Race medal of 1894 to the State Historical Society, Senator Bosworth of Denver wrote this explanation and story.—Ed.

recall, there were several models, the staid ones, more or less, for the old folk, and then the sport model for really virile young enthusiasts. The sport model was painted red and had a front sprocket about eighteen inches in diameter. It was the sportiest thing on the road as well as the speediest, and Milo rode one of the best and fastest of them.

Milo Cornwall was a fine sportsman in the best sense of the word. In addition to his cycling, he was a keen hunter, both of big game and birds. He was drowned in his early twenties when on a duck shooting trip. The story as I remember it in the family, is that Milo's canoe or small boat capsized in a sudden squall. Milo's companion could not swim, so Milo lashed him somehow to the

CYCLE ENTHUSIASTS IN CITY PARK, DENVER
Milo Cornwall is second from the right. Third and fourth are his parents, Mr. and Mrs. W. T. Cornwall.

boat and was endeavoring to push it to shore when he sank. His companion drifted to shore and was saved. In the *Denver Republican* of March 27, 1898, the day after the tragedy, I find this account:

"Calkins Lake, Longmont.

"When about half way across, a sudden gust of wind overturned the boat, throwing both men in the water. Peterson could not swim, but Cornwall was an excellent swimmer. As they rose to the surface, Cornwall grabbed Peterson and holding Peterson above the water, he tried to right the boat—but was unsuccessful. He then got hold of a rope which had lain in the bottom of the boat and fastened it around Peterson's body and his own, lashing them

both to the boat. He loosened his own and tried to kick and push the boat to shore.

"He never once abandoned Peterson. Had he been alone he might have been able to swim ashore."

The Pikes Peak Prevaricator[1]

LEVETTE JAY DAVIDSON*

Among the tall tales which originated in the Rocky Mountain West during the early days, some of the tallest emerged from Sergeant John T. O'Keefe's unusual experiences on Pikes Peak and his even more remarkable imagination. As an enlisted member of the United States Signal Corps he was sent in January, 1876, to the weather station which had been established slightly more than two years before at the top of Pikes Peak. There he spent nearly three years recording wind velocities, rainfalls and snowfalls, temperatures, and other natural phenomena—data which appeared in the weather bulletins published in local papers and in the annual reports of the Chief of the Signal Corps to the War Department. O'Keefe's most thrilling narratives were, however, unwound for the entertainment and the astonishment of his journalistic friends in Colorado Springs, the young metropolis at the foot of the famous mountain, and for the hardy tourists who ascended Pikes Peak without the aid of such later conveniences as the cog-road and the automobile highway.

The first O'Keefe story to attract nation-wide attention was sent as a news item to the editor of the *Pueblo Chieftain* by its Colorado Springs correspondent, Judge Eliphalet Price, who signed himself, "Mucilage." It appeared under the heading "Attacked by Rats, Terrible Conflict on the Summit of Pike's Peak," and was dated "Colorado Springs, May 25, 1876." Within a short time this narrative as given below, was reprinted not only in the Colorado Springs *Gazette* and the Denver *Rocky Mountain News* but in papers all over the United States.

THE RAT STORY

> The vast number of rats inhabiting the rocky crevices and cavernous passages at the summit of Pikes Peak, Colorado, have recently become formidable and dangerous. These animals are known to feed upon a saccharine gum that percolates through the pores of the rocks, apparently upheaved by that volcanic action which at irregular intervals of a few days gives the mountain crest that vibratory motion which has been detected by the instruments used in the office of the United States Signal Station. Since the establishment of the station, at an altitude of nearly 15,000 feet, these animals have acquired a voracious appetite for raw meat, the scent of which seems to impart to them a ferocity rivaling the starved Siberian wolf. The most singular trait in the character of these animals is that they are never seen in the daytime. When the moon pours down her queenly light upon the summit, they are visible in countless numbers, hopping among the rocky boulders that crown this barren waste, and during the summer months they may be seen swimming and sporting in the waters of the lake, a short distance below the crest of the Peak, and on a dark, cloudy night their trail in the water exhibits a glowing, sparkling light, giving to the waters of the lake a flickering, silvery appearance.
>
> A few days since, Mr. John O'Keefe, one of the government operators at the signal station, returned to his post from Colorado Springs, taking with him a quarter of beef. It being late in the afternoon, his colleague, Mr. Hobbs, immediately left with the pack animal for the Springs. Soon after dark, while Mr. O'Keefe was engaged in the office, forwarding night dispatches to Washington, he was startled by a loud scream from Mrs. O'Keefe, who had retired for the night in an adjoining bedroom, and who came rushing into the office screaming, "The rats! The rats!" Mr. O'Keefe, with great presence of mind, immediately girdled his wife with a scroll of zinc plating, such as had been used in the roofing of the station, which prevented the animals from climbing upon her person, and although his own was almost literally covered with them, he succeeded in encasing his legs each in a joint of stovepipe, when he commenced a fierce and desperate struggle for his life with a heavy war club preserved at the station among other Indian relics captured at the battle of Sand Creek. Notwithstanding hundreds were destroyed on every side, they seemed to pour (with increasing numbers) from the bedroom, the door of which had been left open. The entire quarter of beef was eaten in less than five minutes, which seemed only to sharpen their appetites for an attack on Mrs. O'Keefe, whose face, hands and neck were terribly lacerated.
>
> In the midst of the warfare, Mrs. O'Keefe managed to reach a coil of electric wire hanging near the battery, and being a mountain girl, familiar with the throwing of a lariat, she hurled it through the air causing it to encircle her husband, and spring out from its loosened fastening making innumerable spiral traps, along which she poured the electric fluid from the heavily charged battery. In a moment the room was ablaze with electric light and whenever the rats came in contact with the wire they were hurled to an almost instant death. The appearance of daylight, made such by the corruscation of the heavily charged wire, caused them to take refuge among the crevices and caverns of the mountains, by way of the bedroom window, through which they had forced their way. But the saddest part of this night attack upon the Peak is the destroying of their infant child, which Mrs. O'Keefe thought she had made secure by a heavy covering of bed clothing, but the rats had found their way to the infant (only two months old), and had left nothing of it but the peeled and mumbled skull.
>
> Later—Drs. Horn and Anderson have just returned from the peak. It was first thought that the left arm of Sergeant O'Keefe would have to be amputated, but they now believe it can be saved.

The Rocky Mountain News of Denver ran the story under the boisterous heading, "An Awful and Almost Incredible Story—A Fight for Life with Rats on Pikes Peak—An Infant Child Literally Eaten Up." By September 23, 1877, however, the *News* felt it expe-

[1]The materials used in this paper were collected from the files of the *Colorado Springs Gazette* (in the Coburn Library, Colorado College), of the *Pueblo Chieftain* (in the office of the *Chieftain*, Pueblo), of the *Rocky Mountain News* (in the library of the State Historical Society of Colorado), and from numerous books and pamphlets in the Western History Department of the Denver Public Library. The author wishes to thank the librarians of the above-named institutions, who very generously helped to unearth these long-forgotten stories.

*Dr. Davidson, member of our Board of Directors and a Professor at Denver University, has previously contributed articles to this magazine.—Ed.

dient to counteract some of the unfavorable publicity which the rat story had given to Colorado, and to which the "Solid Muldoon," a stone man recently unearthed in the mountains west of Pueblo, was contributing. On that date it ran an editorial denying the truth of the narrative, explaining that it was merely a clever hoax. "Everybody has read it, or heard of it, and every visitor to the Peak is anxious to hear about the rats and see the grave and monument of

THE FABRICATED GRAVE ON PIKES PEAK
Legend on the head board: "Erected in Memory of Erin O'Keefe, Daughter of John and Nora O'Keefe, who was eaten by mountain rats in the year 1876." Courtesy of Western Collection, Denver Public Library.

the poor child which they devoured. Long articles have been written and published by scientists to prove that rodents do not inhabit rocks above timberline, but all to no effect, for people are more ready to believe a good story than a dry truth."

As the *News* writer asserted, "People are more ready to believe a good story than a dry truth." Therefore Sergeant O'Keefe continued to report to his admiring friends and curious visitors the trials and tribulations of life on Pikes Peak, not in the dry style of the "Annual Report of the Chief Signal Officer," but in the manner of Paul Bunyan, Jules Verne, or the noted Baron Münchausen. The following is representative:

WEATHER BOUND
Wonderful Adventures of a Signal Service Officer on His Way to the Peak

Sergeant O'Keefe returned last evening from the unsuccessful attempt to ascend the Peak. He says that it is the first time within his experience that he had been thus baffled, and he asks to be excused from ever being subjected to a similar experience. By the reports which he had received from Mr. Sweeney, who is stationed at the Peak, he was led to infer that but little snow had fallen and in consequence he was not prepared to contend with the obstacles which blocked his path.

The journey for the first few miles of the trail was without any dissatisfactory feature, but while making an abrupt turn in the trail in the vicinity of Minnehaha falls, the sergeant was brought to a standstill by an immense herd of black-tailed deer which impeded his further progress. He contends that the herd contained fully seven hundred head and says that it took just one hour and forty minutes for them to pass a given point.

The sergeant was armed only with a .32 caliber Smith and Wesson revolver and with this poor apology for a firearm he succeeded in killing seventeen of the deer. The only plausible reason that Sergeant O'Keefe can give for the remarkable appearance of this vast herd is that they were driven from South Park by the recent storm. As the sergeant was compelled to continue his journey to the Peak, he gathered the game which he had slaughtered, tied their tails together and slung them over the neck of his faithful mule, Balaam, and continued on his way.

Everything passed off smoothly until timber line was reached when the sergeant encountered another serious barrier as the fierce northwest wind which accompanied the storm had formed mountains of snow across the trail. With the much trusted veteran mule "Balaam" and an unusual amount of perseverance on the part of himself, Sergeant O'Keefe contrived to surmount a tremendous snow drift 28 feet in depth. When safely upon the other side he paused for a moment, and taking his field glass he viewed the prospect o'er and examined the difficulties with which he had to contend. As far as the eye could reach nothing but snow banks could be seen, some of which were at least 100 feet in height. It required only a brief space of time for the sergeant to make up his mind that it would be useless for him to risk his life in making another rash attempt, so he concluded to return to the Springs, but upon turning to step into the saddle he discovered that the mule had disappeared. The sergeant was now in a sad plight. Had he only survived the terrible rat raid of 1876 to find death again staring him in the face from starvation? He retraced his steps through that mammoth snow drift, and after a terrible siege of over one hour he found himself standing upon the other side thoroughly exhausted. After he had somewhat revived he glanced around him in hopes of finding some trace of the lost mule, and what was his chagrin to perceive the much trusted "Balaam" lying upon his back with feet uplifted in the air at the bottom of a deep ravine. The deer, with which he had been festooned, were scattered from top to bottom of the ravine. The sergeant secured the game and the mule and again started on his homeward journey.

While passing along a very secluded portion of the trail he was attacked by six ravenous mountain lions, and in order to save his own life he was compelled to cast away the game which had required so much exertion to capture. Even the seventeen deer did not replenish their ravenous appetites and still they pursued him, but by the proper manipulation of that mule O'Keefe managed to evade them. He reached the signal office in this city at 8 o'clock last night and it is doubtful whether he ever again attempts to traverse the Pikes Peak trail.

Peace and security on the Peak were further threatened, according to the dauntless Sergeant, by the renewed activity of a volcanic

nature in that area in the autumn of 1880. Fortunately for posterity this did not occur until after O'Keefe had returned from a period of service at the Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia. His story, as reported by a local journalist, is as follows:

PIKES PEAK, A VOLCANO
Fire, Smoke, Ashes and Melted Lava
Pouring from the Crater

The probability of a volcano existing in the Rocky Mountains has never entered the minds of our citizens. Conclusive evidence that such a thing does exist and not very far from Colorado Springs has recently been furnished us by Sergeant O'Keefe of the signal service...

It was on the night of the 29th of October that the crater [on Pikes Peak] first displayed any signs of volcanic activity. Sergeant O'Keefe was aroused from his slumbers by a dreary, doleful sound which apparently emanated from beneath the signal station. His first convictions were that it was an earthquake, but this impression was soon dispelled by the fact that the sound still continued without any signs of a jar.

The sergeant concluded to investigate the cause of this mysterious sound and he, in company with his assistant, Mr. F. L. Jones, dressed themselves and started out in search of the cause thereof. They had barely stepped over the doorsill when a bright flash, at first thought to be lightning, surmounted the summit of the Peak. It was only of a second's duration and the Peak was again clothed in darkness. From this time on the sound heretofore described seemed to decrease until the usual quiet of the solemn mountain peak again was restored.

The following day Sergeant O'Keefe visited the crater, feeling confident that the sound heard on the night previous had emanated from that source. What was his surprise on looking down in the crater to discover vapor curling up from the cup-like enclosure. This discovery only prompted him to further continue his researches, and after two hours laborious climbing he found himself standing within about 200 yards of the crater chimney. The heat even at this distance was very oppressive and the ground about him was covered with pulverized ashes and lava which had been emitted from what he believed to be an incipient volcano.

O'Keefe was lost in astonishment. The snow for a distance of half a mile from the crater had entirely disappeared...

Since the 29th of October but one eruption has occurred and that was on the night of November 7th, when another one similar to that which occurred on the 29th, only more violent, occurred. Sergeant O'Keefe happened to be up on the roof of the signal station on this occasion and he portrays the majesty of the scene as the grandest that he has ever witnessed, not excepting that of Vesuvius, seen by him in 1822 when he was a lad and before he left his native Italy for America...

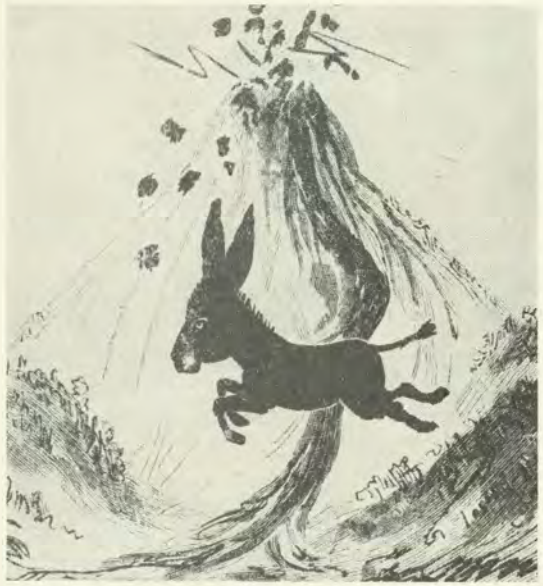
Sergeant O'Keefe informs us that the flow of the lava tends towards Ruxton's creek, whence the water for the supply of the city is procured, and there is no doubt that the hot lava will, if it reaches the creek, so heat the water that it will be of no earthly use for drinking purposes. It is evident that the eruption has but just begun and should it continue any length of time there is no doubt but that Colorado Springs will meet the same fate as that which destroyed the flourishing cities of Pompeii and Herculaneum. The flow of lava has already extended a distance of three miles from the mouth of the crater and only two eruptions have taken place.

Scientists give it as their opinion that the present upheaval will last about three months, after which the volcano will settle down to a state of comparative repose, only to burst with renewed vigor in about six years.

The reporter who was sent to investigate this portentous development has not yet returned and fears are entertained for his safety.

The *Gazette* did warn its readers that not everyone believed this account to be entirely accurate. Witness the following item:

The "Pikes Peak story" has elicited various comments. The Denver Republican solemnly states the story has no foundation in fact, while the Denver News thinks O'Keefe was born in Ireland and not Italy, and that he left his native land in 1862 instead of 1822. Sergeant O'Keefe will in due time answer these imputations on the accuracy of his story.



BALAAM CROSSING THE LAVA FLOW
From an early Colorado Springs publicity pamphlet. Courtesy of Denver Public Library.

Like another famous adventurer, Paul Bunyan, who was assisted by Babe, the Blue Ox, Sergeant O'Keefe had as his faithful companion a remarkable animal, Balaam, mentioned in the above stories. This government mule carried provisions and even riders up the Peak in all kinds of weather. He entered the service of the United States Government at the founding of the weather station on the Peak in 1873, and continued for several years after his most celebrated master had been forced to change to another occupation. He plays an important part in the following accounts:

BALAAM OF PIKES PEAK
A Donkey that Can Give His Prototype
Points and Discount Him

A small group of people who had gathered in front of the signal office yesterday morning attracted the attention of a GAZETTE reporter and upon investigation the centre of attraction was found to be Sergeant O'Keefe and his ancient government mule, Balaam. As the reporter approached Sergeant O'Keefe was heard to remark to the bystanders who had gathered around him, "Gentlemen, you can laugh at that mule as much as you please but he is endowed with better instincts and has got more of a history to back him that any one of you." Whereupon Balaam gave a confirmatory bray. The mule in question was a dapple gray standing about 14 hands high and exhibiting unmistakable signs of having been subjected to many hardships and much exposure. He is a government mule and has been employed ever since the signal station was established on the Peak in transporting the officers to and from the summit.

The sergeant spoke the truth when he said Balaam had a history for he was the first mule to traverse the Pikes Peak trail and to breathe the breath of life at an altitude of 14,400 feet above the level of the sea. For seven long years Balaam has climbed and reclimbed that rugged Peak and although he is 32 years old he is to all intents and purposes good for 10 years more of mountain life.

During the seven years of his mountain experience Balaam has made, according to statistics carefully recorded by Sergeant O'Keefe, 1,924 trips from this city to the Peak, or an equivalent of 40,960 miles or about twice the circumference of the globe. He has worn out 560 sets of shoes, equal in weight to about a ton of iron. It has cost the department to keep him during that time, including forage, shoeing and other necessary expense, somewhat over $4,000. From these facts one can realize the value placed upon him by his owners.

In the following story one of Sergeant O'Keefe's associates, Mr. Sweeney, is represented as infected by O'Keefe's mania for recounting personal adventures. But the events narrated redound chiefly to Balaam's fame:

BALAAM ON A BENDER
The Pikes Peak Mule Escapes and Associates with
Mountain Lions and Wild Horses

Mr. J. K. Sweeney, of the signal service, is more fully convinced than ever before that the veteran and historic mule, Balaam, is endowed with more instinct than usually falls to the lot of an average human being. Some days ago we stated that Balaam had escaped from the custody of Sergeant O'Keefe, since which time all efforts to recapture the sagacious animal have been of no avail.

* * *

Mr. Sweeney is pluck personified, and the following morning he started out with that poor unintelligent, unintellectual and uneducated mule, "Kit," to repair the telegraph line, and if possible to reclaim the prodigal mule, Balaam. After several unsuccessful attempts to find the defective place in the wire, he started for Jones' Park in search of Balaam, thinking that he would be easily caught. Several hours of the most diligent search divulged his hiding place, but to catch him was another thing.

There he was with a band of seven wild horses, the manes and tails of which dragged on the ground. The horses were of a jet black color and their manes and tails pure white. It was apparent that Balaam had become imbued with the spirit that prevailed among his wild associates and it is averred by Mr. Sweeney, who is like Washington in one respect, that under the example brought to bear upon him, his tail and mane had grown not less than two feet during the two days that he had been at liberty. Even an ear of corn would not tempt him, and Mr. Sweeney says that in no instance did he get within 800 yards of him.

He finally gave up his efforts to recapture the animal and returned to this city with the avowed intention of returning the following day without being thwarted in his purpose.

True to his declaration of the previous day, Mr. Sweeney started out yesterday morning and upon his arrival at Jones' Park he was surprised to discover that Balaam had disappeared. After a protracted search among the wild and rocky canons Mr. Sweeney heard a great uproar and cautiously looking around a rock, saw a sight that made him shiver. There was Balaam with every particular hair standing on end fighting for his life with three full-grown mountain lions. Mr. Sweeney was so provoked at the refractory mule that he didn't care much which whipped, but anxious to see the affray out he hid himself behind an adjoining knoll and viewed the situation. Whenever any one of the lions would approach Balaam he would strike at them with his fore feet and thus compel them to retreat, and when they got behind he would kick them in the ribs. In this way he held them at bay, and his vigorous kicks proved very effective.

The lions did not give up the conquest until two of their number were laid dead upon the grass at Balaam's feet.

Mr. Sweeney watched the affray with breathless interest and on several occasions when the lions made a bold charge he said to himself, "Balaam is a goner!"

He was much surprised when the remaining lion retreated from the field of battle, but it occurred to him that Balaam was quite exhausted and could be easily caught, but what was his chagrin when the mule dashed off through a deep ravine and soon disappeared from view. Seeing that it was useless to attempt to give him chase Mr. Sweeney turned his attention to the scene of the terrible battle. It was apparent that the savage beasts had first attacked the wild horses, for two of them lay dead not far from the carcasses of the lions. Mr. Sweeney was at first nearly overcome with the ghastly spectacle that he beheld, the two dead lions and the two dead horses lying at his feet. Realizing that the skins of the lions were of some value he set about skinning the beasts and tied the lion skins to his saddle. Before starting for home he happened to think of the long manes and tails on the wild horses and taking his knife he cut them off and also tied them to the horn of his saddle.

We were shown the trophies above named in the signal office last evening. The hair cut from the wild horses lacks only two inches of being five feet long, while the lion skins are the largest we have ever seen. Mr. Sweeney proposes to keep the hair and skins as remembrances of the exciting adventure and they can be seen at the signal office. When we left, Mr. Sweeney shouted, waving one of the horses' tails over his head, "Hurrah for the United States and Balaam, the government mule." Mr. Sweeney will try to catch Balaam today.

In addition to Balaam and the less intelligent mule, Kit, the livestock attached to the Signal Station included a dog, appropriately named "Seldom Fed." After O'Keefe left the service, this dog went to the *Gazette* office for meat and thus got its name in the paper on March 11, 1882.

No doubt many O'Keefe stories perished in the telling, or dropped out of men's memories after numerous retellings, without ever reaching the comparative permanency of print. Such may

have been the fate of his account of the whitewashing of Pikes Peak. A search for the story in the files of the Denver, Colorado Springs, and Pueblo papers of the O'Keefe period has so far been unsuccessful. Passing references to the feat indicate that O'Keefe was quite proud of this fictional invention and that it was familiar to a wide circle.

One newspaper item refers to his progress in digging an artesian well on the Peak, reporting that by November 5, 1881, it had reached a depth of 628 feet. At times the failure of supplies to arrive forced the resourceful sergeant to unusual expedients. On May 8, 1881, the *Gazette* recorded the following: "Sergeant O'Keefe sustains his reputation for truth and veracity by claiming that he smoked ten pounds of gunpowder tea during his last sojourn on the Peak, the usual monthly supply of tobacco having failed to put in its appearance from Washington."

But the following quotation from a Denver newspaper, December 24, 1881, marks the beginning of the end:

> Sergeant O'Keefe of the Pikes Peak signal office has resigned. His "rat" stories and other myths and legends of that region caused him to be known as the "Prevaricator" of Pikes Peak. Sergeant O'Keefe, with winter snow-bound years on the top of Pikes Peak, was afforded a rich field for "fakes" that made him a national character. The sergeant was handsomely banqueted at Colorado Springs before he left that region.

An account of this banquet, written by one of Denver's outstanding reporters of the time, Stanley Wood, contains among other flowing bits, the following:

> The President arose, and with his goblet filled to the brim with Iron Ute water, proposed the following toast: "O'Keefe, one of the greatest prevaricators, equalled by few, excelled by none. True to his record may his life be a romance and in his final resting place may he lie easy." Apropos of this toast Lieutenant Scott said: "The rosy realms of romance are as real to O'Keefe as the stern and sterile steppes of truth are to many. The golden glow which gilds the granite summit of the peak is but the type of that glamour which surrounds it through the mendacious genius of O'Keefe. This aureole envelopes the peak itself. In the words of another 'the microcosm is lost in the macrocosm and the segregation is swept along in the boundless choral aggregation.' (Tremendous applause from the gallery.) Triumphant tergiversation is productive of more deep and lasting pleasure than parsimonious prevarication, or in the words of the poet the normal condition of affairs is:
>
> Truth forever on the scaffold,
> Wrong forever on the throne.
>
> Gentlemen, here's looking at you."
>
> * * *
>
> When the applause had subsided, the President introduced Alderman Ainsworth Brown with the announcement that the Alderman would read an original poem composed for the occasion. A sudden hush fell upon the great audience as the Alderman began in tones trembling with emotion:

> Assist me now divine poetic fire,
> Come to my aid and help me strike the lyre.
>
> "Hould there," shouted a clear, determined voice, and the tall slender figure of O'Keefe was seen standing sternly erect. "Hould there! Tergevisator, prevaricator and mendacious are terrums which may be used in a freendly spirrit, but whin you talk about sthrikin' the liar oim here every toim."
>
> Alderman Brown at once resumed his seat and with Spartan firmness refused to proceed with his poem. Speeches were made, however, by General Isaac Bailey and others, and the banquet concluded by all those present rising and singing in a very affecting manner, "Farewell, my own; love of my life, farewell." Thus ended one of the most interesting events of the year in Colorado Springs.

The nature of O'Keefe's later experiences is largely a matter of conjecture. Occasional notices in the Denver and Colorado Springs papers indicate that he was employed for a time by the Colorado Telegraph Company, of Denver, and then as a railway mail agent. His obituary, which appeared in the February 3, 1895, issue of the *Rocky Mountain News*, although including some inaccuracies and misspelling his name, rounds out the story of this man who, even in his own day, was turning into a folk hero. At the time of his sudden death at the age of thirty-nine, he was "stoker of steamer No. 2, of the Denver fire department, stationed at Colfax and Santa Fe avenues."

The once-admired marker on what purported to be the grave of Erin O'Keefe, the rat-devoured child, on the summit of Pikes Peak, was removed several years ago by a generation less given to humorous hoaxes. Now and then one still hears, in the Pikes Peak region, fragments of the rat story; and an oil painting of Balaam, by Charles Craig, is preserved in the Pioneer Museum of Colorado Springs.

A Note on Dr. Frederick J. Bancroft*

GEORGE J. BANCROFT

To the Editor of the *Colorado Magazine:*

In your issue of September, Mr. John Horner describes my father as the "immensely obese Dr. Bancroft." This description is somewhat misleading. It is true that father had a "bay window" and weighed 300 pounds, but on the other hand he stood six feet, four inches, in his stockings and measured about three feet across the shoulders. His limbs were as free of fat as are mine and I weigh 160 pounds. He was big all over. He wore a No. 8 hat and

*Dr. Bancroft was one of the founders of the State Historical Society of Colorado and served as its first President (1879-1897). He was not only a prominent physician of Colorado, but an outstanding citizen of the state. He died January 16, 1903. The interesting and enlightening note published here was written by Dr. Bancroft's son, a mining engineer of Denver.—Ed.

in pain.[2] I remembered how we laughed at the old man then and how perplexed I was in after years to hear those groans and curses along the banks of the Purgatoire where I made my home.

Even a year had wrought a change along the trail. We found a bit of plowed land here and there; black strips upon a sea of silver grass. The Indians were there but so also were the settlers, and already the Indians had begun to fight a losing battle. On the Kansas plains the white men hunted the buffalo and the Indian stood sullen and resentful watching the great massacre.

This time mother moved to Kansas City. Once more I entered school and Will found employment on the Kansas City *Journal of Commerce*. He spent all his spare time studying for the ministry and that winter he united with the Baptist Church. However, his patriotism outweighed his religious fervor and he joined a Kansas regiment and marched away to war. He came home one evening in his Army blue and paused a moment on the threshold to say, "Hooray for Abe Lincoln." In a very few days he was sent south with his regiment. He smiled at us and kept smiling and I tried to take my cue from mother by standing very straight and returning smile for smile. Had I known as I stood there, waving and smiling, that fifty long years were to elapse before I was to see Will again I am sure I could not so bravely have let him go.

Before those fifty years were ended Will was to have fought through the Civil War; to have been ordained a Baptist minister; to have been sent as missionary to Calcutta, India; to have returned and been sent to Mexico City as minister. He was stationed in Mexico City when that country was stirred by a great religious revolt. Life in the city of Mexico became a dangerous thing and the Baptist Church ordered Will to return to the States. It was then that Will did the thing, the astounding thing, that so surprised us all, and that puzzled us all the days of our lives. He renounced the Baptist Church and united with the Catholic. He never seemed, in after years, to care to discuss his strange act. He said only that the seed planted in his heart by Bishop Lamy in the little school behind old San Miguel had borne fruit at last. Sometimes, I found myself wishing that Bishop Lamy might have known the result of his patient labors but death had come for the Archbishop many years before.

In Kansas City I began putting my long hair up in curl papers

[2] *Purgatoire* is the French fur trappers' designation of this stream, first named by the early Spaniards as *El Rio de las Animas Perdidas en Purgatorio*, the River of the Lost Souls in Purgatory. Many writers have discussed the origin of this name, some attributing it directly to the Spanish explorers, for the reason given by Mrs. Russell, i. e., that moaning sounds issued from the earth at times. Early American settlers corrupted Purgatoire to Picketwire. Today the river is mapped as Purgatory, and its north branch as the North Picketwire. See A. W. McHendrie, "Origin of the Name of the Purgatoire River," in the *Colorado Magazine*, V, 18-22.

at night so that three shining curls would hang down over one shoulder as was the style those days. Gone were the long brown braids of yesteryears. Mother refused me the use of rouge, although it was then put out in tiny vials labeled "The Bloom of Youth." I dusted my face with rice powder and always wore a black beauty patch near the corner of my mouth. Dressing carefully for the Sunday services I laced heavy stays over fine white muslin underwear. After donning a single long, narrow petticoat I arranged my fly-away hoops and a padded cotton bustle. Then came the flounced petticoats, one of which must be of taffeta, many yards in circumference. My best dress was very wide and caught up at intervals with small clusters of pink tea roses. My hats were very small and my parasols smaller still; while on my hands were silk "half-handers" in color to match my dress.

I know now that mother had great expectations for me and that was partly why she had brought me away from uncouth Santa Fe. She hoped that I might marry well. She encouraged many people to come to our home and our evenings were almost literary events.

A tall young man with dark, commanding eyes came there one evening. He carried Harriet Beecher Stowe's newest book "Dred" under his arm. "Dred," following closely upon the heels of "Uncle Tom's Cabin," was a best seller that year. Gerald Roberts was the young man's name and he read the book aloud to the little party gathered in our living room those long winter evenings. Others joined us to hear the new book. Gerald read it slowly and we eagerly discussed it there. Gerald seemed to lead the older men in endless debates. The Fugitive Slave Law, the Dred Scott Decision and the hanging of John Brown were never allowed to rest. Some mention was made of the new Atlantic cable, and the terror of the war was a background for it all.

Gerald Roberts was in the mercantile business in Kansas City and was, I suppose, of superior financial and social standing. Perhaps mother could have been forgiven for encouraging his visits to our home. Looking back now, I am sure the only feeling I ever had for Gerald Roberts was one of flattered vanity, and I recall how flustered I became when first I noticed his dark eyes resting long upon me. When he asked mother for my hand in marriage I scarcely knew what it was all about. I only remember that he stood holding my hand in his saying, "Miss Sloan, will you do me the honor to become my wife?" I stammered when he put the ring, a sparkling diamond, on my finger, but I deliberately left it there for I had always wanted to know what an engagement ring would feel like. The days that followed were not happy ones for me. I was always trying to hide away from the ardent young man with the dark, possessive eyes. I would take the little ring off along with

the bustle and the hoop-skirts and think of the Santa Fe Trail where one could not be bothered with such trivial things.

When, in 1862, mother began to think of going again to Santa Fe I am sure I disappointed her in insisting upon accompanying her. She had added her plea to Gerald's that I settle down in civilization. However, marriage held no attractions for me as compared with going once again to Santa Fe. Therefore, I returned the little diamond ring and said goodby to the man I liked—but did not love.

ELIZA ST. CLAIR SLOAN, mother of Marion Russell

Mother and I missed Will sadly this trip out. Always we spoke of him and sometimes I awoke in the silence of the night to wonder how he was and where.

Somewhere along the trail I forgot Gerald's dark eyes and returned simply and naturally to my first love—the great outdoors. There have been many things in my life that I have striven most earnestly to forget, but never those trips over the old Santa Fe Trail. The lure that the old trail held for my young heart was not mine alone. Mother seemed never happy unless she was traveling along it or planning to go. In later years, she made the long-anticipated California trip, the trip to the rainbow's end, finding there the beauty of repose, because she closed her long life there and was laid to rest by her father's side.

This trip to New Mexico was destined to be my last over the trail. But not so for mother. She made several trips back and forth alone after I was married. On one of these trips she had an experience that seems worthy of repetition here.

She had engaged passage in the wagon train of one Captain Feltz, in whose wisdom and courage she had confidence. The wagons, eastward bound, were not loaded and mother had a wagon alone except for the Mexican driver.

As mother slept in the wagon, Mr. Feltz gave it place near his own each night. The driver slept under the wagon on the ground. Since she had had her money stolen on her first trip, mother always had been more than merely cautious. At night she placed the small cloth bag containing her few bank notes in the corner of her pillow slip and pinned it there. She really was a seasoned traveler and not given to nervous fears; however, she had never liked the looks of the surly Mexican driver. Captain Feltz had taken the fellow on in Santa Fe after one of his teamsters had fallen ill. He came well recommended and Mr. Feltz had no reason for thinking that he was not all right.

One day mother forgot to remove the bag of money from the pillow as was her custom. Thinking of it later in the day, she crawled back, removed it from the pillow and placed it in the bosom of her dress. Later she had reason to believe the driver had seen her place it there. Often that afternoon she noticed him watching her furtively, and once she thought of communicating her fears to Mr. Feltz, but was ashamed of her cowardice.

That night the moon shone so brightly through the white wagon cover that she could not sleep. She lay and listened to the night sounds and at last began to wonder why the Mexican on the ground beneath the wagon did not make the night hideous with his snoring, as was his wont.

At the front the wagon sheet was drawn taut and fastened with a small rope like a draw-string in a sack. It seemed to her that the sheet vibrated, accompanied by a slight rustling sound. She thought perhaps it was the night wind coming up and tried to reason away her nervousness. It was that hour of the night when velvet-footed animals prowl; from afar came the wail of prairie wolves and close at hand the rustling continued. She lifted herself softly in bed. The knotted rope was almost within reach of her hand. Suddenly a black, misshapen shadow darkened the white wagon cover. The moonlight glittered on the long blade of a knife that had severed the rope. The Mexican slid sinuously into the wagon. Mother's echoing scream sent him back over the wagon tongue. It also brought Mr. Feltz.

The Mexican confessed intention to murder. He said that robbery was his motive. To be set adrift afoot and alone was a punishment often meted out to malefactors, so Mr. Feltz drove the man away from the train when they were ready to break camp next morning. They left him sitting disconsolate by the wayside. Perhaps some other train picked him up. Perhaps the Indians completed his well-deserved punishment. Nothing was ever heard from him again.

This year, romance drew her shining skirts across the door of the Academy at Santa Fe. Captain Grayson, who had been stationed at Fort Union, was ordered to the front and, for that reason, sent his wife, a bride of one month, to the convent at Santa Fe for protection. Mrs. Grayson was a pretty girl about sixteen years of age. I think she worried a great deal about Captain Grayson as the weeks went by and she did not hear from him. I remember her as a quiet child with great, gray eyes set in a small white face.

After she had been with us perhaps two months word was received that Captain Grayson had been killed in action. For a time she was ill with grief and the students and sisters vied with one another in trying to make things pleasant for her. For two years she stayed at the convent, as that seemed to be the only home she had.

One day a young rancher, whose name was George Hebert, passed by and saw Mrs. Grayson on the lawn at the Academy. He said afterward that it was a case of love at first sight with him. Men did really fall in love in those days and women were really shy and timid.

Courting a girl in a convent is uphill work at best. It is seldom attempted and almost never successfully. However, young George Hebert proved himself equal to the task. His ranch, the famous Glorieta estate, situated some distance south of Santa Fe, was sadly in need of a woman's guiding hand. He told Father Lamy that, and Father Lamy knew that George had a reputation for honesty and sterling worth in the country. So he made himself a kindly ally in Cupid's campaign. Some way, a meeting was arranged outside the convent walls and at that very first meeting they were married. Their honeymoon and the remainder of their lives were spent on the Glorieta Ranch. They were always happy and very much in love. Mrs. Hebert and I grew nearer and dearer to one another with each ensuing year.

Once, on my birthday, Mrs. Hebert gave me a gift book entitled "Society Salads." It contained many recipes and beauty hints. I remember it said that drinking coffee made a young lady's complexion very sallow and heavy, while buttermilk, tossed together with crushed tansy, would remove tan and sunburn. "Society Salads" reminded us also that perfect ladies seldom had hearty appetites and that they never chewed gum. It also assured us that real ladies fainted easily and described how to do so with the least damage to deportment and coiffure.

After school closed in June of that year of 1864 we moved to Fort Union. We lived in a low, adobe house consisting of about six rooms in a row. The eastern room was used by the soldiers who were Masons as a lodge room. The Masonic Lodge was organized this year and they asked mother whether they might use her living room as a meeting place. Much was said about the room being on the ground floor and unfit as a Masonic Hall; so special permit was obtained from the mother lodge in Missouri. The Fort Union Masonic Hall has ever been on the ground floor of some building. I remember the discussions that were held there over Kit Carson's membership. His wife was a Catholic and he was married within the Catholic Church, yet he was a member of the Masonic Lodge. The altar cloth of blue plush my mother made for that lodge. It was a bit left over from one of Father Lamy's wonderful robes. Factory-woven cloth was very precious in those days. This was very rich and grand. It had come all the way from Leavenworth by ox-team. When one had one yard of factory-woven cloth left over in those days he was permitted to put it back in the store for resale. So it was that mother bought it and made the Masonic altar cloth. That altar cloth is preserved today under glass. You will find it hanging on the wall of the Masonic Temple at Wagon Mound, New Mexico. Please note the tiny stitches taken in the rare old plush. You cannot see, as I do, the little hands long crumbled into dust, that put them there.

I believe that Fort Union Lodge was called Chapman Lodge in honor of Major William Chapman.

The Civil War did things to old Fort Union. Many of its officers went into the southern Confederacy, but the majority did not. Some time during the later years after the close of the war Chapman Lodge was partially destroyed by fire. It is said that part of its furniture was moved to Las Vegas and a part to Wagon Mound.

At Fort Union in this year of 1864 I first met Lieutenant R. D. Russell. I was rounding a corner suddenly, my green veil streaming out behind me, the wind blowing my hair in my eyes when I met him face to face. The whole wide world stood still. The young lieutenant's blue eyes smiled into my own while I struggled blindly with my veil.

For days the memory of that smile came between me and my dreams. Almost immediately he made opportunity to be formally presented. Mother, it seemed to me, found many chances to com-

pare Lieutenant Richard Russell of the First California Volunteers most unfavorably with Gerald Roberts of Leavenworth. Love, they say, is like the measles. We take it only once. Cupid spends no second arrow on the same heart. I believe that this is true, because from that August day when Richard and I met on the streets of old Fort Union until that other August day twenty-three years later, when an assassin's bullet took him from me, our love never wavered. Indeed, that love is a part of the living soul of me today, although grass has waved over Richard's heart these forty years and more.

Richard had been born in Canada in 1839. He was six years older than I. One evening, he sat in the little adobe house at Fort Union and told mother and me most all of his adventurous life. Mother knew then that Richard loved me and wanted to marry me, although she never said one word to either of us. Richard told her how his parents, natives of Illinois, had been visiting relatives in Canada and that he had been born there. He always regretted the fact that he had been born outside the United States.

When Richard was sixteen he and another lad ran away from their Illinois homes and wandered with an emigrant train to California. Like all the men and boys, Richard walked most of the way and he said that he would never forget the long, hard tramp across the ancient lava beds of the Indian country and Arizona. Reaching California, he sought first the gold field, but with no success. Then he obtained employment on a cattle ranch and at last homesteaded on the Sacramento River. He had built a cabin and several miles of stake-and-rider fence when the Civil War drums began sounding. So it was that he gave up his dream of a herd of Texas longhorns and enlisted in the First California Volunteers. However, I am sure that Richard was always pioneer at heart. He loved the big open places and was always for pulling up stakes and striking out farther west as civilization approached. The old plainsmen, they say, were a restless lot with the hearts of homeless nomads. While this may be true, it is also true that these nomads watered with their hearts' blood the seeds of freedom they planted for you and for me.

The First California Volunteers were ordered immediately to New Mexico, where General Carlton was having a bad time. The Confederates were at that time holding Albuquerque, and they were also inciting the Comanche and Apache Indians to deeds of horrible bloodshed and outrage. The coming of the First California Volunteers forced these Confederate troops to evacuate Albuquerque and retreat steadily southward into Texas. General Carlton was then able to turn his attention to the hostile Indians. Arizona was embraced within the Territory called New Mexico. It was a dreary, thirsty land of 20,000 whites and 40,000 Indians. The whites kept together near the forts and were always more or less terror-stricken when necessity demanded that they leave that protection. Scarcely a day elapsed that we at Fort Union did not hear of some Indian massacre or outrage more shocking than death itself.

When September rolled around, mother moved again to Santa Fe. I was sick at heart because Richard and I had never had a moment really our own. Always we were chaperoned; always there was some elderly person with us. Only our eyes told what lay silent in our hearts.

One week had passed in Santa Fe without a word from Richard; then one morning a great caravan was sighted coming in along the eastern trail. I went alone to the post office as the mail sacks were brought there and emptied first. I stood among the jostling crowd until my turn at the little window came. But there was no news from Fort Union. Sadly, I turned away.

I had dressed with special care that day. My dress of factory cloth, cotton challis as mother called it, was a lovely golden dress. It was long with a tight little buttoned basque and long close-fitting sleeves. The skirt had four fluttering flounces. At my throat was mother's great cameo brooch. That day at the post office lies in my memory as faint and sweet as the scent of old lavender. I had turned away from the window and started slowly homeward when Richard came up behind me and pulled my arm through his. He had come with the emigrant train. My heart overflowing with happiness, I followed where he led me and soon we were at Santa Fe's great arched gateway, all alone.

For one brief, forbidden moment I stood within the circle of his arms. I saw the wide, old trail flowing like a river through the gateway far away. I heard the tinkle of distant sheep bells. I knew it was the close of an Indian summer day. I saw the little girl that had been me, the little girl of the blue pinafore and long brown braids, slipping away among the shadows on the trail. I knew that she had gone forever. I was conscious of my fluttering golden dress. I was conscious of Richard's arms around me and his bared, fair head so near my own. I was a woman now with the heart and soul of a woman.

Six months from the day of our first meeting Richard and I were married in the little chapel at Fort Union. We were married in February, 1865. Mother had sent to Kansas City for my trousseau. I still think it was very lovely. My wedding dress of soft

beige fitted my slender figure. My hat, adorned with a single white plume, was small and turned away from my hair at the side. My cape of blue velvet covered me from tip to toe. This was indeed an elegant costume for New Mexico in the sixties.

I am truly afraid that I did not hear a great deal of the wedding ceremony, for a sacred and triumphant ceremony was taking place in my heart, one in which all the bells of heaven rang out madly. Somewhere at my side I heard Richard's young voice saying again and yet again, "I do. I do." Then, we were outside in the little patio and a fine white snow was blowing against my new velvet cape. There were tears in mother's eyes and Richard held my hand tightly, so tightly in his own.

From our wedding in February until May of that year, Richard and I lived in Fort Union. Our honeymoon there was a very happy one. Our quarters were next door to Colonel Carson's. I was the only woman there and the soldiers made much over me. Many of the soldiers could not resist gambling. Some would give me their money on pay day and I tried so hard to save it for them.

Sometimes I rode horseback around the fort, but never very far away. The Apaches were growing bolder and more cruel. The Comanches were driving off the white man's sheep and cattle. The emigrant trains were cruelly harassed.

These emigrant trains, constituting as they did a great artery of travel between the Mississippi River and the Pacific coast, required protection by Government troops. Fresh water springs in this part of the country were never less than twenty miles and sometimes more than forty miles apart. To overcome this difficulty a continuous line of military posts and a system of artesian wells were planned. Of these military posts, Camp Nichols was the first to the eastward. It was completed in June of 1865 and was abandoned in September of the same year.

It was in May, after our marriage, that Richard was ordered to help establish little Camp Nichols. Shocking massacres had become so frequent that Colonel Carson had decided that a fort must be built somewhere along the New Mexico-Oklahoma line. Camp Nichols was to be this fort. It has ever been the policy of this government to keep always in mind the permanent good of the white man while bestowing as many temporary indulgences upon the Indian as it could. The Cheyenne and Arapaho had added their forces to the Comanche and Apache, and wagon trains had almost ceased trying to cross the Plains without military escort. Three hundred soldiers were stationed at Camp Nichols, the idea being that when four or five wagon trains had gathered there, a detachment of soldiers would escort them east as far as Fort Larned, in Kansas, or west as far as Fort Union. The soldiers would find other trains waiting for them at these points which they would, in turn, escort back to Camp Nichols. Thus did Uncle Sam try to protect his traveling public.

Sometimes wagon trains were forced to wait several weeks at a time for military escort. Just before Camp Nichols was established Colonel Carson had become greatly incensed over the massacre of five white persons at Cimarron Springs, and over the theft of a great herd of horses from the wagon train of a Mr. Allison, California bound. These two events caused Colonel Carson, together with Major A. H. Pfeiffer,[3] to set out eastward with their complements of wagons, cavalry, scouts and a band of cattle to look for the location of a new fort. This location they found on the prong of a little stream called the Carrizo, meaning the nameless. This little fort was called Camp Nichols and was located about 130 miles east of Fort Union.

At Camp Nichols high rock walls were erected surrounding a tract of ground about 200 feet square. Outside the walls a deep ditch or moat was dug. Entrance to the enclosure was through a gate at the northeast corner. Within, they erected several stone buildings. One of these had two rooms and was situated near the east side. It was eighteen by thirty-six feet and was used as a hospital. Near the south wall was another building, fourteen by seventy feet, which was used as a commissary. Mounted howitzers were placed at especially constructed embrasures at the southeast and northwest corners. These howitzers were destined to be fired only once during the life of Camp Nichols. That was on July 4, 1865. Flat stones were laid in the center of the enclosure at ground level, over an area covering about eighteen by thirty feet, stretching north and south. This was a place to tether horses during the night. Along it ran a long rope, to which the horses were tied.[4]

Outside the south wall and west of the gate were a row of stone rooms for the officers. Timber for the roofs and for other purposes was cut at the head of a little timbered canyon and was laboriously hauled to the new camp. The flag pole was placed some hundred

[3]Colonel Albert H. Pfeiffer was one of the most noted Indian fighters of the Southwest. During Kit Carson's 1863-64 campaign against the Navahoes Pfeiffer led 100 men through the Canyon de Chelly, driving the Indians before him. For this daring feat he was privately reprimanded and later promoted. He was Lieutenant-Colonel under Kit Carson at Fort Garland and died in the San Luis Valley, Colorado. For an account of this interesting personality see Laura C. Manson White's article in the *Colorado Magazine*, X, 217-222.

[4]For a description and a drawing of the fort see the *Colorado Magazine*, XI, 179-186.

feet from the entrance gate, where the Stars and Stripes were proudly flung to the western breezes.

My husband was ordered to Camp Nichols in May and I was determined to go with him. I felt that Colonel Carson would think that it was not very safe for me and I began planning some way to win his consent. I asked him to please come to our quarters and be guest of honor at a little dinner party. I knew he loved coming because he liked my cooking, just as he had liked mother's. This evening he seemed to have guessed my little ruse, because he watched me smilingly throughout the evening. After our other guests were gone, he did not wait for me to make my request, but told me kindly though firmly that as soon as the stockade at Camp Nichols had been erected and howitzers mounted he would send a detachment of soldiers for me.

"Until that time you are safer here at Fort Union," he said, and added: "I promised your mother to look out for you, child." I can see him yet as he looked when he said that. He was standing under the hanging lamp in our quarters at Fort Union. A slight man with a suggestion of a frown between eyes that showed an infinite capacity for tenderness.

Years after Colonel Carson's death, I was to go and stand in the ruins of that little room and to remember again the sound of his kindly voice refusing me my heart's desire. Standing there, I was also to remember Colonel Carson as he looked, coming across the Plaza at Santa Fe to take my arm and hold it closely under his as he piloted me among the covered wagons. He held his hat in his hand and the sun shone on his long, straight hair. I felt my head bumping against his leather-clad shoulder. Colonel Carson piloted me surely through the troublesome young days of my girlhood.

(To be continued in the next issue.)