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Frontier Humor

ANN WOODBURY HAFEN

Humor put leaven in the heavy columns of the frontier newspaper. There were proverbs with a flavor of frontier wisdom, popular conundrums, tall stories, light verse, novel definitions, timely anecdotes, besides the usual slang, jokes, word play, and fun-provoking advertisements. Characteristic items, gleaned from the first five years of the *Rocky Mountain News*, which began publication at Denver on April 23, 1859, are herein presented.

PROVERBS

There is no Sunday west of the Missouri River.

The frontier is hell on horses and women.

Wise as the greenhorn who purchased an axe to cut buffalo chips.

Proof of the pudding is in chewing the bag.

A right smart poultice on the wrong stomach.

One slab of marble becomes a useful doorstep; another, a lying tombstone.

Advertising for a wife is like being measured for an umbrella.

DEFINITIONS

Politician—a person who, buoyant by putrefaction, rises as he rots.

Old maid—an unmarried lady of forty-five who has passed the Cape of Good Hope.

Noose-paper—a marriage certificate.

Female illiterature—woman's rights.

Editor—a poor fellow who empties his brains to fill his stomach.

Dude—a man who parts his hair carefully in the middle so as not to upset his balance.

Wild oats—a crop manured with late hours and bad whiskey to bring premature gray hairs and gravestones.

Negro—an unbleached American.

Indian—a copper-faced type of mankind.

Stuffed duck—a lady filled with flattery.

Stethoscope—a spyglass for looking into people's chests with your ears.

Devil's pickets—the young men at church doors who stand to watch the ladies coming out.

Rumor—the illegitimate daughter of Miss Representation with no less distinguished ancestor than the Father of Lies.

Strychnine whiskey—Taos lightnin', tangle-leg, minnie-rifle.

Births, marriages, deaths—hatched, matched, dispatched.

Stingy man—invented a machine for cooking dinner by the smoke from his neighbor's chimney.

Ice cream—saucers of cold comfort.

ANECDOTES OF THE HOME LOCALE

Buttermilk and farmers' smiling daughters are enjoyed on Sunday drives.

Marriageable young women are in great demand in the West here. A New Jersey man wrote home to his father: "Suppose you get our girls some new teeth and send them out here to Denver."

A lady was wearing a big pistol strapped to her belt, at sight of which the editor commented drily: "I reckon our mountain lions will keep a little shy."

Business is rushing in Denver. "Gone to bury my wife; be back in half an hour." Another busy lumberman complained that he was able to get in only for the second prayer in his wife's funeral.

Because of the billions of bedbugs in frame houses, going to bed is not going to rest, but is turning in to combat with animated nature.

On the hottest days Indians are seen wearing buffalo robes, fur inward to keep out the heat. Others carry white men's parasols.

In Mountain City or thereabouts a Mr. Wolf is about to marry Miss Lamb. They will doubtless fulfill the prophecy that "The wolf shall lie down with the lamb, and a little child shall lead them."

A letter from a Civil War soldier said: "To be candid, mother, my breeches have learned to execute the military movements 'To the rear, open order!' and when I get back to camp I must go a tailoring."

Madame Walker, surnamed Kate, for being drunk was put in jail to sober up. But she was drunker next morning; she had smuggled in a bottle of Bourbon in her crinoline folds.

He bought a drink for two-bits; then handed two bits of a broken bridle.

The patriot made a toast: "The United States of America! From the iceberg to the orange tree, from the cliffs of granite to the mountains of gold, one empire indivisible, united, solid, entire, eternal."

On a wagon cover was the ad: This out Fitt for sail.

Colorado must have taken an emetic from the way miners are rolling out of the country.

The man here who won't buy a newspaper even though he has an eatinghouse has a soul not half as big as a goat's gizzard.

A colored chap was a bootblack and latherer in a barber shop. He struck for higher wages. Got no results so he bought a razor and set up his own shop. Then he decided to change to a doctor, but he couldn't spell the words he wanted painted on his sign.

A chap asked the daughter's hand, but got the father's foot. His wooing was not bootless.

Air is so thin at Denver that people walk with mouths open, gasping for breath—that's what easterners think of our altitude.

A westerner thought he was eating corn dodgers. But instead, he was sampling codfish balls. "Somethin' dead in that, Tom!"

Cub, most noted pet in the country, is the old white horse belonging to Martin & Smith. He is twenty years old; has had livery service in Wisconsin and here. He was the first horse kept in Denver for public hire, and has been driven by nearly every lady and man in the city. Cub is going east to retire to the land of colt days. Tom Smith drives him to the river where he has a car chartered for him. He has bade goodbye to his old friends. Once Cub was a dark iron gray but he is now snow-white. (December, 1863).

At the surprise party for Colonel Jack Henderson, the twinkling feet merrily tripped the hours away till noon of night.

"Pies and Milk"—the inviting sign on mountain houses.

The Gobaeks had their trials and tribulations over the plains. Here's a typical Infit from Pike's Peak:

- 1 ragged coat with collar and tail torn off
- 1 pair pants hanging together by shreds
- 1 old black hat barrin' the rim
- 1½ shoes looking like fried bacon rind
- ¼ lb. raw beans
- ½ pint parched corn
- 00,000 ounces of gold dust and nuggets
- Specie, nary red

"We made it pay" is the report in St. Joe by certain gold hunters, though their appearance was uncouth looking—long hair, sunburned countenances, dilapidated hunting shirts.

Everybody going West in 1863 were called Pilgrims. A woolen-shirted, sombrero-hatted teamster with a guitar sang "Joe Bowers," "Betsy from Pike," "Soapsuds Over the Fence," and "Turkey in the Straw." He made excellent dance music for the travelers.

Horace Greeley stood behind a gambling table in Denver in 1859 admonishing the red-shirted, bearded-faced adventurers to be temperate in their habits, to be mindful of agriculture as well as of mining. As the white-coated philosopher stepped from the table, the gambler proceeded: "Come down, gentlemen, who goes \$40 on the ace? Come, gentlemen, roll up and down with your dust. You'll find this don't much resemble agriculture but it's mighty like mining."

Punishment advocated for fire starters in the mountains: "Deal out a little of old Judge Lynch and give them free papers to leave the mountains."

Too many stray dogs and stray pigs in Denver streets. Boar fights. An old motherly sow gathered rags to cover herself from the heat.

LIGHT VERSE

"Let Her Rip" appeared August 27, 1859, in the *News*:

One sunny afternoon last week
I thought I'd take a ride,
And hired a nag they said was fast,
I'm sure she was when "tied."
My friend, Bill Spriggins, drove the mare,
While I laid on that whip
And shouted till I was quite hoarse—
"Bill, put that animated female projectile power through—
go 'long—
Let her rip."

A chap who drove a large bay nag
Seemed anxious for a "brush,"
So, whipping up our own fast crab,
We went it with a rush.
'Twas neck and neck a mile or more,
When his mare made a trip;
We glided by like lightning greased—
For having hired the extraordinary animal, we considered
that we had a perfect right to get the worth of our
money, and therefore—
Let her rip.

Soon after there appeared a "Soliloquy of the Returned Gold Adventurer," written by a fellow who signed himself Syntax:

Been to Pike's Peak, lost all my dimes,
And for a week had "darn'd hard times"
Hunting for gold, 'mong rocks and hills,
Catching a cold, the fever and chills.
Got mighty sick, felt very sad,
Stung to the quick, times were so bad;
Money all spent, worn out my shoes,
Clothing all rent—I had the blues.

Got in the lurch—my spirits down,
Gave up the search, came back to town,
Footsore, weary, hungry, spleeny,
Heartsick, dreary, and a—greeny
To leave mother, a pleasant home.
And a dear brother, away to roam. etc.

Then there came along a boy from Indiana with a sheaf of home-made verses. Editor Byers dared to have a little fun in his columns. He disliked amateurish verse as much as he scorned amateur theatricals. But to his would-be contributor—P.P.P. (Pike's Peak Poet), otherwise Job Straight, he gave this public advice:

Wiggle, wiggle, pollywog,
Pretty soon you'll be a frog.

Job took the hint. After struggling over new verses he finally admitted in the paper's columns:

Not every one can be a po-it,
No more nor a sheep can be a go-it.

For several months occasional verses did appear under the signature of P.P.P., one of which was called "A Bachelor's Reverie at the Peak."

'Tis a bright lovely night, all is quiet and still
Save the howling of wolves on the side of the hill.
The stars twinkle brightly, the moon's mellow light
Sheds a halo of glory infinitely bright
O'er the mountains which sleep 'neath her soft hallowed rays,
And the valleys and plains where 'tis lovely to gaze
On the jewels that glitter on every dry spear
To deck the bright brow of the happy New Year.

Here I sit in my cabin, my thoughts running fast
O'er the days that have fled in the dim misty past.
Methinks that again I am back to the States
Where mince pies and apples and hot buckwheat cakes,
Fresh pork and potatoes and peaches and cream
And oysters and fruit cake on table cloth clean
Are spread out before me, but, alas, 'tis a dream!

For I turn myself 'round and behind on the wall
That side of old bacon, too strong e'er to fall,
And there in the corner behind the bean sacks
Is a loaf which to cut I must sharpen the axe!

A week later his "Farewell Ode to Crinoline" startled the readers.

Farewell, vast crinoline, farewell!
Thy wide proportions, gorgeous swell,
Which filled the sidewalks and the street
We hope we never more shall meet.
No more thy swelling form encroach
To make us ride outside the coach.

Job Straight turned his energies to farming. One day in June after a prolonged silence in the papers, he walked into the editorial office with an armful of green stuff, which he left with a note. On June 13, 1860, this item appeared in the *News*:

Thanks to Job Straight for a basket of nice lettuce from his farm on Montana Creek. An accompanying note designated it as the "real poetry" of Pike's Peak. Granted, but P.P.P., our numerous readers and your admirers would be immensely gratified by the more frequent ventilation of your ideal. It is more universally enjoyed, and seems less selfish than your "real poetry."

As was customary in eastern newspapers of the day, each New Year the *News* issued Carriers' Greetings, consisting of endless home-made verses in the pattern of couplets. Each subscriber paid the boy a quarter in return for the humorous greeting. The first year, 1860, there were 134 lines, printed on green handbill paper, some of which follow:

Kind Patrons, good morning! A happy New Year
To you all! May peace and prosperity cheer
Your lives and your labors through all coming time;
May you always be flush, not lacking the dime—
Or the *quarter*, or more—to gladden and cheer
The Carrier's heart at the dawn of the year.

That we're a great people, no one will deny—
Great in deeds, great in words, and in efforts to try
Our hands and our luck at whatever comes 'round:
In wisdom and logic we're counted profound. . .
Be this as it may, we don't care to ask
For anything better than plenty of gas
To mix with our notions and brighten our rhymes,
And assist us in telling our TALE OF THE TIMES.

First, we'll tell of our nation, as now it exists,
Befogged and bedimmed by political mists. . .
Next Kansas, it seems, is a terrible bore,
The like of which sages say ne'er was before. . .
Old Brigham—the saintly, the just and the wise,
Whom all the old orthodox feign to despise. . .
Next we'll speak of Pike's Peak, the place of all places,
To which men turned their backs as well as their faces. . .

Our towns have sprung up, as it were, in a day
And now we can boast of as fair a display
Of dwellings and store-rooms, and all things complete,
As will fairly outstrip—at least fairly compete
With any new towns you can find in the West;
With this difference, however, that ours are the best. . .
We have plenty to eat, and at moderate rates,
And plenty to wear—and to *drink*, thank the fates—
So we don't care a cuss how the croakers down east
May think we've run down to a species of beast. . .

So now, my dear friends, let us all return thanks
That our tickets for life have not all proven blanks. . .
We don't care a fig how the Eastern world wags,
We're bound to go onward and never to lag.
So hurrah for young Jefferson, Star of the West!
May her land e'er be free and her people all blest. . .

But hold my dear friend, have you during the winter
Thought enough of your country to pay up the PRINTER?
If not, go at once and hand him the "wheels,"
And feel the delight that an honest man feels.

For the next ten years Colorado newspapers greeted their patrons each New Year's day with a handbill of long, home-made verses.

JOKES

The grass widow looked up adoringly at her admirer and said coyly: "I wonder if that moustache feels as good on your lip as it did on mine!"

"You buying this hay for your father?"

"No, for the hoss. Dad don't eat hay."

"Our gals don't lie, for the old woman has licked 'em a hundred times for lying."

A Chinese merchant gave his ideas on the Japanese Embassy's reception in this country: "Japanese great men now—Americans want more treaty—by'n by treaty be signed, then Japanese like anybody—just like Chinese—just like damn nigger."

The general tasted some Tennessee butter. Then he arose, saluted the butter plate, saying: "Gentlemen, that butter outranks me."

"You won't get half a crop this year."

"I don't expect to. I'm workin' it on shares."

"Now stand up and tell your story like a preacher."

"No sir, none of that. I want you to tell the truth."

Eve ate the apple and gave man the core. That's where he found the seeds of original sin.

"Do you believe in second love?"

"Yes. If a man buys a pound of sugar, isn't it sweet? When it's gone, don't he want another pound? Isn't it sweet, too? I believe in second love."

Lo the poor Indian whose untutored mind
Clothes him before and leaves him bare behind.

Italy doesn't allow Army officers to marry, but 1,200 are to be court martialed for the offense.

"Injun lost? No, wigwam lost. Injun here."

Whisky and sausage don't mate. Sausage took a sudden rise and choked him lifeless.

What our forefathers thought of tobacco—In 1621 the House of Commons moved to have tobacco banished from the kingdom "lest it overthrow a hundred thousand men in England" because now "plowmen take it at the plow."

Nine lives of Abraham Lincoln have already been issued by the book publishers. He has now as many lives as a cat.

Mrs. Partington says that nothing despises her so much as to see people who profess to expect salvation go to church without their purses when a recollection is to be taken up.

WORD PLAY AND SLANG EXPRESSIONS

A shower of rain made a pluvius clamor on our shingled roof.

That Rip Van Winkle of a city council finally stirred to consider a Hook and Ladder apparatus.

I'll suavel you [or] he was suaveled. [Suddenly snapped up or caught unawares.]

Colonel Chivington looks youthful since he had his appendages shaved off his face.

The thief is now sporting ball and chain jewelry.

The dancing party was merry as a marriage bell.

Congress is still discussing the old subject of nigger in the woodpile.

Free drinks three times a day—ice water.

The telegraph vs. the ox-egraph. Bully for the oxegraph.

Clara Primrose, a fat daughter of Ham.

The three institutions from New Mexico: senoritas, burros, and chili colorado.

Our old friend looks as well as he did before the coquettish smiles and irresistible blandishments of Spanish senoritas had overcome him like a summer cloud.

Shearing sheep with a handsaw is sheer nonsense.

The feminine gender of banjo is ban-josey.

Ben Franklin paid two deer for his whistle, in these days of antelope and mounting sheep.

Lee is on the skedaddle now.

Kate Walker, on a spree again, couldn't pay her fine so she was confined to the tombs.

Poor Uncle Toney is the Pony expressionist cuss that we ever did see.

Denver Dustyopolis—dust six inches deep since the city fire.

Wet rations (whisky).

Editor wants a melon. Any farmers with a melon-choly mood?

Pingle (to pay down).

Agony hats displayed in the windows for ladies.

A new perfume called "Balm of a thousand bayonets."

A hurdy-gurdy dance hall on G street. Disgraceful Whim Houses were burned on the Gregory lode. Aunt Betsy and her girls in Highland, the degraded place. Sisters of misfortune. A nymph of frailty.

Teach the young idea how to shoot. A boost not a boast.

Apple pie order. Neat as a pin. High Mucky-muck.

"Greek Fire" is the secret stuff in bombs.

When asked for a dance the girl replied: "You bet your Mucky-muck."

Weather is roasting, as the farmer says.

Laughed the buttons off his shirt.

The question in a peanut shell.

"Muchly" is an expression used at Central City in 1863.

Scared as a singed cat at a fire.

The cat flew out like greased lightning.

Tipsy patriotism on the Fourth of July, when all the world and his wife were out to celebrate.

When new ladies appear in hotels the boarders say: "Ain't she got the eyes!" or "Too much sail, too much headway; better tuck in some of that canvas!"

Rifle whisky was so-called because the militia smuggled their rifles full into camp with corked muzzles. . . Influenced by the juice of the rye.

Some only make grub while others get rich.

The rusty shovel humbug (the urge to seek gold).

Had Adam been a modern, there would have been a hired girl in paradise to look after little Abel and raise Cain.

Six feet in his boots! Why not say six heads in his hat?

Double-breasted poetry.

Emigrants from Omaha are plentiful as blackberries in August.

Photography advertisement: To catch the human face divine.

Big potatoes vs. the little potatoes.

O ladies, do your d-iviness!

Male and female strawberry plants occupy the same bed.

Midas' touch turned to gold, but if you touch a man with gold he'll turn into anything.

A thundering sight of laziness.

Wooden-headed men. Only wash gold. Mint drops (gold coins).

Went off the streak (lost the line of pay dirt).

The Smoky Hell Route.

Better escape the slang-whang intrigues of politics.
 Our country vs. spoil.
 He lied our paper black in the face.
 We trust our subscribers will fork over the spondulicks liberally.
 Volcanic biscuits (burned to a crisp).
 Returning croakers curse the country.
 Lady artists in the shows—exponents of the balm and beauty of a thousand strawberries on the stem.
 These new-fangled little affidavits that the ladies sport nowadays on their heads, instead of bonnets, are in many instances mighty powerful rejuvenizers.
 Garden sass. White settlements. All a humbug.
 The whispering pines—heaven's own music.
 Surface scratchers; humbug shouters.
 The crowd dispersed to take a "smile."
 At the toll gate he gave a scripture measure of gold dust.
 Suspended. Caved in. Pegged out. Gin in. Vamoosed.
 Spread eagle politicians.
 He knocked the fellow into the middle of about three weeks.
 The wheel that came off a dog's tail when it was a waggin'.
 Mountain lions, cougars, varmints.
 Expressions describing the big flood: Fierce as ten furies, terrible as hell. Gone up the spout. Gone down the Platte. By the galloping jumping Cherry Creek.
 Petered out. Tough cuss.
 Indians need a little salt petre and cold lead.
 His friends took leg bail.

CONUNDRUMS

Why is Denver destined to become the largest city in the world? Because the plat (Platte) extends from the Snowy Range to the Missouri River.

Which kind of cows furnish the buttermilk?

Is a rooster's knowledge of daybreak a result of observation, intuition, or pure instinct?

Why do men seldom kiss each other, though women do kiss each other? The men have something better to kiss but the women have not.

Why do women in the mining camps like to marry? Because the men folk rock the cradle there.

Why are ladies like bells? You cannot tell their metal till you've given them a ring.

Why is the mirror over a bar like a photograph album? They are both receptacles for empty mugs.

What's the psychological difference between killing a man or a hog? Assaulting with intent to kill vs. killing with intent to salt.

Why do women often make a hue and cry? Because they paint their faces, then weep when it does not make them beautiful.

TALL STORIES

Some years ago a party was traveling in a stage through the pines, and saw in the distance what they supposed was the frame of a log house. On approaching it they found it was the skeleton of a mosquito which had starved to death, the flesh having fallen from the bones. Rather tall! (*R.M.N.* August 27, 1859.)

Pike's Peak gold stories of the miraculous Munchausen flavor:

It is said that a man takes a framework of heavy timber, built like a stone boat, the bottom of which is composed of heavy iron rasps. The framework is hoisted to the top of Pike's Peak, and a man gets on and slides down the sides of the mountain. As he goes swiftly down, the rasps on the bottom of the framework scrape off the gold in immense shavings, which curl up on to the machine, and by the time the man gets to the bottom nearly a ton of gold is following him. This is the common manner of gathering it.

The Wheelbarrow Man swears that when he arrived in the Pike's Peak country he put the wheel of his vehicle in the waters of Cherry Creek and it turned to gold. (May, '59)

ADVERTISEMENT

Count Murat's sign in his barber shop: Barber-ous. Prepared to work with two hands. Come and get your hair and beard mowed.

On February 1, 1860, this appeared in the *Rocky Mountain News*:

"Fair flowers that are not gathered in their prime
 Fade and consume in little time."

A young gentleman of Denver City, twenty-five years of age, with a handsome present and prospective fortune, desires to make the acquaintance of one of the many interesting ladies within the bounds of the consolidation, with a view to matrimony. The successful applicant must be a lady perfect in accomplishment, suative, bland, coy, pleasing and agreeable, withal slightly beautiful, highly moral, perfectly intellectual, musical, merry and cheerful. Symmetry of form a desideratum—the complexion must be fair, cheeks ruby and rosy—with or without dimples, not particular—forehead

prominent, nose slightly aquiline, chin nicely turned, teeth of pearly whiteness, dress becoming, gaiters tight and wardrobe tidy—eyes bright, beaming and graceful, voice melodious, character as pure and unsullied as the morning light, not given to gossip, scandal or scurrility, not coquettish, deceitful or roguish—willing to “love, honor and obey,” for “better or worse, for richer or poorer,”—not too domestic, nor yet too fond of the walk, the romp, the ride, the street, the door or the window. In short, the solicitor, to suit the advertiser, should be perfectly headed, artistically hooped, and nicely heeled; of model mould, of finished figure; a flower, not warped or wilted, but in rose-bud prime: *a la brevíta*—a duck of a wife, every way. The representative of the above points . . . please address D.P., Denver Post Office.

(Among the many responses to Dam Phool's advertisement came a choice acceptance from Bridget Mulrooney which was printed February 15 to publicize her eligibility and her good points.)

The most famous feature of this line was the Devil's Gate Viaduct on what is now known as the Georgetown Loop. The masonry piers were built under the immediate supervision of Mr. W. P. Jones, the resident construction engineer for the Union Pacific Railway, and completed October 4, 1883.

The Phoenixville Bridge Company of Pennsylvania contracted to furnish the iron for the bridge and erect it. On September 20, 1883, the iron arrived in Denver on standard gauge cars. It was transferred to narrow gauge cars there and the first car arrived at

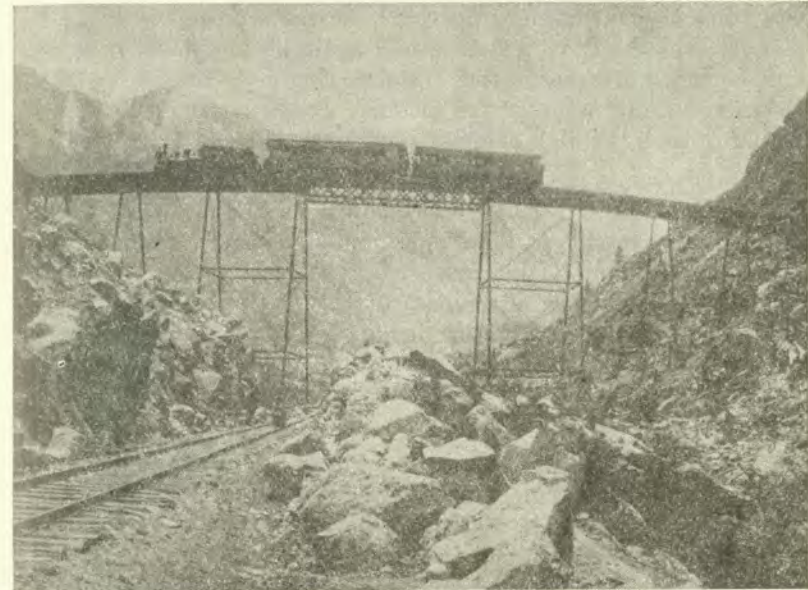
The Famous Georgetown Loop

ELMER O. DAVIS*

According to records in the Secretary of State's office, the Georgetown, Breckenridge, and Leadville Railway was organized on February 23, 1881, by Union Pacific interests to build what was to be known as the Highline Railroad. This was an extension of their Colorado Central narrow gauge line which had been built from Golden to Georgetown between July 22, 1872, and August 14, 1877. This 34½-mile construction was completed seventy years ago.

The credit for laying out the serpentine route from Georgetown to Silver Plume was due to Chief Engineer Robert Blickensderfer, a civil engineer employed by the Union Pacific with office at Omaha, Nebraska. He had the chief supervision of all engineering work done for the Union Pacific and its numerous branches during that period. The chief engineer on the Highline was R. B. Stanton, under whom Frank A. Maxwell did the actual field engineering. Mr. E. J. Milner was locating and construction engineer, and Mr. Chester W. Collins was the general contractor for the railroad extension from Georgetown to Silver Plume and to Graymont, at the foot of Gray's Peak. The grading and minor bridge work was completed in 1881-1883.

*Mr. Davis is a retired office engineer of the Union Pacific Railroad and is historian of the Union Pacific Old Timers Club. The dedication of a State Historical Society marker at the site of the Georgetown Loop on August 17, 1947, makes this article especially timely.—Ed.



HIGH BRIDGE OF THE GEORGETOWN LOOP

Georgetown Friday night, October 5, 1883, twenty-three cars being retained at Golden.¹ Timber scaffolding being built for its erection was described, on October 14, 1883, as a mountain of lumber. On October 15, 1883, the first column was erected, and on October 18 the Union Pacific Board of Directors inspected the Highline. On November 25, 1883, the great bridge was completed—or so it was thought.

Then owing to defective riveting and to the fact that the bridge was built wrong end foremost, Chief Engineer Stanton would not accept it. The columns placed on the north end of the structure should have been on the south end. The entire bridge had to be

¹The dates and specific information given here and in the remainder of the article were gathered from the *Rocky Mountain News* of the dates indicated.

taken down and rebuilt. The bridge builders must have become dizzy and lost their directions coming up the serpentine trail. The poor riveting was charged to frequent change of mechanics. They would work a short time on the ninety-foot structure over roaring Clear Creek and then head back to Denver that night. When the citizens of Silver Plume were notified that the train they expected in a few days would not arrive for months, there was great disappointment.

The bridge builders who had been discharged and left November 25th, were recalled and the work of turning the bridge around was started. On January 20, 1884, it was reported that the big viaduct over the Devil's Gate would again be completed in a week and be ready for inspection. Chief Engineer Stanton went to Georgetown and accepted the bridge. Construction forces started laying rails on the high bridge January 29, 1884.

On February 28, 1884, it was reported that the bridge over Devil's Gate was crossed by a locomotive for the first time the day before. Superintendent Pat Touhy and Roadmaster Charles Burgdorf of the Union Pacific inspected the Highline March 5, 1884. The rails reached the city limits of Silver Plume March 8. On March 12, 1884, the Highline bridge was successfully tested by running trains over it. Superintendent Touhy and Bridge Builder James Parks were in Silver Plume March 25 to inspect the big bridge and new depot layout.

The first regular passenger train over the wonderful Highline to Silver Plume was run March 31, 1884, it being the regular night train from Denver. The Union Pacific officials spent April 1, 1884, with Photographer William H. Jackson of Denver taking pictures of the high bridge and surroundings. One picture was of four trains bound for Silver Plume with headlights pointing the four directions—north, east, south, and west.

It took $4\frac{1}{2}$ miles of railroad travel to cover the $1\frac{1}{2}$ miles of distance between Georgetown and Silver Plume. The fare was 35 cents and time 25 minutes. Regular passenger service started April 1, the train arriving thereafter at Silver Plume every evening at 7:25 and leaving every morning at 6:50.

The title to the railroad and viaduct passed to the present Colorado and Southern Railway during what is known as the reorganization period, 1897-98. The railroad between Idaho Springs and Silver Plume was removed in February and March, 1939. The bridge on the loop was sold in place to the Silver Plume Mine and Mill Company for use in constructing mining trestles, and was torn down shortly thereafter. It had been in use 55 years.

Early Colorado Cactus Tragedy

A. R. Ross

There are very few people living today who can recall the vast growth of Prickly Pear cactus plants that infested the flats of the prairie country of Colorado in the early days. This sharp-spiked growth, although it is almost forgotten in the West today, that spread itself so profusely over the open range and caused no end of trouble to riders and to their horses and cattle, is the keynote and leading thought of this story.

I have read recently of the serious trouble caused by this variety of cactus in California and know that it has destroyed much range in Texas, but I have not seen anything in print about it existing as a menace now to the cattle country in Colorado. I am not familiar with the various kinds of cactus in range countries but I can safely say that I knew the Prickly Pear type as it grew in the lower Platte River area in the open range days. This species was composed of round, flat disks about three inches across, literally covered with long, sharp spikes, and several would be attached to one root. As the disks grew and increased, they fastened themselves with new roots and proceeded to thicken up until very little, if any, bare ground would be left on an entire flat. These bare places were not in any direct line but very irregular, and saddle horses that were used in a cactus country became very wise about the needle spikes that caught in their fetlocks and pierced the skin and flesh, and worked ever deeper in as the day's ride dragged on, and they refused to cross them willingly. When forced to take the first step, the horses would try to make high jumps from one bare spot to the next one. These spots at which they aimed were never in line, of course, but zigzagging from side to side until the riders were guessing all the time how to keep in the saddle and most of the time were making good use of the handy bucking straps with which all range saddles were equipped. Riders were not disqualified in a case of this kind as a hold on a buck strap was more important than a hand in the air, as in the modern rodeo.

The flats were inhabited by owls, prairie dogs, and rattlesnakes. The holes and tunnels dug by prairie dogs honeycombed the ground and the horses were wise also to the added hazard of sinking into these holes and breaking a leg or getting a strike from a rattler. Occasionally a rider was thrown into one of these cactus beds and there was always the constant danger of it. The careful riders always inspected their horses after a trip across the cactus-covered flats and removed the spikes and treated infected sores, as it was up to each one to keep his horses fit.

I can easily recall in the seventies when the Prickly Pear cactus began to dry up on the Colorado prairies. No reason was ever given by the stockmen, who were vitally interested, for its passing. Many took it as a matter of course; others didn't even make a comment. Certainly the cactus was doomed. I believe it came by a Higher power, and that the Lord did not intend this country to be the home of the savage, the owl, the prairie dog, and the rattlesnake. At any rate, three of the largest cactus infested flats of Northern Colorado in that early day; namely, Eaton, Fort Morgan, and Weldon Valley, are today producing bumper crops of sugar beets, grain, corn, and alfalfa. As far as I know, it is still anybody's guess. You say!

The wealth of wild grass that covered the face of the Platte River country was dotted generously with sage brush, soapweed, and cactus when I first viewed it (1871), and to put it lightly I was not favorably impressed with my adopted state when I compared it with my native State of Illinois. There the commons were covered with a beautiful growth of clover which I had no right to expect in this new, wild, undeveloped area which was a vast expanse of wide-open range. Cow camps dotted all of the running streams and any rider was welcome at a camp whether it belonged to his outfit or to some other cattle owner. Being continually on the range, riders stopped at nights at the closest camp. At times a rider would be alone at a camp, which was the case when the Indians attacked the unfortunate man of this story.

My close companions shortly after I came here were two half-breed Indian boys, their mother being a full-blooded Sioux. At the playgrounds, and later as we rode and worked together, they taught me, a tenderfoot lad, many wonderful things that I never forgot and they helped me to get accustomed to my new surroundings and to grow to like this Western life and take advantage of the resources at hand. They taught me how to tan antelope hides without soap, using soapweed root instead. They taught me how to twist hair rope for hackamores, using hair we trimmed from the tails of range horses. If our supply of hair ran short, we would ride out on the range and drive in some horses with long tails and replenish our stock at no cost. I found these Indian boys agreeable and interesting companions, worthy of my respect, which they recognized and returned. We spent much time together as they were my friends for many years. We were playing together as usual when the word came to our little frontier town of Evans that one of the riders of the Iliff outfit had been brought in from down the Platte in a serious condition following an encounter with Indians. With typical boyish curiosity, we hurried to the small office of the only hotel in the town, which was owned by the father of my Indian boy friends, and saw the man and heard his horrible story as he sat in an armchair

and waited for the Union Pacific train on the Denver division to take him to the nearest hospital in Cheyenne. He looked to me as one in a high fever and talked to us slowly, and as if in great pain, stopping often to rest and gain breath. His hands, feet, arms to the elbow, and legs to the knees, were bare and so thick with cactus spikes, many reaching to the bone, that scarcely a pinpoint could have been placed between them. They had the appearance of solid festering sores and were red and swollen. I shall never forget his deplorable condition nor the pitiful story this man told. Soon after he had gotten his lonely meal at the camp on that fateful night, his two dogs began barking fiercely and he realized that the Indians, who had been most troublesome, had seen the smoke from the cabin and were intent on getting his scalp. He quickly barred the door and waited to meet an emergency, or a friendly visit. The cabin was built of logs, chinked with clay. The savages quickly picked out the clay and began to shoot through the cracks at him. He promptly put out his candle and covered the live coals in the fireplace with ashes. He took off his boots so he could not be located by his movements and sat down in front of the fireplace to await developments. Before long he noticed small sparks jumping up from the ashes in the fireplace. He leaned forward in an attempt to see up the chimney just as a bag of powder dropped on the coals and exploded, blowing him and his chair to the middle of the room and setting the cabin on fire. He told us that this dazed him so badly that he was confused for a while but managed to remember to strap his revolver and belt around him on his way to the back door. He threw the bar from across the door and jumped out. Indian guards were on each side, as he had expected, and he fired first on one side and then on the other, and started to run as fast as he could.

The nearest settlement was across a ten-mile cactus flat, and as he ran toward it he realized immediately that he had left his boots behind in the burning cabin. The Indians turned his dogs loose and they followed him, giving the redskins a perfect lead. At one time, he said, they were close enough to him to be clearly heard, but for some reason they gave up the chase in the middle of the flat and left him, already tortured with the needle spikes of the cactus in his feet. He walked toward the settlement until he could stand the punishment no longer, and then he crawled on his hands and knees until he reached a camp at ten o'clock the next morning. If he had had his boots on, there would have been a different ending to this story. Although he was given all the care possible at the Cheyenne hospital by his employer, John W. Iliff, who was called the "Cattle King," the largest cattle owner in Colorado, he only lived a few days. He was just another knight of the saddle on the open range who gave his life to the advancement of the early cattle industry. He was soon forgotten by his carefree companions. I did not learn

his name and I never heard it mentioned. He may have been a college graduate, or had no education at all, but he had all the qualities required for a tophand on the range and rode it without fear or favor.

The two Indian boys stood quietly beside me during the telling of the story, with faces showing no emotion. They made no comments then or later about the affair. Some time after this tragic event, we drifted apart and I never saw either of them again. I heard that one met a violent death and that the other brother finally joined the Sioux tribe in South Dakota. They were sons of Elbridge Gerry, a grandson of Elbridge Gerry, a signer of the Declaration of Independence.

New Light on La Lande, First American in Colorado

LEROY R. HAFEN

Recently there has come to light a letter pertaining to Baptiste La Lande, who was the first recorded American visitor to the territory of present Colorado. But before we present it, let us review our previous knowledge of this man.

Our first information about La Lande came from Captain Zebulon M. Pike, who met him in New Mexico in 1807. The young American officer wrote thus of La Lande and the circumstances that took him through Colorado to Santa Fe:

In the year 1804, William Morrison, Esq., an enterprising merchant of Kaskaskias, sent a man by the name of Baptiste La Lande, a Creole of the country, up the Missouri and La Platte, directing him if possible to push into Santa Fe. He sent in Indians, and the Spaniards came out with horses and carried him and his goods into the province. Finding that he sold the goods high, had land offered him, and the women kind, he concluded to expatriate himself and convert the property of Morrison to his own benefit. When I was about to sail, Morrison, conceiving that it was possible that I might meet some Spanish factors on the Red River, intrusted me with the claim, in order, if they were acquainted with La Lande, I might negotiate the thing with some of them. When on the frontiers, the idea suggested itself to us of making this claim a pretext for Robinson to visit Santa Fe. We therefore gave it the proper appearance, and he marched for that place.¹

Dr. John H. Robinson, the civilian attached to Pike's expedition, made his way alone from Pike's stockade on the Conejos to Santa Fe, where he presented his claim against La Lande. The governor confined the American doctor while he investigated the debtor. Later the governor reported to Robinson that La Lande possessed no property and was unable to discharge his debt.²

When Pike came into New Mexico he met La Lande, who greeted him thus:

My friend, I am very sorry to see you here; we are all prisoners in this country and can never return; I have been a prisoner for nearly three years and cannot get out.³

But La Lande became so inquisitive that Pike suspected him of being sent by the Spaniards as a spy to learn who Pike was and what his plans were. In fact Pike reports that he forced from La Lande a confession of such a design. So Pike labeled him an absconder and a spy and looked upon him with contempt, and other writers have followed with similar appraisals.

La Lande's name appears in some of the Spanish documents of New Mexico.⁴ Some of these, as translated and edited by the late Lansing Bloom, give substantiation to La Lande's statement that he was a prisoner in New Mexico. In writing of La Lande and Lorenzo Durocher⁵ in 1805, Bloom says:

Apparently their first request through Alencaster [Governor of New Mexico] was that they be allowed to return home by way of Texas, but when they presented themselves before Salcedo [Commandant General of the Internal Provinces] in Chihuahua they were asking (possibly as a matter of policy) that they be allowed to continue subjects of the Spanish government with residence in New Mexico.⁶

In his letter of September 9, 1805,⁷ Salcedo referred the decision in such matters to Governor Alencaster, but said: "I charge you to have them under observation."

In a communication of September 12, 1805, Salcedo gave a list of goods he was sending to New Mexico for distribution to Indians on the far northeastern frontier "in order to win and strengthen the friendship of the Indian Nations which inhabit the banks of the Misuri River from its confluence with the Chato [Platte] westwards." The goods were valued at 460 pesos seven reales, and included "50 pesos furnished the travelers Lorenzo Durocher and Juan Baptista Lalanda."⁸

La Lande and Durocher accompanied the expedition in October, 1806, taking presents to the Pawnees in the Nebraska country of today. Enroute they almost certainly crossed eastern or southeastern Colorado. If La Lande had been very eager to return to Illinois, he probably could have got away from the Spaniards in the Pawnee country, but instead he returned to New Mexico.

¹*Ibid.*, II, 601.

²Ralph E. Twitchell, *The Spanish Archives of New Mexico*, II, 480, 487, 490.

³Durocher was a Frenchman who came to New Mexico from the Illinois country, possibly with La Lande.

⁴Lansing Bloom, "The Death of Jacques D'Eglise," in the *New Mexico Historical Review*, II, 371.

⁵Translated in *ibid.*, II, 375.

⁶*Ibid.*, II, 376.

¹Ellitt Coles (Ed.), *The Expeditions of Zebulon Montgomery Pike*, . . . , II, 499-502.

²Robinson's report in *ibid.*, II, 623-624.

The party to the Pawnees was accompanied, if not commanded, by Don Pedro Vial, the famous Frenchman who had become a Spanish subject and frontier explorer. Twenty years before, in 1786, Vial had opened a route from San Antonio, Texas, to Santa Fe, and in 1792, explored a trail from the New Mexico capital to St. Louis, Missouri.⁹

On the journey to the Pawnees in 1806, La Lande and Durocher apparently spoke in derogatory terms of Spanish frontier service and pay. As charged by one of their companions and reported by Governor Alencaster, these Frenchmen said, "Never could this Province [New Mexico] make gratuities to the (Indian) nations as (could) the Americans who had a greater supply of gifts, better, and that (the Indians) would always like the friendship of those (Americans) and would prefer them to us [the Spaniards]."¹⁰ They also told the interpreter Jarbet that his pay of ten *pesos* was very small, that Americans were paying interpreters 25 *pesos* per month. Vial and Jarbet said, according to Alencaster, "that it had not looked well to them that, after having been well received and well treated in this Province, the said Durocher and La Lande should so express themselves."¹¹ Then Alencaster continued:

These persons are desirous of a chance to return to their Country, and although Your Honor has approved it, it seems to me proper to call your attention to this point so that you may decide whether both they as well as the other two Frenchmen and the American who came in with the Cuampes¹² shall be permitted to do so, since it occurs to me that some injury might be occasioned by them and the knowledge which they have acquired of this Province, and consequently even though an opportunity (for their return) present itself, I shall not allow them to depart without an express order from Your Honor.

Next, chronologically, were La Lande's contacts with Dr. Robinson and Captain Pike, as indicated above. Apparently they had no success in collecting the debt owed to Mr. Morrison. So when the party headed by Robert McKnight made ready to go from Missouri to New Mexico in 1812, Morrison placed in McKnight's hands the statement of indebtedness and letter reproduced below.

The original of this document is owned by Everett D. Graff, outstanding Western Americana collector of Chicago. He generously provided the present editor with a photostat of the paper and gave permission for its publication.

⁹L. R. Hafen and C. C. Rister, *Western America*, 156-157.

¹⁰Alencaster's letter of January 4, 1806, translated in Bloom, *op. cit.*, II, 376-377.

¹¹*Ibid.*, II, 377.

¹²The Cuampes were a branch of the Apaches living east of the Rio Grande. The two Frenchmen and the American have not been positively identified. The American may have been James Purcell (or Purseley), whom Pike met in New Mexico and who told Pike of finding gold in South Park, Colorado.

The letter, addressed to "Mr. Baptiste La Lande, Ste Affie" [Santa Fe], follows:

| | | |
|-----------------------|-----------------------------|---|
| Dr. Baptiste La Lande | | To James & Jesse Morrison ¹³ |
| 1804 | | |
| 8 June ¹⁴ | To your note of hand " | \$1053.00 |
| | To One Other Note | 65.95 |
| 1805 | | |
| 7 June | To One Other Note | 43.11 |
| | pd Jacques Foistin | 75.00 |
| | pd Etienne Petiste his man | 82.00 |
| | | <hr/> |
| | Intrust on the above | \$1319.06 |
| | 6 years at 6% ¹⁵ | 468.84 ¹⁶ |
| | | <hr/> |
| | | \$1787.40 |

My dear Sir:

the bearer of this Mr. Robert McKnight¹⁷ a Particular Friend of ours, wishes to visit your Country. I have given him my opinion of you as a good young man I hope you will Proove as such, by Discharging the above acct as also doing everything in your Power for Mr. McKnight. I hope that the change of climate has not changed you honest Disposition which I know your was possessed of. I would recommend to you to return to this Country with Mr. McKnight, your Sisters are all well and wish to See you. Should it not be in your Power to return Please pay to him the amt. due us and he has promised to bring it on for us I also hope you will write to us by him, we are

Dear Baptiste with respect
Your Humble Servts.
James & Jesse Morrison

St. Charles May 6th 1812

We have found no evidence that indicates whether or not McKnight succeeded in collecting the debt. About the only additional references to La Lande which we have found are in *The Leading Facts of New Mexican History*, II, 94. Twitchell says there that "La Lande was born in Illinois, his name appearing on the list of the Militia of St. Clair County in 1790." Twitchell also cites Escudero's *Noticias Historicas* as saying that La Lande was wealthy and left many descendants.

¹³Pike said it was William Morrison who furnished the goods to La Lande. Whether this was a mistake, or whether James and Jesse Morrison may have succeeded to the debt has not been determined.

¹⁴This is valuable as giving the beginning date of the venture.

¹⁵This is a very modest interest rate, considering the period and the risk involved.

¹⁶The figure for interest should be \$474.86 instead of \$468.84.

¹⁷Upon arrival in New Mexico, McKnight and his party found themselves unwelcome guests. They were imprisoned and were so held until the achievement of Mexican independence in 1821 brought them freedom from their nine years of confinement.

Longmont's Seventy-Fifth Anniversary Celebration

VAUNA SALTHOUSE SCHULZ*

In July, 1946, Longmont was seventy-five years old. As early as February, plans began to get under way for celebrating the big birthday. Through the newspapers the public was requested to make suggestions for ways in which to make the occasion a memorable one.

The first idea to gain support was the Whisker Club. It was agreed at the initial meeting in February to award prizes to the growers of the best beards each month and to encourage all types and a wide variety of facial decorations. Beards were to be classified and awards given to the best in each class; goatees, Van Dykes, full beards, mickey beards, mutton chops, and an all-inclusive grand prize beard. And then a special notice was published in the local daily to the effect that "to correct any misunderstandings which might provide excuse for not raising a beard, color will be no obstacle in the whisker contest. The beards may be grey, red, brown, or black, or any other color that can be achieved." To discourage timidity and poor sportsmanship about entering the competition, it was announced that non-participants would be punished by having to perform foolish stunts on Main Street after a kangaroo court trial. Even the ministers of the town entered into the gala spirit and challenged one another to hair-growing contests. After a few weeks stubble had camouflaged their faces, and it was difficult to recognize even life-long friends. By the fourth of July most of the nation knew about Longmont's pending birthday celebration because travelers through our city spread the news when they returned home. Then, too, local men traveling from our city were accosted and asked for explanations of their facial adornment.

Naturally, the town's women folk could not let the men carry off all the glory in the forthcoming event, so a Bustle Club was organized. The custom was soon adopted of donning grandmother's old clothes complete with bustle and parasol for the Saturday shopping tours.

All through the spring, street serenading on Saturday evenings by both the Bustle Club and the Whisker Club became a feature looked forward to all week long by entertainers and audience alike.

Shortly after the clubs got started, merchants began displaying pioneer "merchandise" in their windows. Window-shoppers found their time well spent when viewing the old-time fashions, farm equipment, tintypes, shooting irons, and other items too numerous to mention.

*Mrs. Schulz, who lives in Longmont, has written previously for this magazine.—Ed.

The local papers also printed stories of pioneer life in this community which were contributed by both surviving old-time settlers and some of their descendants.

Naturally, any big celebration must have a queen, and this was no exception. The various clubs about town selected candidates for this honor, and from the five most popular candidates a queen and her attendants were chosen.

All the while that old things were being dug out of the attics and barns, dusted off and shown to the public, beards and bustles were being adopted as the proper things to wear, and old tales were being brought to mind—a committee was hard at work compiling all possible available information into one office; sorting, rejecting, and saving the best to put together under one cover which would be the climax of the celebration—a pageant. It was to be a reproduction of the true events in the history of Longmont and the St. Vrain Valley. Longmont is proud of the pageant committee and the wonderful show they made possible, of which there will be more later in this article.

This fine production would not have been possible, however, had it not been for the unselfish cooperation of the farmers, ranchers, and townspeople alike in taking an active part in dramatizing the pageant and also in lending their horses, buggies, wagons, and other equipment for the two days celebration. It took an effort to make costumes, or borrow them, to rig up covered wagons, to make floats for the parade, and to bring animals several miles to town two days in a row, but people did cooperate and as a result the parade and pageant were a remarkable success.

When the big days finally arrived about twenty-five thousand people lined the streets and thrilled to a historical western parade that required an hour to pass a given point. Starting at 1:00 p. m., it was divided into six sections, as follows:

Section 1

Police escort
Mounted colors
Parade Chairman, parade commander and staff
High School band
Sioux Indians (the real McCoy)
Trappers, explorers, prospectors, pioneers, burros, pony express riders, oxen, stage coach, covered wagons, etc. (The stage coach was borrowed from the Loveland museum.)

Section 2 (Boulder)

Boulder City Band
Boulder entries, which consisted of horses, riders, and marchers dressed in cowboy and cowgirl costumes or jeans and bright shirts

Section 3

Denver Letter Carriers Band
Local postal personnel and vehicles
Whisker Club band
Whisker Club entries
Horsemen

Section 4

Boulder Elks Cowboy Band
Seventy-fifth Celebration and city officials
Seventy-fifth Queen's float with queen and attendants

Floats, these consisted of log cabins constructed on trucks and hay racks, on which were people enacting old-fashioned scenes in every day pioneer living, such as Saturday night bath in the kitchen with the family looking on (in the wash tub). Bringing the first school bell to old Burlington, as the original settlement was named, square dancing, etc.

Old horse-drawn vehicles
Horsemen

Section 5

Longmont Elks cowboy band
High school section
Horsemen

Section 6

Junior High school band
Pageant people in costume
4-H Club in costume
Old fire apparatus

Old cars. Every one of these should be in a museum. They all moved under their own power, but it is doubtful if that miracle was any less believable in their day than it was at our celebration. How anything that looks as unwieldy as those cars did, could work was nothing less than astonishing.

Immediately following the parade there was a Western Show in front of the grandstand at Roosevelt Park. Sioux Indians in Tribal Dances, specialty acts including stunts by mounted performers, educated horses, roping and shooting were climaxed by a performance by a local group that was named the Rhythm Riders, who square danced on horseback. (After our celebration they appeared in other similar shows, including the Stock Show in Denver last winter.)

At seven-thirty in the evening both nights the pageant was started off with music in front of the Roosevelt Park grandstand. Then the Koshare Indian Dancers (which are the Boy Scouts of La Junta, who for twelve years or more have been interpreting dances of the Plains Indians, including the thrilling Snake Dance with live bull snakes). This was followed by the St. Vrain Valley Historical Pageant. The re-enacting of events that have occurred in this locality since the first Indians roamed the plains—the coming of the trappers and hunters, the advent of the covered wagons,

the first log cabins to be constructed, the first settlement, the fire that destroyed most of the original town, and so on up to the present time. All scenes were carried out with live people, real animals, real and make-believe Indians, real stage coaches, covered wagons, etc.

Afterward there was dancing in the auditorium on July 3 and a Midway show, concessions, and rides. Then on the 4th the pageant was followed by a mammoth fireworks display and rides and concessions.

There were other forms of entertainment about the town, too, such as swimming, golf, horseshoe games, croquet, and tennis. There was a pony ring for the children, and bowling alleys, roller skating rink, dances, both jitney and square dancing, and picture shows. The churches had old-fashioned hymn sings, organ recitals, old and new-fashioned games, places to rest and to give the children a quiet, restful time to relax between excitements. At the High School Auditorium there was an old-fashioned melodrama both nights, "It Wasn't Onions Made Her Cry."

On July fifth the town was quiet after the excitement of several months' preparation for the biggest celebration Longmont has ever had—quiet except for the barber shops. They did a land-office business unmasking faces that had been hidden since February.

Surveying for the Moffat Railroad

EDWARD T. BOLLINGER*

This is the story of some of Dave Moffat's boys. They built a cut-off for the California Zephyr, though they thought they were building a new railroad. These boys made the rails climb over the pile of mountains west of Denver. It is not one mountain, but piles of them dumped by the Almighty's great shovel to make a wall one-hundred or more miles wide and better than a mile higher than Denver's plains. The fingers of time cut canyons through these granite walls to encourage engineers to search for passes, which proved to be well above eleven and twelve thousand feet in altitude. Here mighty winds swept the snow up out of valleys to blanket the strongholds with another barrier. Even to this day the wall is guarded by snow storms such as the one that marooned thirty-two people on April 11, 1941. Air routes avoided this route until after the second World War, when a weather

*Rev. Bollinger, now of Raton, New Mexico, formerly lived on the line of the Moffat Railroad and for several years has been gathering material on the history of the road. This article is a somewhat summarized extract from his book-length manuscript.—Ed.

bureau station was set up in Fraser, Colorado, to take the readings every two hours through day and night so that the sudden changes in weather could be noted.

So rugged was this wall that America's first transcontinental railroad had spurned Andrew Rogers' survey for a route in the James Peak area. Denver seemed threatened to remain a cross-road mudhole, for some of her enterprising merchants were closing shop and were moving to Cheyenne, Wyoming, on the route of the Union Pacific. But there was gold and silver in "them thar hills." Cities like Leadville, Central City, and Georgetown needed roads to develop them. But it takes men with tenacity to build roads in the Rockies.

No one would have dreamed that David Moffat, the bean pole of a lad scarcely out of his teens, who opened up a stationery store in Denver in 1859, would be the man to conquer the Divide. He was just an ambitious paper boy, who took the freshly arrived Eastern papers, which his wagons had gotten to Denver before the mail, and sold them to his regular customers for twenty-five cents.

A year later he brought West his boyhood sweetheart to hang lace curtains in a little home. She had traveled in the marvel of sooty trains as far as they ran, then had crossed the plains of Nebraska and Kansas in a rough riding stage that took days for the trip. She could not be astonished at anything.

Denver was as untidy as an adolescent lad with fishing worms in his pocket and a shyness for girls. A new two story brick building might be erected on a vacant lot between a log cabin and a noisy false-front frame building.

Moffat had left school to be a messenger in a New York bank at the age of twelve. A brother had gone West to Des Moines, Iowa, and Dave followed. In the few years that intervened before he was of age, he had been teller-messenger-cashier from Des Moines to Omaha, where he had made and lost a fortune on lots, in speculating where the road west would be built. He was adjutant-general of Colorado Territory in 1864. In 1867 he was cashier of the First National Bank of Denver. His financing was to touch railroading. The first locomotive on the Denver Pacific to reach Denver bore no number but his name. That construction engine with his name was symbolic of the friendly man, who became treasurer of the Boulder Valley Railroad, and the Denver and South Park and Pacific Railroad. We see his signature among the original incorporators and directors of the Denver, Utah and Pacific.

Moffat was a railroader by necessity. For the only road of any usefulness in that day was a railroad. Industry could not be built

by hauling mining machinery in lumbering wagons on the little improved trails. Central City, Leadville, and other cities were to be reached by narrow gauge railroads, which cut down the overhead incurred by costly wagon transportation. Moffat was a miner more than a railroader having heavy interest in one hundred mines.

So it was that in the day when some men made money selling whiskey to Indians, Moffat began developing the Rocky Mountain Empire.

If the narrow gauge branch lines converging in Denver could be tied up with a direct Western outlet, Denver would become a great city. The Rio Grande had been beaten in its race to Raton Pass in New Mexico, but its intentions had been Mexico, not the West Coast. However, when the Rio Grande won the Royal Gorge battle, many people were enthusiastic. But this route west would be as far south (over a hundred miles) as the Union Pacific had gone north of Denver.

The real enemy of Colorado expansion was not the Indian, but the freight rate discrimination against the Colorado manufacturer.

Moffat hoped to get a road west that would be financially controlled by Colorado men. In 1873 he became President of the Rio Grande Railroad. He began surveys to find a shorter route west. During his presidency he spent \$106,374 for surveys. For example, a rise and fall of 4,000 feet to Pueblo, which landed a train further east than it had been to start with, was not sound railroading. But with Eastern directors not seeing eye to eye on this great expense, Moffat turned to improving the existing line, and making it broad gauge. Where a branch would develop a good mine, a branch was advocated. Sometimes Moffat himself financed and built these branches, which the board turned down, such as the Creede branch. The Rio Grande later was happy to take over this most profitable venture. In 1891 Moffat resigned as president of the road.

Harriman was reorganizing the Union Pacific with the same basic principle Moffat had employed in reorganizing the Rio Grande, when the Denver business world was electrified with the announcement that Moffat would build a road directly west of Denver. He was 63 years old when he attempted this most daring scheme of his life. If successful, the Burlington and the Rock Island would have a route west of Denver. At that time the Eastern owners of the Rio Grande looked with great disfavor on the scheme, though today the Rio Grande, the Burlington, and Western Pacific use the Moffat line to save 173 miles on a transcontinental route.

Much could be written about the projector of this railroad and of the many problems involved in its building, but our present article is concerned principally with the surveying of the route.

In May, 1902, T. J. Milner, chief engineer of the Denver street railways, retired to his Denver office to organize the railroad surveys. L. D. Blauvelt was under him in charge of field work. Blauvelt looked up a young fellow by the name of R. B. Parker, and asked him to accept a job as transitman. He told him to report to work Sunday, May 31. On Saturday, May 2, a college kid by the name of Art Weston applied to T. J. Milner for a job. He was advised to have his bed roll ready and to report to the office the next day to meet Mr. Blauvelt, who would be in town at that time. That Sunday the two boys met, one with some experience as a surveyor, and the other with a sheep skin for a sail. These boys rode on the narrow gauge electric line as far as Arvada, where they were met by an Ed. Milner (no relative to T. J. Milner). He had a spring wagon with some groceries ready to take the two boys along the projected narrow gauge line then under construction beyond Arvada. They rode out across the rising mesa to the foot of Coal Creek Canyon. Here was a camp of a few tents and five men. One of the young fellows was H. Reno, who was later to become chief engineer for thirty years of the Denver Union Stock Yards. Reno was a rod and chain man and like such fellows received no confidential whispers from the big shots, as to why they were doing some of the things they had done in the two weeks previously. So the new lads had to conspire to figure out the story. A set of levels (elevations) was being run up the wagon road in the canon to ascertain the fall of the stream.

The next day, Monday, Blauvelt appeared and moved the camp up the canon to a spot near the Copperdale Ranch. This was action which spoke for itself as to what was going on. The camp having been set up, Art Weston was acting as temporary draftsman for Blauvelt, until an experienced draftsman could be found. For the college kid this was the beginning of his Master's Degree course in railroad engineering, which would prove most invaluable for him. Harry Raymond had been the levelman in charge of the small original party now headed by the chief, L. D. Blauvelt, himself.

If you can get the beauty of May weather in the foot hills west of Denver, the meadows turning green, the spicy early mornings with a little white frost on the tent in Coal Creek Canyon, the pranks of these young fellows waiting to tear the world down or build it the next day, the bragging about the girls they had met, the crooning of rag time songs left over from the Spanish American War, then you have the atmosphere for this opening scene in railway survey work. Everyone desires to make good, for there is a hint of the feeling that this may be something "pretty big" before it is all over.

The work begins on the top of what is called Anderson Summit at the head of Coal Creek. The lads first ran a 2.2% line down the south bank of Coal Creek out into the rock flats heading it towards the Leyden Coal Mine, where the electric line had been surveyed. Another line was dropped down on the north side of Coal Creek to the same place. Now a 2.2% grade drops or climbs 110 feet a mile and is a stiff grade for a railroad, though a 6% grade on a Rocky Mountain highway like Berthoud Pass is maximum.

From Anderson Summit west four miles of level grade was run to meet a line run by Mr. Deyo who had been on the 1886 survey. From the Rocky Flats west was run the first projected line, which became known as the Milner Line. It reached a spot high up on the hog back of the Divide, where a 2.6-mile Main Range Tunnel could be bored through the Divide, at an elevation around 9,930 feet.

If the boys were still in the dark in the middle of July as to what they were helping to survey, they were not after they read the Denver papers printed on July 18, 1902. The headlines announced that David Moffat was going to build a railroad west to Salt Lake City and the Coast. In fact, that very day the line was incorporated, not as a narrow gauge interurban line wandering first to the coal mines and perhaps a half dozen years later to Hot Sulphur Springs, but as a standard gauge steam railroad of the most approved construction through to the coast, to challenge the great roads which had left Denver off their main lines in going west by much easier routes. The line was incorporated as the Denver, Northwestern and Pacific Railway Company.

Though this day might have given the boys great enthusiasm, it gave Milner a chill, for the name and picture of H. A. Sumner appeared as Chief Engineer together with the name of A. C. Ridgway as General Manager.

Gerald Hughes, the only man who remained with the Moffat from its conception down to its merger says that though T. J. Milner was a fine engineer, he was out-classed in this undertaking by the exceptional qualities of H. A. Sumner.

The failure of Milner to be appointed to this new position caused no end of comment all down the years.

E. C. McMeichen, in his book *The Moffat Tunnel of Colorado*, tells of an interview he had with A. C. Ridgway (page 107):

"I (Ridgway) was then in Colorado Springs in charge of the Colorado Springs & Cripple Creek District Railroad, which I had just built. One morning I picked up the *Denver Republican* and saw upon the front page pictures of David H. Moffat and myself. An accompanying article stated that Moffat was to build a railroad to the Pacific Coast, and that I was to be general manager. This

was the first intimation I had received that a new road was in contemplation. The same afternoon Moffat called me over the telephone and asked me to come to Denver as he had some matters he wished to discuss with me. Upon my arrival at this office he reviewed the situation and asked me to go over the ground, as far as surveyed, and report my opinion. H. A. Sumner had just received his appointment as chief engineer. Together we examined the old Tramway survey up Coal Creek, where the Denver & Northwestern had done some grading on a line previously located. We were of the same opinion in that we believed the cost would be prohibitive, and that the South Boulder route would be preferable to that in Coal Creek Canyon. Upon my return I said: 'Mr. Moffat, I would not build that road now, if I were in your place. It will be a very expensive piece of construction.' I shall never forget his reply, delivered with a tone of finality that left nothing more to be said: 'I am going to build this road because I want to develop Colorado—and you are going to build it for me.'

"He emphasized his instructions that I was to build the best line that I could, not sparing expense, as he was going through to Salt Lake. He concluded in the most impressive manner with these words: 'I want this road to go down in history as my greatest effort in railroad building.' . . . Moffat had given me my start in railroading, while I was still a boy . . ."

Milner had attempted to get his line under construction about July 4 but the work was stopped. Ridgway asked for more surveys. At his request even a 3% line was run. Two 1.75% lines were run.

After these lines had been run H. A. Sumner wrote, "I recommend that the 2% line as surveyed reaching the Main Range Tunnel at an elevation of 10,000 feet be adopted by your company for construction."

There was no longer in Sumner's mind any question of more need for surveys, "In conclusion I will say that we have thoroughly explored all the available country as far west as the Continental Divide, and I beg to submit. . ."

If H. A. Sumner was wrong, it was because he saw operating conditions in his day and did not foresee the changes of modern power. And who knows what trouble might have been run into by construction of the 2.2 lines, 23 short tunnels. Some men have an idea this line had no tunnels. It had more tunnels than the 2% line but with almost 5,000 less feet in them.

In these statements we notice the retiring nature of the great engineer who had lost the sight of one eye in the white sands of New Mexico.

Sumner was a Christian gentleman. He would not hire a Texan or a cigarette smoker. A pipe or cigar was all right. However, by the time he had reared his own boys, he accepted both Texans and cigarettes.

Those who worked under him tell that he towered above them in strength of character. Whenever in Denver or a community that had a church, he was found in church. He was a staunch member of one of the churches that merged later to become Plymouth Congregational church.



H. A. SUMNER
Engineer

The effects of this great engineer through his character, sense of humor, retiring nature, and great ability was marked on most of the lads who worked in the parties under him. They have taken their places all over America, and they have not been obscure places in the engineering world.

While the engineering department was getting geared for its work, another corporation was setting up its offices, the Colorado Utah Construction Company. It had been organized on July 22, "Uncle Dave's" 63rd birthday. Syl Smith was elected president of this corporation.

That Uncle Dave had been nervy for a man his age can be seen, when we realize that the promised financial backing for his road had been canceled in the East. Moffat had not been afraid to

risk his own 11 million in the project for he believed that where a real need existed, there would be help to meet the need. He had the answer in the Northwestern part of Colorado with its undeveloped resources of coal and partly developed cattle industry, besides his short line to Salt Lake.

The engineering department of the Moffat seems to have started its career in the Evans Building, together with the Denver Northwestern Railroad, which had built its narrow gauge electric lines to the Leyden mines. Here H. A. Sumner must have begun his organization of facts that the field engineers sent in. In October, 1902, he wrote a friend, Mr. Parker Spofford: "... am very much elated over the opportunity of being connected with the gigantic enterprise now starting, which has been a dream of mine, since I was with Mr. Lawson on the first survey for the 'Q' in 1886. At that time we expected it would go and probably would have done only for the calamitous strike coming on." We hear little of David Moffat, who seems to be in New York trying to finance the line.

Sumner was a tall man well over six feet, who left a kindly feeling in the hearts of the trainmen he met on the construction trains, as well as with those with whom he worked in his department. He was a New Englander, educated at a small college in Massachusetts.

From a position as rod man on a New York railway he moved up steadily. He went to the Burlington and Southwestern as Chief Engineer and held the same position on the St. Louis and Keokuk and Southwestern, the Florence and Cripple Creek, the El Paso and Northeastern, and the El Paso and Rock Island, the latter two in New Mexico. He was employed by the Rio Grande and received his most helpful experience for the work Moffat asked of him, when he became a locating engineer on the Colorado Railway from July, 1886, to December, 1887. He also had the wide experience as state engineer of Colorado for the years 1893 and 1894.

He was perhaps Colorado's greatest locating engineer. He did not sacrifice his family for his work. His sons became admirable men in the life of Denver.

One would suppose that the work of a chief engineer would consist of directing the surveys, poring over the reports sent in to select the most practical route, and the supervision of the contractors, when construction had been authorized.

H. A. Sumner's letters as chief engineer reveal that he wove into his work, day after day other threads, many of which took much of his time and indeed burdened him more by keeping him away from the things he was really supposed to do. He also had to take care of all the general correspondence for the railroad.

Many minor problems that would snag a survey party were brought to him.

Here is a party that needed a tent; they were overcrowded by the addition of more axemen who had been brought in because of the increasingly heavy timber encountered. Every line sight meant quaking aspen trees and lodge pole pines to be cut down. A requisition is mailed in for another tent. But the party is twenty miles from a mail route, and the mail is carried on the lumbering stage but twice a week.

H. A. Sumner answers the long delayed letter. A tent is ordered, sent out on the nearest narrow gauge railroad. The locating engineer is informed. He allows time for the tent to arrive and dispatches one of his men by horse back to the railroad miles away. The man finds that the tent has not arrived and spends a day waiting. He returns. The locating engineer waits patiently while his men crab and his party morale is lowered. He sends in a man with a wagon to pick up the weekly supplies sent out by the office and is asked to pick up the tent. Two days pass and the wagon returns with the news that the railroad agent said he has received no tent.

The locating engineer then writes of his troubles to H. A. Sumner who in turn inquires of the railroad. Days and days later the tent is found, missent to Boulder.

Another locating engineer writes in to the office that his party was shorted oleomargarine on their last shipment. It is hard to work miles away from home, never to be near a nickelodeon or a place where you can buy your girl a sasparilla. The mail was subject to delays. The newspapers telling about the latest match between Jim Corbett and Bob Fitzsimmons were slow. The nights were always cold in the summer and a hot bath was an unheard of thing in this land of glacial streams of ice water. Now ask those men who open up trails, slip on damp rocks, and sprain ankles to go without oleo and the lid goes off.

Sumner knew all about it, for he had been on such parties. He sent them another shipment of oleo and made an explanation to A. C. Ridgway, who could be exacting as to why so many things were missing, when the orders arrived on the field.

A new party was created by taking men out of an existing party and sending in new men to both parties. Everything was all right, except the new location engineer arrived to find there was no cook.

Sumner wrote back, that if no cook has arrived by the time the letter arrives, to hire his own cook. Find a cook among the

cowboys and the Indians and the pioneers? So the new engineer, who has to build up a smooth machine, makes a trip to Black Hawk to find a cook.

Another locating engineer writes in that he has no suitable crayons with which to make his contour map. This engineer has just been bawled out, for not having his reports in on time. Now can you go up a mountainside and knock on the home of some bear or mountain lion and say, "Please sell me some crayons appropriate for contour maps?" It was bad enough to hear the coyotes howl all night, and to find the fresh tracks of a mountain lion at night



MOFFAT RAILROAD OFFICIALS

(Oldtime Surveyors Marked with an Asterisk)

Back row, left to right: *George Berry, on original survey; Glen Turner, Chief Engineer (holding volume of H. A. Sumner letters); Ed Sunegren, Office Engineer; W. C. Jones, Assistant to General Manager, D. & R. G.; *Bruce Parker, Locating Engineer. Front row: Ed Graebing, Asst. Office Engineer; *Albert Peck, on original Gore Canyon Party (holding a J. J. Argo diary), and *Albert Weston, on original party in Fraser Canyon (holding an Argo diary).

fall in the fresh snow as you come home, without having to deal with the natives, that are getting ready to hibernate for the winter. Add to this the days lost waiting for the crayons and you have the story.

Mr. Sumner had a little war with his men regarding the making out of their requisitions properly and getting the reports in on time. One fine engineer writes in a personal letter asking if his work is unsatisfactory. H. A. Sumner writes back, "No, but the work in the office cannot go along without the reports."

Then there are such problems as buying jacks, and the price the natives want for them, and what the Chief Engineer thinks they are worth. These pack animals are indispensable for such a country.

Eternally disgusting is inefficiency, be it a party chief whose notes do not agree with his maps, or be it a firm that sends out a new surveyor's instrument with only one of the three necessary legs.

The office writes to the firm in the East to send direct by express the needed tripod. The firm, because of some cross-eyed or cross-minded clerk, sends only one leg, which is a different size.

The locating engineer writes in his disgust at what was received. Another round is made with something wrong sent, and Sumner gives up and sends back the entire instrument. We always forget that in the past business firms were inefficient and talk about the "good old days."

Mr. Sumner had also the problem of his personnel. Here was a good man with a man with whom he did not get along. Rather than lose a good man, Sumner makes a transfer between parties.

Then comes a serious accusation by a fired rodman to the effect that his locating engineer is always drunk. The rodman claims he was to have been promoted to levelman and someone else more sympathetic to drink was promoted instead. Sumner has to question and figure out whether this is revenge or the fact. Days and days pass and then the story comes in about this capable man who has to be relieved. The Office Engineer is sent out to do this. The unfortunate man had no doubt struggled all his life with this. He was gentleman enough to complete his notes, that naturally would have been almost impossible for a new man to understand. This man gets his work all in order and steps out of the picture, when he could have just walked off the job.

One day Sumner received a telegram for a man he could not reach by telephone, so he sent the telegram out by Wells Fargo Express and then wrote a letter to that effect. But Wells Fargo lost the telegram. The man wrote in asking if Sumner can recall the contents. Sumner writes back that the telegram came from Los Angeles and said, "Operation successful. Can you wire me \$50 care of hospital?" The party in the Los Angeles Hospital had been going through agony waiting for the money that it seemed her friend did not care to send.

There is another thread that is woven into the daily life of the Chief Engineer. Certain engineering problems arise making necessary research. Chief among these problems will be the construction of the main range tunnel, which is considered at the 9,980 foot location. Such a tunnel, which is to be 2.6 miles long, if

constructed after common practices would be higher in the center than at either end to afford drainage of water during construction. This apex in the center would leave a smoke pocket in the tunnel. A fan would be needed to ventilate the tunnel. Inquiries are sent out to firms for such a fan.

Concern is felt regarding the kind of rock formations that will be discovered. Geologists are asked for advice.

The second major concern is the snow conditions that will have to be battled over the Divide via the temporary branch line. Sumner writes railroads that Harriman controls, "If consistent, will you send us plans of double track snow sheds . . .?"

Other related problems are approached from other railroads that operate in high altitudes where deep snows are expected, such as the kind of switch points which will be satisfactory. At one time Sumner was on the verge of ordering stub switches for the entire branch line.

The office, which had by now been moved to the Majestic Building, received applications of men for jobs as section laborer, civil engineer, and even foreman. Contractors with Japanese laborers write in that their contract in Idaho is about done. Another man with a tribe of 1,500 Greeks seeks employment for his men.

The entire realm of human pathos is parading through the letters of H. A. Sumner. People seeking men who have disappeared and once worked with Sumner, asking him to go over the list of men working for the contractors to seek for a man who had run away from his loved ones.

With the coming of deep snows on the Divide and the closing up of many parties and the reports of slow progress by other men because of the depth of snow, the Moffat Road is ready to let contracts for the construction of the tunnel section of the line. Here twenty-eight tunnels in less than ten miles would have to be bored.

But in importance above all these pressing problems, Sumner was constantly organizing his discoveries into various alternate routes, which might be multiplied with difference in grades. When David Moffat wired for a figure on the cost from, say, Arrowhead to the coal mines, or from Arrowhead to Salt Lake, Mr. Sumner was able to wire by code the cost. Sometimes the request was for the cheapest route possible. There in the vault of the Railroad engineering department is still on file these lengthy memorandums that went by mail, following the code, explaining in detail all that had been found and why.

We meet in the letters that Sumner wrote a truly great man, concerned about all of Dave Moffat's boys.

R. B. Parker wrote of Sumner: "I have ridden with him on long trips to work and as a young engineer with not much experience, and in a conversational way he would give me instructions assuming that I had sense enough to take them to myself and learn. Here is an example of his wit. When Mr. Moffat was trying to interest men with money in the completion of the road, he made many trips to New York, taking along a lot of Resource maps of northwest Colorado, colored in the Denver office. Then he would wire for more. Mr. Sumner remarked that the sewers of New York were clogged with those maps. So out in the drafting room the boys called them the sewer maps and the chief draftsman would say, "Color up another batch of those sewer maps." I always thought Mr. Sumner carried a heavy load. A. C. Ridgway wrote: "Things are not going well here Sumner, put a man in here who will move it along." The grade line was too low when the river was high and too high when the river was low.

Through the fall of 1902 various contractors stopped in Denver to visit the gracious chief engineer. They were interested until they got out in the mountains. Art Weston, then draftsman under H. M. Rodgers who was camped in South Boulder Canyon, relates how these numerous contractors would visit the projected line.

"Some of them once stayed overnight and I listened to a very significant comment on the job. An eastern contractor remarked that he did not see how they expected to build through such rough terrain, it was just impossible to get steam shovels onto the work. Wm. Crook quietly replied that he could get a mule and a cart anywhere he had seen." (Wm. Crook was of the firm Orman and Crook, contractors of Pueblo). It was mules and carts that built the road.

December 18, 1902, contracts were let to Orman and Crook of Pueblo and George S. Good and Co. of Lock Haven, Pennsylvania. The importance of beginning immediately construction of this tunnel section, in which were located 28 tunnels, was very evident, as until every tunnel was completed, the rails could not be laid west and the entire progress was delayed. These contracts were to prove a major worry to the engineer's office. Sumner moves to consider plans for the surveyors camps. For surveyors must be on hand to set stakes for the contractors. The plans drawn up called for 14 by 16 feet buildings with wood floors and tent roofs. One building would be the engineers office, another a bunk house, and still another the kitchen and dining room. The cost of such camps was estimated at \$200.

A February letter to George S. Good and Company reveals that the line is under construction, and that Sumner is worried that the contractor is moving too slowly. But what country to

move into. It is more than twenty miles from Denver. The narrow gauge tramway line extends about twelve miles out of the city and can be used. Beyond, for a few miles the prairie rises heavily, so that wagons can easily break a road. But beyond Coal Creek Canyon the contractor battles the abrupt toes of the Rockies. Yet, this is the section that must get under construction for in it are thirty tunnels that enable the line to cut through the ribs of South Boulder Canyon. These tunnels must be completed before the railroad can lay one rail west. Tunnel work can be carried on in the winter. Though opening trails, setting up tents and bunk houses in this country, which becomes more inaccessible from Tunnel One west, the last 24 miles were very difficult in the age before the bulldozers.

In a letter of H. A. Sumner, Sept. 1, 1902, the following survey parties are listed: Party number one with R. B. Parker, locating engineer; number two, with R. D. Scott; number three with B. F. Howel; number four with C. L. Mitton; number five with E. A. Meredith, and number six with Thomas Withers. L. D. Blauvelt was resident engineer. The number of parties and leaders changed from year to year.

To reconstruct what the survey parties went through, we have two diaries of J. J. Argo. The first one is the story of his party high up on the western side of the Main Range Tunnel site country.

The first page has in good handwriting:

Sunday, Nov. 1, 1903.

Camp on Deer Creek about 10,300 elevation.

Fine clear day.

No field work as usual on Sunday.

Made up reports and bills for October.

This date means that Indian Summer in her glory of quaking aspen trees and their golden colors is gone by more than two weeks. A leaf here and there still clings to the trees. You look out across the mountain sides and easily locate where the aspen trees grow, for their trunks stand out like slim skeletons among the dark green lodge pole pines and Engelman spruce. We will expect to hear of snow.

The camp elevation means that all new members of the party are gasping for breath, as they try to keep up with the men who have been at this altitude for six weeks or more.

What did the boys do on Sunday? Write letters home? Go fishing in Deer Creek? Hardly. There would be little water at this elevation. Perhaps they went squirrel shooting. More likely they played cards and loafed around camp arguing. I doubt if any of them had energy enough to drop down three and one-half

miles to Idlewild, for they would have to climb 2,300 feet elevation going back. Other than the saloon there was nothing there but the ranger station. Of course, they might see the stage come in, and J. J. Argo might have been generous enough to have let them have a horse or two for the trip.

What was Argo doing? "Made up reports and bills for October." That is saying a lot, for H. A. Sumner insisted on requisitions being filled out for every cent spent. Then the reports of the week's progress would be made out. The findings of all the work would have to be kept up on maps and in topography books. After all, the purpose of the survey was to give the Chief Engineer a chance to select the best survey, and to even call off lines being run in case it became clear that they were useless in light of other lines run.

Monday, November 2, 1903.

Weather fine. Almost clear.

The marvel of the weather, so near the Divide and in this entire Rocky Mountain area is that at night it can be below zero and by noon the next day the men will have peeled off all coats and be working in their shirt sleeves.

Transit party on section lines.

Topography party on T. L. line.

Projected P. 45 line.

As the sun dropped over the wall of western mountains darkness came like a doused light and the men enjoyed their supper. They argued about all they had done during the day, until the party chief was almost tempted to enforce some loggers rules that no one dare talk at the supper table. The fathers among the men thought of the excitement at the supper table back home, when the little children all talked at one time, while dad wanted to talk to mother.

But we have more than the diaries to build our story. We have the carbon copies of the letters H. A. Sumner wrote. These letters are answers to the locating engineers' protests to impossible conditions, supplies not received, sickness, and accidents. We can reverse the letters Sumner wrote, imagine what had been asked and build in our mind the conditions.

But above all else we have the memories of one of the men in camp, W. I. Hoklas, who had gone to work the summer before, on July 22, had been interviewed by Milner in the small office he occupied in the Evans Building at the Tramway Loop. Hoklas and his friend Spencer took the C and S narrow gauge train the next morning to Empire Station, then a stage to the hotel in Empire, where they stayed over night, going over Berthoud Pass the

following morning. Hoklas helped to run the preliminary line for the short range tunnel that fall. A year later they are back at the same spot. Hoklas is by now an old hand at high altitude climbing. We have no fears to listen to his stories, for his memory is kept in line by Argo's diary, Sumner's letters, and the observations of one who tramped all over the same country forty years later.

It is evening. J. J. Argo, the locating engineer, is in his office tent going over some notes with the topographer by kerosene light. A pencil drops on the wooden floor of the tent. We see that the floor boards have shrunk—they must be native pine. The tent is 16 by 16 feet with four and one-half foot walls. The wood stove is



SURVEYING FOR THE MOFFAT RAILROAD

appreciated, for the evening is chill. Finally J. J. Argo interrupts his work to say, "Man, is it hot in here! Who left the draft on?"

The voice of a teamster is heard, as he returns from feeding the pack mules, which the boys referred to as "jacks" in that day.

The cook is busy washing his pots and pans in the cook tent, where he has just fed twenty-two men including two teamsters and five axemen, who have real appetites from cutting lines through the timber for the surveyors to sight through that day.

In one of the sleeping tents we hear someone plucking on a guitar, "Hot Time in the Old Town." This is the first note of the evening concert. We go over to listen to the songs of the Spanish American War. There is quite an out-lay of musical instruments:

Mandolin, Jews harp, mouth harps and a violin. As other boys joined the camp, they brought their instruments. For in the day before the radio was seriously dreamed about, boys loved to sing and add their own accompaniment. Between the numbers an occasional prank is played. One lad is seen filling his pipe. Since it is Monday and one or two of the boys had been down to Idlewild on Sunday, a big fat cigar comes out. There are the usual stories, some that smell and one or two that stink.

W. I. Hoklas recalls these songs as popular among the boys in all the parties along the Moffat survey:

Heidelberg; School of Mines Song; Merrily We Roll Along; Goodnight Ladies; Old Kentucky Home; Swanee River; Working On the Railroad; Dixie; Maryland; Strolling Down the Shady Line with Your Gurley (Gurley transit or level); John Brown's Body; When the Mists Have Rolled Away. Also some classics and some hymns.

A scuffle occurs between two of the fellows and a camp cot almost collapses, while a lad a year older looks on in disgust at the juvenile age that he has just popped out of. The lantern light is not so good and as the hour is late, the boys drop off to bed. One lad is in great disgust that the country has no snakes, that he could capture and put in a very good friend's bed.

Another lad shouts back to the conspirator, "The only rattle-snakes you can find is from the liquor you drink at the Idlewild saloon."

The next morning the discussion of snakes goes on. An older man says, while he eats his breakfast, "The altitude is just too high. You don't even find any bed bugs in Grand County."

Tuesday and Wednesday are clear days. Thursday it is cloudy in the morning but clear in the afternoon. The threat of snow disappears the rest of the week. Sunday finds a light snow after sundown. J. J. Argo adds, "Made up reports as usual."

By Tuesday a snow storm breaks, which keeps the boys in at cards during the morning. No field work is possible, though the afternoon reveals that only three inches of snow fell.

Wednesday's entry tells about a high wind and snow storm. The men worked in the morning, but dared not venture forth in the afternoon on account of the danger of falling trees. The storm continued the next day with the men working in the field. It was Saturday before the storm cleared. From Sunday afternoon through Wednesday it snowed and blew. Wednesday morning was clear and cold. The transit party attempted to produce the main range tunnel tangent from the summit west, but they were unable to work on the crest because of the blowing snow. The weather was

good on through to Thanksgiving Day. We wonder if the boys had turkey. They must have almost prayed for bad days to rest up on. Holidays must have been most welcome, for the work was rigorous in this two-mile-high altitude.

Friday Argo adds to his diary that, as there was an error in the notes he gave the men, the line that was run that day was wrong.

December comes with more snow near Christmas time. The Sunday before Christmas the boys work, so they can have the Saturday after Christmas off.

Wednesday, December 23, work is begun in moving the camp down to Idlewild. Great difficulty was found in plowing through the five foot snow in the timber with a sled. It overturned once. We wonder where the violin was packed. The men got to Idlewild late. Argo had only four pair of snow shoes for his twenty-two men. He was constantly asking H. A. Sumner to rush the shipment of snow shoes, but snow shoes had to come from Maine.

That evening J. J. Argo fed his men at the restaurant. At night Argo and his men slept in Ed Evans' saloon. Argo said he slept in a corner. We wonder if some of the boys were under the counter and tables? How could they be trusted among the bottles?

The next day the twenty-two men with their two teamsters got busy finishing the moving job. The last load overturned. Christmas Eve was darkening in that little spot. The camp was not set up and some of the boys went off to Denver on the afternoon stage. J. J. Argo and the remaining boys spent Christmas day in that beautiful spot of tall trees, a bubbling brook (called a river), where trout could be caught. The log saloon and the Evans Homestead and the Idlewild ranger station made up the entire town, which was nestled in the loneliness of high mountains towering above and the blanket of darkness of the night before Christmas.

Christmas day they could lay in bed late, if someone kept the fire up in the stove for them. There was sure to be the best dinner that the cook and J. J. Argo could get together. Afternoon they could write letters home, catching up on some of the letter writing that moving had interrupted. There was the story of the mountain lion tracks that they had seen in the snow. Of course, coyotes were just plain ordinary pests. The tracks of bears were very common. The wolf was not an unheard-of animal.

Christmas evening the boys, who had been too tired the night before from moving and setting up camp to play their instruments and sing, now took to singing the Christmas carols. Some instruments were silent as their masters were in Denver.

Sunday comes with the arrival of Mr. E. A. Meredith, who is in charge of all survey work on the west side of the range. Every-

one enjoyed being with this six-foot giant, who was a Yale graduate and could talk on any subject. An athlete who never tired, Mr. Meredith told how he had walked against the world's champion, doing 100 miles in twenty-four hours. J. J. Argo had been promoted under Meredith. Hoklas, who served under both men, attributes all his knowledge of engineering to these men. Meredith was known to work every day as long as he could see in the gathering dusk, little concerned if he were one mile or ten miles from camp.

With Meredith in Argo's camp there was certain to be some guarded talk about T. J. Milner. For they were good friends. Hoklas must have overheard a discussion of the different ideas Milner had about the main range tunnel work on some of these visits.

Milner had been very insistent on putting through the main range tunnel by the help of a temporary switch back. Ridgway had said that such a line could not be operated, because a rotary snow plow could not keep it open, as it would be backing half the time. H. A. Sumner had won out with his survey of the temporary branch line, which Milner pointed out would cost considerably more than a switch back. The Santa Fe had built through Raton Pass by using a switch back until the tunnel was completed, but Raton Pass was not high up in the snow country.

As J. J. Argo had run the survey for the tunnel location that Milner had urged, all such talk was likely to be rekindled regarding Milner and his work.

The same Sunday that Meredith arrived, Mr. C. H. McCoy arrived on his way to Hot Sulphur. He operated the hotel in McCoy, where famous meals were served in pioneer days. That evening the boys were sure to serenade both Argo and Meredith with the Moffat engineer's own song, "Argo and a Surveyor's Chain, Every Link in Meredith's Name," which they sang to the tune of "Oh, Mary Don't You Weep."

The deep voice of Dick Holmes, former Color Sergeant for the famous Colorado First Regiment in the Philippines, would be among the singers. He would then call for a Spanish American War song. These song fests were very popular in particular in the summer and Indian summer, when men could be outside around the camp fires. But just give the boys a Jews harp or a good leader and you had music anywhere.

Meredith would talk a little about the engineering department of the railroad occupying the entire seventh floor of the Majestic Building. The boys would make appropriate remarks about how Sumner was coming along with his sewer maps. All would laugh.

The Argo party worked all winter in Fraser Valley. April 29 they finished their work and disbanded. The men and their baggage left Idlewild (now Winter Park) at 4:00 a. m. and reached Denver at 4:35 p. m.

(To be continued)

My First Prairie Fire Fight

ALBERT W. THOMPSON*

The gravest dangers attending early settlers in our southwestern plains country, namely the Texas Panhandle, northeastern New Mexico, the Neutral Strip and southern Colorado, fear of Indians having been dispelled, were winter blizzards and prairie fires, both of which took high toll in loss of livestock, and not infrequently, human life. Sometimes these two agencies of destruction joined forces in sweeping across the unprotected plains, leaving nothing in their wake but black, smouldering ashes, where lay dead cattle, buffalo and antelope, or if not dead so seriously burned and blinded by smoke and flames, that they afterwards died.

Primal ranchmen, those of the 1880s within these districts, attempted to protect their ranges from prairie fires by plowing the prairie's sod in two parallel rows, lying close to each other, which the wind-driven flames found it difficult to leap. Such procedure, however, was not mandatory. It usually failed to include the "little fellow," small owner of range cattle who during the roundup season in summer, worked with wagons of the big companies. Damage done by fire, depended on the height and density of grass it met. In some portions of the district, grass grew two or even three feet high, and the blaze quickly destroyed it. Across the line in northeastern New Mexico, grass was much shorter and lay closer on the ground. It was gramma and buffalo grass, over which prairie fires moved slower than in taller varieties.

In this short article I would like to quote from a letter I received years ago from a Texas cowboy who had come up the long trail from southern Texas with a herd of 2,000 mixed cattle in the summer of 1885. In October the outfit reached Coldwater Creek in Hansford County, Texas, where grass was then well grown, and the seasons were generally mild. A winter camp was accordingly made in this then unsettled country, and the herd turned loose. Its location was about twenty miles southwest of the present town of Texhoma, on the Rock Island Railroad.

*Mr. Thompson, who was a cowboy on the western plains in 1885, has previously contributed to this magazine. His book, *They Were Open Range Days*, was reviewed in our issue of July last.—Ed.

"Prairie fires nearly got the best of us that winter," the cowboy wrote. "One morning after the big fire swept down the creek where we had left the bulk of our stock, I counted something like 300 head that had been burned to death. Several antelope, a buffalo cow with her eyes burned so she was blinded, and a buffalo yearling, lay near them. The fire started 65 miles northwest of our camp, and blew two days and nights, driving the flames down the Beaver to the Canadian, and all stock that was out on the plains had their hair singed. I skinned the dead buffalo, but the hair was burned so close the robe was valueless. Bailey (his companion in camp), however, stretched it over some little hackberry poles and used it for a door shelter for our sod house, which we found there, and had once been occupied by buffalo hunters." Such is the graphic account of a November prairie fire that once took place within the Texas Panhandle.

My first sight of, and participation in an attempt to extinguish a prairie fire, followed a month later in northeastern New Mexico, 150 miles almost directly north of the scene described above.

One morning in December (1885) about 9:30, a cowboy rode rapidly up to the ranch house in Tramperos Canyon where I had been ensconced a month, with the report that a prairie fire had started early that day ten miles below us, which, driven by a strong southwesterly wind, was making fast headway toward us. Help must be mustered at once to check it, or great damage would be done to the range. Would we, at the so-called NY ranch, join other men already on their way to the blaze in an effort to check it?

Decision was quickly made in the affirmative. From a high point back of the house, smoke from the oncoming conflagration was now plainly seen.

Half a dozen of our men set to work immediately preparing to start for the fire. A team of horses and wagon on which two barrels of water were lashed, their tops carefully covered with canvas, were soon ready to go forward. Into the wagon were dumped a dozen or more empty gunny sacks—100-pound size. Several long lariats and stake ropes were requisitioned. From atop the log corral was snatched a dry cowhide and tossed into the wagonbed. Its use will be described later on. A five gallon keg was filled with water at the spring for drinking. During the hurried preparation, two men rode up to the ranch who at once volunteered to join us in fire fighting. Incidentally I might here mention that our nearest town was Springer, seventy miles west. Raton was fifty miles north.

Thus equipped we made a hurried drive up the canyon, escorted by some of the potential workers on horseback, and climbed a steep rocky road leading to the prairie above, on reaching which

we headed for the fire now perhaps six miles south. The range was covered with dry, well cured short gramma and buffalo grass. On arriving about noon 300 feet from the advance line of flames, we stopped. Here a few men had already assembled. The wind had, during the past hour, increased in violence, with prospects of no early let up. Flames ran along from east to west, some two miles from where we stood, close to the northeast line of the fire. Behind it lay a blackened, devastated Sahara.

Our first work on reaching the conflagration was to take from the wagon the cowhide before mentioned and spread it out on the ground. Onto its front end a cowboy on horseback tossed his lariat, wrapping the rope around his saddle-horn. A second cow-hand snared both hind legs of the hide, which was then heavily weighted down with rocks to keep it lying flat. Putting spurs to his horse, cowboy Number One dashed across flame and smoke to the burned-out side. Spreading out opposite each other, the riders began dragging the stone-weighted hide back and forth along the edge of the blaze, thus helping to smother it. Close behind rider Number Two, men followed on foot, armed with wet gunny sacks with which they dexterously beat out a flame, as one was met.

After some hours of active work, efforts in subduing the blaze were meeting with success. By 5 o'clock the southwest wind, as often suits its caprice, showed signs of abating and soon, along the sinuous line of smoke and fire, all progress of the latter was halted. Occasionally a wisp of flame turned up in some tuft of grass taller than others about, but was promptly beaten out by our gunny-sack patrol, and as darkness settled over the scene, the fight seemed won.

Just then a Mexican sheepman living on Ute creek, ten miles northwest, whose attention that afternoon had been directed to the fire, drove up in a lumber wagon, accompanied by one of his herders, bringing a supply of fresh water, camp equipment, coffee and a flour sack filled with tortillas, prepared to spend the night, watching for any outbreak of the conflagration. So, after refreshing ourselves with several cups of black coffee prepared quickly over a fire of wood our visitors had brought along, supplemented by tortillas, our tired crew, begrimed of face and arms, boots sadly impaired, some with holes burned in their overalls, turned the situation over to the recent arrivals, and set out for home, where we arrived after midnight. Later investigation disclosed that a dozen or more square miles of grass had been destroyed by the blaze, though its origin remained unknown.

Colorful, indeed, were the incidents connected with the long day's work. It was my first experience in prairie fire fighting, though not destined to be my last.