



## Buffalo Bill's Cowboys Abroad

BY CLIFFORD P. WESTERMEIER

Before Buffalo Bill's Wild West show appeared, the cowboy was both a hero and an antihero, depending upon the image created by the authors of dime novels and the writers of articles for newspapers and periodicals. The "hired man on horseback," either glorified or dishonored, was the victim of the pens of many individuals who were not qualified to judge his worth. Furthermore, three years following the launching of the Wild West show (1883), chroniclers of the cowboy began bidding him farewell. "The Decayed Cowboy," "On a Western Rancho," "Cattle Trails of the Prairies," "The Passing of the Cowboy," "A Fading Race," "The Passing of the Cow-Puncher," and "Goodbye to the American Cowboy" were predictive and presumptuous titles of articles pushing his bad-good and good-bad image from the scene.<sup>1</sup>

Buffalo Bill may have "started the cowboy hero on his way," but the vast literature that surrounds William Frederick Cody certainly does not reveal any particular effort on his part to do more than enhance his own ego.<sup>2</sup> In fact, the Indian members of his traveling troupe fared far better, at least photographically. However, the ordinary spectator, the notables, and particularly the members of the press were fascinated and enthralled with the cowboy. This was the era of that supershowman "Buffalo Bill" as well as numerous others, among them James Butler Hickok—"Wild Bill," Gordon W. Lillie—"Pawnee Bill," and

<sup>1</sup> Clifford P. Westermeier, *Trailing the Cowboy* (Caldwell, Idaho: Caxton Printers, 1955), pp. 383-90.

<sup>2</sup> Don Russell, *The Wild West; or, A History of the Wild West Shows* (Fort Worth: Amon Carter Museum of Western Art, 1970), p. 118.

Charles Meadows, showmen all "who roused their fellow Americans to rush to the tents, the canvas hippodromes, and arenas to behold the last gasp of the fading frontier and particularly its leading character, the cowboy."<sup>3</sup>

However, in the long run it was Cody—pony express rider, scout, hunter, and Indian fighter—who lifted the cowboy from his native environment into the national and the international spotlight. Cody was never convinced of the merit of the western melodramas in which he found a niche between 1872 and 1881. Although he prospered financially under the skillful management of John M. Burke in the populous East, he was unhappy because the West he knew was rapidly succumbing to civilization. Burke recognized the potentialities of Cody as the epitome of western heroes so in demand by a reading and a viewing public, but it was Buffalo Bill who sought to glorify the spirit of the mountains and the plains and to bring before the world the men who had conquered them. While the authors of dime novels spun their mirages on pulp and the range cowboys captured the popular imagination with their rugged and hearty tournaments and contests of riding and roping, John Burke created for the public the lasting, heroic image of a Westerner.

The dream of a vast, colorful panorama of sight and sound became clearer in Cody's mind, and a combination of circumstances made the dream a reality. The success of Cody's "Old Glory Blow-Out" on 4 July 1882 at North Platte, Nebraska, expressed all of his ambitions. Finally, in the spring of 1883, the financial aid and the trick-shooting talent of Dr. W. F. Carver put their "Wild West Rocky Mountain, and Prairie Exhibition" on the road.<sup>4</sup> The show paraded all phases of the western plains—the Indian, the scout, the pony express rider, the stagecoach holdup, a variety of wild life, and, of course, the cowboy, who rode bucking horses, shot his six-shooter accurately, engaged in races, roped, threw, and tied Texas steers, and for extra thrills rode the "ornery" buffalo. It was a rip-snorter—a display of brawny, rough, masculine action.<sup>5</sup>

Unfortunately, the outfit lacked organization—Carver proved to be a difficult partner, Cody lacked business sense, and both failed to maintain discipline in the troupe. Between



A part of the cowboy contingent that made up the Wild West show about 1886. Johnny Baker, "the Cowboy Kid," holds the gun.

engagements the cowboys hit the primrose trail and missed performances; toward the end of the tour the cowboys and the Indians, longing for their western homes, quarreled and became recalcitrant.<sup>6</sup> As the entire setup deteriorated, Cody approached Nate Salsbury, who earlier had refused to be a part of the organization because Carver "was a fakir in the show business" and, in Cody's words, "went West on a piano stool."<sup>7</sup> In the typical manner of the West—flipping coins—Cody reached a settlement with Carver, and Salsbury took over as partner. In 1883 after many months of reorganization the new show, "Buffalo Bill's Wild West—America's National Entertainment," opened in Saint Louis, destined to become, within the next decade, an international institution. Thus, the cowboy continued his rise to greater fame.<sup>8</sup>

Among the cowboys associated with the early Buffalo Bill shows the most notable were Bud Ayers, Johnny Baker (the Cowboy Kid),<sup>9</sup> Marve Beardsley, Dick Bean, Broncho Bill Bullock, Antonio Esquivel, Utah Frank, Con Groner (the Cowboy Sheriff), Blue Hall, Montana Joe, James Willoughby (Jim Kid),<sup>10</sup> Jim Lawson, Broncho Charlie Miller, Jim Mitchell, and William Levi Taylor. William Taylor was "Buck" Taylor who, as

<sup>3</sup> Clifford P. Westermeier, "Clio's Maverick—The Cowboy," *The 1966 Brand Book of the Denver Posses of the Westerners*, ed. William D. Powell (Boulder: Johnson Publishing Co., 1967), p. 163.

<sup>4</sup> Don Russell, *The Lives and Legends of Buffalo Bill* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1960), p. 290; Henry Blackman Sell and Victor Weybright, *Buffalo Bill and the Wild West* (New York: New American Library, 1959), pp. 162-63.

<sup>5</sup> Winifred Johnston, "Passing of the Wild West," *Southwest Review* 21 (Autumn 1935): 36.

<sup>6</sup> Sell and Weybright, *Buffalo Bill and the Wild West*, pp. 164-65; Russell, *Lives and Legends of Buffalo Bill*, pp. 297-99.

<sup>7</sup> Nate Salsbury, "The Origin of the Wild West Show," *The Colorado Magazine* 32 (July 1955): 207.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 208; Russell, *Lives and Legends of Buffalo Bill*, pp. 300-301.

<sup>9</sup> "Races Close at Aspen," *Denver Republican*, 27 August 1900.

<sup>10</sup> The name appears as both Kid and Kidd.

"King of the Cowboys," is the prototype of all cowboy heroes so royally designated, including the riding and singing stars of radio, motion picture, television, and, last but not least, the great, genuine, rodeo cowboy, the late Bill Linderman.

Taylor, a native Texan, rode and roped his way from the ranges of the cow country to top billing in the arenas of both the United States and Europe. Dime novelist Prentiss Ingraham, the first author to personify the cowboy, made "Buck" by name and imagination the hero of his many publications. There is no doubt that both contributed to his fame and kingly appellation, for prior to Buffalo Bill's Wild West invasion of Great Britain and the publication of Ingraham's *Buck Taylor, King of the Cowboys*, Taylor spent time in Cheyenne buying horses for the show. The *Cheyenne Democratic Leader*, unimpressed by him or his mission, concluded that "Taylor is . . . looking around and investing in old superannuated horses, but all right for the business Buffalo Bill will have with them." However, a month earlier the same newspaper informed its readers that "Buffalo Bill lately bought . . . and shipped to this place in care of James Willoughby alias Jim Kid, a horse well known to broncho riders as the 'White Emigrant'. . . . This is one of the horses that the Kid will ride in the shows given by Buffalo Bill next summer."<sup>11</sup>

About two years later, following the triumphant tour of England, the *Cheyenne Daily Leader*, commenting on the presence of Salsbury and an associate in the city to hire cowboys "of considerable reputation," reported with an air of greater respect that "to appear with Buck Taylor and Jim Kid a cowboy must be able to retain the saddle on anything in the shape of horse flesh."<sup>12</sup> Obviously, the "King" did not suffer from journalistic exposure, and, although a minimum of criticism rode with them, the grand tour of England did not harm the cowboys' image.

In connection with Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee in 1887, promoters featured Buffalo Bill's Wild West at Earl's Court arena in London. The show comprised about 240 persons and 225 head of stock. Extensive preparations had been made at the site in order to portray "the existing and adventurous scenes of frontier life." The track around the arena was over one-third of a mile in circumference and the grandstand accommodated 20,000 people; furthermore, "standing room, under shelter, is provided

for nearly 10,000 more and this . . . with the standing room in the open ground will afford a good view of the entertainment to about 40,000 people." In addition, a large hill took shape with "17,000 loads of earth and rock, and in this, among a grove of newly-planted trees, will be the encampment of the Indians and cowboys."<sup>13</sup>

Camp was set up immediately after arrival on 16 April, and although the first performance was not scheduled until May, the press gave ample space to the Wild West company. Distinguished visitors, political and royal, present from many countries to honor the English sovereign, visited the camp. Actors, actresses, and prominent citizens called to extend greetings and good wishes to Colonel Cody. More important, at all times newspaper correspondents and representatives of the press attended to catch the spirit, the color, and the impressions of the American West.<sup>14</sup>

The lavish praise heaped on Buffalo Bill was encouraged by John Burke, his publicity director. "There are some magnificent specimens of men among these 'cowboys' and pioneers," wrote one reporter, "but none more magnificent, at least on horseback, than their chief and leader, 'Buffalo Bill'."<sup>15</sup> However, many chroniclers of daily events in the camp and the arena were aware of other members of the troupe. The Indians fascinated them, especially their physical appearance, dress, and action; the marksmanship of Annie Oakley elicited amazement; the animals—horses, mules, donkeys, and particularly, the buffalo, elk, deer, and wild Texas steers—aroused curiosity.

But it was the cowboy who evoked expressions of praise and admiration. A special representative of the London *Era* wrote that "the typical cow-boy possesses several strongly-marked characteristics. He is a perfect hero with respect to bearing pain and meeting danger. He has a code of honor which, half savage as it is, he adheres to with far more rigidity than is the case in similar circumstances with the denizens of civilized districts. Absolute indifference to peril, perfect fealty to a friend, extreme amicability and openness, coupled with a readiness to 'shoot' as soon as a certain code of civility has been transgressed, and a habit of indulging in periodical 'sprees,' which are dangerous alike to his pocket and life, are roughly speaking, the

<sup>10</sup> "The American Exhibition," *Daily Chronicle* (London), 23 April 1887.

<sup>11</sup> Russell, *Lives and Legends of Buffalo Bill*, pp. 328-32.

<sup>12</sup> "The American Exhibition," *Times* (London), 27 April 1887, p. 6; "The American Exhibition and the Wild West Show," *Pictorial News* (London), 30 April 1887.

<sup>11</sup> *Cheyenne (Wyo.) Democratic Leader*, 11 April, 11 March 1886.

<sup>12</sup> "The Star with Buffalo Bill," *Cheyenne Daily Leader*, 4 April 1888.

peculiarities of the cow-boy's character." As if to apologize for this revelation, the correspondent continued: "Doubtless, the latter custom has been abandoned by Buffalo Bill's company, without any detriment to their admirable qualities."<sup>16</sup>

Another observer noted that "[the cowboy] was conspicuous for his sensitive pride, his almost aggressive spirit of independence, his bright intelligence, and his sportsmanlike instincts. Such at least are the best of them. . . . On the other hand our cowboy is shockingly cruel, hasty in temper, and unbridled in tongue. . . . The use of a 'forbidden expression' resulted in a killing for 'he had provoked the risk and had paid the penalty' for his rashness; [however], their flow of bad language is limited to their animals."<sup>17</sup>

In a column entitled "The Wild West Show," a reporter for the *Era* divulged that "the life of a Texas or Colorado cow-boy is, according to our civilized ideas not a happy one. There is no lack of physical courage among us, and the more exciting adventures of cattle-driving would probably be enjoyed by a majority of young Englishmen. Still, some of the things these 'cow-boys' do in everyday life are calculated to astonish even a courageous Britisher. . . . Whether it be 'the survival of the fittest' which is the cause or not, the breed produced under these conditions is a



fine one. There are few types of manhood more essentially masculine than the better class of Western man."<sup>18</sup>

In an interview with Buffalo Bill a British admirer of the cow-boy received firsthand information: "It is the general impression among the people East that the long hair, wide-brimmed hats, huge spurs, fringed leggings, and other striking accessories in a cow-boy's outfit, are worn simply for show and effect; but that impression is wrong. It was not a desire for picturesqueness that led to our 'make-up' as it is to-day, although that effect has followed. Questions of necessity were the first considerations that prompted the adoption of our peculiar dress, from the big cruel-looking spurs to our hair like Sampson's before he was shorn. All these appurtenances may be ornamental, but their usefulness is many times greater than their ornateness."<sup>19</sup>

Another journalistic impression described the cowboys as "reserved thoughtful men and lads, most tall and thin, with long hair thrown behind their ears, and whose most conspicuous articles of attire are broad-brimmed gray soft felt hats and close fitting riding boots reaching above the knees. . . . They are of various ages, as 'once a cowboy, always a cowboy'."<sup>20</sup> In London "Buck Taylor . . . is king of this strangely mixed party. . . . His followers . . . hail mainly from Wyoming, Texas, Colorado, and Nebraska, though amongst them are a few vaqueros."<sup>21</sup> One admirer of the manly Westerner characterized Taylor as "six feet four . . . perfectly made, and hard as nails. His manner is decidedly pleasing, he can set any horse that is brought him, and he wears his hair over his shoulders."<sup>22</sup>

Upon the arrival of former Prime Minister and Mrs. William E. Gladstone at the American Exhibition on 28 April, the Cowboy Band, directed by William Sweeney, played "Yankee Doodle," a gesture reported in the *Manchester Guardian*: "The Cowboy Band upsets all one's previous ideas about the correct costumes of the musicians, but they play with great spirit, with very fair execution, and in excellent time." The band was supposedly made up of cowboys "who have retired from the

<sup>16</sup> "Buffalo Bill in Camp," *Era* (London), 23 April 1887; *Fame and Fortune* (London), 21 April 1887.

<sup>17</sup> "Wild Life in Texas," *Tit-Bits* (London), 14 May 1889, p. 69.

<sup>18</sup> "The Wild West Show," *Era*, 23 April 1887.

<sup>19</sup> "Buffalo Bill" Interviewed," *Tit-Bits*, 7 May 1887, p. 53.

<sup>20</sup> "The American Exhibition," *Weekly News and Clerkenwell Chronicle* (London), 3 May 1887.

<sup>21</sup> "The Yankeries," *Newcastle Daily Chronicle*, 7 May 1887; "The Yankeries and the Wild West," *Sporting Life* (London), 4 May 1887. Buck Taylor discusses in detail the dress of the cowboy, his gear, and his equipment in "A Chat with the King of the Cowboys," *Tit-Bits*, 18 June 1887, p. 149.

<sup>22</sup> *Pictorial News*, 30 April 1887 (pp. 8, 9 feature illustrations of the Wild West).



hardships of the plains and taken to music.<sup>23</sup> Gladstone was particularly interested in the bucking horse rides, according to a reporter who had one eye on the former prime minister and the other on the action in the arena. His description of the arena activities was typical: "The rider once mounted, the horse would jump high into the air, kick, rear, and perform the most astonishing gyrations to get rid of its rider, but the cowboy invariably won the victory." Another reporter suspected that "the buck-jumping horses appear to be stimulated and encouraged in their antics, but when they begin they 'mean business every time'." One correspondent, who agreed that the bucking horses were exciting, believed that "the riding of the Texan steers will be the greatest novelty to the English public. The cowboys bestride these animals when in wild career, and have nothing to hold by except a rope passed round the shoulders."<sup>24</sup>

Albert Edward, prince of Wales, with a party of notables visited the camp and witnessed a preview of things to come. His Royal Highness was enthusiastic about the Indian war-dance, the stampede and the capture of buffalo, and the attack on the Deadwood stagecoach. "The riding of the bucking horses also pleased the Royal party greatly. . . . Buck Taylor, King of the Cowboys, picked his handkerchief up from the ground while riding at full gallop, and also in the same way picked up a rope attached to a runaway horse."<sup>25</sup>

Almost a month later Buck Taylor sustained a severe injury when his horse swerved into another during the quadrille. The horse became uncontrollable, and the star cowboy, his leg having become twisted across the animal's back, fell from the saddle insensible with a serious compound fracture. "The unfortunate man's injuries are so severe," a newspaper disclosed that "it is feared he will never again be able to ride." Six weeks later Buck had recovered sufficiently to be on crutches.<sup>26</sup>

Buffalo Bill's cowboys in London were not unlike cowboys in a cow town or a city on the western plains. One observer commenting on the presence of cowboys in the promenade at the Alhambra and at the American bar of the Criterion agreed that while "their appearance is picturesque beyond dispute, . . . it might be improved by soap and water plentifully applied."<sup>27</sup> In a public house, cowboy Richard Johnson became engaged in a fight with another patron, William Payne, and two constables. Payne asked Johnson to have a drink with him and fists began to fly. It was admitted that Payne earlier had "said he would not drink with cowboys," and in this struggle the constables were struck. Johnson was found guilty and sentenced to six months imprisonment at hard labor; however, he was pardoned through the intercession of the Prince of Wales.<sup>28</sup>

"A New Mexico Cowboy in London," in the 28 January 1888 *Raton Weekly Independent*, relates the amusing tale of Red Pugh with the Buffalo Bill show, who created an incident that ended in an arrest and a fine. "He went into a restaurant and ordered a rare beefsteak. The waiter brought him one so rare that it jerked around on the plate. Red drew his gun and fired three or four shots through it to kill it, as he explained, when everyone in

<sup>23</sup> "Mr. Gladstone and Buffalo Bill," *Globe and Traveller* (London), 29 April 1887; "The American Exhibition," *Manchester Guardian*, 29 April 1887; "The American Exhibition," *Weekly News and Clerkenwell Chronicle*, 3 May 1887.

<sup>24</sup> "Mr. Gladstone and the Red Indian," *Newcastle Daily Chronicle*, 29 April 1887; "Royalty at the American Exhibition," *ibid.*, 18 May 1887; "The American Exhibition," *Manchester Guardian*, 29 April 1887.

<sup>25</sup> "The Prince of Wales among the Red Indians," *Newcastle Daily Chronicle*, 6 May 1887.

<sup>26</sup> "Accident to the Cowboy King," *ibid.*, 2 June 1887; "Theatrical Group," *Era*, 16, 30 July 1887.

<sup>27</sup> "Round the Theatres," *Weekly News and Clerkenwell Chronicle*, 23 April 1887.

<sup>28</sup> "A 'Wild West' Cowboy," *Era*, 20 August 1887; "The Roping Contest," *Fort Worth, Texas Live Stock Journal*, 1 December 1888.

the establishment joined in a general stampede. After killing the steak, Red sat down to eat his meat and was interrupted in a few minutes by the arrival of about fifty police who told him that it was against the laws of her Majesty Queen Vic to make such John Branch plays in England."

Throughout the entire London engagement, extending from early May through October, and then to Birmingham, Manchester, and Hull, Buffalo Bill's Wild West remained the focus of journalistic reporting, most of which was favorable. The Indians, the spectacular acts, and the magnificent panoramas were inducements for expressions of wonderment and explanation, but the cowboy consistently retained the admiration and the respect of his audience.

In Birmingham the show opened on 5 November in the Great Hall and Skating Rink at Aston Lower Grounds. A reporter of the *Daily Post* lauded the physical build of the cowboys and noted that "they are more chatty than the Indians. . . . They are no carpet knights," he observed. Furthermore, he concluded that "one glance at their shrewd, clean-cut, resolute faces convinces you of that. . . . But with all his peculiarities the cowboy is a gentleman. Not one word of brag does he speak, and if you would hear stories of adventure from him you must be prepared to fill in from imagination the blanks which his modesty and lack of self-consciousness leave in them at every step. . . . They are not to be confounded with the criminals and bullies who have disgraced the name of 'cowboy' in some American cities."<sup>29</sup> Another reporter commented that "the 'Wild West' is not only realistic, it is real," and the cowboys "a knot of sinewy and strapping lads . . . are not actors. They are simply living over again some scenes of the life which they have just left, and to which they will soon return."<sup>30</sup> A six-day race between Marve Beardsley and Broncho Charlie Miller—pony express riders who absented themselves from the Birmingham show—and the champion professional bicyclists, Richard Howell and W. M. Woodside, at the

Agricultural Hall in London caused considerable comment as to the modes of racing. The cowboys won by a narrow margin of almost two miles.<sup>31</sup>

The Wild West opened in Manchester on 17 December and again the press noted the esteem placed on the cowboys, especially as riders of the "wild prairie mustangs spoiled in the breaking." One reporter observed that the difficulty in mounting these animals with their "varieties of vices" created an impression of fun, which was lacking in the entertainment up to that time. In his concluding remarks he referred to the announcer as an "orator" who suggested "that if anybody in Manchester would bring down a refractory horse the cowboys would have great pleasure in riding it. And one can believe it, in view of a kind of wild joy they seemed to take in mastering their own animals."<sup>32</sup>

When Buffalo Bill's Wild West ended its visit of five months in Manchester on 1 May 1888, accounts indicated that 20,000 spectators attended this final performance. "The great feature was a 10-mile race for £ 400 between English thoroughbreds and American bronchos." An accident to Antonio Esquivel, the American horseman, delayed the race by one day; however, he was the winner, using 13 horses in the 10-mile pony express race.<sup>33</sup>

At the close of the Wild West in Hull on 5 May the entire show returned to the United States, and no one knew better than Buffalo Bill that the year had been a great success. In a letter to an old friend, William Roy, of El Paso, Texas, he said, "I have captured this country from the Queen down and am doing them to the tune of 10,000 dollars a day . . . with my European reputation you can easily guess the business I will do when I get back to my own country. It's pretty hard work with two and three performances a day and the society racket, receptions, dinners &c. . . . I am over here for dust."<sup>34</sup>

Back in the United States, humorist and wit Bill Nye carefully observed the progress of a triumphant Cody and his

<sup>29</sup> "The Wild West at Aston," *Birmingham Daily Post*, 3 November 1887.

<sup>30</sup> "Opening of the Wild West Show at Aston," *ibid.*, 7 November 1887.

<sup>31</sup> *Era*, 5 November 1887. Cf. Russell, *Lives and Legends of Buffalo Bill*, pp. 338-39.

<sup>32</sup> "The 'Wild West' Show," *Manchester Guardian*, 19 December 1887. Frank Richmond, the announcer, is also referred to as the "lecturer" (*ibid.*, 14 May 1887). Richmond received a complimentary note via the Dowager Duchess of Ely expressing the pleasure of the queen with his description of the Wild West and with it a Parian marble bust of Her Majesty ("The Queen and the Wild West Show," *Hull Daily News*, 5 May 1888).

<sup>33</sup> "Farewell Performance of the Wild West," *Manchester Guardian*, 2 May 1888. Cf. Russell, *Lives and Legends of Buffalo Bill*, p. 340.

<sup>34</sup> "Buffalo Bill on His Visit to London," *Era*, 27 August 1887.



troupe who had entranced the spectators in England. As news concerning "Buffalo William" continued to filter back to the United States, and as the tour came to an end, Nye leveled his light and flippant shafts of humor with devastating accuracy at the growing western influence on American and European youth. With tongue in cheek he reported that the news from London indicated that

the coming year [1888] will witness a large hegira of armed gossins from England who intend to prosecute the cow-gentlemen and stage robbing business on our frontier. . . . American and foreign youth alike [are] turning with undisguised loathing from educational pursuits to immerse [their] legs in a pair of chaperajos, . . . to whoop-up with the red-eyed, haughty and high-tailed Texan maverick, or shoot large irregular holes into the other wise poorly ventilated savage. . . . Everywhere the fever follows his [Buffalo Bill's] performance. Wherever he goes his high-heeled boots, lariats, tarantula juice and hair rise to fictional value. . . . I do not wish to be considered an alarmist, but lest we bring in our Indians at night, the cowboys of Great Britain and of France will sweep our Great West.<sup>35</sup>

Notwithstanding Nye's freewheeling use of the English language, his badinage does not fall short of actual fact. As stories of the cowboy spread throughout the United States, England, and other parts of Europe, the youthful admirers of Buffalo Bill and dime-novel cowboy heroes imitated them in dress and action. Youngsters packed their clothes, cracked their banks, and started out in search of their dreams; the more mature ones made serious inquiries into the life of the cowboy, and some individuals proposed that young men be trained to carry on the work.<sup>36</sup>

Following his triumph of 1887-88 in England and a successful season in the United States, Buffalo Bill's tour, which had started in Saint Louis, Missouri, more than two and one-half years earlier, came to an end.<sup>37</sup> However, in the spring of 1889, his Wild West was once again embarking upon a grand tour—extending from May 1889 until October 1892.

The first continental tour corresponded with the opening of the Industrial and Artistic Exposition Universal in Paris, May 1889. Fifteen thousand spectators attended *la grand première*, and "the audience which assembled on the occasion of the opening exhibition equalled any known in the record of premieres of



Joe and Tony Esquivel, two of the "stars."

that brilliant *capitale des deux mondes*."<sup>38</sup> An enthusiastic Parisian remarked—"I have seen many first performances . . . but never have I seen one at which there was such a splendid representative gathering of all Paris."<sup>39</sup>

During the weeks that followed, the elite of the French capital lionized Buffalo Bill. Visitors to the exhibition included President and Madame Carnot, the ministers of the French government, the Prince and the Princess of Wales, the Shah of Persia who watched the exhibition "with an intense, almost childish interest,"<sup>40</sup> ex-queen Isabella of Spain, the American ambassador to Great Britain Whitelaw Reid, Thomas Edison, and the American prima donna Sibyl Sanderson. A *déjeuner*, with Vicomtesse Chardon de Briailles as hostess, in honor of Buffalo Bill raised him to the zenith of social success.<sup>41</sup>

While notables were enthralled by Cody, Paris loved the cowboys, and the fad of wearing cowboy headgear swept the city. One newspaper reporter acknowledged that "the women fell in love with the big hats, and a new fashion is created." The manly and serious appearance of the cowboys intrigued them, and, according to a bystander, "they were all gentlemen, 'because ladies could circulate freely in their midst'."<sup>42</sup>

During the Paris sojourn some Parisian gentlemen questioned the ferocity of the bucking horses and thus the riding

<sup>35</sup> "Bustling Paris," *New York Herald*, 19 May 1889. See advertisements of Buffalo Bill's Wild West company in *Le Soleil* (Paris, France), 13, 20 May 1889; *Le Monde* (Paris, France), 20 May 1889; Burke, "Buffalo Bill," p. 233.

<sup>36</sup> "Bustling Paris," *New York Herald*, 19 May 1889.

<sup>37</sup> "Feteing the Shah," *New York Herald* (European Edition, Paris, France), 2 August 1889.

<sup>38</sup> "Buffalo Bill's Breakfast," *New York Herald*, 30 May 1889; "Buffalo Bill's Visitors," *ibid.*, 3 August 1889; "Around Bill's Board," *ibid.*, 28 August 1889. Cf. Burke, "Buffalo Bill," pp. 233-34; Sell and Weybright, *Buffalo Bill and the Wild West*, p. 213.

<sup>39</sup> "At the Paris World's Fair," *New York Times*, 23 June 1889, p. 16.

<sup>35</sup> "Nye and the Cowboy," *Fort Worth, Texas Live Stock Journal*, 3 December 1887.

<sup>36</sup> Westermeier, *Trailing the Cowboy*, pp. 327-38.

<sup>37</sup> John M. Burke, "Buffalo Bill" from *Prairie to Palace: An Authentic History of the Wild West* (Chicago and New York: Rand, McNally & Co., 1893), pp. 227-31.

skills of the cowboys. Several who did not hold this opinion placed wagers on the cowboys. A powerful black stallion, Le Rétif, of vicious reputation, having killed two men who attempted to break him, was selected. Just before the performance began he was turned into the corral with the broncs used in the exhibition.

Cowboy Tony Esquivel roped, bridled, and saddled the stallion almost before the animal was aware of what had happened. As the preparations progressed, Le Rétif soon made it difficult for the men who held him. When he was led into the arena, in a swift move, Jim Kid, the Wyoming cowboy, was on his back. "For a few minutes Le Rétif showed that in the art of bucking he had nothing to learn from his American brethren." He fought with his fore- and hind-feet and plunged and leaped, but he eventually gave up the struggle and allowed the cowboy to ride him. The "delighted audience rose to their feet, cheering and waving their hats and handkerchiefs with wild enthusiasm." At the end of the exhibition another cowboy jumped on the animal behind Kid, and after a brief struggle Le Rétif "was forced to carry the double load around the arena."<sup>43</sup> Thus, when the seven-month-long Paris engagement ended on 14 November, to move on to Lyons, Marseilles, Barcelona, and Naples, a newspaper caption read "Parisians Mourn the Departure of 'Guillaume Le Buffle'."<sup>44</sup>

As early as 14 December 1898 the Barcelona *El Correo Catalán* began to advertise the Wild West in large newsprint and

<sup>43</sup> "A Riding Lesson," *New York Herald*, 7 July 1889. Cf. "M. Tailard, Members of Jockey Club," *New York Herald* (European Edition, Paris, France), 6 July 1889. Cf. "Cowboy Backers Win," *ibid.*, 7 July 1889.

<sup>44</sup> "Off for Lyons," *New York Herald*, 14 November 1889. Cf. *ibid.* (European Edition, Paris, France), 14 November 1889.

Approximately fifty miles west, as the crow flies, from Marseilles is the *Camargue*, a strange and lonely region of swamps, lagoons, and sand dunes. This is the home of the half-wild herds of white horses and small black bulls. It is also the home of the French cowboys (*gardians*—keepers of herds of bulls) and the ranch owners and stock breeders (*manadiers*). The city of Les Saintes Maries de la Mer with its ancient fortress church dominates the region. Here, the Marquis Folco de Baroncelli-Javon—a descendant of an old Florentine family—a *manadier*, a poet, and a strong-willed individual who was somewhat of a mystic—kept alive the heritage and the culture of the region by creating the *Nacion gardiano* (society of *gardians*). Since his death in 1943 he has become a legendary figure for the herders (Michel Droit, *Camargue* [Chicago: Rand McNally & Co., 1963]; René Baranger, *Cavaliers de Camargue* [Clichy, France: J. Vega, 1958]; Henri Aubanel, "Un Veau de Race," *Le Figaro Littéraire* No. 1185 [2–8 September 1968]: 2–8).

In Saintes Maries de la Mer at the apex of the diverging Rue Victor Hugo and Rue Corneille, a short block from the fortress church, stands the Musée Camarguais, a small building of three stories. A staircase, the walls of which are lined with pictures and documents concerning the region, leads you to the rooms above. Here, in a far out-of-the-way place, Buffalo Bill's memory and the Wild West are devoutly enshrined. You can find pictures of him and his troupe, letters and memorabilia that were associated with either his tours in 1889 or 1906 to Lyons, Nîmes, Arles, and Marseilles (visited by Dr. and Mrs. Clifford P. Westemeier, 3 November 1967). Cf. *La Camargue, édité par le Syndicat d'Initiative des Saintes-Maries de la Mer*. It contains a map of the Camargue and the city with the location of the Musée Camarguais.

five days later it imparted information that the show had arrived on the steamer *Palma* from Marseilles.<sup>45</sup> On the opening of the Barcelona engagement on 21 December, one newspaper gave a short account of the many features of the show, among which were battles between Indians and whites in the "virgin forests" of North America.<sup>46</sup> The following day *La Vanguardia* captioned a long and detailed article "Búfalo Bill's" and included the information that the first Indians were brought to that city by Columbus in 1493 to be presented to the monarchs Isabella and Ferdinand. While the Indians were, without a doubt, the most fascinating of all Buffalo Bill's troupe, the Catalans did praise Buck Taylor, King of the Cowboys, and the rope tricks of the cowboys. Johnny Baker's skill with firearms and Buffalo Bill's precision with the rifle at full gallop enthralled the spectators. It was estimated that no fewer than seven thousand attended the opening performance.<sup>47</sup>

While a large attendance continued for several days, an ominous note gradually crept into the various newspapers, which finally meant disaster for the Barcelona engagement.<sup>48</sup> In *El Diario de Barcelona de Avisos y Noticias*, the medical profession of Madrid expressed great concern over *la epidemia*, which appeared in Spain and then engulfed most of Europe. The epidemic was categorized as dengue, grippe, francazo, and influenza, and each day more people became ill as a cold, rainy spell set in. People stayed indoors, the theaters closed, and many physicians became ill, while others were so overworked for it was impossible to care for all the sick.<sup>49</sup>

The evening edition of *El Diario de Barcelona* on 2 January 1890 announced that because of bad weather the performances would be suspended, but three days later the Wild West was advertised as continuing—the weather had improved and more people appeared on the streets and in the cafes—although dengue persisted. However, during these days tragedy struck the Wild West. Many members of the troupe became ill and Frank Richmond, the announcer, died. Still the show must go on! A

<sup>45</sup> *El Correo Catalán* (Barcelona), 19 December 1889; *La Vanguardia* (Barcelona), 19 December 1889; *El Barcelonés*, 19 December 1889. Cf. "Wild West Show: Barcelona Engagement," *New York Times*, 22 December 1889, p. 2.

<sup>46</sup> *El Correo Catalán*, 21 December 1889.

<sup>47</sup> *La Vanguardia*, 22 December 1889.

<sup>48</sup> *El Correo Catalán*, 23 December 1889.

<sup>49</sup> *El Diario de Barcelona de Avisos y Noticias*, 21, 27, 28, 29, 30 December 1889, pp. 15515, 15735, 15773, 15783, 15380, respectively; "Influenza," *New York Herald*, 27 December 1889. Cf. Sell and Weywright, *Buffalo Bill and the Wild West*, p. 214. There appears to be disagreement in the works of Elizabeth Jane Leonard and Julie Cody Goodman and Russell concerning the epidemic.

parade, with the troupe elaborately costumed, was held on 6 January and, regardless of the epidemic, on 9 January over three thousand attended the afternoon performance.<sup>50</sup> The last performance was held on 20 January, and with a reduced admission the crowds were enormous. At its conclusion the workmen immediately began to dismantle the show. Buffalo Bill's Wild West left Barcelona 22 January and, in a rough voyage, sailed on the steamer *Bellver* for Naples, Italy.<sup>51</sup>

The reception of Buffalo Bill and the Wild West in Italy was sensational! In Rome the most thrilling and exciting event was the challenge by Don Onorio Herzog of Sermoneta, Prince of Teano, who declared that no cowboy on earth could ride one of his famous herd from the Pontine Marshes. "The cowboys laughed at the boast." Before an audience of twenty thousand, including the members of the oldest families of Rome, the cowboys roped, bridled, saddled, and mounted two of the animals in five minutes. "The animals leaped in the air, writhed, bucked and reared madly; all in vain." Then, according to a *New York Herald* reporter, for a few minutes they were ridden around the arena while the vast crowd "roared and shrieked with delight."<sup>52</sup> A day or two later two Italian horsemen attempted to ride Colonel Cody's bucking horses and after several seconds one rider succeeded, but the other finally gave up. "This cannot be called much of a victory over the American cowboys," concluded a reporter of the contest.<sup>53</sup>

During the Rome engagement the entire Wild West troupe appeared with the celebrants of the twelfth anniversary of the coronation of Pope Leo XIII. The Indians, cowboys, and western personalities, who had permission to appear without swallowtail coats,<sup>54</sup> were in sharp contrast to the brilliant uniforms of the



Swiss Guard and the elaborate dress of the Papal Court, Diplomatic Corps, and prominent guests. The entrance of the Wild West troupe was startling. "Suddenly a tall, chivalrous figure appeared at the entrance and all eyes were turned toward him. It was 'Buffalo Bill.' With a sweep of his great sombrero he saluted the chamberlains and then strode between the guards with his partner, Nate Salsbury. Next came Buck Taylor, who towered hugely above the tallest men in the palace, his long hair tied back on his shoulders; then came 'Broncho Bill' in buckskin, and after him trooped the cowboys, splashed with mud and picturesque beyond description."<sup>55</sup>

Everywhere in Italy the Wild West was greeted with fanatic rapture. The cowboys, Buffalo Bill, and the colorful, blanket-clad Indians kept the spectators wild with excitement.<sup>56</sup> Enthusiastic praise—*Belissimo uomo! Magnifico! superbo! Boofalo Beel!*—echoed from city to city. Diocletian's arena at Verona witnessed cowboys in big hats and chaps in place of nude



<sup>50</sup> *El Diario de Barcelona*, 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 10 January 1890, pp. 98, 146, 196, 241, 289, 306, 457, respectively.

<sup>51</sup> *La Vanguardia*, 21, 22 January 1890; "Buffalo Bill" at Naples," *New York Herald*, 26 January 1890; *El Diario de Barcelona*, 22 January 1890, p. 982.

<sup>52</sup> "Roman Wild Horses Tamed by Cowboys," *New York Herald*, 5 March 1890.

<sup>53</sup> "Italian Cowboys and Bronchos," *ibid.*, 3 March 1890.

<sup>54</sup> "The Pope and the Kaiser," *ibid.*, 3 March 1890.

<sup>55</sup> "Buffalo Bill in the Vatican," *ibid.*, 4 March 1890. Cf. Burke, "Buffalo Bill," pp. 244-46. See Salsbury, "The Origin of the Wild West Show," pp. 211-14.

<sup>56</sup> "Buffalo Bill in Milan," *New York Herald*, 4 April 1890; "Buffalo Bill in Rome," *ibid.*, 21 February 1890.

gladiators or Christian martyrs. Furthermore, one observer ruminated that "as the last horse of the last cowboy disappeared from the arena after the 'saluto finale,' the small boys of the audience, after the fashion of small boys at a show, swarmed down the steps into the arena, and we wondered as we went away if after those bloody spectacles for which the edifice was built the Veronese boys of eighteen centuries ago had done the same."<sup>57</sup>

The same enthusiasm greeted the Wild West as it moved north, showing in many German cities, including Munich, Berlin, Bonn, Coblenz, Dresden, Hamburg, Bremen, Stuttgart, and Strassburg where it closed 26 October 1890. During the European tour of twenty months Buffalo Bill had achieved a reputation for which every showman lusts.<sup>58</sup>

The Paris bureau of the *New York Herald* announced on 25 October that Buck Taylor had left the show in Germany with intentions not to return and was now in Paris, where "his giant figure and flapping sombrero are seen daily on the Boulevards." The correspondent noted that Taylor had been Buffalo Bill's chief assistant for twelve years but now "it is rumored that he intends to organize a company of Indians and cowboys himself."<sup>59</sup>

After wintering in Benfelden, Alsace, the tour continued that following spring through Germany in the cities of the upper Rhine, then moved into Belgium, and finally to Great Britain for exhibitions during the summer and fall, mainly in the northern parts of that country as well as in Wales and Scotland. One enthusiastic reporter for the *Liverpool Mercury*, aroused by the daring feats he had witnessed, editorialized that "Captain Mayne Reed and Fenimore Cooper have in various works depicted with realistic effect the life of a frontiersman, but a work of fiction necessarily pales in effect before the actual performances of the very men who have been mixed up with, and some of whom are the heroes of, many a blood-stained frontier fight with the children of the West and their white brothers."<sup>60</sup>

Another admiring reporter wrote that "as I wandered alone among the tents cowboys of the Far West, wearing sombreros on their heads, hurried on errands from place to place. Those cow-

boys had never been accustomed to hold long converse with people. Doubtless, for many long months at a time, they have dwelt with their cattle on the wide prairie, without seeing any human being. In answer to my questions they would only give a curt reply, as if shy, and then hurry on their business."<sup>61</sup>

After wintering in Glasgow, the show was again on the road and opened the London season at Earl's Court in April 1891 in conjunction with the International Horticultural Exhibition. Nate Salsbury added a number of gauchos and Cossacks to the riding troupe who seemed "to be quite at ease among cowboys, Mexicans, Indians, bucking horses, and buffaloes."<sup>62</sup> On 7 June another command performance was held on the tennis grounds at Windsor Castle where Her Majesty Queen Victoria "admired the daring and brilliant riding of the cowboys best of all, and was especially delighted with their work on the mettlesome, bucking ponies."<sup>63</sup> The cowboys, without a doubt, were great favorites with the spectators. One of their most popular acts billed as "Cowboy Fun" included picking handkerchiefs off the ground and roping wild horses; however, "it is the 'buckjumping' which causes the sightseers to shout and clap their hands and laugh as only English men and women, and children can laugh. There is not a dull countenance to be seen throughout the immense throng."<sup>64</sup>

After a five-months run in London the tour ended on 12 October 1892, and the entire company sailed for home three days later.<sup>65</sup> But Buffalo Bill's Wild West tour of Europe did not end with that of 1892; ten years lapsed, however, before it returned to the scene of its triumphs abroad. "In its unspoiled form the Wild West show was both a history and a symbol."<sup>66</sup> By this time many imitators had appeared who cashed in on the established success. However, they were inferior enterprises and, in the long run, were an undermining factor of genuine Wild West shows. Furthermore, carnival and circus acts were gradually infiltrating the performances.<sup>67</sup>

<sup>57</sup> "Cowboys in Old Verona," *New York Times*, 18 May 1890, p. 17. Cf. Burke, "Buffalo Bill," pp. 243-44.

<sup>58</sup> "Buffalo Bill in Bavaria," *New York Herald*, 21 April 1890; "Buffalo Bill at Dresden," *ibid.*, 2 June 1890; "Buffalo Bill at Hamburg," *ibid.*, 24 August 1890; "Buffalo Bill in Bremen," *ibid.*, 10 September 1890; "A Cry from the Wild West" [Stuttgart], *ibid.*, 6 October 1890; "Buffalo Bill," *ibid.*, 15 October 1890; "Buffalo Bill's Wild West" [Strassburg], *ibid.*, 27 October 1890.

<sup>59</sup> "The 'Wild West' Show," *ibid.*, 26 October 1890.

<sup>60</sup> "Buffalo Bill" in *Liverpool*, *Liverpool Mercury*, 7 July 1891.

<sup>61</sup> "The 'Wild West' in Cardiff," *Evening Express* (Cardiff), 23 September 1891.

<sup>62</sup> "Buffalo Bill's Cossacks," *Era*, 4 June 1892.

<sup>63</sup> "Buffalo Bill at Windsor," *New York Times*, 26 June 1892, p. 5.

<sup>64</sup> "Royalty at the Horticultural Exhibition," *Daily Telegraph* (London), 9 May 1892. Cf. "A True Love Story," *Fort Worth, Texas Live Stock Journal*, 20 September 1890, and "A Private View of Buffalo Bill," *Globe and Traveller*, 2 May 1887.

<sup>65</sup> "Wild West Show: London Engagement Ended," *New York Times*, 13 October 1892, p. 5.

<sup>66</sup> Johnston, "Passing of the Wild West," p. 41.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 39-42. Cf. Sell and Weybright, *Buffalo Bill and the Wild West*, pp. 231-33.

In 1897, after the retirement of Salsbury, Buffalo Bill's Wild West was billed as "An Ethnological, Anthropological and Entymological Congress—Greatest Since Adam." It was now managed by James A. Bailey, the circus entrepreneur who convinced Cody that he could play one-night stands. The Congress of Rough Riders of the World was accompanied by a conglomerate of unrelated attractions of the side-show variety, so common to the circus.<sup>68</sup>

Between 1903 and 1906 this combination of Wild West and circus made its last European tour. An absence of a decade had not dimmed the affection for, and the popularity of, Colonel Cody. Said the *Bristol Echo*: "It is a tribute to the distinction of his career and character that he can come back to England after so long an absence, and enjoy an equal vogue. It is a truism to call his entertainment unique. There is nothing like it



*Buffalo Bill and his cowboys in London during the tour of England, Scotland, and Wales in 1903-4. This photograph was used in the programs during the continental tour of 1905-6.*

anywhere."<sup>69</sup> And, the cowboy's skill was still a source of enthusiastic admiration. Concerning it, another reporter acknowledged that "in the matter of daring riding the cowboys with their bucking bronchos, give a thrilling display. . . . No sooner does the cowboy place his foot in the stirrup than the broncho begins to rear and kick, and assume, in the most vigorous or sudden fashion, all the twists and shapes imaginable.

<sup>68</sup> Johnston, "Passing of the Wild West," p. 42.

<sup>69</sup> "Buffalo Bill," *Bristol Echo*, 20 July 1903.

Notwithstanding that, and the breakneck speed at which the broncho makes for the exit the cowboy, once in the saddle, invariably remains in it."<sup>70</sup> The first portion of this tour (1903-4) took Buffalo Bill through England, Scotland, and Wales, and, in the following two years to the continent through France, Italy, Austria, Hungary, Germany, and Belgium.<sup>71</sup>

The Wild West of 1887 had few women as participants; however, the marksmanship of Annie Oakley and Lillian Smith and the riding of Emma Lake and Georgia Duffy enthralled the spectators. Several accounts state that in 1905 Will Rogers coined for Lucille Mulhall the title of "cowgirl"; however, two years earlier (1903) the *Liverpool Daily Post* reported that "a company of 'Cowgirls,' who rode astride . . . managed their horses as cleverly as any of the sterner sex." A year later the *Glasgow Evening News* commented on the "American girls from the frontier [who gave] an attractive exhibition of equestrianism, and afford an opportunity of studying the relative merits of sitting sideways and in the male fashion, which most of the daring damsels affect with the aid of divided skirts."<sup>72</sup> During the 1905-6 visit to Berlin, Emperor William requested Cody to "select a representative cowboy and a typical Indian to sit as models for the royal portrait painter, Carl Hinkle. Buffalo Bill chose his own nephew, Henry Goodman, as the symbol of the American cowpuncher."<sup>73</sup>

By this time great changes had taken place in the production of Wild West shows in the United States, and much of their original character had disappeared. Of the various so-called Wild West shows on the road only "Pawnee Bill's Great Far East" and "The 101 Ranch Wild West" ever attempted successfully to duplicate the quality and the reputation of the prototype.<sup>74</sup> The Wild West continued to decline even after the combination of the Buffalo Bill and Pawnee Bill shows; the end finally came in mid-summer 1913. The 101 Ranch Wild West, a late starter, won the approval of western fans and played all the

<sup>70</sup> "Buffalo Bill's Shows," *Glasgow Evening News*, 2 August 1904.

<sup>71</sup> Cf. Charles E. Griffin, *Four Years in Europe with Buffalo Bill* (Albia, Iowa: Stage Publishing Co., 1908).

<sup>72</sup> Bill Burchardt, "The Fabulous Mulhalls," *Oklahoma Today* 10 (Fall 1960): 29; Russell, *The Wild West*, pp. 25, 27, 79; "The Wild West in Liverpool," *Liverpool Daily Post*, 5 May 1903; "Buffalo Bill's Show," *Glasgow Evening News*, 2 August 1903. See the use of the word cowgirl as found in the following newspapers: "The Cow Girl of Texas," *Denver Tribune-Republican*, 28 December 1884; "Cow 'Girls,'" *Fort Benton (Mont.) River Press*, 21 December 1884.

<sup>73</sup> Elizabeth Jane Leonard and Julia Cody Goodman, *Buffalo Bill: King of the Old West*, ed. James William Hoffman (New York: Library Publishers, 1955), p. 255.

<sup>74</sup> Johnston, "Passing of the Wild West," pp. 43-44.

large eastern cities, but the day of this kind of entertainment was over. In the late summer of 1931, the last of the big Wild West shows closed in Washington, D. C.<sup>75</sup>

A number of factors brought about the demise. Once the original character of the Wild West was lost, the decline set in. The imitators never offered a headliner comparable to Buffalo Bill, but a new arrival appeared and attracted spectators—the motion picture and, particularly, the western film. In addition, a more satisfying competitor, as far as western fans were concerned, made itself felt—it was the time of the great cowboy contests—the frontier days, the roundups, and the stampedes. The wild bunch of the earlier Bill show and the cowboys, now professional performers, bridged the void left in the entertainment world and filled the gap with the spectacular, wild, and rugged competitions of the cowboy sport—the rodeo!<sup>76</sup>

*A professional artist and a professor of history at the University of Colorado, CLIFFORD P. WESTERMEIER is a previous contributor to THE COLORADO MAGAZINE and an authority on the American cowboy. TRAILING THE COWBOY, one of his four books, is a study in journalism, cowboy lore, and history. Among his many published articles is "Cowboy Sexuality: A Historical No-No?" recently in the RED RIVER VALLEY HISTORICAL REVIEW 2 (Spring 1975).*

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., pp. 47-49. See news items concerning recent revival of "Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show": "Buffalo Bill Rides Again," *Empire Magazine of the Denver Post*, 19 September 1971, pp. 14-15, 17, 19; "Buffalo Bill Show Gets OK of Court on Use of Name," *Denver Post*, 4 October 1971; "Wild West Show Opens in Phoenix Despite Suits," *Boulder Daily Camera*, 9 September 1971; "Cowboy Star Monty Montana Files Bankruptcy," *Denver Rocky Mountain News*, 13 April 1972; "Wild West Show a Hit in Nebraska," *Denver Post*, 14 August 1972; "Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show," advertisement, *Denver Post*, 7 July 1974.

<sup>76</sup> Johnston, "Passing of the Wild West," pp. 49-50.

# The Elusive Quest for the "Princeton of the West"

BY NORMAN J. BENDER

The Presbyterian church has a proud tradition of support for efforts to spread the Word through the medium of the classroom. This spirit was carried into the Rocky Mountain West after the Civil War when the construction of the transcontinental railroads brought a stream of new settlers into that region. These settlers were soon followed by Presbyterian missionaries and in their ranks were many who were obsessed with a vision of establishing a "Princeton of the West."<sup>1</sup>

Certainly the Reverend Sheldon Jackson, who arrived in Colorado in 1870 to become the superintendent of Presbyterian Missions for Colorado, New Mexico, Montana, Wyoming, and Utah, had this sense of responsibility. On 1 July 1874 readers of Jackson's newspaper the *Denver Rocky Mountain Presbyterian* could note that "arrangements are far advanced for the establishment of a college in Colorado under the control of the Presbyterians. It is probable that the Preparatory Department will be opened this fall."<sup>2</sup> A few days later articles of incorporation were prepared for this new school to be known as Evans University. The school would be located at Evans, Colorado, a small farming community north of Denver. The name of the town and the university honored ex-Governor John Evans of Colorado, a man known for his charitable contributions to worthy educational endeavors.<sup>3</sup> Evans University was to be a coeducational school conducted under the auspices of the

<sup>1</sup> Princeton University in Princeton, New Jersey, dates from the granting of a charter to the Presbyterian Synod of New York on 22 October 1746.

<sup>2</sup> "Presbyterian College," *Denver Rocky Mountain Presbyterian*, 1 July 1874; originals of this newspaper are located at the Presbyterian Historical Society, Philadelphia, Pa. (hereinafter cited as PHS).

<sup>3</sup> John Evans was instrumental in the creation of Denver University in Colorado and Northwestern University in Illinois. For more on his educational interest, see Harry E. Kelsey, Jr., *Frontier Capitalist: The Life of John Evans* (Denver: State Historical Society of Colorado, 1969).

Presbyterian church. Heading a list of twenty-five proposed trustees in the articles was the name of John Evans, and the first of six actual signatures was that of Sheldon Jackson.<sup>4</sup>

Apparently Jackson and the Reverend John F. Stewart of the Evans Presbyterian Church had decided that the time had arrived to get started on a real western university as the Episcopalians, the Methodists, and the Congregationalists already were active with similar proposals in Colorado. The articles were, therefore, prepared and the announcement was made of the creation of the new school. Only then did Jackson and Stewart begin to solicit financial support and acceptance from the designated trustees for the use of their names. Not all of these gentlemen were agreeable without question to accepting this responsibility. The Reverend William E. Hamilton of the Pueblo, Colorado, church wrote to Jackson that he would be glad to serve as a trustee, but he asked: "Have you made a wise location, and have you made a good prospect of plenty [of] cash?"<sup>5</sup> The Reverend John Lowrie of the Colorado Springs church asked for more information before consenting to act as trustee. He was skeptical of a successful first-class college in Colorado if it had to be dependent on nebulous eastern aid. He also insisted that it was folly to talk of inducing students with health problems to leave eastern institutions to come to Colorado's salubrious climate to study, as it should be obvious that if they could not carry on their studies at home, "they are much too broken down to carry them on anywhere."<sup>6</sup>

The use of university in the school's name was also questioned. An eastern friend wrote to Jackson that Stewart had sent him a "Hurrah" over Evans University, and this writer suggested that the use of a less grandiloquent title, substituting college for university, might be more appropriate.<sup>7</sup> All of these suggestions were of no avail. Stewart, when informed of the concern about the name of the school, insisted that his preference for university prevail, no doubt feeling that the more illustrious label would be attractive to prospective students and financial donors. Stewart also assured Jackson that he would take full responsibility for beginning the university on 28 September 1874

and that he hoped to be able to write soon to a suitable professor to take charge.<sup>8</sup> Acting on this surety, Jackson announced in his newspaper that the school would open in September on forty acres of ground that had been set apart for the institution in the center of the town of Evans.<sup>9</sup>

In August Stewart found a "suitable professor" to head the university. He proposed to appoint the Reverend E. M. Rollo, principal of Maple Grove Academy of Stephentown, New York, a man said to have the highest recommendations from eastern educators. Stewart then revealed a rather extraordinary fact when he asked Jackson: "Have you ever felt Governor Evans' pulse on the subject of Evans University? The people in Greeley have it that he intends giving \$50,000 to our University."<sup>10</sup> Being unaware that Evans's pulse was yet to be felt, Rollo tentatively accepted the offer and then complained to Jackson that he was entirely in the dark as to the nature of the school and to the number of teachers. When Rollo finally did receive more information from Stewart regarding his job he had to admit: "It is a little more crude than even the utmost stretch of fancy could anticipate. The real state of things is so much in contrast with the advertising of the school, that it excited more than a smile."<sup>11</sup>

Advertising for the school did tend toward the grandiose. In a long article in the *Denver Rocky Mountain Presbyterian*, one writer showed that the youth of Colorado could not depend on eastern colleges for their training as traveling expenses would be prohibitive. Therefore, "the large class of intelligent men and women who are settling that region [Colorado] are anxious to secure for their sons and daughters the advantages which they left behind in older States." After reconciliation to a small beginning for the university, it was then observed: "Let it begin as a common school if you please, but by all means push up to the stature of a full-grown college as rapidly as possible." The local student body would be glad to welcome "broken down" students from the East who would be able to improve their health while studying in the invigorating environment of Colorado. And, finally, perhaps Christian men and women of means in the East might wish to contribute to a building or to the endowment of a professorship because, even though small, the school might become as Moses in the bulrushes. Moses

<sup>4</sup> "Articles of Incorporation of Evans University," 11 July 1874, copy in the miscellaneous, unpaginated material with Sheldon Jackson, "Correspondence Relating to Pioneer Presbyterian Missions West of the Mississippi and Missouri Rivers and in Alaska, 1856-1908," 26 vols., PHS (hereinafter cited as Jackson Correspondence).

<sup>5</sup> William E. Hamilton to Sheldon Jackson, 20 July 1874, Jackson Correspondence, 5:459.

<sup>6</sup> John Lowrie to Jackson, 21 July 1874, *ibid.*, p. 461.

<sup>7</sup> W. T. Wylie to Jackson, 20 July 1874, *ibid.*, p. 458.

<sup>8</sup> John F. Stewart to Jackson, 28, 29 July 1874, *ibid.*, pp. 466-67.

<sup>9</sup> "Presbyterian College," *Denver Rocky Mountain Presbyterian*, 29 July 1874.

<sup>10</sup> *Denver Rocky Mountain Presbyterian*, 23 September 1874; Stewart to Jackson, 17 August 1874, Jackson Correspondence, 5:476.

<sup>11</sup> E. M. Rollo to Jackson, 2, 14 September 1874, *ibid.*, pp. 491, 498.

seemed very insignificant in his infancy, but later "at the head of God's hosts . . . he became a leader in whom the whole world was blessed."<sup>12</sup>

Ex-Governor Evans's intentions were eventually revealed in an address before a meeting in Denver of the Presbyterian Synod of Colorado where he called for support from all churches in Colorado for a Union University to be located in Denver.<sup>13</sup> Without Evans's endorsement or financial contribution Stewart's university did not open as planned in September 1874, and Rollo finally declined the leadership post. Stewart did not give up at once, and he wrote later to Jackson that he was negotiating with a graduate of Oberlin College in Ohio to head his proposed university. However, the continued lack of financial support apparently thwarted these plans and Evans University remained forever an unfulfilled dream.<sup>14</sup>

The failure of this early educational effort by Presbyterians in Colorado could have disheartened other like-minded planners for many years. However, a new incentive for creating institutions of higher education in the West came in the 1880s. At the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in 1882, the Standing Committee on Education explained that there were probably enough of these schools in the older states, but in the newer states and territories west of the Mississippi River such institutions should be speedily established and endowed through the united efforts of the whole church.<sup>15</sup> With the hope that more candidates for the Presbyterian ministry might come from this expansion, a Special Committee on Education was formed to plan for implementation of this proposal. In the following year this committee recommended the creation of a Board of Aid for Colleges and Academies to "have in charge the interests of higher education as connected with the Presbyterian Church" and, perhaps to show its special concern for western institutions, the offices for this new board were removed from the church headquarters in Philadelphia to a place way out West—Chicago, Illinois. The committee concluded that the Presbyterian church could not simply take care of her own, but "she is in the world for aggression and conquest; and, as we have seen, she must widely

pervade the atmosphere with intelligence if she would find wide acceptance of her doctrine and polity."<sup>16</sup>

The appearance of militant rhetoric in discussions about the responsibility of this church in the academic world was not at all unusual, and with this new impetus perhaps the most ambitious attempt to establish a Presbyterian college in the Rocky Mountain West took place at Denver, Colorado. Members of the Presbytery of Denver petitioned the Colorado Synod in 1882 for authorization to create a college in their state, with the thought that this choice plum would surely be located in the metropolis of the state, namely Denver.<sup>17</sup> But, to the chagrin of the Denver Presbyterians, the synod in 1883 was persuaded to place its College of the Southwest in the small town of Del Norte in southern Colorado.<sup>18</sup> Some of the Denverites had already prepared a slate of trustees, a certificate of incorporation, and a code of bylaws for their proposed school, which was to be named the Westminster University of Colorado. Undaunted by the action of the synod, they now sought ways to build their Westminster University with their own resources.

The means to finance the plan were hard to come by, but a glimmer of hope finally appeared in 1888 when it was noted at a meeting of the Synod of Colorado that there had been received "certain propositions from businessmen of Denver, offering under specified conditions land and money towards a college in Denver."<sup>19</sup> The specified conditions must have been such that the synod shied away from official acceptance of the plan, for it was not until 1891 that it was announced that the long awaited Presbyterian college in Denver would be constructed as part of a private, real estate, development scheme. It was revealed that a college syndicate had acquired or had options on 640 acres north of Denver, where a new educational suburb would be created.<sup>20</sup>

The financing for this elaborate concept was to come from private promoters who contemplated profits from the sale of residential lots in the city, which were expected to grow up around the great cathedral of learning. A promotional prospectus for the college and the envisioned community lauded the

<sup>12</sup> W. T. Wylie, "The College at Evans, Colorado," *Denver Rocky Mountain Presbyterian*, 16 September 1874. Wylie suggested optimistically: "There may be more than one hundred students gathered around its professors as soon as they are fairly established and ready for work."

<sup>13</sup> "Minutes of the Synod of Colorado," 22 September 1874, 1:33, PHS.

<sup>14</sup> Stewart to Jackson, 2 February 1876, Jackson Correspondence, 6:794.

<sup>15</sup> *Minutes of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America* (New York: Presbyterian Board of Publications, 1882), p. 63; these minutes are published annually.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 1883, pp. 585, 589.

<sup>17</sup> "Minutes of the Synod of Colorado," 25-28 April 1882, 1:74-75.

<sup>18</sup> For a discussion of the life and the death of the College of the Southwest, see Norman J. Bender, "A College Where One Ought to Be," *The Colorado Magazine* 49 (Summer 1972): 196-218.

<sup>19</sup> "Minutes of the Synod of Colorado," 4 December 1888, 1:460. For brief comments on Westminster University, see Andrew F. Murray, *The Skyline Synod: Presbyterianism in Colorado and Utah* (Denver: Golden Bell Press, 1971), pp. 38-40; "Westminster University," *Coloradan* 1 (15 June 1892): 10-11; *ibid.*, 2 (1 March 1893): 10-11.

<sup>20</sup> *Denver Rocky Mountain News*, 14 June, 19 August 1891.

appearance of the college building, claiming that on its completion it would be the "Pride of the West." In an area far removed from the smoke of the city, the pure air was credited with the ability to rebuild broken constitutions and to impart to the residents and the students of Westminster health, vigor, and a keenness of intellect. In conclusion it was promised that the promoters would surround the university with all of the elevating influences of a Christian community. The suburb would be made "a home for invalids, capitalists and their families, where they may live, rear, and educate their children, free from the gross influence of a rushing, money making, commercial, and manufacturing city."<sup>21</sup>

A huge, red sandstone building to house the university was built, and when completed it had a frontage of 160 feet and a depth of 80 feet, a height of 3 full stories, and a tower of 175 feet. The cost of the building was first presumed to be \$80,000, but a Denver newspaper insisted that the college buildings and projected improvements to the property would entail, eventually, an expenditure over \$1,000,000.<sup>22</sup> At the dedication ceremonies on 6 June 1892 the featured speaker, the Reverend John S. McIntosh, a prominent official of the American Society for the Extension of University Teaching, told his audience that it was faced

with a great war, not of bayonets and battlefields, but of brains and books. He rejoiced that Presbyterians were already facing up to this conflict from the pulpit and in politics, and the new Westminster University would now add influence where it also was needed, in the professorate. Young men and women would be taken hold of and carried up to higher and broader ways, and those who had selected such an appropriate location as the Denver area were commended, as Denver would surely soon become the strategic crossroads of all America.<sup>23</sup>

The Synod of Colorado continued to disassociate itself officially from this promotion. On one occasion the synod did acknowledge the kindness of the Westminster trustees in providing a free excursion to the site of the university, but it was emphasized later that "certain Presbyterians of Colorado, independent of formal presbyterial or synodical endorsements, undertook the enterprise."<sup>24</sup> In any event the severe financial panic of 1893 brought the entire speculative artifice to an abrupt halt. For a decade the great red building would sit in isolated splendor on its desolate location on the open prairie. However, in 1895 a Presbyterian minister touring in Colorado was inspired to write to the secretary of the Board of Aid for Colleges and Academies: "Have you heard of Westminster University, Denver? There is a fine building, already complete, about 300 acres of land attached to the scheme. Worth something! A considerable part of the same tract sold at \$1,000 per acre in five acre lots. This property with \$90,000 mortgage on it can be had, possibly, for the Presbyterian Church and the mortgage can be paid off."<sup>25</sup>

The Board of Aid did not rush to swallow this bait. On the contrary, in October 1898 the secretary of the board wrote to a friend.

We have watched the proposed Westminster University from its inception with much interest. I spent the 28th of last month in Denver by Presbytery, conferring with many brethren. . . . They regard the outlook as perfectly hopeless, not believing that the institution will open, or that it could, in



<sup>21</sup> "Westminster," Board of Aid for Colleges and Academies, Correspondence [1892], file RG-32-31-10, PHS (hereinafter cited as Board of Aid Correspondence).

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*; *Denver Republican*, 16 January 1893. A later purchaser of the property stated that the main building "was designed by one of the nation's most prominent architects, Stanford White, and cost \$200,000" (Arthur K. White, *Informing Our Friends: Story of Westminster University and Education at Bellevue College* [privately published, n.d.], p. 3).

<sup>23</sup> "Westminster's Cornerstone," 6 June 1892, George Darley Scrapbooks, 1:58 (microfilm), Western History Department, Norlin Library, University of Colorado. Originals in library, Adams State College, Alamosa, Colorado.

<sup>24</sup> "Minutes of the Synod of Colorado," 18 October 1892, 2:264; "Westminster University," *Church Chimes* (Pueblo, Colorado) 4 (April 1907): 2.

<sup>25</sup> Willis A. Craig to Edward Ray, 15 August 1895, Board of Aid Correspondence, file RG-32-31-10.

the present location, be reached by students. They think that money given to it, unless half-a-million should be given, will go to pay interest on the hopelessly large debt on the building. They say that lots there cannot be sold at any price, unless to unsuspecting Eastern investors, and that nobody will live in that region for many years to come.<sup>26</sup>

Perhaps hoping to counter this pessimism, a writer for the *Denver Times* in 1899 offered the assurance that Westminster University would not be abandoned, all reports to the contrary notwithstanding. It was observed that the building was entirely complete, and it was one of the finest in the country, without exception.<sup>27</sup>

Early in 1903 the Reverend Robert F. Coyle, a former moderator of the General Assembly and then pastor of the Central Presbyterian Church of Denver, took a personal interest in the Westminster project. He wrote to the Board of Aid for advice with the added revelation: "We have a proposition from the present owners to turn it over to the Presbyterian Church for educational purposes, absolutely unencumbered; that is, to turn over the building and 120 acres of land."<sup>28</sup> The secretary of the board responded at once, agreeing that Denver would be a very good place for a Presbyterian college, but, although the Westminster building sounded very fine, "it has been the common, sometimes fatal, often very serious, blunder of such schools to get too far away from population centers." This reply concluded with the advice to keep any operation small for a few years and to accept no gift of land and buildings until there was an adequate endowment or else a successful school in actual operation.<sup>29</sup>

These cautious admonitions fell on deaf ears. A press release immediately following this exchange proclaimed: "Denver Will Get College—Trustees of old Westminster College . . . offered the entire plant to the Board as a free gift." A short time later it was announced that the new university "will start with \$1,000,000 behind it. . . . Dr. Coyle is to leave Monday for the East to interest rich men of the denomination in the enterprise."<sup>30</sup> At least a few of the local readers of these joyous

tidings, like the Board of Aid, were moved to advise restraint. One writer warned that the Methodist university in Denver had been located too far out and that "Presbyterians should not be led into the mistakes that their brethren have. It should not be necessary to enter into a land speculation to secure a site." Another correspondent from Colorado Springs, after noting that Denver and its vicinity already had creditable private and state institutions of higher learning, offered the thought that "the moral atmosphere of any other community in the state is superior to that of Denver, and surely the trustees of the college ought to take that matter into consideration in locating such an institution."<sup>31</sup>

Certainly Coyle was not dissuaded by suggestions that some of the state institutions already established might serve his purpose. When interviewed in the spring of 1903 he was reported to have said: "The church is in perfect sympathy with the state universities, but we feel that the work of our denominational universities will fill a place which the state universities cannot where they are supported by all kinds of people, Jews, agnostics, etc."<sup>32</sup> But the entire matter drifted once again from this point until 1905 when the Reverend Thomas Kirkwood, synodical superintendent of home missions for Colorado, revealed a possible explanation for continued delay. He informed the Board of Aid that the property was supposed to be in the hands of one man, but it was later found "that this gentleman could not secure a clear title . . . and that is the unfortunate condition of affairs today."<sup>33</sup>

The "unfortunate condition" at Westminster did not deter the Synod of Colorado from following its own path to locating a Presbyterian college somewhere in Colorado. The previous effort to establish a college in the southern part of the state at Del Norte had now failed, and at the synod meeting in 1905 a committee was appointed to consider the feasibility of making another attempt elsewhere. One suggestion, to endorse the already existing Colorado College, supported by the Congregational Church at Colorado Springs, brought a quick

wealthy lady in Pittsburgh had not as yet been heard from, but she would surely give \$100,000 and "the proposition is backed by the First National Bank and is to be relied upon."

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 11 February, 11 March 1903.

<sup>27</sup> Coyle quoted, *ibid.*, 17 June 1903. Coyle also stated that he would be calling on Andrew Carnegie to contribute to the good cause.

<sup>28</sup> Thomas C. Kirkwood to James S. Dickson, 15 July 1905, Board of Aid Correspondence, file RG-32-31-10; Kirkwood confessed in this letter that he was a member of a Board of Trustees headed by Coyle, and he was anxious to resign, "but we have never had a meeting at which a resignation could be acted upon."

<sup>26</sup> Ray to George Payson, 5 October 1898, *ibid.*, file RG-32-38-8.

<sup>27</sup> *Denver Times*, 28 July 1899. This writer also revealed that \$181,600 had been borrowed in 1896 on the property, but a representative of the institution was now traveling in the East to raise funds, and "he has a great many conditional pledges for large sums."

<sup>28</sup> Robert F. Coyle to Ray, 2 February 1903, Board of Aid Correspondence, file RG-32-31-10.

<sup>29</sup> Ray to Coyle, 4 February 1903, *ibid.*, file RG-32-39-5.

<sup>30</sup> *Denver Times*, 9 February, 10 March 1903. The latter article also included the comment that a

retort from the Board of Aid. The secretary of the board asserted that he could not look with the slightest favor upon the plan of cooperation with the work of Colorado College, for "Colorado is a big enough state and a big enough synod to have its own Presbyterian institution."<sup>34</sup> The final decision on this matter was scheduled for the synod meeting of 4 May 1906. Repeating the advice to refrain from association with the Congregational church to provide a college education for Presbyterians, the secretary of the Board of Aid wrote to a prospective Colorado delegate that "I hope you will do everything in your power to hinder a movement that would make a college for Colorado dependent on a condition of the raising of a great sum of endowment before the work could be begun."<sup>35</sup>

At this point a Colorado Presbyterian might be excused for expressing an air of bewilderment regarding the wishes of the Board of Aid. Three years earlier its advice had been to go slow, start small, and have an adequate endowment in hand at the beginning. Now it seemed to be endowment be damned—full speed ahead! The earlier advice had pertained to a hazardous speculation in real estate without sanction of the Colorado Synod, whereas by 1906 the situation required a positive and immediate reaction to those apostates who seemed to suggest subordination of Presbyterian standards in an association with an educational project of a rival denomination.<sup>36</sup>

The result of the synod's action in 1906 may not have been exactly what the Board of Aid, and a number of Colorado Presbyterians, hoped to attain. After the synod meeting the board was advised by a Denverite, with a note of exultation, that "We won out for Westminster as the college location." A coalition of southern Colorado delegates had fought hard for a location in that part of the state, preferably in Pueblo, but the final vote favored Denver and the Westminster site, fifty-seven to forty-two.<sup>37</sup> Swallowing any disappointment, the secretary of the board sent congratulations and assurances that the location near Denver was probably the best one after all.<sup>38</sup> So the long avoided union of the ill-starred Westminster project and the official

bodies of the Presbyterian church was finally consummated, to the joy of some and to the very reluctant acquiescence of others.

As the wheels began to turn to get the university underway, the selection of the Reverend Joseph Weaver as the first president was viewed by some as unwise. Although a man of excellent reputation in his pastoral calling, he was also the pastor of the First Presbyterian Church of Pueblo, and he had been associated with the fight to get the college site for his city. Hopes that his appointment might mollify the losers in this struggle would not be realized in the later controversy. The selection for president of the Board of Trustees went to James D. Husted, a Denver businessman who was described as being "associated and acquainted with many capitalists and financiers who may be influenced by the contagion of his own enthusiasm to make generous contributions and bequests to the institution."<sup>39</sup>

The long dormant Westminster University was to open finally for classes in September 1907, and the time prior to that date was spent in clearing title to the property, in publicizing the coming event, and in raising money. The question of clear title was evidently resolved quietly by legal action behind the scenes, as the topic was no longer discussed in correspondence between the college officials and the Board of Aid. As for publicity, the remarks in one Presbyterian publication indicated that the faculty would be of top quality, with men of national reputation on the staff. The curriculum would be comparable to that of the finest liberal institutions in the nation, leading to degrees in classical, literary, philosophical, and scientific fields. Bible study would most certainly be part of the curriculum, and the Bible "must command from its teachers a consideration other than that accorded to an antiquated and superceded book. Its integrity must be maintained, not maligned." In the matter of accommodations for students, it seemed to be highly probable that when the school opened there would be campus dormitories for the convenience of the student body.

Continuing in this vein, it was noted that for those who did not choose to live on campus, a railroad operating from Denver had a station adjacent to the university grounds, and the future extension of an electric streetcar line from Denver would place that service even nearer to the doors of the school. Prospective

<sup>34</sup> Kirkwood to Dickson, 21 October 1905, and Dickson to Kirkwood, 8 November 1905, *ibid.*, file RG-32-40-2.

<sup>35</sup> Dickson to Kirkwood, 20 April 1906, *ibid.*, file RG-32-31-10.

<sup>36</sup> A change in secretaries for the Board of Aid from Edward Ray to James Dickson in the interval also may have contributed to this revised expression of board policy.

<sup>37</sup> W. S. Rudolph to Dickson, 19 October 1906, Board of Aid Correspondence, file RG-32-31-10.

<sup>38</sup> Dickson to Rudolph, 29 October 1906, *ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> *Church Chimes*, p. 3. Coyle felt it necessary, even before the school opened, to charge Weaver with making mistake after mistake, and "it would be almost impossible with the way things are going, to retain on the Board of Trustees any of the Denver men" (Coyle to Dickson, 3 June 1907, Board of Aid Correspondence, file RG-32-31-10).

students were reminded that "physicians and educators are pronounced in their verdict that at such elevations as Westminster University commands, one mile above sea level, heart and nerves best perform their functions in unison with brain and mind in the duties of college life." And, finally, in order to quickly make the school self-supporting, for the first year a resolution was announced to secure a one million dollar endowment with the encouragements already offered giving inducements for "great expectations."<sup>40</sup>

Endowment expectations may have been stimulated by a report from Coyle that a woman of wealth from the East, whose name he was not at liberty to divulge, had offered \$100,000 if the school would be religious in character and would be patterned after the system in vogue at Princeton University.<sup>41</sup> It was left to Husted, as chairman of the trustees, to face up to the immediate challenge of fund raising, and he confessed, perhaps just a bit dolefully: "I am today considering the problem of how to present this enterprise in a sufficiently favorable light to the citizens of Colorado and of the U.S. as to prevail upon them to separate themselves from a million and a quarter of money."<sup>42</sup>

The general tone of optimism and enthusiasm in most of these remarks seemed to augur well for the success of the school, but in a brief two years after its opening the faculty was in open revolt, the school was faced with financial disaster, and the ability and the integrity of leading university officials was seriously questioned. The school did open in September 1907 but not in its facilities at the Westminster location. Repairs to that building were still being carried on and the anticipated electric streetcar line had not been extended. Therefore, classes for the first year were conducted in Denver at the Central Presbyterian Church with an attendance of eleven "preparatory" students and twenty-two "college" students.<sup>43</sup>

Early in 1908 the trustees and the promoters of the Westminster property pressed hard for a commitment to move the classes for the next academic year out to the suburban campus. This movement was strongly opposed by faculty members who pointed out that the student housing at Westminster was still

<sup>40</sup> *Church Chimes*, pp. 2-4.

<sup>41</sup> Coyle quoted, "Westminster University," n.d., clipping file, Western History Department, Denver Public Library.

<sup>42</sup> James Husted to Dickson, 15 March 1907, Board of Aid Correspondence, file RG-32-31-10. At about this time the Board of Aid received from Husted's office a pennant of Westminster University with the thought that "you might like to have the colors of the Princeton of the West about your office" (C. W. Fairchild to Dickson, n.d., *ibid.*).

<sup>43</sup> Husted to Dickson, 13 November 1907, *ibid.*; "Enrollment of Westminster University, 1907," *ibid.*

not underway and that the plans to place students in the upper floor of the college building or with families in homes widely scattered in the vicinity were not satisfactory. Besides, with the transportation facilities from Denver still haphazard, expensive, and time consuming, many in the already meager student body would have to drop out if they had to attend their classes outside the city.<sup>44</sup> However, the trustees prevailed on this issue, and it was announced on 17 September 1908 that Westminster University now occupied its own campus and that success was assured. About sixty students were in attendance and "today, for the first time, water will be installed in the building, the engineers having completed their work last night."<sup>45</sup>

The controversy over this issue exemplified a growing division between the trustees on the one hand and President Weaver and the faculty on the other. Monetary problems would ultimately cause this ill feeling to erupt into open rebellion. A financial statement for 1908 showed the income from tuition, gifts, and the Board of Aid to be \$13,329.48. Expenses, however, totaled \$21,198.24 of which the major part was the salary category of \$18,300.00. Faculty salaries were in arrears, and the secretary of the Board of Aid expressed great concern over financial matters at the university. He revealed that he had heard that there was a certain degree of distrust in the conduct of the chairman of the Board of Trustees and that word was being passed around in Denver that no pledges of any kind should be placed in that individual's hands.<sup>46</sup>

This very unfortunate kind of rumor mongering did nothing to help the school's financial reputation, but it was true that the attempts to profit from the sale of land in the area continued to prove irresistible to some of the trustees. The original developer of the tract congratulated the chairman of the Board of Trustees at this time on his foresight in organizing a new Westminster Realty Company to facilitate these sales. For surely the time was not far distant when Westminster would indeed become the Princeton of the West and would rank with Princeton, Yale, and Harvard. These encouraging thoughts were supplemented with the declaration that there were doubtlessly thousands of young

<sup>44</sup> "To the Board of Trustees of Westminster University," 15 January 1908, *ibid.* The earlier description of rail facilities as "adjacent" to the university did not mention the fact that it was over a mile to the nearest station on the electric or steam lines.

<sup>45</sup> *Denver Rocky Mountain News*, 17 September 1908.

<sup>46</sup> "[Financial] Information Blank—1908," and Dickson to E. W. Work, 9 December 1908, Board of Aid Correspondence, file RG-32-31-10. Dickson was discouraged at the lack of financial contributions from Coyle's Central Church, and he noted that only \$1.08 had been contributed to the university during the entire 1907-8 school year (Dickson to Husted, 28 September 1908, *ibid.*).



*Westminster University in 1893, still standing today.*

men in New York alone whose parents were financially able to give them a college education, but these potential students were not strong enough to undertake that challenge in the East, and surely they would eventually come to Colorado and get their health and education at the same time. The conclusion to all of this optimism brought the reluctant admission: "I must add that I am at the present time, and generally have been all my life, very long on enthusiasm and very short of actual cash. I cannot send you a check now."<sup>47</sup>

In 1909 many of the faculty found it necessary to bring their grievances into the open. They prepared a lengthy narrative recapping the events in the history of the school. Included therein were charges that monetary subscriptions publicized by the trustees were not bona fide, that expectations from land development were hopelessly entangled in various subcorporate devices, that the decision to move out of Denver was absurd in light of the transportation and housing deficiencies, and that a movement to reduce drastically faculty salaries, already in arrears, was reprehensible and illegal. It was also charged that no public accountant had ever audited the books of the school,

that university checks were being issued by the private company of the chairman of the Board of Trustees, and that statements on these matters made by him were "inadequate and misleading." This long lament ended with the challenge: "Is it not time that this farce should come to an end?"<sup>48</sup>

The farce did indeed come to an end—but only for the insurgent faction. President Weaver instituted legal action on behalf of the faculty against the trustees to obtain satisfaction on unpaid salaries. The suit failed, and Weaver and the mutinous faculty members were dismissed from their positions. Subsequent publicity for the school early in 1910 assured readers that a thorough reorganization had taken place during the past year and then, after a lengthy pitch again for the sale of lots in the college community, the assurance came that "those closest to the management of affairs expect Westminster to realize large success in the future."<sup>49</sup>

This realization was never attained. At various times in succeeding years, reports would appear of new campaigns to obtain endowments. It would seem that at least enough was raised through these efforts to wipe the slate clean of old encumbrances because it was announced in 1912 that the old debts of the school had been completely cleared and that "its permanency is now assured."<sup>50</sup> But another ill-advised decision of school officials hastened its final demise, when, for the school year 1915-16, it was proclaimed that young ladies would no longer be admitted, as this policy had a tendency to divert the students of both sexes from their studies. On making this decision the trustees were "only following the more advanced thought in matters of instruction."<sup>51</sup> With the entry of the United States into the war in Europe in 1917 the concept of a boy's school also failed. Prospective male students were attracted to the military, enrollment dwindled, and the school closed. The building and forty acres of land were sold in 1920 to the Pillar of Fire Church for \$40,000, and an agent for the buyer commented: "To say that we found the college in a sorry condition is to speak with the utmost restraint."<sup>52</sup>

<sup>48</sup> "Facts Concerning Westminster College," 26 April 1909, *ibid.*

<sup>49</sup> *Denver Times*, 15 September 1909, 17 January, 4 February 1910.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 17 December 1909, 11 January 1910, 31 December 1911; *Denver Republican*, 5 April 1912.

<sup>51</sup> *Denver Rocky Mountain News*, 13 October 1915.

<sup>52</sup> White, *Informing Our Friends*, pp. 4-5; this observer noted that farmers in the area were keeping chickens in the basement and farm machinery on the first floor. Over one-half century later the building still stands and is operated as Bellevue College by the Pillar of Fire Church. The surrounding area is now heavily populated and is incorporated under the name Westminster.

With the benefit of hindsight in casting about today for an understanding of the eventual collapse of Westminster University, it might be noted that certain personality traits of key persons in the decision-making roles brought clashes that were detrimental to the best interests of the school. With all of the hazards to be overcome in launching this enterprise, it was essential that the team pull together and this was most certainly not the case. Surely some of the physical problems related to the college location were not effectively evaluated. For example it was, to be sure, far removed from the "gross influences" of Denver, but the reasoning that it might be so far removed as to become inaccessible to a potential Denver student body was discounted by an influential few who were entranced by the possible profits to be derived from land speculation. To be a streetcar college without a streetcar invited disaster.

The Board of Aid for Colleges and Academies could have contributed much more in the way of rational advice and, most of all, financial support. But this board was remote from the problem area, and its own financial resources were limited and uncertain. A spokesman for the board tried to excuse its minimal participation in this matter with the statement in 1909: "The Board was assured before the College was opened at Denver that Colorado, and especially Denver, would give \$10,000 to equip a building and would give strong aid toward current expenses. The Board, in view of these statements, heartily recommended the opening of the College and promised to assist in every possible way; and when it was positively determined that water and transportation were assured, it approved the occupying [of] the new building." This same spokesman was said to have concluded later that "nothing could be done in the East for the College until Colorado, and especially Denver, should show its desire for the College and its appreciation of the work by giving as it had been expected to do."<sup>53</sup>

In the final analysis most of the difficulties of the school were financial. There was no charge, beyond hints and innuendos, of actual malfeasance in positions of financial trust. There was, however, more than a little ineptness on the part of those churchmen who plotted the financial course of the school. In 1916 a member of the Presbytery of Denver was designated to report on these problems, and he concluded that the Synod of Colorado had obviously been deceived into believing that the

<sup>53</sup> Dickson quoted, "More Facts Concerning Westminster College," 1909, Board of Aid Correspondence, file RG-32-31-10.

synod had title to the property, which was not the actual case as the trustees seemed to hold title and over them the synod had no control. This investigator also remarked that he became aware of numerous corporations formed for the purpose of exploiting the property and then found "what looks to me like an intricate [*sic*] tangle of interlocking directorates." And too, the school was simply unlucky, for the serious financial panics of 1893 and 1907 came at crucial periods when attempts were being made to get things started. Anticipated contributions from some donors were undoubtedly curtailed by the ensuing lack of confidence on the national economic scene.<sup>54</sup>

Furthermore, there appeared at times an air of almost childish naïveté in the approach to these financial matters. There were always "great expectations" and assurances of "heartly support," but the previously cited statement of one prospective donor—"very long on enthusiasm and very short of actual cash"—would have provided a much more realistic basis for college planning. The use of the present-day term "credibility gap" might very well characterize these circumstances, and it would be interesting to know just how much actual cash entered the college coffers as compared to the hundreds of thousands, or even millions, that were predicted.

Still, in all fairness to the Westminster situation, it is evident that these same mistakes, or some variety thereof, were associated with college planning in general by the Presbyterian church in the Rocky Mountain West at this time. A few men were inspired to bring some form of higher education to their locale. Often these beginnings were stimulated by the presence or the threatened presence of similar institutions sponsored by other churches. Practical considerations of financial planning and student enrollment potentials were minimized or ignored. Local civic leaders were carried along to the extent of providing town lots, or pledging other support, in order to secure these schools. After plans were made and announced, there was a flurry of solicitations among local men of means and among contributors from the East. And, perhaps above all, those in the active ministry and others in administrative posts with the national church found it difficult to comprehend the realities of dollars and cents. Intricate plans for property development associated with mortgage commitments and construction costs

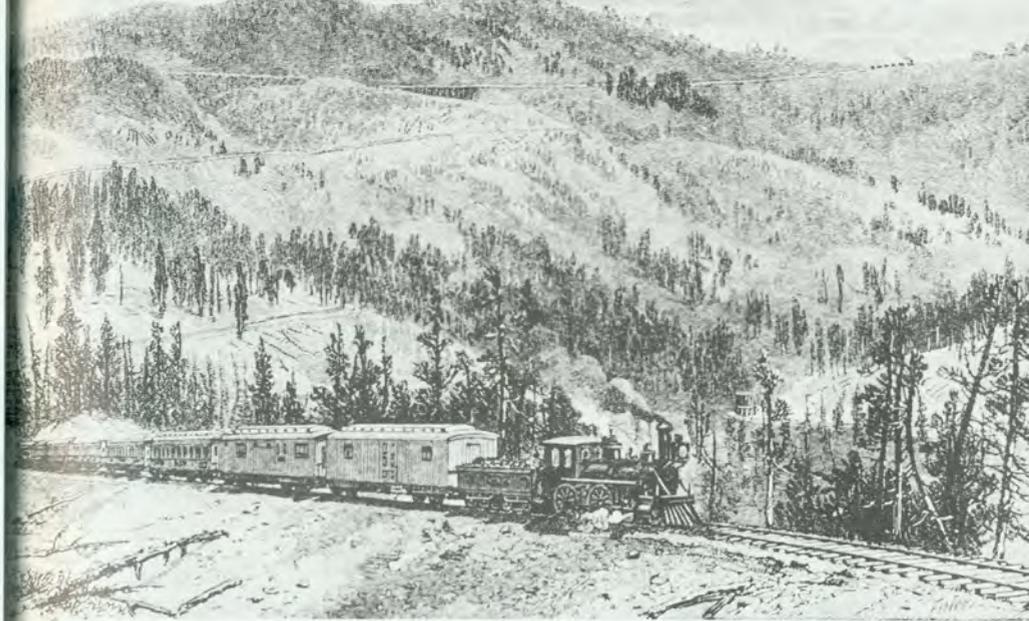
<sup>54</sup> J. Mont Travis to Robert Mackenzie, 22 September 1916, *ibid.*

became areas of confusion and bewilderment that confounded the most well meaning of men.

Presbyterian colleges in the Rockies, with the exception of the Westminster College of Salt Lake City, were not enduring successes.<sup>55</sup> Nevertheless, those who agitated for their presence also served as gadflies to local, territorial, and state governing bodies that sometimes appeared to be slothful in their support for the continuation of high quality educational programs in the West. Therefore, before dismissing these Presbyterian efforts as failures, other factors relating to the spirit of the times should be weighed in the balance. The men concerned had a goal that was very acceptable for their society, that is, to extend the benefits of Protestantism and Americanism to a relatively new area of the nation that seemed to them to retain attributes of the frontier environment. They wanted the Rocky Mountain West to become a proper addition to the national heritage as they saw it, and if the methods of utilizing the available means unintentionally defeated their anticipated ends, it would be unjust to conclude without commendation for their courage and for their faith in inevitable progress as part of the American dream.

*NORMAN J. BENDER, an assistant professor of history at the University of Colorado at Colorado Springs, holds M.A. and Ph.D. degrees (1969, 1971) from the University of Colorado. He is a previous contributor of articles on Presbyterianism to THE COLORADO MAGAZINE 47 (Spring 1970); 49 (Summer 1972).*

<sup>55</sup> Westminster College of Salt Lake City can trace its origins to the Salt Lake Collegiate Institute founded by the Presbyterian Church in 1875. It later became Sheldon Jackson College near the turn of the century and is today a thriving liberal arts college.



## Black Smoke among the Clouds

BY WALTER R. BORNEMAN

Late in the fall of 1873 a man, whose mouth was so swollen from a toothache that he was forced to suck gruel through a straw, stumbled onto the summit of an unknown and, as yet, unnamed pass on the Continental Divide of central Colorado. In his haste to get from the rugged San Juan Mountains to the nearest dentist in Denver, William Marshall discovered the pass that would become a transportation cornerstone in the development of the mineral and agricultural wealth of central Colorado.

Marshall was in command of one of three surveying parties operating as the Colorado division of the Wheeler Survey. His party had spent the summer and early fall surveying in the San Juan Mountains near present-day Silverton. All signs pointed to early snows that year, and Marshall and his men made plans to return to Denver before winter enveloped the mountains. As the party prepared to depart, Marshall came down with what he later described as "one of the worst toothaches that ever befell a mortal." His mouth became so sore and swollen that he could not open it or even move his jaw. Disenchanted with the prospect of a blacksmith extracting the tooth, Marshall made plans to

reach the nearest dentist in Denver, three hundred miles away, as quickly as possible. Forsaking the well-traveled route through the San Luis Valley as too long and circuitous, Marshall and a packer, David Mears, set out ahead of the main party and struck a line for the area of Twin Lakes in the central Sawatch Range. When early snows blocked his way in that direction, he recalled having seen another low depression over the divide during his earlier travels and started eastward toward the pass that would soon bear his name.

Marshall and Mears spent six days traveling the last twelve miles to the summit through a maze of fallen timber and deep snow. Once on the summit, however, Marshall realized that he had stumbled onto a new east to west route. No deep canyons or steep slopes came off the crest of the pass; rather, its slopes were gentle and rolling, making it inviting to wagon wheels and railroad tracks. Marshall momentarily shook off the pain of his toothache and spent a day and a night on the summit making a complete survey of the pass. His measurements of the altitude and the grade were so accurate that a scant eight years later the Denver and Rio Grande Railway used them, with but a few alterations, in building its line across the pass. Their measurements completed, Marshall and Mears pushed on to Denver and arrived four days before the main party despite the obstacles encountered. Marshall deduced that the pass had saved them 125 miles.<sup>1</sup> This fact, and Marshall's assertion that a railroad could easily be built over the gentle slopes of the pass, caused much excitement in Denver. Marshall soon became a local celebrity, although he did not celebrate until he had promptly visited a dentist and had his famous toothache relieved.

As the years passed, interest increased steadily in Marshall's pass and in the riches of the Gunnison country and the San Juan Mountains that lay beyond. On 3 August 1877, almost four years after Marshall's historic crossing, Otto Mears, the indomitable "Pathfinder of the San Juans," chartered the Marshall Pass and Gunnison Toll Road.<sup>2</sup> W. H. Nelson and George Nathrop cut the

first significant trail over the pass that same year, although it was 1879 before work began in earnest to turn the trail into a suitable road.<sup>3</sup> The finishing work on the toll road was completed during the spring of 1880, and by 15 June, W. M. Outcalt, the superintendent of the Marshall Pass work force, reported to the *Gunnison News* that the road was complete and that "all who travel it pronounce it the best road into the county."<sup>4</sup> Otto Mears, always the energetic businessman, heralded this accomplishment by running the following advertisement in the *Mountain Mail* of South Arkansas City, soon to be renamed Salida.

If you are bound for the Gunnison, take the Marshall Pass Road. The route is now open, and is by thirty miles the shortest road to Gunnison City, Pitkin, Ruby Camp, Virginia City, Hillerton, Gothic, Crested Butte and all other points in the Gunnison Country. It is only 60 miles from South Arkansas to Gunnison City. This is the most direct route to Lake City, Ouray, San Miguel, and all points in the San Juan Country. Ship your freight in care of forwarding houses at South Arkansas, and thus avoid tedious delays that are caused by other routes.

Otto Mears was not the only one announcing things to come with the opening of the Marshall Pass road. The *Mountain Mail* also reported that the Barlow and Sanderson Stage Company was inaugurating stage service between South Arkansas City and Gunnison over Marshall Pass. The article boasted of bringing stage service to the Gunnison country and reported that the stage would leave South Arkansas City at 7:00 A.M. daily, one hour after the Denver and Rio Grande Railway's overnight train from Denver would arrive. After a twelve-hour journey over Marshall Pass, the stage would arrive in Gunnison at 7:00 P.M. that same day. Indeed, the *Mountain Mail* noted, this one-day service from Denver was sure to be a big boost for the Gunnison country.<sup>5</sup> A week after the inauguration of stage service, the *Mountain Mail* reported that traffic over the pass was increasing steadily. Not only was the stage business booming but some freighters were reporting that the Marshall Pass road was the best crossing into the Gunnison country from any direction.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Thomas Dawson, "Godfather of Marshall Pass," *The Trail* (September 1920): 8-10 (based on a personal interview with William Marshall). For other comments on Marshall Pass, see Robert G. Athearn, *Rebel of the Rockies: A History of the Denver and Rio Grande Western* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1962); Walter R. Borneman, "Black Smoke among the Clouds" (B.A. thesis, Western State College of Colorado, 1974).

<sup>2</sup> At a capital cost of \$15,000, the toll road ran west from just north of Poncha Pass on Mears's Poncha Pass Toll Road, crossed Marshall Pass, and descended by way of Marshall Creek and Tomichi Creek to the budding supply center of Gunnison, a distance of sixty miles. D. H. Cummins, "A Social and Economic History of Southwestern Colorado, 1860-1948" (Ph.D. diss., University of Texas, 1951), p. 416. See also Michael Kaplan, "Otto Mears and the Silverton Northern

Railroad," *The Colorado Magazine* 48 (Summer 1971): 235-54; Kaplan, "The Toll Road Building Career of Otto Mears, 1881-87," *ibid.* 52 (Spring 1975): 151-70.

<sup>3</sup> *Gunnison News-Champion*, 6 February 1936.

<sup>4</sup> *Gunnison News*, 19 June 1880.

<sup>5</sup> *South Arkansas City Mountain Mail*, 12 June 1880.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 19 June 1880.

Meanwhile, in Gunnison, the editors of the *Gunnison News* deflated their boosterism to the point of admitting that there had been "some" criticisms of the Marshall Pass road but that they had personally been over the road and could report it to be the "best, easiest, and quickest route between Gunnison and the railroad connection at South Arkansas."<sup>7</sup> By 7 August South Arkansas City had been renamed Salida, and the *Mountain Mail* of that date did away with any reservations and stated that it was the "universal" verdict that the Marshall Pass road was not only a good road but the best in Colorado. The newspaper went on to point out that on other passes it sometimes required a good team just to haul an empty wagon up the grade, but that on Marshall Pass there were no such problems because of an easy grade all the way.<sup>8</sup>

Unfortunately, not everyone shared the optimistic views of the newspaper editors. One day, Otto Mears stopped to exchange the time of day with a couple of unlucky travelers who were stuck in a mud hole on Marshall Pass. Mears listened sympathetically and anonymously as the men spoke a profaned and impassioned denunciation of any man who would dare charge a toll for a road that was in such a condition as the one on which they were presently stuck. After Mears listened quietly to their woes, he told them that they would probably have the chance to meet Mears since he had seen the roadbuilder about ten miles back. With that, the "Pathfinder of the San Juans" rode on, apparently refusing to help the unfortunate gents out of their predicament.<sup>9</sup> Another tale of crossing Marshall Pass was related by Carrie Adell Strahorn in her account of thirty years of traveling in the West. In overdramatic detail Mrs. Strahorn recalled a journey from Salida to Gunnison that was filled with upsets and near-disasters brought about by the poor condition of the road. During the journey, she also heard one seasoned pioneer remark, "I am no tenderfoot, but an old mountaineer, used to danger and exposure, but this trip beats all, and my thoughts have been with home and God all day."<sup>10</sup>

In retrospect it would seem that actual conditions on the toll road in 1880 were somewhere in between the picture painted by the fiery boosterism of the local newspapers and the

overdramatic remembrances of a Victorian lady. As the rush to the Gunnison country continued, the Marshall Pass toll road gave Otto Mears a handsome return on his investments, and as Mears collected his tolls during the fall of 1880, more changes were in store for the pass.<sup>11</sup>

The Denver and Rio Grande Railway first entered Salida on its way north to Leadville in May 1880. Now, in the autumn of 1880, with the Leadville traffic well in hand, General William Jackson Palmer looked with covetous eyes to the wealth of the Gunnison country. Equally covetous of the wealth that lay west of the Continental Divide was John Evans. Evans already had plans to build his Denver, South Park, and Pacific Railroad from the Arkansas Valley up Chalk Creek and over Altman Pass into the Gunnison country. When the joint operating agreement between the Rio Grande and the South Park fell through, which would have allowed Rio Grande trains to operate on the South Park extension to Gunnison in exchange for concessions in the Leadville traffic of the Rio Grande, Palmer made immediate plans to build his own line into the Gunnison country. Indeed, the wealth of the Gunnison country and the prospects of a rail connection between Denver and Salt Lake City were inviting and, thus, the race was on.

Railroad fever hit Gunnison as early as May 1880, when a petition for a Denver and Rio Grande extension was circulated around town and signed by "all" county and city officials as well as some prominent citizens. In reporting the event, the *Gunnison News* predicted that Gunnison would then be blessed with two railroads.<sup>12</sup> Little did the editor know that the second railroad they were counting on, the South Park, was in for rough going at the Alpine Tunnel. Railroad talk increased, however, and on 20 July the *Denver Rocky Mountain News* reported that George H. Owens, the general agent for J. L. Sanderson and Company, had received orders to sell through tickets, Denver to Gunnison, by way of the Rio Grande trains and the Sanderson stages. The cost for a one-way trip was \$22.50.<sup>13</sup> As traffic swarmed over Marshall Pass during the summer of 1880, Sanderson charged ten to

<sup>7</sup> *Gunnison News*, 12 June 1880.

<sup>8</sup> *Salida Mountain Mail*, 7 August 1880.

<sup>9</sup> Betty Wallace, *Gunnison Country* (Denver: Sage Books, 1960), pp. 52-53.

<sup>10</sup> Carrie Adell Strahorn, *Fifteen Thousand Miles by Stage* (New York: Knickerbocker Press, 1915), p. 217.

<sup>11</sup> No records remain to provide a clue to his exact profits; however, the *Gunnison News* of 12 June 1880 did furnish information on the rates he charged. For a passage from Mears Junction on the Poncha Pass Toll Road to Gunnison, a wagon with a two-horse team was charged four dollars; a wagon with one horse was charged two dollars; a wagon with additional teams of horses cost two dollars per team; loose stock and pack animals cost twenty-five cents per head; and saddle animals cost fifty cents each.

<sup>12</sup> *Gunnison News*, 1 May 1880.

<sup>13</sup> *Denver Rocky Mountain News*, 20 July 1880.

eleven dollars for a passage from Salida to Gunnison and did a land office business as the company boasted "let the railroad come."<sup>14</sup>

And the railroad was coming! Throughout the summer of 1880, survey teams under the supervision of Robert F. Weitbrec, the construction manager of the Rio Grande, worked over Marshall Pass along Otto Mears's toll road and over Monarch Pass some fifteen miles to the north. The surveys that Weitbrec conducted showed the two passes to be remarkably similar. Based on the estimates by James McMurtie, the chief engineer, the distance from Salida to Gunnison over Monarch Pass would be eighty-six and one-half miles while the Marshall Pass route would be eighty-seven miles. Costs, which included grading and bridge construction, were estimated at \$1,133,250 for Monarch Pass and \$1,223,750 for Marshall Pass.<sup>15</sup> By late August the *Gunnison News* was speculating that the probable route would be from Salida to Poncha Springs and then over Marshall Pass by way of an 800-foot tunnel near the summit of the pass.<sup>16</sup> While the newspaper guessed correctly that Marshall Pass and not Monarch Pass would be used, the question provided for some betting and speculation on both sides of the divide.

Two key issues were involved in the final decision to choose Marshall Pass. First, while McMurtie's estimates for Monarch Pass showed its maximum grade to be 211-feet-per-mile, the same as Marshall Pass, the canyons that ran off Monarch's crest were much deeper and steeper than those on Marshall, and the road would have had more difficulty snaking its way up than along the more rolling slopes of Marshall Pass. The decisive factor, however, rested with Otto Mears. Throughout the summer wagons and stages had done a reasonable job of smoothing his toll road over Marshall Pass. Realizing that the railroad and the competitive road being built over Monarch Pass would severely cut into his profits, Mears agreed, through Weitbrec, to sell the toll road to the Denver and Rio Grande for \$13,000.<sup>17</sup> Thus, with the major portion of the route to Gunnison already graded, the Rio Grande could hope to make faster time and beat the South Park railroad to Gunnison.

<sup>14</sup> *Gunnison News*, 28 August 1880.

<sup>15</sup> Construction Records, File Folder 13, Notebook 6, pp. 111-12, Robert F. Weitbrec Collection, Documentary Resources Department, State Historical Society of Colorado, Denver (hereinafter cited as SHSC).

<sup>16</sup> *Gunnison News*, 21 August 1880.

<sup>17</sup> H. P. Bennet to H. A. Risley, 27 April 1882, Denver and Rio Grande Railroad Collection, 4307, SHSC.

In the middle of September 1880 the first concrete step in building the Gunnison branch was taken when the Rio Grande began driving piles for a bridge across the Arkansas River at Salida. By late October the bridge was completed, and on 14 November the five miles of track west to Poncha Springs were finished.<sup>18</sup> Service started to Poncha Springs on 22 November with connecting Sanderson stages running to the Gunnison country. Before winter brought construction to a halt, crews were working on the grade south from Poncha Springs to the base of Marshall Pass.

While the Denver, South Park, and Pacific would be more than a year behind the Rio Grande in entering Gunnison because of difficulties at the Alpine Tunnel, Palmer was not taking any chances as 1881 dawned. During the first week of February, workmen began grading and laying track south from Poncha Springs six miles to Owens Sawmill. By the middle of the month more than eleven hundred men and one hundred fifty teams were at work battling cold and snow as they set the ties and spiked down the rails into the frozen ground. At Owens Sawmill the railroad negotiated for land to build a depot, which soon became known as Mears.<sup>19</sup> Despite the bitter winter weather, the rails reached Mears on 26 March, and the following day trains began running to Mears, the new temporary freight and passenger terminus.<sup>20</sup> Within the week the rails were laid to Silver Creek and that construction camp became the railhead for passengers and freight as the tracklayers wound their way up the pass. At Silver Creek, renamed Shirley, the serious climbing began for the ascent of the pass, which lay 12 railroad-grade miles away and 2,200 vertical feet higher. By the middle of April, Shirley was a booming construction camp, boasting 14 large business tents, 8 of them saloons and dance halls. Tracklaying for the moment had ceased because of a shortage of rails, and while the grading continued, Shirley enjoyed the overnight prosperity of a railhead.<sup>21</sup>

As the railroad got farther west of Salida, references to the route in the *Mountain Mail* became fewer. While Salida had the consolation of becoming a key railroad center, the town obviously was envious of the fact that Gunnison would soon be the

<sup>18</sup> *Salida Mountain Mail*, 18 September, 23 October 1880.

<sup>19</sup> Gordon Chappell, "Scenic Line of the World," *Colorado Rail Annual*, No. 8 (Golden: Colorado Railroad Museum, 1970), p. 17.

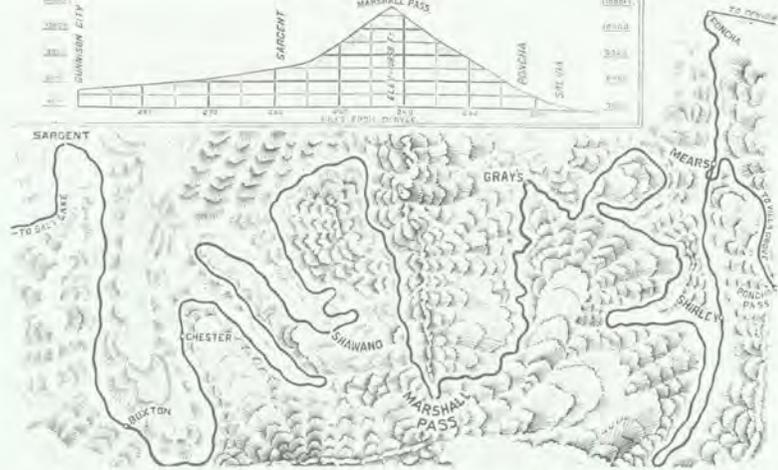
<sup>20</sup> *Salida Mountain Mail*, 19 February, 26 March 1881.

<sup>21</sup> Chappell, "Scenic Line of the World," p. 19. Silver Creek (Shirley) was located at the junction of Silver Creek and Poncha Creek and like many early towns it soon changed its name.

railhead for the wealth of the San Juans. As Gunnison eagerly looked forward to this event, the *Gunnison Review* reported early in April that large crews on the pass were "making the dirt fly." The tunnel that the *Gunnison Review* had speculated on the previous fall was not needed. Instead a fifty-foot deep cut was blasted through the hogback ridge on the summit of the pass where Marshall had huddled seven years before. Deviating from its community boosterism, the *Gunnison Review* went on to report that the toll road over Marshall Pass was in very poor condition. Spring thaws had caused snow and mud slides, making it "impossible to get wagons through." In addition, the Denver and Rio Grande was making no effort to keep up the toll road it now owned, because the railroad would soon replace it. Although the newspaper lamented about the freight that had to detour around Marshall Pass and come into Gunnison by way of Cochetopa Pass, an article the following week suggested that the condition of the road had improved considerably. As witnessed by the adventures of Carrie Strahorn and others, a Sanderson stage journey over the pass was not the safest nor the easiest undertaking known to the western traveler, but nevertheless, on 9 April three Sanderson coaches crowded with passengers braved the ride over Marshall Pass and arrived in Gunnison.<sup>22</sup>

As late as April, Gunnison was still optimistically speculating that both the Rio Grande and the South Park would arrive by the first of August. As Gunnison cheered, the railhead remained at Shirley, which boasted seventy-five tents and buildings by the middle of May.<sup>23</sup> But the railroad was moving on, and on 28 May, Green and Foody, the construction company that had the contract for laying the rails, commenced laying steel west. For Shirley it was the beginning of the end.<sup>24</sup>

On 21 June 1881, as the Sanderson coach pulled into Gunnison, the weary passengers announced that their passenger train was the first to arrive at the summit of Marshall Pass. From Shirley to the summit the scenery was sensational and to the passengers' surprise the ride had been smooth and easy. The *Gunnison News-Democrat* went on to say that "this is not the best of the news. It is positively stated by those in authority that the terminus of the Gunnison branch will be at Sargents [at the



The alignment of the Denver and Rio Grande over Marshall Pass.

foot of Marshall Pass on the west] by the Fourth of July. From Sargents to Gunnison as everybody knows is a comparatively level country, and as the larger part of the road from that point has been already graded, there is little doubt but that the whistle of the first locomotive in this valley will serenade the people of Gunnison by the first of August."<sup>25</sup> The curves and the round-about route of the road as it wound its way down the western side of the pass were such that this report proved to be overly optimistic.

On the afternoon of 16 July the first, regular, passenger train from Salida steamed into Sargents. Although travel on the roadbed was slow, to allow the track to settle and adjust, freight service was started two days later and soon Sargents was enjoying the boom of being a railhead. As Shirley slipped quietly into the role of a peaceful, little railroad siding, the *Gunnison Review* spoke in glowing terms of the boom in Sargents, which Shirley had experienced just three months before. The newspaper noted in mid-July that fifty businesses were in operation, most of them occupying tents. One man had already been killed in the roaring town, and the merchants were taking advantage of the boom, which was certain to end abruptly with the Rio Grande's arrival in Gunnison.<sup>26</sup>

On the evening of 5 August, citizens on the corner of Main Street and Tomichi Avenue in downtown Gunnison heard the long, moaning wail of a locomotive echo down the Tomichi Valley for the first time. Looking east, the group could see a little diamond-stacked engine belching black smoke, slowly nosing its way around the bluff near J. H. Haverly's ranch about a mile away. Swarms of workmen worked by lantern light throughout

<sup>22</sup> *Gunnison Review*, 2, 9 April 1881.

<sup>23</sup> Among Shirley's tents and buildings were four forwarding houses, five groceries, two clothing stores, two hotels, one drug store, three bakeries, two meat markets, two blacksmith shops, one wholesale liquor store, two butter and egg depots, and restaurants and saloons galore! *Ibid.*, 16 April 1881.

<sup>24</sup> Chappell, "Scenic Line of the World," p. 22.

<sup>25</sup> *Gunnison News-Democrat*, 25 June 1881.

<sup>26</sup> Chappell, "Scenic Line of the World," pp. 25-27.

the night and at 2:25 P.M. on Saturday, 6 August 1881, the rails of the Denver and Rio Grande Railway were spiked down across Main Street, completing the line from Salida to Gunnison over Marshall Pass. Two days later, civic dignitaries gathered around the depot site to welcome the first passenger train into the Gunnison country and to toast the beginning of passenger service over Marshall Pass.

The arrival of the Denver and Rio Grande in Gunnison soon fulfilled the reasons that had prompted Palmer to build over Marshall Pass. Gunnison was swamped by a rush of business flowing into the town over Rio Grande tracks, and the railroad profited from the mineral wealth it carried out of the country. During August 1881, freight receipts in Gunnison averaged an incredible \$6,000 per day with more than 260 cars waiting to be unloaded on certain days.<sup>27</sup> From 1881 until the completion of the Rio Grande standard gauge over Tennessee Pass west of Leadville in 1890, the Marshall Pass-Gunnison branch was the mainstay of Palmer's transcontinental efforts and the only transcontinental route through Colorado.

Throughout the fall of 1881 improvements were continually made on the roadbed over Marshall Pass as the track settled and shifted into a permanent position. In October carpenters began work on a series of snowsheds, designed to protect the track on the upper reaches of the pass from the drifting and blowing snow. Despite these efforts, train service over Marshall Pass became erratic as winter settled in on the Continental Divide. As early as 13 November snow interfered with train operations and passengers complained of being delayed while the snow was cleared. The *Gunnison Daily News-Democrat* admonished those who complained of having suffered from hunger during the delay by asserting that no person should attempt to cross the divide during the winter "without taking a full day's rations with him."<sup>28</sup>

What was it like to travel across Marshall Pass during those early years of the Rio Grande's glory? From Salida, the railroad

<sup>27</sup> *Gunnison Daily News-Democrat*, 17 August 1881. No sooner were the tracks of the Rio Grande laid to Gunnison, than the tracklayers turned north toward the ready source of revenue in the Crested Butte coal fields. From Gunnison, the main line ran west to connect the Eastern Slope with the riches of the San Juans. Palmer's last major consideration had been for a transcontinental route west, and he obtained a part of it by building west through portions of the Black Canyon, over Cerro Summit to Montrose and Grand Junction, and on to Salt Lake City. In March of 1883 the rails of the Denver and Rio Grande were joined with those of the Palmer affiliate, the Denver and Rio Grande Western Railway Company near Green River, Utah, completing the through line from Denver to Salt Lake City (Chappell, "Scenic Line of the World," pp. 41-42, 55-56).

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 15 November 1881.

ran west five miles to Poncha Springs. At Poncha Springs, it curved south up the valley of Poncha Creek along present-day U.S. 285, four and one-half miles to the small station of Otto. Otto, named after Otto Mears, was one and one-half miles below Mears Junction, where the Marshall Pass line turned west to cross Marshall Pass. There, also, another Rio Grande line climbed south over Poncha Pass into the San Luis Valley. The junction at Mears was a key point in railroad operations for the helper engines on Marshall and Poncha passes as well as a switching point for the Gunnison and the San Luis Valley lines.

Two and one-half miles above Mears the once-booming Shirley had settled into the role of a tank town. In railroad slang "tank town" refers to a place whose only existence stemmed from the importance of its water tank. In the era of steam locomotives, water was a critical necessity and Marshall Pass was dotted with tank towns. Keene, three and one-half miles west of Shirley, was not even a tank town; its sole importance came from its nineteen-car capacity siding. Keene was 600 vertical feet higher than Shirley. The Rio Grande made a long loop to the south and then a series of smaller loops to the north in the process of gaining elevation between Shirley and Keene. From Keene, the road hugged the mountainside and wound around the site of present-day O'Haver Lake to Gray's Siding, sometimes referred to as Gray's. Gray's was six miles from the summit of the pass and was an important halfway point. In addition to the water and fuel station, Gray's forty-six car siding provided a place for passenger trains halfway up the grade to pass slow mov-

*C. H. Clark, an early Salida photographer, captured this view of Gray's Siding and Mount Ouray in the early 1880s.*



ing freights and work trains. From Gray's the road twisted up the shoulder of Mount Ouray as the valley of Poncha Creek dropped away. The station of Pocono with its nineteen-car capacity siding was located halfway between Gray's and the summit. Its very location, wedged near the railroad grade below the slopes of Mount Ouray and above the depths of the valley, suggests that it was little more than a name on the Rio Grande's timetable.

The summit of the pass was characterized by a unique three-quarter mile straightaway on the eastern slope. Nestled against the hogback ridge of the summit were a water tower, two large buildings housing railroad personnel, and a depot. At these buildings the road curved south and crossed the Continental Divide through the cut that was blasted out in 1881. During the 1880s snowsheds covered the track through the cut and down the western slope for more than a mile. Just across the divide as the track curved to the north, another cluster of buildings was located on the south of the roadbed. These included a tall lookout tower, which scanned the sixteen miles of the western slope to Sargents. Running parallel to the mainline to the north was another siding with a capacity of sixty-two cars.

On the western slope the roadbed twisted down no less than five major terraces in dropping the 1,400 feet to Chester, halfway down the western slope. Halfway between the summit and Chester was Shawano. Named after a Ute Chief, Shawano had the usual water tank and siding, and the Shawano Loop was one of the scenic attractions on the pass. George A. Crofutt in *Crofutt's Overland Tours* paid particular attention to this engineering marvel. "The rail tracks above and below seem to be running in all directions; and you are led to query what other railroad companies have built over this pass, when you suddenly discover that some of the tracks are those over which you have lately passed, and others are those over which you will presently pass."<sup>29</sup> From Chester the track ran two miles to Tank Seven, named because of its location seven miles above Sargents. By Tank Seven, the worst of the pass was over and the railroad had six and one-half miles of easy running to make the remaining distance to Sargents through the stations of Buxton and Jackson Spur.

Sargents was the key point on the western slope just as Mears Junction was on the eastern slope. Aside from the water tank and siding space for 155 cars, the town was the headquarters of

the helper engines on the western slope and boasted a six-stall roundhouse.<sup>30</sup> From Mears Junction to Sargents, all of the stations and tank towns had one thing in common—their entire existence was tied explicitly to the railroad.

The fantastic scenery of the Marshall Pass line made it a popular trip for tourists. The scenery of Marshall Pass, the Royal Gorge, and the Black Canyon of the Gunnison River prompted the Rio Grande railroad to adopt the slogan, "Scenic Line of America." In 1884 Shadrach K. Hooper, general passenger and ticket agent of the Rio Grande, went one step further and changed the slogan to read "Scenic Line of the World," adopting as the railroad's symbol the Curecanti Needle of the Black Canyon. Praise was lavished on the magnificent beauty and the engineering accomplishments of the route from all quarters. In speaking of the Rio Grande system, *Harper's Weekly* boasted that "Marshall Pass is perhaps better known than any other point by reason of its great height, its magnificent scenery, and the difficulty with which it is climbed, to say nothing of the fact that it is on the through line of the road between Denver and Ogden."<sup>31</sup> Marshall Pass also received publicity in the *New York Times* when the paper proclaimed in 1893 that the pass was the most famous of the Denver and Rio Grande's climbs.<sup>32</sup>

The men who ran the trains over Marshall Pass were a breed of iron men who battled a host of natural elements to "get 'er there on time." These mountain railroaders were faced with steep curves, avalanches, high elevation, fierce winds, snow, and chilling cold. Normally dangerous railroad equipment became even more dangerous when subjected to the twisting road over Marshall Pass. It was no small coincidence that fatalities among mountain railroaders were high and that anxious wives kept glancing at the clock and straining to hear that familiar whistle. The history of Marshall Pass is filled with the stories of men who set out in their narrow-gauge cabs to make the run over the pass and never came back.

One particularly tragic wreck occurred on the pass in November of 1900. At 1:30 on the morning of 20 November, train No. 70, loaded with coal and coke from Crested Butte, left the summit of the pass heading east and was descending toward

<sup>29</sup> Named Marshelltown when founded in 1880, it survived a weak attempt by the Denver and Rio Grande to rename it Aureau and was finally named after the town's leading merchant, Joseph Sargents (Frank Hall, *History of the State of Colorado . . . from 1858 to 1890*, 4 vols. [Chicago: Blakely Printing Co., 1895], 4:146).

<sup>30</sup> *Harper's Weekly*, 4 February 1889, p. 79.

<sup>31</sup> *New York Times*, 13 February 1893, p. 3.



*The east side of the base of Marshall Pass below Gray's Siding with the Sangre de Cristos in the background.*

Gray's Siding when the air brakes failed. The engineer, Paddy Ryan, tied down his whistle in an anguished plea for hand brakes. Because of the momentum of the train and a covering of frost on the rails, the hand brakes had little effect. The train, with the exception of one car and the caboose, piled up on a sharp curve just above the section house at Gray's Siding.

The conductor, Frank Perkins, was the only man able to move about after the wreck, and in the wintry night he started down the track for Gray's. The nearest telegraph station was at Shirley some six miles away. Perkins commandeered a handcar at Gray's and after forceful threats convinced the only occupant of the section house, an Italian who spoke little English, to go back to where the freight had been wrecked and to flag the second section of the freight before it plowed into the caboose. Perkins then started down the valley for Shirley, but less than two miles from Gray's the handcar ran into a snow drift and stuck tight. Perkins could see the faint light of the Shirley sta-

tion a thousand feet below him. Through the woods it was close to a mile to the station, while on the tracks it was almost four miles. Realizing he must act quickly to rescue his companions, Perkins plunged into the timber and waist-deep snow. After much sliding, falling, and stumbling, he reached Shirley and telegraphed for doctors and a wrecker. When the rescue party reached the wreck, they found a ghastly sight. The fireman, Bert Basswell, was buried beneath the mass of splintered cars, yet miraculously survived. Brakeman Charles Shaw was dead, and engineer Paddy Ryan, suffering from internal injuries, died on the way to Salida. Two other brakemen were also seriously injured.<sup>33</sup> Perkins's dedication in going to Shirley undoubtedly saved their lives. Acts of this nature characterized the unselfishness of the mountain railroaders.

As the Rio Grande railroad profited from the tourist trade and the freight traffic over Marshall Pass, an event occurred in 1890 that foretold the inevitable end of the Marshall Pass line. The growing traffic on the railroad had persuaded Palmer to convert the line from Denver to Pueblo to standard gauge in 1881. In 1887 the railroad laid a third rail from Pueblo to Leadville, permitting either standard-gauge or narrow-gauge equipment to operate on it. Better equipment, improved construction techniques, and competitors dictated that in the future the building and the improvements along the main lines would be standard gauge. So it was that in 1890 the Rio Grande completed a standard-gauge line from Leadville over Tennessee Pass and on down the valley of the Colorado River through Glenwood Springs to Grand Junction. While it was some time before this new, standard-gauge line would adversely affect the Marshall Pass branch, the trend toward the standard gauge was established. Just as important, the Rio Grande now had two lines across the Continental Divide. Marshall Pass retained a substantial volume of tourist traffic and did a big business in local freight, but the majority of through traffic between Denver and Salt Lake City went by way of the standard-gauged Tennessee Pass.

The entire country was hit by a severe financial crisis in 1893, and the Denver and Rio Grande railroad company mirrored the economic position of the nation. Yet, thanks to the popular tourist trade and the great volume of local freight, the Marshall Pass line did not suffer greatly. A timetable for 30 July 1893

<sup>33</sup> Gilbert A. Lathrop, *Little Engines and Big Men* (Caldwell, Idaho: Caxton Printers, 1954), pp. 80-82. For other accounts of rail accidents on Marshall Pass, see *Salida Mountain Mail*, 6 August 1881; *Gunnison News-Democrat*, 20 February 1882.

showed the Rio Grande busy with three main trains going in each direction, each day.<sup>34</sup> As the early years of the twentieth century passed by, there was talk of standard-gauging Marshall Pass. Since the completion of the standard gauge over Tennessee Pass, the narrow-gauge segments had deteriorated. If the Marshall Pass line was to survive these improvements, it was going to have to be standard-gauged. The board of directors of the Denver and Rio Grande first announced plans to standard gauge the segment from Salida to Montrose in 1912. The estimated cost for the project was \$2 million. The decision was based on the need to accommodate increasing transcontinental traffic as well as an ever increasing tonnage of fruit, coal, grain, cattle, and ore, which was produced on the Western Slope.<sup>35</sup> Between 1912 and the early 1920s countless plans to standard gauge Marshall Pass were announced, but not one mile of narrow-gauge track was replaced.

While there is little doubt that a standard-gauge line over Marshall Pass would have served the Rio Grande profitably for many years, the railroad company had some definite reasons for never undertaking the project. With a corporate history of receiverships and near bankruptcies, the Denver and Rio Grande was far from a steady concern capable of pouring \$2 million into standard-gauging a section of road unless absolutely necessary. Thus, the key reason no action was taken, despite the initial decision of the board of directors, was that it was not absolutely necessary. While there was a great tonnage of agricultural and mineral products being developed on the Western Slope, there was no one industry that cried out for increased transportation facilities as the mines had done around 1880. Likewise, with the Rio Grande's route over Tennessee Pass, there was no absolute demand for another through route between Denver and Salt Lake City. Thus, the action was continually postponed, and as time went on, dust gathered on the idea.

However, in April 1919 news from Denver gave a new twist to the seemingly impossible task of spurring action. Western Slope

senators and representatives attempted to attach an amendment to the Moffat Tunnel Bill calling for a similar tunnel under Marshall Pass. The Moffat Tunnel under James Peak was proposed to give Denver a direct railroad connection west to Salt Lake City and to eliminate the treacherous Rollins Pass. Western Slope lawmakers saw hope that a similar project could be initiated for Marshall Pass. Such a project was sure to bring about standard-gauging and would greatly benefit the development of the Western Slope. The state senate approved the amendment, but the state house defeated the measure 33 to 31.<sup>36</sup> Still, the idea to tunnel under Marshall Pass and to standard gauge the line was revived.

Along with the Moffat Tunnel proposal, there were plans for the Dotsero Cutoff, a thirty-eight mile section linking the Denver and Salt Lake railroad with the Rio Grande line west from Tennessee Pass to Grand Junction. Such a cutoff would give Denver a long desired direct line to Salt Lake City. The *Gunnison News-Champion* on 25 April 1919 carried a letter from state Senator George Hetherington stating that if the Moffat Tunnel and Dotsero Cutoff were approved, the only way for southwestern Colorado to retain its share of commerce and transportation would be to tunnel under Marshall Pass and to standard gauge the line from Salida to Montrose.

On 24 April a Denver conference concerning the proposed tunnels was held with approximately twenty-five delegates attending. Carroll M. Carter and H. C. Bartlett, the Chamber of Commerce representatives from Gunnison, reported that all of the delegates were in favor of the Moffat Tunnel and that they also were interested in the Marshall Pass Tunnel. Carter and Bartlett concluded that Denver interests would eventually build the Moffat Tunnel and Dotsero Cutoff regardless. Consequently, it was necessary to include Marshall Pass in the initial plans or southwestern Colorado would be left with a narrow-gauge line indefinitely.<sup>37</sup>

The debate continued throughout 1919. In early March 1920 the *Gunnison News-Champion* ran a banner headline proclaiming "Three Tunnel Project Wins United Support of Colorado." On 1 March 1920 at a meeting of mayors and town representatives in the Denver City Auditorium, the Colorado Railroad Commission had unveiled the tritunnel project. The proposal for

<sup>34</sup> Heading east from Gunnison schedules ran as follows: the Colorado Express, a first-class passenger train, left Gunnison at 4:00 P.M. daily and arrived in Salida just four hours later at 8:00 P.M.; the Colorado Fast-Freight, a freight with connections east to Denver, left Gunnison at 4:30 P.M. daily and with stops for loading and unloading, arrived in Salida at 11:20 P.M.; the local freight, serving local commerce along the route, left Gunnison at 8:25 A.M. and after a day's journey slowly winding over Marshall Pass, arrived in Salida at 4:00 P.M. Of course, numerous difficulties made this schedule impossible to follow, particularly during the winter, and at times mass confusion resulted when the schedules of westbound trains were integrated with the above schedule. It was then that the ten sidings between Mears Junction and Sargents became important ("Denver and Rio Grande Time-Table," *Salida and Gunnison Routes*, 30 July 1893, Denver and Rio Grande Railroad Collection, SHSC).

<sup>35</sup> *Gunnison News-Champion*, 20 September 1912.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 11 April 1919.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 2 May 1919.

tunnels under James Peak, Marshall Pass, and Cumbres Pass was given almost unanimous support. The only region opposed to the proposal was southeastern Colorado, where people refused to give up their monopoly on the Denver to Salt Lake City traffic through the Royal Gorge. Two points important to the Western Slope were made at the conference. First, there was a definite need for a tunnel under either Marshall Pass or Monarch Pass, if the section from Salida to Montrose was ever to be standard-gauged. Second, there was a consensus of Western Slope delegates that the bill for the tunnels should provide for simultaneous construction. This would eliminate the possibility of the Moffat Tunnel being constructed first and the remaining projects then being halted by Denver politicians.<sup>38</sup>

Because the three tunnels in the proposal were to be owned and operated by the state of Colorado at an estimated initial expense of \$18½ million, the issue had to be approved by the voters of the state. On 2 November 1920 the voters of Colorado rejected the tritunnel amendment by 10,000 votes. Denver carried the measure by almost three to one, but Pueblo and southeastern Colorado, out to hold on to the Royal Gorge route monopoly, soundly rejected the plan. This setback did not stop the hard-core supporters of the Moffat Tunnel. The fears voiced by Chamber of Commerce representatives Carter and Bartlett at the 1919 convention came true. Denver used its political and financial power to build the Moffat Tunnel, and eventually the Dotsero Cutoff, despite the sentiment of the rest of the state. Because the Marshall Pass area could not begin to equal the political and financial clout of Denver, the region could not take the same "we'll build regardless" attitude. Thus, southwestern Colorado was left with the narrow gauge, and the Marshall Pass line settled into the role of a sleepy country railroad.

While the railroad over Marshall Pass slipped into oblivion, the pass remained in the headlines because of a controversy over highways. As early as 1880, the competition from a toll road over Monarch Pass had prompted Otto Mears to sell his Marshall Pass toll road to the Denver and Rio Grande. Marshall Pass, because of the Mears toll road, won the battle for the railroad. By the time the automobile came on the scene, the Monarch Pass supporters were back, desperately lobbying for a road. By the fall of 1913, an auto road, though quite steep in places and with numerous switchbacks, was completed over the pass. Then,

in 1921, an improvement project on the road was completed, which reduced the grade to less than 6 percent and lowered the crossing by 150 feet.<sup>39</sup>

As U.S. Highway 50 was improved across the state, residents along the route in central Colorado began to clamor for a better crossing of the Continental Divide. One such promoter was the same W. H. Nelson who had cut the first significant trail over Marshall Pass in 1877. After serving in the state legislature and later as a county commissioner, Nelson wrote to Governor Edward Johnson in August 1935, requesting an improved crossing of the divide. In doing so, he argued for changing the route of Highway 50 from Monarch Pass to Marshall Pass. Nelson, though now past eighty, wrote of the gentle grade, the lower altitude, and the sunny southern slope of the pass that he had worked on almost sixty years before.<sup>40</sup>

Nelson's letter, along with many others, prompted Governor Johnson to order Homer Gray, resident engineer at Gunnison, to conduct a preliminary survey of Marshall Pass in the fall of 1935. Gray's reports were favorable and in May 1936, the highway board voted its approval of Marshall Pass as the new route for Highway 50.<sup>41</sup> The board's resolution did not call for immediate action, and it was mid-July before State Engineer Charles Vail appointed R. E. Cowden, head locating engineer in the department, to make the locating survey. The survey was conducted and the appropriations for the road over Marshall Pass were made a part of the 1937 state highway budget when it was drawn up in November 1936. Approved by the highway advisory board and signed by Governor Johnson, the 1937 budget appropriated \$1¼ million for the twenty-six miles of road between Mears Junction and Sargents. The battle for Marshall Pass seemed to be won, and supporters along Highway 50 cheered. However, even in reporting the budget approval, the *Gunnison News-Champion* questioned whether this assured the construction of the highway. The paper noted that there was a difference of opinion on the status of the budget. Most authorities agreed that the signed budget was a legal document binding on the state for the next year, but a few people said that certain high officials in the road department could side-step the appropriation. In this particular case "certain high officials" meant State Engineer Charles Vail.

<sup>38</sup> *Pueblo Chieftain*, 15 August 1971.

<sup>39</sup> *Gunnison News-Champion*, 6 February 1936.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 28 May 1936.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 5 March 1920.

A few days before the end of 1936, Vail made headlines all along Highway 50 by refusing to sign the road budget because of the appropriation for Marshall Pass. Vail contended that the \$1¼ million designated for Marshall Pass should be used on Floyd Hill, west of Denver. Vail's actions precipitated a major legal battle in which the state attorney general concluded that it was not necessary for Vail to sign the budget for it to become effective. The attorney general also declared that once the budget was written and signed, the state engineer could not substantially alter it.<sup>42</sup> It seemed that Vail had no choice but to build over Marshall Pass. Early in February 1937 the *Gunnison News-Champion* ran a story stating that the new governor, Teller Ammons, was considering directing \$3 million of the 1937 road budget toward Denver roads. Ammons had been accused of being a "Denver Man" during the campaign, but despite this charge, residents along the route could not believe that the governor would yield to Vail and "deprive us of Marshall Pass."<sup>43</sup>

Then, on 17 June 1937, in a pure case of "the votes are in the city, the country be damned," the *Gunnison News-Champion* in bold headlines reported that Vail, with Governor Ammons's subtle approval, had stolen \$1 million from Marshall Pass. Vail announced that \$750,000 of the original appropriation would be used on Monarch Pass and the remainder on Cochetopa Pass. To the citizens along the route, this was getting two secondary crossings instead of the one good crossing that had been promised.<sup>44</sup> Politics had dealt William Marshall's short cut a foul blow. Work started on Monarch Pass in October 1938. When it was opened to the public on 19 November 1939, local residents who made the trip to the top were shocked to see a sign reading Vail Pass. Their attitude was something less than benevolent and the sign quickly disappeared. Vail had won the battle, but he would have to go elsewhere if he wanted immortality on a mountain pass.

The highway that had provided so much controversy between Marshall Pass and Monarch Pass also made its weight felt on the railroad. In 1936 the Colorado Public Utilities Commission authorized the Denver and Rio Grande to abandon passenger service between Gunnison and Montrose. Four years later on 24 November 1940 the passenger train "Shawano" made its last

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 31 December 1936.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 4 February 1937.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 17 June 1937.



*The last, regular train over Marshall Pass enters the summit snowshed after gathering up rolling stock and equipment on the western slope.*

regularly scheduled run out of Gunnison over Marshall Pass and disappeared forever to the east.<sup>45</sup> During World War II, with the shortage of trucks and gasoline, the Marshall Pass line hauled a great volume of local freight as well as products that were destined for further shipment all over the country. But after the war, trucks, which were faster, cheaper, and more versatile, soon began to take a huge chunk out of the Rio Grande's business over Marshall Pass. By the beginning of the 1950s, the question of abandoning the entire line was no longer "Will they?" but merely, "When?"

The abandonment began on 30 September 1952 when the Rio Grande closed the station on the summit of the pass. With its closing, one of the more colorful institutions on the pass died. Shortly after the railroad was built, the Post Office Department established the Marshall Pass Post Office. Many tourists mailed cards and letters from the summit for the Marshall Pass postmark. Now, this too was only a memory as the "closed" sign was put out for the last time. In May of the following year, hearings were held before the Interstate Commerce Commission to consider a move by the Denver and Rio Grande to abandon the Marshall Pass line. Despite vigorous protests by some businessmen in the Gunnison country, Rio Grande operating losses of \$146,338 in 1950, \$205,781 in 1951, and \$175,141 in 1952 could not be denied, and on 9 December 1953, the commission authorized the railroad to abandon the route.<sup>46</sup>

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 21 November 1940.

<sup>46</sup> *New York Times*, 4 October 1953, Section F, p. 1; *Gunnison News-Champion*, 10 December 1953.

The physical end to the line came during the summer of 1955 when the Brinkeroff Brothers Construction Company of Rico pulled up the branch lines in the Gunnison country and then started east over Marshall Pass. By the end of August, the wrecking crew was past Sargents, leaving nothing but a deserted depot with a sagging front door. By the first of October, almost on schedule, the job was completed and the railroad line over Marshall Pass became history. The railroad's demise, however, did not signal the end of Marshall Pass. Two events occurred that assured Marshall Pass of a continuing role in the commerce of central Colorado. The first was the decision in July 1956 to convert the old roadbed into a road for mining equipment and tourists, and the second was the construction of a gas pipeline across the pass in 1962 by the Western Slope Gas Company.

Now, a century after William Marshall's discovery, it may seem to many as though the pass has come full circle, back to the solitude of Marshall's first visit. Yet, there are those who look at the pass and see, just as Marshall did in 1873, the low elevation, the favorable grade, and the gentle slopes. While the land of the Gunnison country requires careful control over development, its potential in recreational facilities and mineral resources is vast. It would not be too surprising to see Marshall Pass once more catapulted back into the center of Colorado commerce and transportation as an artery to serve the booming Gunnison country.

*The heritage coordinator with the Colorado Centennial-Bicentennial Commission, WALTER R. BORNEMAN holds B.A. and M.A. degrees in history (1974, 1975) from Western State College in Gunnison. He is a member of the National Honor Society and Phi Alpha Theta.*