

Frontier Dentist: The Letters of Waltus Jewell Watkins

EDITED BY NORMAN L. CROCKETT

The appearance of professional men in a frontier area often indicated the region's advancement to a higher level of development. Because they usually possessed education and special skills the professionals contributed to the growth of a well-organized social system characterized by law, order, and morality. Yet, the frontier exerted its influence. Pioneer life encouraged and often necessitated versatility; ministers taught and teachers preached while some doctors attended to the medical needs of both man and beast. In numerous cases the professional calling became subordinate to other activities, and in the final analysis the frontier rather than the individual had produced the most change.

One such professional man was Waltus Jewell Watkins, born on July 7, 1852, near Lawson, a small farming community in northwestern Ray County, Missouri. His father Waltus Lockett Watkins had migrated from Kentucky to Liberty, Missouri, in the early 1830's and had operated his own cotton spindles in addition to offering Clay County, Missouri, residents custom wool-carding services. When fire had destroyed his spinning machinery, the elder Watkins turned to farming, tanning hides, attempting the commercial production of honey, and operating a saw mill. In 1839 he had moved his family to a huge tract of land a few miles west of Lawson. With bricks fired in his own kiln he had erected a two-story house in 1850 and ten years later he completed the construction of a woolen and grist mill.

Three of his sons, Joseph, Judson, and John, continued to operate the farm and mill after their father's death in 1884, but Waltus Jewell lacked the stability of his three younger brothers. Although he attended William Jewell College at Liberty, Missouri, he apparently failed to graduate, and the next



few years of his life seemed marked by intermittent employment. With funds from his father's estate he attempted ranching in Montana, but abandoned that pursuit and returned to Missouri in the late 1880's to open a jewelry store and watch repair shop in Bunceton. He next studied dentistry, and by the mid-1890's offered his professional services to the residents of Burlington Junction, Missouri. The year 1895 found him completing a post-graduate dental course in Chicago.

In the spring of that same year Jewell toured Colorado with all the exuberance of a tenderfoot in search of gold. He seemed especially fascinated by the mining camps of southwestern Colorado, and was determined to try his hand at prospecting even though his wife Minnie failed to share his enthusiasm. When his talents as a miner produced little income, Jewell's wife returned east with the assurance that her husband would follow after settling some financial obligations. Rather than join her, he sold their household belongings for \$35.00, loaded his dental equipment on a wagon, and commenced approximately thirty years of wandering. He never contacted Minnie again.

After establishing headquarters at Craig, Jewell visited the mining camps and small towns of Colorado searching for teeth to repair, deer to hunt, and claims to mine. Before his death in a Kansas City nursing home in 1925, he had written more than one hundred letters to his brothers in Missouri, describing his travels and his schemes for gaining quick wealth.¹ Jewell's boundless optimism concerning the West provides little that is new to the student of western history, but the comments in the following selection of his letters perhaps offer some insight into the impact of the frontier on one professional man.

DENVER, COLO.
12/8/1898

DEAR BROTHERS:²

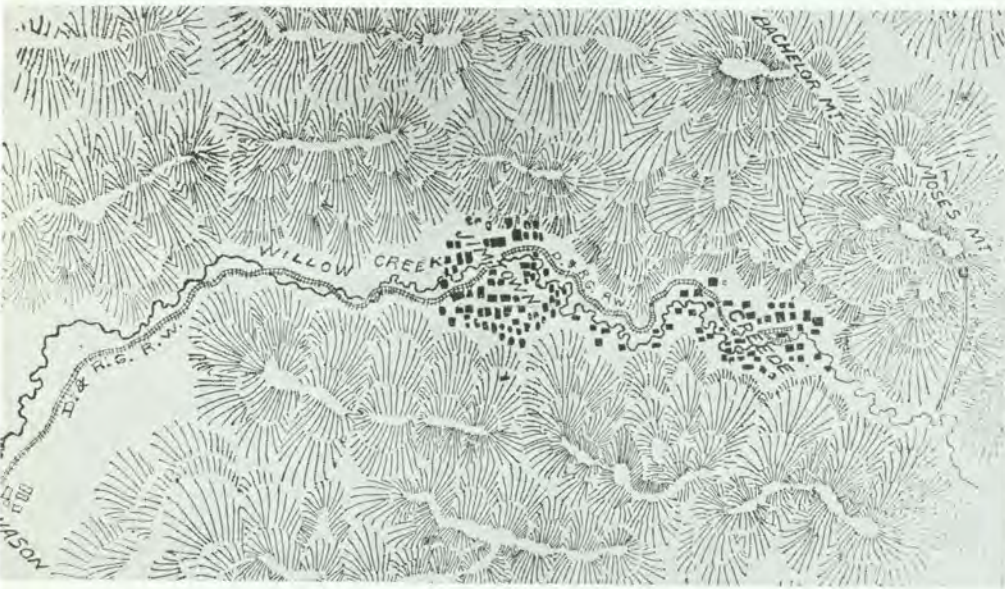
. . . I got here the right day for my business transaction. If I had been here one day sooner I would have had to stand an examination which I could not possibly pass. One of the board showed me some of the examination questions and they were corkers. I paid the secretary and took his receipt (which is unlawful on his part) and will have to stand an examination in time. I can practice until that time. He, the sec. is doing crooked work therefore I feel safe. . . \$100.00 to \$500.00 fine or 6 months to 1 yr in jail or both for practicing in this state without license.³ I have the pinch on this dental examining board. (They think I dont know it) and I am feeling very comfortable. Love to everybody and my dog Joe.

Your affect Brother
W. J. WATKINS

¹ The original Waltus Jewell Watkins letters are located in the Watkins Mill Collection, Jackson County Historical Society Archives, Independence, Missouri, and are published with the kind permission of the society. The editor is indebted to Mrs. Ruth Roney of Lawson, Missouri, who supplied much of the background material on the early life of Jewell Watkins.

² Letters addressed to "Brother" were written to John H. Watkins. The salutation "Brothers" included not only John but also Joseph and Judson.

³ Colorado enacted its first dental law in 1889 (Colorado, General Assembly, *Session Laws*, 7th Sess., 1889, pp. 122-24). It required individuals who wished to practice dentistry in the state to pass an examination administered by the Colorado State Board of Dental Examiners. When the board was not in session, its secretary was authorized to issue a temporary permit which was valid only until the next board meeting, at which time it could be extended. However, a subsequent law passed in 1897 (Colorado, General Assembly, *Session Laws*, 11th Sess., 1897, pp. 144-47) made no provision for the issuance of temporary permits. It also reduced the maximum fine for practicing without a license from \$500 to \$300 and eliminated a jail sentence included in the earlier law. See also William A. Douglas, *A History of Dentistry in Colorado, 1859-1959* (Boulder: Johnson Publishing Co., 1959), pp. 121-25.



JIMTOWN, COLORADO
12/18/1898

DEAR BROTHERS

Well I am here in Jimtown all right. Jimtown, Creede and Bachelor are mining camps all connected together (in a manner)⁴ in a mountain gulch about 9000 feet altitude . . . Jimtown is in Mineral Co. I think I can do well here in the practice of dentistry. These miners get from 3 to 5\$ pr day. Money is plenty in this camp. Population about 3000 souls. There is a dentist here, but I will locate here just the same. . . . Some of the people here wont let this dentist work for them. He gets drunk and raises—old ned. A pretty good class of people here now, but was a tough place when the camp was new. . . . No Sunday here except in name. My hotel has office and saloon all in one little room and it is the best hotel in town. I can only get one small room for dental office & I have to sleep in that. Every thing is crowded to death. A good 2\$ hotel could make money here. . . .

I Remain your affet. Brother
W. J. WATKINS, D.D.S.

P.S. The name of P. O. here is Amethyst and not Jimtown

⁴ With the arrival of great numbers of miners following the Creede strike, camps quickly appeared in the vicinity. In 1891, Jimtown (sometimes known as Gintown, Creedmoor, and Amethyst) came into existence and above Jimtown, following Creede's first fire, Bachelor (or Teller) was built nearby. Muriel Sibell Wolle, *Stampede to Timberline* (Boulder: University of Colorado, 1949), p. 321.

AMETHYST, COLO.
March 9—1899

DEAR BROTHERS.

. . . Somebody killed here every week or two. Sometimes with gun & sometimes accidentally in mine. 3 men got killed in mine today & one more in dying condition. . . . My advertisements cost me about \$6 pr. month. Other expenses about \$50 pr month not to say anything about tobacco, life insurance, lodge dues⁵ and numerous other things. . . . Everything is pretty high here. . . . A great many of these people want gold crowns and bridges, & some of them want gold crowns on front teeth for display. They ought not to be put there of course, but I am not here to regain lost health. I crown them when they want it done. I have two incandescent lights in front of my dental chair; each light is 32 candle power. I do considerable night work for miners⁶. . . . The dentist I bought out is still here. He agreed to leave by the 15 of Jan. . . .

Your affet. brother
WALTUS J. WATKINS

AMETHYST, COLO.
June 3, 1899

DEAR BROTHER

. . . I have rented a doctors residence in the best location in town and it is finely furnished, paying \$40 a month rent. Everything in the house is beautiful & costly. I will have the finest equipped dental office & residence combined in the state. The house is in the middle of the block of business houses. The dentist I bought out is still here he has been sober for 5 wks & is getting considerable practice. . . I am not going to Denver to stand examination. I expect I will have trouble with them. It costs like fury to go up there & return, and I am going to risk the trouble. . . .

With love to all I am your brother
W. J. WATKINS

⁵ Jewell religiously paid his dues to the Masonic and Woodman lodges throughout his travels in Colorado. He explained to his brother John that attendance at lodge meetings in the towns he visited helped to combat his feelings of loneliness and isolation.

⁶ Typical of other mining camp practitioners, Jewell established evening office hours to accommodate miners.

AMETHYST, COLORADO
Sept 25, 1899

DEAR BROTHER

. . . I go prospecting every Sunday & Wednesday. I have a half interest in two claims which I think will bring me some money next year. They both need more development, but they are so high and no good way to get to them. I cant do but very little work this fall; besides I have to practice dentistry to make a living. If it hadnt been that I had to stay at office nearly all of the time I think I would have been shipping ore before now. . . . I was up above timber line last Wednesday & had to shovel away six inches of snow before I could dig in prospect hole. . . . Dentistry is dull. The dentist I bought out is still here. I think I will have to go to Denver in Dec & stand my examination. I don't think I can hoodoo the dental board any longer.

With love to all I Remain your Brother
WALTUS J. WATKINS.

AMETHYST, COLO.
1-4-1900

DEAR BRO.

. . . I went to Denver about a month ago to stand examination before state board of dental examiners. I passed all right & received my certificate today. Now I have license to go and do in this state just as I ——— please.⁷ I have done \$15 worth of work today and I am tired and have not much time to write before the train leaves. . . .

I remain your Brother
W. J. WATKINS

AMETHYST, COLO.
2-21-1900

DEAR BRO.

. . . There is a man who lives in this town & two others who live in other parts of the state who have 4 patented⁸ claims

⁷ Although Jewell's optimism regarding his right to do as he pleased was generally correct, the holder of a Colorado dental license was expected to be a person who subscribed to a professional code of ethics. Douglas, *History of Dentistry*, pp. 120, 125.

⁸ Under United States mining laws, the patent was the grant of deed of the United States, which passed the title. Legally, it was considered proof of having met all of the necessary requirements for issuance. Robert Peele (ed.), *Mining Engineers' Handbook* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1918), pp. 1475, 1484, 1499, 1501.

on Campbell Mountain. . . . On this mountain are 3 different mines all excellent producers shipping gold, silver, lead, & zinc. (Sounds funny but true.) These claims I am about to lease are situated higher up the mountain on a line with these good mines below. . . . In all ore that runs 50 dollars to ton we will have to pay 10 pr cent royalty.⁹ Over \$50 we will have to pay 15 pr cent, that is cheap. . . . Labor is worth \$3 pr day. I think we can get men to work it for 1/8 interest by boarding them & furnishing powder fuse & such like. Now Jno can you come out here at once. I truly believe there is lots of money in this deal. . . . I aint able to work it. I dont want to see you lose one cent, & I dont think you will. Every word in this letter is the truth. If you come I am sure you will like it. . . . Help me out on this and we will divide equally. . . . I have been so infernal busy mining and trying to practice dentistry at the same time that I have not had time to do anything. . . . I feel like I would like to start in where that zinc is oozing out of the mountain & follow it to a finish. Now if you cant come send dispatch. . . . I hope to God you will come.¹⁰

With Love to all I remain Your Bro.
W. J. WATKINS.

AMETHYST, COLORADO
2-22-1900

DEAR BRO.

. . . The night shift struck a vein of quartz in our mammoth mountain claims last night which run 39 oz in Silver. The quartz is about 12 to 14 inches wide. We are running two tunnels. One is about 300 ft below the other. The upper tunnel is where we got the quartz. When we get the lower tunnel in as far as the upper one now is I think we will have it very rich. . . . Well it begins to look like I am in it or will be pretty soon.

Your Brother
W. J. WATKINS, D.D.S.

⁹ A royalty, which was normally based on a sliding scale varying with the value of the ore, was the rate paid to the mineowner under a lease contract. Peele (ed.), *Mining Engineers' Handbook*, p. 1361.

¹⁰ Joseph Watkins visited Creede in April, 1900, to inspect the mining prospects discussed in this letter. However, since Jewell had moved to northern Colorado by September of the same year, it seems unlikely that he was able to obtain the necessary funds to develop the claims on Campbell Mountain.

AMETHYST, COLO.
3-15-1900

DEAR BROTHERS

. . . I am getting leary of the mines. The second night I worked in the mine I came in an ace of getting killed. . . . I quit the mines about a week or ten days ago. . . . I expected to take a trip down the valley & make some mon at dentistry, but the nearest town is Delnorte 40 miles, and they have the smallpox there. . . . I am going to try awful hard to keep my interest in the lease up without work until we find it in paying quantities. Then I will be all hunky-dory. . . .

With Love to all I Remain
W J WATKINS

CRAIG, COLO.
Sept 15—1900

DEAR BRO.

I am in Craig Colo.¹¹ and expect to be here a week yet & perhaps a few days longer. . . . I intended going to Baggs & Saratoga Wyoming but from all I can learn it will not pay me to go there. . . . I am stopping here expecting to do dental work. . . . There has been several dentists through here this summer & some of them done very poor work & charged high prices & the people here are rather sore on dentists and it makes it hard on dentists that can do good work.¹² I expect to go from here to Hotchkiss Colo. and winter. . . . At Hotchkiss the weather is not severe and feed is cheap. . . . It has been very dry here this summer. There is no grass in Colo except on the higher mountains. Will Close with love to all

Your Brother
W. J. WATKINS

CRAIG, COLO.
Sept 29-1900

DEAR BROTHERS.

I arrived in this town Sept 12—and got here the right day and under the right circumstances for the practice of my pro-

¹¹ As indicated, Jewell had moved from Creede, in southern Colorado, to Craig, located approximately forty miles south of the Wyoming border.

¹² Jewell was only one of a large number of itinerant dentists who moved from town to town in Colorado, much to the consternation of the permanent and often better-trained practitioners. Douglas, *History of Dentistry*, pp. 118-19.

fession. There had been some dentists through here that done very poor work & the people were kinder [rather] afraid of new dentists, but I got started to work & pleased every one I worked for & I have had a very good practice. I have taken in \$76.50 & expect to take in at least 35 or 40\$ more next week. I will be here another wk yet, and then I may go to Baggs & Dixon Wyoming about 50 miles from here. If the snow comes before I get out of this country I will put my wagon on sled runners and travel that way until I get out of snow. . . . I spent \$40 for dental material & my expenses here will be considerable. I think me and my little red wagon can make it all right in this country next spring & summer and fall. . . . I am waiting now for material from Denver. . . . it takes 6 days to get an answer. . . . They will have a telephone line in soon from here to Rifle and then we can telephone & telegraph. . . .

With love to all
JEWELL

CRAIG, COLO.
Oct 11-1900

DEAR BRO

. . . I have done a pretty good business in this town considering its size. There are about 100 souls here. 2 stores 1 harness shop 1 newspaper 1 blacksmith shop 1 saloon one two by 4 hotel. I get work to do from about 30 miles away. I think I have taken in about \$115. . . . I think I will work my way in to Hotchkiss about as fast as I can get there. Direct all letters to Craig I will have them forwarded. . . .

Your Affect Bro.

Oats are scarce and sell at 2½¢ pr lb. I want to winter where feed is cheaper.

and unless something happens to cause a relapse there is not the least doubt but they will get well.

Dr. Watkins, the dentist, has found business so lively n Craig he has to remain until Sept. 28th. He makes crown and bridge work a specialty. Teeth extracted without pain. if you have any dental work to be done, give the Doctor a call while you have an opportunity to get the work done in first-class shape.

Some new additions to our Crockery Department that will interest you.

J. W. Hugus & Co.

CRAIG, COLO.
Oct 20-1900

DEAR BROS.

. . . Expect to be here for quite awhile yet. I and another man are going about 50 miles from here and locate some oil placers. Some parties have been boring for oil and struck it & there is considerable excitement about it here. . . . I may be here all winter. . . . Write to me at Craig. . . .

With Love to All Your Affect Bro

CRAIG, COLO.
3-8-1901

DEAR BRO.

. . . went to Meeker and made a little dough & done work for a \$42.00 set of spring wagon harness, and stopped at Hamilton P.O. and done 30\$ worth of work and wont get those 30\$ till next summer. I came on to Craig & then went 22 miles down the "valley" & made a set for an old lady, & while there a man came along and wanted a set and said he had no mon & didnt know when he would have. I axed [asked] him if he had any hosses he could trade. He had one. I went and looked at her. A great big 4 yr old mare as poor as a snake. We traded & I make him a set & traded the mare off before I left his house.

Love to Everybody
W J WATKINS

STEAMBOAT SPRINGS, COLO
1-4-1902

DEAR BROTHERS AND SISTER¹³

. . . Drove 24 miles in a snow storm to make a set of teeth for a man that was not able to come to Craig. Went back to Craig in a snow storm. Had to buy a sleigh before I started. . . . There is no wagons used here now. Snow everywhere. . . . It was 30 below zero before I left Craig. Went to Hayden and stayed two weeks, & took in over 100 sheckels [*sic*]. Came to this town Jan 1st., 1902. I made 5 gold crowns today since dinner all except polishing. Will put them in a mans face tomorrow & collect the dough. . . . I got my teeth mended in Denver & the day I got to Craig I broke one of the crowns off. No I didnt say a word but if I had had hold of that dentist I would have walked

¹³ Cary Watkins was Jewell's sister who lived with John in Missouri.

his log. I will be here one week or longer and then expect to go to Craig. . . Direct to Craig and letters will be forwarded if I aint there. . . .

Love to everybody
BRO. JEWELL

STEAMBOAT SPRINGS, COLO
1-9-1902

DEAR BRO.

. . . A great many of these people in Steamboat, and the best of them too want me to rent an office here and make this place my headquarters. They dont like the dentist here, or his work. I have made two bridges over since I came that he had made. . . . I dont' know about renting an office, but I will be sure and come around once in a while and relieve them of some of their cost.

BRO. JEWELL

CRAIG, COLO.
4-3-1902

DEAR BRO.

. . . Expected to leave here for Hayden yesterday noon but a lady came in yesterday morning to have a tooth extracted and I prevailed on her to have some bridge work done and I just got through with the work this afternoon. I pulled the old gals leg for \$50. Will be in Hayden two or 3 weeks and if the weather will remain good I think I can then go on to Steamboat. . . .

Your Bro.
W. J. WATKINS

W. J. Watkins
Optical, Musical, and
Sporting Goods—
Watches and Jewelry—
Glasses Accurately Fitted.

BAGGS, WYO.
June 4, 1902

. . . I traded dental work for a 25-35 smokeless Winchester & traded it for a 30-40 U. S. govt Winchester. . . . I have had paper and envelopes printed same as this sheet & I write for almost any kind of catalog and wholesale prices and I get them,

NOTICE.

During my absence my fur trade will
will be attended to by Uncle Lee Bryan.

JOHN B. DREW.

Nicely bound Gift Books.

J. W. HUGGS & Co.

OPTICAL GOODS.

Dr. Watkins carries a complete line of
optical goods—the best grades of glasses
—and he thoroughly understands the
art of fitting them to the eyes.

Fresh Candies and Nuts.

J. W. HUGGS & Co.

consequently I buy almost everything at wholesale. I sell a few spectacles in my travels and can always have a pair to fit myself. Will leave here in 4 or 5 days and go to Craig . . . & remain until first of July & then hunt & prospect for two weeks.

Love to All.
YOUR BRO JEWELL

CRAIG, COLO.
7-19-1902

DEAR BRO.

I am not doing much this month practicing but am having a pretty good time hunting etc. . . . When I go to Steamboat . . . am going to advertise like the devil & try & make some dough & if there is no other dentist there I expect to make it win. I dont think the resident dentist will be there then.

Well good bye
BRO JEWELL

CRAIG, COLO.
Oct. 15, 1902

Jno. H. Watkins
Lawson, Mo.

DEAR BRO.

. . . I visited Hayden and Steamboat Springs professionally staying a week at each place. I done a good business in Hayden but didnt do near so well in Steamboat. Two dentists were there but the editor of the paper up there gave me a good write up as you will see from the clipping enclosed.

Mr. Watkins, the dentist will remain in town until Sunday, but will be back later on to stay longer. His

business in Steamboat, as elsewhere in the country, is always good. He is competent and the people know it. That is the reason they pass up the fakirs and wait for Watkins.

Love to all
BRO. JEWELL

CRAIG, COLO.
1-25-1903

DEAR BRO.

. . . I am going to have sleigh runners fitted to my wagon and am going to use my own rig in the future. I will have to carry sleigh runners & wagon wheels both. Part of the time between now & May I will have deep snow in places . . . so I am going to be prepared to travel either in wagon or sled. I lost money last spring by not having a sleigh & wagon combination. I will be here 3 wks anyway and will then go to Baggs & Dixon in Wyo.

YOUR BRO. WALTUS

This photograph of Jewell Watkins, perhaps on his way to visit a patient, was probably taken late in his professional career.



CRAIG, COLO.
Aug 2, 1904

DEAR BRO.

. . . There are two traveling dentists on snake river & two on Bear River. . . One of them came into this town yesterday, but he wont do very much and perhaps nothing while I am here. I am going 50 miles down the river in 2 or 3 days to look at horses for dental work, (That is trade dental work for horses) providing every thing is right. Will be gone 2½ or 3 days and then I am going to Glenwood Springs.

YOUR BRO JEWELL

CRAIG, COLO.
9-21-1904

DEAR BRO

. . . Got here on time & went to Hayden and found a dentist had been there for a month and advertised to remain permanently. I looked him up & found he had no license to practice and told him he had better "git" but he . . . just staid until I had him arrested. He couldnt give bond and had Hahns Peak jail staring him in the face so I let him off if he would pay costs and get out of the country. . . .

YOUR BRO W J WATKINS

DIXON WYO
12-13-1905

DEAR BRO.

. . . I will be in Craig next week, in Hayden Christmas week, & will then go to Yampa & stay about 10 days; after that I am going 90 miles west of Craig where I have an interest in some mining claims. Another man & I also have a reservoir site in that country, and I am going down to have it surveyed. . . . A little later on I am going to take up a homestead and also 160 acres under the desert act.¹⁴ . . . I am taking or locating a mill site just below where the reservoir will be, and there is a mighty good spring there. . . . I took up the mill site

¹⁴ Jewell was probably referring to the Carey Act of 1894 rather than to the Desert Land Act of 1877 with its several revisions. Although both laws were created to deal with the disposal of arid western land, at the time of Jewell's intention to settle, one person could claim 320 acres under the Desert Land Act while under the Carey Act, he could only claim 160 acres. Benjamin Horace Hibbard, *A History of Public Land Policies* (New York: Peter Smith, 1939 [first published in 1924, New York, Macmillan Company]), pp. 424-55.

because I think some one will put up a Smelter in that country before a great while. The reservoir will furnish water for a mighty big scope of country. . . . It is taking nearly all I can make to pay expenses and keep the prospectors going. I and a few other men have two prospectors over in Utah. They talk encouraging but prospectors talk dont go very far with me. We have two men at work down where I am going. . . . The mercury registers from ten to 20 below zero every morning.

I Remain Your Brother
W J WATKINS

CRAIG, COLO.
12-10-1906

DEAR BROTHER.

I am going to start to Goldfield [N]ev¹⁵ in the morning. . . . I have some claims near Silver Peak and I think now I can make some money out of them. There is quite a boom there and—there has been a Railroad built in 4 miles of my claims, and have started a town there. They call the town Blair. . . . The price of beds in Goldfield now is \$4 pr night. They have had a wood & coal famine there and there has been some suffering & sickness in consequence. . . . A spring wagon and team costs \$18 pr day. I presume I will have to give some man a half interest in my claims to haul me a round. . . .

YOUR BRO JEWELL

CRAIG, COLO
1-31-1907

DEAR BROTHER

. . . I have stock in the Storm Cloud mine at Lida, Nevada & I think I am going to make some good money out of it. I was looking for a sure thing & I believe I have it. I also see in the Goldfield papers where quite a number of people have perished in snowstorms going from one place to another. I could make money in that country if I would stay there, but I would rather

¹⁵ Located in southwestern Nevada, Goldfield was a booming mining camp of about twenty thousand in 1906. The area eventually produced about \$105,000,000 in gold and silver, although Jewell's share seems to have been negligible. Rufus Wood Leigh, *Nevada Place Names: Their Origin and Significance* (Las Vegas: Southern Nevada Historical Society; Boulder City: Lake Mead Natural History Association, 1964), p. 82.

be a poor dentist in Colorado than be wealthy and have to live in that country very long at a time. . . .¹⁶

As ever your brother
W J WATKINS

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¹⁶ From all indications none of Jewell's mining ventures or promotional schemes ever produced any substantial profits, and in May, 1925, he closed out his business in Craig and returned to Missouri. John paid the cost of his care in a Kansas City nursing home prior to his death on July 17, 1925.

The Colorado Co-operative Company, 1894-1904

BY DUANE D. MERCER

Utopia, an ideal society economically, socially, and metaphysically, has tantalized man throughout his recorded history. In the nineteenth century, inspired by sages such as Edward Bellamy, François Fourier, and Robert Owen, utopian colonies were founded upon humanitarian concepts, but few existed for more than a half decade, and by 1900 most utopian experiments had failed. Colorado, however, offered some hope for utopia. In the southwestern part of the state, one colony was endeavoring to show mankind the true course to a model order. Through unselfish, sedulous effort, equalitarianism, and unity, the Colorado Co-operative Company members would pilot the way.

Their odyssey began on February 16, 1894, when the company was incorporated in Denver by nine men and one woman. With a capital stock of one hundred thousand dollars—one thousand shares valued at one hundred dollars each—the Colorado Co-operative Company sought to establish a community which could “reach the highest condition of social and intellectual attainment and material equality.”¹

Land for the colony was obtained in a rather circuitous fashion. In the summer of 1894, the company sent J. H. Brammeier, B. L. Smith, and an unidentified third party in search of a satisfactory site for the cooperative community. Brammeier directed the group to Tabeguache Park,² an area of approximately twenty thousand acres which lay five miles north of his farm at Naturita. He then convinced Smith that the arid mesa could be irrigated by the San Miguel River, fifteen miles

¹ Declaration of Principles, appendage to the Articles of Incorporation, corporation files No. 16614 (February 16, 1894), Secretary of State, Denver.

² Tabeguache was the name of a Ute tribe that had occupied the park. The word is thought to mean “the sunny side.” Ellen Z. Peterson, “Origins of the Town of Nucla,” *The Colorado Magazine*, XXVI (October, 1949), 253.

north of the park.³ Moreover, since the park was federally owned, land could be inexpensively claimed under the Desert Land Act, the Pre-emption Act, or the Homestead Act.

After examining the region, the trio wired a message to Denver, and the company responded by sending a committee, which conducted a preliminary survey of a canal between the San Miguel and the park. Upon returning to the capital, the optimistic contingent quickly persuaded the others that water could be brought to Tabeguache Park.⁴

Once the company had affirmed the initial survey, San Miguel water rights of 31.28 cubic feet per second were filed in Montrose and the decree was granted sixteen years later.⁵ The company was, however, allowed water during the interim, and additional water rights would not be difficult to obtain. With a guaranteed source of water the company then could seek out prospective members.

Settlers were actively recruited by various means. Word-of-mouth propaganda was rather successful in the Denver area; however, the printed word had a somewhat wider impact. In January, 1894, the *Altrurian*, the company's monthly newspaper, had been inaugurated. Despite its small circulation, the newspaper reached many distant states and promoted considerable interest in the colony. Through the efforts of Dr. Stephen McLallin, editor and publisher of the Topeka, Kansas, *Advocate*, the company received wide publicity. Dr. McLallin had investigated the company's plans and was quite favorably impressed. Another champion came in the person of Mrs. Annie L. Diggs, a renowned reform speaker from Washington, D. C., who toured the East and Midwest in 1896 on behalf of the colony.⁶

Publicity provided a substantial impetus for membership. Funds came from neighboring Kansas and Nebraska as well as from Texas, Florida, Minnesota, New York, and other states. Moreover, within two years Colorado Co-operative Company Clubs were established in Denver, Pueblo, Brooklyn, Chicago, Washington, D. C., St. Paul, and in several Kansas towns.⁷ All helped to promote the colony financially, and, in addition, some

³ Interview with Mrs. Erma Florence Brammeier Grimes, daughter of J. H. Brammeier, August 30, 1967, Nucla.

⁴ E. L. Gallatin, *What Life Has Taught Me* (Denver: John Frederic, 1900) p. 54.

⁵ Priority Order List, Water District No. 60, Office of the State Engineer, Montrose.

⁶ Ellen Z. Peterson, *The Spell of the Tabeguache* (Denver: Sage Books, 1957), pp. 10-11.

⁷ Gallatin, *What Life Has Taught Me*, p. 65.

settlers came from the out-of-state clubs. Under the articles of incorporation and bylaws potential members had to be at least eighteen years old. Every member of the company was required to own at least one share of stock, and the candidate was obliged



to submit a deposit along with his application form. Following a screening process of about one month, the application was acted upon by the board of directors, the nine members who formed the governing body.⁸

Board members were elected at the annual stockholders' meeting, and the board, in turn, selected its own officers. In addition to supervising the company's financial affairs, a majority of the board members could "punish by suspension or otherwise" any stockholder who violated the laws of the company or exhibited behavior detrimental to the company. A suspended member could appeal his case within thirty days of the formal notification. If no appeal was submitted in the allotted time, the individual was ousted from the company and reimbursed for his shares.⁹

⁸ Articles of Incorporation and Bylaws of the Colorado Co-operative Company, corporation files, No. 16614.

⁹ *Altrurian* (Denver), August, 1895.

Stock ownership carried with it three privileges: company membership, a voting franchise, and water rights.¹⁰ Though the first two were important, the third was perhaps the most valuable. For each share of stock, an individual was permitted water rights on no more than forty acres of land.¹¹ As this option alone was worth several times the value of a share of stock, the company expected to receive all necessary capital through this enticement. Additional income might also be secured from cooperative enterprises such as the store, boarding house, and sawmill.¹²

Following incorporation the company made preparations for the Tabeguache Park venture during the remainder of 1894. In the late fall B. L. Smith and his family, together with his brother, Truman Smith, arrived at Naturita, a few miles south of the park. With the permission of Rockwood Blake, a local farmer, the group constructed a house for the colony's first inhabitants. The next summer saw the advent of more colonists, and seven or eight filed land claims in the park. This practice deviated somewhat from the collective ownership principles of other utopian communities; however, the Colorado Co-operative Company's founders, in spite of some pressure, had decided that private land ownership would increase the colony's chances for action. Their decision was influenced by the strenuous efforts of C. E. Smith, who had participated in the unsuccessful Topolobama Commune.¹³ Through its decision the company was thus charting a somewhat different route to utopia. This deviation from traditional utopian ideals caused considerable dissatisfaction among the colony's more zealous socialists, who opposed any form of private property.¹⁴

Despite some dissension between collectivists and the company, however, the work continued. During the summer of 1895 the company leased eighty acres of Rockwood Blake's land. In return for a three-year lease, the colonists agreed to build a two-mile irrigation ditch to the leased property. Low on provisions and lacking sufficient assistance from Denver, the settlers

¹⁰ Bylaws of the Colorado Co-operative Company, corporation files, No. 16614.

¹¹ The articles allegedly guaranteed forty acres of water rights for every share; however, after the ditch was completed several shares were required for water rights sufficient to irrigate forty acres.

¹² *Altrurian* (Denver), August, 1895; *Denver Times*, October 19, 1899.

¹³ According to Ernest S. Wooster's *Communities of the Past and Present* (Newllano, La.: Llano-Colonist, 1924), the Topolobama Colony was an unsuccessful attempt of Albert K. Owen (no relative of Robert Owen) to establish a utopian community in Mexico on the Gulf of Baja California. The venture occurred in the 1890's.

¹⁴ Gallatin, *What Life Has Taught Me*, pp. 52-55.

barely completed the project in time to irrigate their seventy acres of crops. In addition to cultivating their acreage, however, the colony members engaged in a myriad of other activities. Roads were built, a sawmill was purchased and set up, and thirteen miles of ditchline were surveyed. These latter non-agricultural endeavors continued into the winter.¹⁵

In February, 1896, the colony members moved to an old placer mining site at the junction of the San Miguel River and Cottonwood Creek. Here they established Cottonwood Camp, later named Pinon for the pine nuts of the district.¹⁶ Surrounded by red sandstone cliffs interspersed with pinon and cedar trees, Pinon was to serve as the colony's center of operations while the ditch was being dug.¹⁷

During the same month the company commenced ditch work five miles above Pinon in San Miguel Canyon.¹⁸ This site was favored because it allowed for an average gravity run of four feet per mile from the San Miguel to the park, while other locations probably would have necessitated pumping operations. To facilitate ditch construction the colony built a camp at the proposed headgate of the irrigation system, consisting of a stable, cookhouse, bunkhouse, and forge. Further support was drawn from the colony's Sheep Creek sawmill, thirteen miles up Cottonwood Canyon, which would supply trestles and flumes for the canal. Moreover, excess lumber would be made into fruit boxes or laths, hauled to Montrose, and traded for hay and groceries.¹⁹

By early spring each of the colony's three contingents was assiduously plying its tasks. The town of Pinon was being erected from the mill's roughhewn lumber, and within five years fifty edifices would bear witness to the town's diligence. Included among the buildings were the company office, a printing shop, commissary, library, school, assembly hall, carpenter shop, forge, barn, cabins, post office, saddlery, ice house, community dining hall, and a men's rooming house which was dubbed the "Beehive."²⁰ Except for family homes, all buildings

¹⁵ Peterson, *Spell of the Tabeguache*, pp. 11-12.

¹⁶ "Cooperative Colony—Builders," *Out West*, XIX (July-December, 1903), 112.

¹⁷ Wilson Rockwell, *Uncompahgre Country* (Denver: Sage Books, 1965), p. 169.

¹⁸ C. E. Julihu, "Pinon—A New Brook Farm of the West," *National Magazine*, XI (October, 1899), 30.

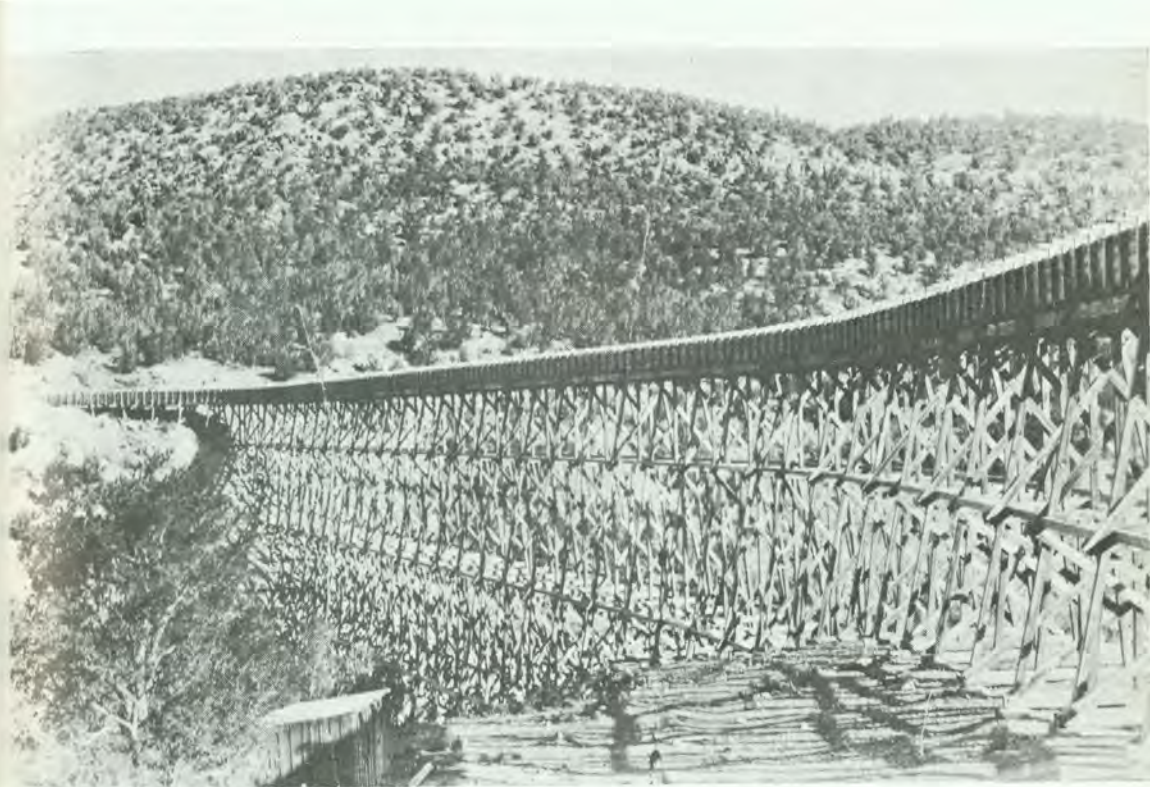
¹⁹ Interviews with Leonard Zatterstrom, former president of the Colorado Co-operative Company and one of the company's original settlers, July 16-17, 1967, Nucla; Rockwell, *Uncompahgre Country*, p. 169; Julihu, *National Magazine*, XI (1899), 31.

²⁰ Rockwell, *Uncompahgre Country*, p. 169; Julihu, *National Magazine*, XI (1899), 30-31.

belonged to the company. Land in and around Pinon was leased by the company,²¹ and members were allowed quarter-acre garden plots near their abode. In addition, the company had its own garden, ably managed by a "garden foreman." Vegetables were sold to members at cost. One part of the garden, the "Bean Ranch," supplied an abundant and inexpensive legume which was nicknamed "the ditchbuilder."²²



Meanwhile, important work was being accomplished by the ditch gang. The first five miles of the canal, about one-fourth of the total operation, offered the most formidable obstacles. Ditching was possible for the initial mile; however, boulders obstructed much of the way and many of the stones were loaded by hand into scrapers. After a short piece of riprap, spanning a bend of the river which jutted into the mountain side, the remaining half mile of ditch consisted of cut and fill, forty feet deep at one point. Flume and trestle were then used for the rest of the five miles. Solid cliffs often had to be blasted to facilitate the work. With the five-mile stretch completed, the men were then confronted with Cottonwood Canyon.²³ Eventu-



Completed in 1903, the Cottonwood Trestle collapsed in the mid-1920's. Today a large pipe transports water across Cottonwood Canyon.

ally the canyon would be traversed by the Cottonwood Trestle, which was 108 feet high and 840 feet long.²⁴ At the time of its completion in 1903, the trestle stood as the world's tallest and longest irrigation flume. The Cottonwood Canyon project, however, was to be only one of the numerous trestles that spanned the canyons along the route.²⁵ In spite of nature's impediments, by 1899 the ditch crew had finished the section between the headgate and Pinon, and local newspapermen predicted that water would flow into the park by mid-1900.²⁶

But dissension from various sources helped to delay the culmination of the dream. Internal discord had become apparent as early as 1895. Two members who, in the words of E. L. Gallatin,²⁷ "were full of theoretical socialism, and could lean on

²¹ Minutes of the Board of Directors, Colorado Co-operative Company, July 17, 1897; June 18, 1898; January 29, 1902, office of the Colorado Co-operative Company, Nucla. Hereafter referred to as Board Minutes.

²² Interview with Leonard Zatterstrom, August 24, 1967, Nucla.

²³ Juhlhu, *National Magazine*, XI (1899), 31-32.

²⁴ Peterson, *Spell of the Tabeguache*, picture opp. p. 32.

²⁵ *Gunnison News Champion*, August 11, 1938.

²⁶ *Montrose Enterprise*, March 18, 1899.

²⁷ Gallatin served as the company's official corresponding secretary. Although he resided in Denver, he visited the colony annually and remained closely in touch with the colony's news. His memoirs of this period are contained in the aforementioned *What Life Has Taught Me*.

a shovel handle and build castles for a king"²⁸ caused some discord. Both socialists thought the company's policies were not consistent with their concept of utopia. A third person joined their clique, and all were conspiring to steal a contract for a building which the colony planned to use as a schoolhouse. However, the plot was thwarted, and two of the trio left the colony.²⁹

Another, more serious, crisis occurred early in the following year. John G. Otis, a former Kansas congressman, together with seven other newcomers, initiated a vicious attack against the management. In addition to charging the leadership with malfeasance and dishonesty, the group burned the company president in effigy. At the annual board meeting the malcontents, including two board members, demanded that the bylaws be amended to prohibit the private ownership of land.³⁰ The board responded to the Otis faction by sending an investigating committee of non-members to Pinon. After an examination of the colony, the committee reported to the board that Otis' allegations were without proof, and recommended that the bylaws remain unaltered until the next annual meeting. At the same session a petition, signed by sixteen of the colonists, was submitted to the directors. The document called for the expulsion of the eight men. In accordance with the bylaws the petition was acknowledged, and by a majority vote of the board the eight were ousted.³¹

Though expelled, the Otis set continued its harassment. Shortly after the board meeting Otis returned to the colony and led a raid on the commissary, nearly cleaning it out. Not wishing any adverse publicity, the company did not prosecute and, in fact, company records fail to record the incident. Less than one month later the company paid the eight all money due for wages and stock. The expelled members then planned to form a new colony, the Altrurian Association, eight miles from Pinon, but nothing happened. Spring saw an end to the opposition, yet the propaganda, as seen in letters and newspapers, dissuaded many potential settlers and non-resident members. Nevertheless, by the end of the year 56 new members had joined the colony and 111 individuals had subscribed for stock.³²

1897 brought a mélange of prosperity and strife. On the favorable side company membership increased by 129,³³ the bylaws were amended to require monthly reports from the general manager (the board's chief administrator in Pinon) and various foremen,³⁴ some attention was given to members delinquent in their monthly payments on stock,³⁵ the company office was moved from Naturita to Pinon,³⁶ and Finch's Saw Mill on Horsefly Creek was purchased.³⁷ On the other hand, bickering continued between the directors and some of the other members. One occasion saw the board demand and receive an apology from Miles D. Bowen, who was judged guilty of "conduct unbecoming a member of the board."³⁸ Further indications of discord can be found in the frequent resignations of the general manager and foreman. Perhaps the year's most intriguing episode occurred on September 15, when "on motion the General Manager was instructed to notify Mr. Bartow that he would be allowed 48 hours in which to get his girl out of camp from time of notice."³⁹

The advent of a new year signaled an increase of discontent among the membership. The first indication came in January, when a Denver member demanded that the *Altrurian* publish more information about the colony's activities.⁴⁰ Three months later a committee of censors was appointed to review *Altrurian* copy and eliminate any article harmful to the colony.⁴¹ Resentment toward the board's arbitrary methods culminated in a petition allegedly signed by "a majority of the members working for the company" demanding an end to censorship as well as "space in the *Altrurian* in which to give our opinions of the affairs of the company."⁴² After a spirited discussion, the petition was voted upon and denied by a three-to-three tie vote with Bowen abstaining. It is interesting to note that in the next annual meeting Bowen and the three "nay" voters were not re-elected.⁴³

Dissatisfaction with the board probably had an adverse effect upon the work at Pinon and upon the financial contribu-

²⁸ Gallatin, *What Life Has Taught Me*, p. 56.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 56.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 59-60.

³¹ Board Minutes, April 11, 1896. See also Peterson, *The Colorado Magazine*, XXVI (1949), 255.

³² Gallatin, *What Life Has Taught Me*, pp. 82-86.

³³ Colorado Co-operative Company Register, 1894-1900, office of the Colorado Co-operative Company, Nucla.

³⁴ Board Minutes, January 9, 1897.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, May 30, 1897; August 21, 1897.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, November 14, 1897.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, August 15, 1897.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ *Ibid.*, September 5, 1897.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, January 29, 1898.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, April 23, 1898.

⁴² *Ibid.*, June 18, 1898.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, July 11, 1898.

tions by members; however, another, more important, factor inhibited the ditch's progress. With two and one-half years' work behind them, only two miles of flume and trestle had been completed.⁴⁴ Poor leadership could be held responsible for slow progress, yet nature was undoubtedly more to blame. The ditch crew had been confronted with obstacles which were nearly impossible to remove by nineteenth-century methods. As a result, many members, both workers and non-workers, were unhappy with the ditch and showed their discontent by failing to meet their company obligations. Yet work continued, despite growing dissension.

In 1899 another conflict arose, this time between the Denver Club and the colony. The primary issue concerned the latter's policy of conducting business without adequately consulting the outside members. The Denverites were especially disturbed by the company's procedure of allowing the annual meetings to be held in Pinon. Since the bylaws designated Denver as the company's headquarters, the club insisted that the meetings occur in Denver. In May their contention was accentuated by a lawsuit against the company.⁴⁵ Upon hearing the case, the

Ultimate headquarters of the Colorado Co-operative Company, Pinon on the San Miguel River is known today as Nucla.



judge declared that by majority vote the company could conduct its affairs wherever it desired.⁴⁶

After the court's dismissal of the case, the dispute continued within the company ranks. On three occasions the Pinon group was unsuccessful in garnering the necessary two-thirds vote to amend the articles,⁴⁷ but on the fourth attempt the colonists won by a 166-90 tally with 32 not voting.⁴⁸ Despite a valid protest from the company attorney that the affirmative vote lacked a two-thirds majority (192), the vote was declared valid.⁴⁹

Transfer of the company's principal headquarters from Denver to Pinon seems to have triggered renewed zeal within the board. Progressive measures included streamlined economy measures,⁵⁰ a crackdown on members delinquent in payments,⁵¹ and approval of a smaller four-foot-wide ditch.⁵² Perhaps the greatest impetus for completion of the ditch was the contract system. Initiated in early 1902, this method paid the contractor a set scale of prices per cubic foot of earth removed.⁵³ Rates for trestle construction were established later. Payment was generally made in credits which could be applied toward personal supplies or shares. Moreover, a completion date was set for every contract; twenty-five per cent of the payment was forfeited if the deadline was not met.⁵⁴

In spite of frequent hardships and dissension, by 1903 the colony had grown to a population of 232 (72 men, 57 women, and 103 children).⁵⁵ Much has been said about battles between members; however, this is only part of the story. While two men may have been at each other's throats during the day, the Saturday dance would most likely see them friends once again.⁵⁶ Cooperation was indeed the colony's watchword and without it the community would have foundered.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, September 19, 1898.

⁴⁵ *Denver Times*, June 27, 1899.

⁴⁶ *Altrurian* (Pinon), July 19, 1899.

⁴⁷ Minutes of the Sixth Annual Meeting of the Colorado Co-operative Company, Denver, July 20-21, 1899; Minutes of a Special Meeting, Denver, September 29-30, 1899; Minutes of a Special Meeting, Pinon, May 18, 1900, office of the Colorado Co-operative Company, Nucla.

⁴⁸ Minutes of the Seventh Annual Meeting of the Colorado Co-operative Company, Denver, July 4-5, 1900, office of the Colorado Co-operative Company, Nucla.

⁴⁹ Letter of protest by John Gabriel and W. F. Liebenberg, Denver, July 5, 1900, *ibid.*

⁵⁰ Board Minutes, July 11, 1900.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, August 26, 1900.

⁵² *Ibid.*, September 30, 1900; March 2, 1901; May 5, 1901.

⁵³ For example, earth excavation paid twenty cents per cubic yard, loose rock forty cents, side cuts in solid rock fifty cents, and through cuts of solid rock sixty-five cents. Prices, of course, fluctuated from time to time.

⁵⁴ Board Minutes, December 14, 1901; February 14, 1903.

⁵⁵ *Out West*, XIX (1903), 113.

⁵⁶ Interview with Leonard Zatterstrom, August 28, 1967, Nucla.

Entertainment undoubtedly helped elevate morale and unite the brethren. Besides its weekly dances the colony had two major celebrations, the stockholders' annual meeting and the colony's anniversary celebration. The annual meeting, held in July, featured discussion by day and dancing in the evening.⁵⁷ Lavish hospitality was the rule, sometimes making outside members think that their Pinon compatriots were "rich cousins."⁵⁸ Each year on November 25, the colony honored its anniversary with a feast, a few speeches, a concert by either the Columbine Band or the Brass Band, and possibly a theatrical production by the Pinon Dramatics Club. During the rest of the year the colony was treated to occasional concerts and plays. As a spare-time pursuit colonists might take classes in art, music, or sewing and mending. And for those who liked to talk or listen there were Sunday evening meetings in the assembly hall. At these gatherings members of all ages volunteered recitations, readings, music, original essays, poems, and ethical talks. Debate, however, was prohibited.⁵⁹

In contrast to its abundant resources of entertainment, the colony was often confronted with a shortage of material goods. Money was frequently scarce because most colonists who lacked funds worked for company credits at twenty cents an hour (twenty-five cents after 1899). At an early date the commissary was required to ration food, and in 1899 a system of coupon books was established.⁶⁰ After a comprehensive study of the cost of feeding a family, the company declared that families of two adults would be granted twelve dollars per month in coupons with four dollars for each additional member over thirteen years old, and three dollars for anyone under thirteen and over two.⁶¹ Coupons, in turn, were charged against one's credits. As a means of keeping account of his credits, each member carried a passbook which was updated once a month by the company bookkeeper.⁶²

Food was a repeated topic of interest, and the board minutes contain many references to food prices or the need to procure supplementary stores. Nevertheless, some items, such as beans,

were never in short supply. To make the "ditchbuilders" more appetizing, cooks concocted delicacies such as baked beans, stewed beans, bean stock, bean salad, bean soup, and even bean loaf. Lunches for the ditch gang often consisted of beans and bread.⁶³ On one occasion, after complaints about the lunches had become too overbearing, the cook sent the crew out with only bread in their bags. She was quoted as saying: "I thought the boys would like a change."⁶⁴ Another story tells how a pork rind was transferred from camp to camp in order to add flavor to the beans.⁶⁵ It was little wonder that Pinon soon acquired the nickname "Lick Skillet."⁶⁶

Amid austerity the colony dreamed of its future community in the park. According to some, the populace would live in town and commute to their farms via street cars. Concern was also given to the color of plush to be used on the new town's opera house seats; after a torrid debate, the issue was still unresolved between green and red.⁶⁷ Although the future town of Nucla was to have neither street cars nor an opera house, hope for them helped bolster the colony's spirit.

During the 1902-1904 period about half of the ditch was finished, much of the work being done by contracts let to Bowen and Company. In the spring of 1904 water flowed from the ditch to its initial destination.⁶⁸ Sagebrush and prickly pear cactus were cleared from some of the virgin land, and the park's first crop was planted. Strangely enough, there were no weeds in the soil for several years.⁶⁹

Water had indeed reached the park; however, with this accomplishment came a deterioration of the cooperative spirit. Members who had water on their land were reluctant to do any further ditch work. Moreover, die-hard socialists were dismayed by the speed with which colonists had abandoned communal property ideals in favor of private ownership. Some socialists left in disgust while a few others made an attempt at collective farming; but their efforts also met with disaster.⁷⁰ At this juncture one might say that private enterprise had

⁵⁷ Interview with Joe Weimar, one of the original colonists, August 31, 1967, Nucla.

⁵⁸ Interview with Leonard Zatterstrom, August 28, 1967, Nucla.

⁵⁹ Juhlhu, *National Magazine*, XI (1899), 33.

⁶⁰ According to Leonard Zatterstrom, the coupon idea was patterned after a method used in the Coeur d'Alene, Idaho, mining camps.

⁶¹ Board Minutes, September 3, 1898; October 29, 1898.

⁶² Interview with Leonard Zatterstrom, August 28, 1967, Nucla.

⁶³ Mrs. E. G. Chamberlain, "Pioneer Life in Pinon," handwritten reminiscence in the possession of Leonard Zatterstrom, Nucla; Peterson, *The Colorado Magazine*, XXVI (1949), 254.

⁶⁴ Interview with Leonard Zatterstrom, August 29, 1967, Nucla.

⁶⁵ Interview with Joe Weimar, August 31, 1967, Nucla.

⁶⁶ Interview with Leonard Zatterstrom, August 28, 1967, Nucla.

⁶⁷ Chamberlain, "Pioneer Life in Pinon."

⁶⁸ Interview with Leonard Zatterstrom, July 17, 1967, Nucla.

⁶⁹ Interview with Joe Weimar, August 31, 1967, Nucla.

⁷⁰ Interview with Leonard Zatterstrom, August 28, 1967, Nucla.

seemingly put a curse upon those who were seriously contemplating utopia. Nevertheless, the company continued to promote a small degree of cooperative *élan* by maintaining the ditch, store, sawmill, and dairy. However, from 1909 to the present date only the ditch has remained a company enterprise.⁷¹

In conclusion, one might say that the company failed to reach utopia but did succeed in attaining its primary objective—the ditch. The colony itself had a utopian tinge, yet there seems to have been a progressive drift away from utopian socialism. Private ownership of property, the contract system, and the communal farm debacle all helped to eliminate utopian aspirations. Nonetheless, the hope for utopia had created some tangible results and an appropriate slogan for the colony might read: “A little bit of utopia will go a long way.”

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⁷¹ Minutes of the Fifteenth Annual Meeting of the Colorado Co-operative Company, November 25, 1909, office of the Colorado Co-operative Company, Nucla.

The Golden, Boulder and Caribou

BY JEAN M. GREINER

On a Sunday afternoon in the middle of February, 1878, a number of well-dressed ladies and gentlemen stepped from a train at Marshall, Colorado, and upon being furnished with lighted miners' lamps, began a tour of the Marshall coal mine. Great admiration and surprise were expressed at the fine condition of the mine and the eleven-foot thickness of the coal vein.¹ After a thorough exploration, the party returned to the train for an excellent dinner prepared by Cella, Denver's famous restaurateur.² The hosts for the afternoon's festivities were David H. Moffat, Thomas W. Moffat, and Theodore G. Lyster; and their guests, who filled two passenger cars, had come from Denver, Golden, and Boulder to celebrate the completion of the Golden, Boulder and Caribou Railroad between Boulder and the Marshall coal fields.³

The Golden, Boulder and Caribou Railway Company had been chartered four months earlier on October 26, 1877, with a capital stock of sixty thousand dollars. The articles of incorporation stated that the company would construct, operate, and maintain a railroad from Golden to Boulder and from Boulder to Caribou, with branches to the various coal banks along the route.⁴

David Moffat was neither an incorporator nor a director of the company, but there is little doubt that he was the instigator

¹ *Colorado Banner* (Boulder), February 21, 1878.

² Elmer O. Davis, "The Second and Third Quintade of the Railroad Era in Colorado from June, 1872 to June, 1882," February 18, 1878, Western History Department, Denver Public Library, hereafter cited as Davis, "Railroad Era in Colorado."

³ *Boulder County News*, February 22, 1878; *Colorado Banner* (Boulder), February 21, 1878.

⁴ Golden, Boulder and Caribou Railway Company, corporation files, Domestic No. 1558 (October 26, 1877), Colorado State Archives and Records Service, Denver.



David H. Moffat

and primary financier of the road. Early writers on Colorado and its railroads, referring to the Golden, Boulder and Caribou, said that Moffat personally built it;⁵ or that he owned it and it was his private property,⁶ or that he was actively associated with its construction and financing.⁷

At the time of the Golden, Boulder and Caribou incorporation, Moffat was a well-known, highly respected figure. He had

⁵ Wilbur F. Stone (ed.), *History of Colorado* (Chicago: The S. J. Clarke Publishing Co., 1918), II, 50.

⁶ Henry V. Poor, *Manual of the Railroads of the United States for 1879*, Twelfth annual number (New York: H. V. and H. W. Poor, 1879), p. 919.

⁷ Frank Hall, *History of the State of Colorado* (Chicago: Blakeley Printing Co., 1890), III, 172.

come to Denver in 1860 and had been cashier of the First National Bank of Denver for ten years. His name, moreover, was one of several that were associated consistently with railroad promotion and development in Colorado in the late 1860's and the 1870's. In 1876, embarking on a third field of endeavor, he and Jerome Chaffee purchased the Caribou silver mine fourteen miles west of Boulder.⁸

Undoubtedly, Moffat's interest in the mine was a factor in the incorporation of the Golden, Boulder and Caribou. He well knew that minerals extracted from the ground must be moved to have any value.⁹ A wagon road did exist between Boulder and Caribou, and several short roads dotted the area;¹⁰ but only a railroad could open up the region effectively. Until tracks were laid, the full potential of the silver resources at Caribou, as well as the gold resources of the entire area between Boulder and Caribou, would be unrealized.

What applied to the gold and silver in the mountains west of Boulder was also true of the coal resources in the valley to the east. Coal had little value unless it could be carried from field to market.¹¹ In 1871 the Denver Pacific had built a branch west from Hughes, on its line to Cheyenne, to the coal banks at Erie, and in 1873 the branch was extended into Boulder. This railroad, the Boulder Valley, supplied the Denver Pacific locomotives with the coal they needed for fuel; and Erie coal was used also in the towns along the lines of the two railroads.¹² Moffat was treasurer of both the Denver Pacific and the Boulder Valley, and thus was quite aware of the actual and potential value of the vast coal deposits that lay northeast of Denver.¹³

The coal, which was principally lignite, was satisfactory for generating steam and smelting ores.¹⁴ It was also free from oily and sooty substances and had only the slightest trace of

⁸ W. B. Vickers, *History of the City of Denver, Arapahoe County, and Colorado* (Chicago: O. L. Baskin & Co., 1880), p. 510.

⁹ Frank Cunningham, "D. H. Moffat . . . Empire Builder," *Tradition*, IV (July, 1961), 8.

¹⁰ Forest Crossen, *The Switzerland Trail of America: An Illustrated History of the Romantic Narrow Gauge Lines Running West from Boulder, Colorado: The Greeley, Salt Lake & Pacific and The Colorado & Northwestern, Later The Denver, Boulder & Western* (Boulder: Pruett Press, 1962), pp. 7-12.

¹¹ *Sunshine Courier*, November 10, 1877; *Rocky Mountain News* (Denver), February 19, 1878.

¹² Herbert O. Brayer, "History of Colorado Railroads," in *Colorado and Its People: A Narrative and Topical History of the Centennial State*, ed. by LeRoy R. Hafen (New York: Lewis Historical Publishing Co., Inc., 1948), II, 646; *Mining Review* (Georgetown), November, 1873, p. 25.

¹³ Harold A. Boner, *The Giant's Ladder: David H. Moffat and His Railroad* (Milwaukee: Kalmbach Publishing Co., 1962), pp. 32-34.

¹⁴ *Report of James W. Taylor on the Mineral Resources of the United States East of the Rocky Mountains* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1868), pp. 36-37.

sulphur¹⁵—qualities which made it desirable for domestic use. The completion of the Denver Pacific, Kansas Pacific, and Colorado Central lines into Denver in 1870, as well as the growth in population and the development of manufactures during the decade, had created a demand for fuel, which, because timber was a scarce commodity on the Plains, could be fulfilled only by utilizing the coal resources at the foot of the mountains.¹⁶

Several mining companies had been organized in the 1870's to work the coal veins, and railroads were needed to move the extracted coal to points of distribution.¹⁷ The intent of the Golden, Boulder and Caribou to build branches to the coal banks was a logical response to the burgeoning demand and need for fuel in the Denver-Boulder area in 1877.

The five men who actually filed the articles of incorporation were to serve as its officers and directors.¹⁸ President Theodore Lyster, who had come to Colorado from Chicago the year before, was the assistant cashier of the First National Bank of Denver and brother-in-law of banker Walter S. Cheesman.¹⁹ Thomas Moffat, secretary and treasurer, was David Moffat's older brother and was also associated with the First National.²⁰ Junius Berkley, an attorney and member of the board of regents of the new University of Colorado, had been a resident of Boulder for over a decade.²¹ Lemuel McIntosh, who had come to Colorado in 1860, had spent some time prospecting for gold in the mountains west of Boulder. He soon turned to raising cattle and had owned a ranch in the county for many years.²² The fifth director, John Bush of Golden, was to be supervisor of the construction of the road.²³

Moffat and the directors had planned an ambitious route for their railroad—Golden, Boulder, Caribou, the coal banks—

¹⁵ *Sunshine Courier*, March 2, 1878.

¹⁶ U.S., Congress, House, *Mineral Resources of the United States*, by Albert Williams, Jr., H. Misc. Doc. 75, 48th Cong., 1st Sess., 1883, p. 44; *Report of James W. Taylor*, p. 35.

¹⁷ Hall, *History of the State of Colorado*, III, 305; *Sunshine Courier*, November 10, 1877.

¹⁸ Golden, Boulder and Caribou Railway Company, corporation files, Domestic No. 1558.

¹⁹ *Portrait and Biographical Record of Denver and Vicinity, Colorado, Containing Portraits and Biographies of many well-known Citizens of the Past and Present* (Chicago: Chapman Publishing Co., 1899), p. 203.

²⁰ *Denver Times*, July 3, 1901; *Fifth Annual City Directory of the Inhabitants, Institutions, Incorporated Companies, Manufacturing Establishments, Businesses, Business Firms, Etc., in the City of Denver for 1877* (Denver: Corbett, Hoyer & Co., 1877), p. 177.

²¹ *History of Clear Creek and Boulder Valleys, Colorado* (Chicago: O. L. Baskin & Co., 1880), p. 609.

²² *Portrait and Biographical Record*, p. 601.

²³ *Boulder County News*, December 14, 1877.

but one that appears to have been serious and made in good faith. It was decided to begin the line with a short standard-gauge branch between Boulder and the Marshall coal fields.²⁴ Most of the coal, after being hauled to Boulder, would then be carried by the Boulder Valley into Denver.²⁵ While this part of the railroad was under construction, the route for the next portion of the road, that between Boulder and Caribou, could be explored.²⁶ There is no record that Moffat and the directors ever made any plans for the line between Golden and Boulder beyond the statement of their intent to do so in the incorporation articles; this territory had been served by the Colorado Central for several years.²⁷ In any event, their interests in the fall and winter of 1877 were directed first, toward building the coal branch; and secondly, toward planning the narrow gauge into the mountains.

The Marshall coal bank, destination of the Golden, Boulder and Caribou branch, was six miles southeast of Boulder on South Boulder Creek. Settlers had gone to these outcroppings to gather coal for fuel as early as 1859, and the area was known locally as the Kitchen bank.²⁸ Joseph M. Marshall, however, was credited with the actual discovery and opening up of the fields three years later.²⁹ Marshall, in partnership with Augus-



Joseph M. Marshall, whose furnace, according to traveler Bayard Taylor, was doing a "thriving and successful business" in 1866.

tine G. Langford, owned a foundry and machine shop in Denver. In 1862, shortly after finding the bank, he sold his share of the foundry to Langford and William and Milo Lee, who soon transferred operations to Black Hawk.³⁰ It was Marshall's intention, using his coal as fuel, to make coke and pig iron for the foundry from the iron ore deposits which lay near the coal.³¹ Erecting a crude blast furnace, he produced two hundred tons of cast iron in the next few years.³²

Throughout the 1860's coal mining was conducted on a small, sporadic basis at the Marshall bank.³³ In 1872 plans were made to enlarge and formalize operations when Marshall, Langford, John W. Nesmith, the manager of the Black Hawk foundry, and two other men organized the Marshall Coal and Transportation Company for the purposes of dealing in coal and building wagon roads and such shops as might be required.³⁴ The hauling of coal by wagon, however, had obvious drawbacks; and the amount of coal extracted from the mine at Marshall during the middle 1870's was limited by this rudimentary form of transportation.³⁵

A few weeks after the incorporation of the Golden, Boulder and Caribou, the Marshall Coal Mining Company was chartered. The three incorporators of the new company and its officers and directors were Nathaniel P. Langford, president; Augustine Langford, secretary; and Samuel S. Davidson.³⁶ Augustine Langford had sold his interest in the foundry at Black Hawk and returned to Denver to organize the Colorado Iron Works with Davidson and others two years earlier.³⁷ Nathaniel Langford

²⁴ *Sunshine Courier*, November 10, 1877; *Boulder County News*, November 16, 1877.

²⁵ *History of Clear Creek and Boulder Valleys*, p. 204.

²⁶ *Boulder County News*, December 21, 1877.

²⁷ Brayer, "History of Colorado Railroads," in *Colorado and Its People*, II, 645.

²⁸ Percy S. Fritz, "Mining in Colorado," in *Colorado and Its People: A Narrative and Topical History of the Centennial State*, ed. by LeRoy R. Hafen (New York: Lewis Historical Publishing Co., Inc., 1948), II, 486; *Boulder News and Courier*, January 2, 1880.

²⁹ *Sunshine Courier*, March 2, 1878.

³⁰ El Roy Nelson, "Manufacturing History of Colorado," in *Colorado and Its People: A Narrative and Topical History of the Centennial State*, ed. by LeRoy R. Hafen (New York: Lewis Historical Publishing Co., Inc., 1948), II, 583-84.

³¹ George Langford, "Augustine Gallet Langford, 1834-1885," *The Colorado Magazine*, XXII (September, 1945), 213.

³² *History of Clear Creek and Boulder Valleys*, p. 421.

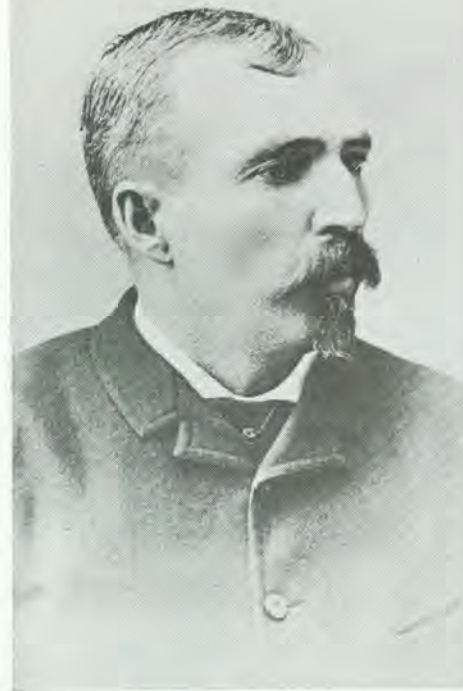
³³ *Sunshine Courier*, March 2, 1878.

³⁴ Marshall Coal and Transportation Company, corporation files, No. 1539 (April 2, 1872), Recorder's Office, Boulder.

³⁵ *Rocky Mountain News* (Denver), February 19, 1878; *Denver Times*, December 31, 1877.

³⁶ Marshall Coal Mining Company, corporation files, No. 1550 (November 19, 1877), Recorder's Office, Boulder.

³⁷ Nelson, "Manufacturing History of Colorado," in *Colorado and Its People*, II, 584.



After selling his Black Hawk foundry, Augustine Langford helped to organize the Colorado Iron Works in 1875-76.

was his older brother and a resident of St. Paul, Minnesota.³⁸ The company proposed to lease and purchase lands for the purpose of mining and marketing coal;³⁹ the lands were, of course, those belonging to Joseph Marshall. The elder Langford personally secured a ten-year lease of 1,480 acres from Marshall with the provision that he could, in turn, assign it to the Marshall Coal Mining Company.⁴⁰ This he did on February 12, 1878.⁴¹

The Golden, Boulder and Caribou, in the meantime, had issued sixty mortgage bonds, each worth one thousand dollars. It is not known who bought the bonds, but the trustees for the bondholders were David Moffat and Nathaniel Langford.⁴²

By mid-November the line between Boulder and the Marshall mine had been surveyed and located by engineer John S. Titcomb. All the contracts for grading, bridging, tying, and ironing were let on November 14, and the directors anticipated that the railroad would be completed within three months.⁴³ The flat or gently rolling terrain through which the track was to be laid should present no problems. Seventy-five men had

³⁸ Langford, *The Colorado Magazine*, XXII (1945), 214.

³⁹ Marshall Coal Mining Company, corporation files, No. 1550.

⁴⁰ Miscellaneous Records, No. 49, pp. 166-68, Recorder's Office, Boulder.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 244.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 234-38.

⁴³ *Boulder County News*, November 16, 1877; Davis, "Railroad Era in Colorado," December 21, 1877.

been employed to build the road, and Bush, supervising the entire job, was capable of keeping the work moving on schedule.⁴⁴

Grading began on November 20. A month later two miles of track were down and a total of three and a half miles had been graded and bridged.⁴⁵ The construction crew ran into a few weeks of bad weather, but this caused no significant delay. On January 13, when Lyster and Thomas Moffat inspected the line, they were pleased to see it progressing so well.⁴⁶ Grading was almost completely finished, and four miles of track had been laid.⁴⁷ An engine house was under construction next to that of the Boulder Valley and the locomotive was expected any day.⁴⁸ By the end of January the branch was so nearly completed that Bush was able to pay off most of his men. The remaining work consisted of ballasting, surfacing up, and straightening.⁴⁹

While the first part of the Golden, Boulder and Caribou was being built, the scene at its terminus was one of feverish activity. Seventy-five miners were opening new chambers in the mine and, in general, readying it for a big business; moreover, a trestle and shute were under construction from the mine to the railroad line. Several houses and the inevitable saloon had been built—the beginning of the town of Marshall.⁵⁰

The Boulder *County News* followed the construction of the road with immense enthusiasm. The consequent large-scale

Miners and their families on the porch of the boarding house at the Marshall mine, as seen by photographer J. B. Sturtevant.



development of the Marshall mine should add to the town's prosperity in several important ways, the paper thought: Boulder would become a coal distributing center; the mine would provide employment for a number of men; and some of the miners might choose to live in Boulder, rather than in Marshall, and ride the train to and from work. However, whether they lived in Boulder or not, the town was bound to have the benefit of their trade as the little community at Marshall would be a direct tributary. All in all, the *News* declared, the incorporators of the Golden, Boulder and Caribou were to be commended on their enterprise.⁵¹

One of the incorporators, Junius Berkley, was particularly active while the road to Marshall was under construction. It was his task to procure rights-of-way for the line. In return for thirty to thirty-eight feet of land, the company paid the owners amounts ranging from forty to one thousand dollars.⁵² A second responsibility concerned the next portion of the railroad, the narrow gauge into the mountains. The directors had a report from an engineer, presumably Titcomb, suggesting the route which the road should follow between Boulder and the terminus of Caribou or Nederland. They requested Berkley to collect as much information and as many statistics as possible concerning the mining towns, camps, and mills along this proposed route, with particular emphasis on freight and passenger traffic to and from the mountains.⁵³

Berkley's report covered the towns, camps, and mills in detail. He discussed each one fully, stressing its proximity to, or distance from, the proposed line; its present amount of freight traffic; and its prospects for future growth. Of greatest importance to the company, Berkley felt, especially when considered in connection with the branch from Boulder to Marshall, was the transportation of coal to the mountains. At the present time

⁴⁴ *Rocky Mountain News* (Denver), December 25, 1877; *Boulder County News*, December 14, 1877; *Colorado Transcript* (Golden), January 2, 1878.

⁴⁵ *Colorado Banner* (Boulder), November 22, 1877; *Rocky Mountain News* (Denver), December 25, 1877.

⁴⁶ *Boulder County News*, January 18, 1878.

⁴⁷ *Sunshine Courier*, January 12, 1878.

⁴⁸ *Colorado Banner* (Boulder), January 31, 1878; *Boulder County News*, January 11, 1878.

⁴⁹ Davis, "Railroad Era in Colorado," January 31, 1878; *Colorado Banner* (Boulder), February 7, 1878.

⁵⁰ *Colorado Banner* (Boulder), February 7, 1878; *Rocky Mountain News* (Denver), December 25, 1877.

⁵¹ *Boulder County News*, December 7, 1877; December 14, 1877; January 11, 1878.

⁵² *Miscellaneous Records*, No. 49, pp. 103, 336-39, Recorder's Office, Boulder.

⁵³ *Boulder County News*, December 21, 1877.



Lawyer Junius Berkley was particularly active in the affairs of the University of Colorado, serving as first secretary of the board of regents.

very little coal was used because of the high cost of carrying it by wagon. He emphasized that a need for reasonably priced coal existed throughout the area that the Golden, Boulder and Caribou would serve. The American mine at Sunshine, for example, could use approximately 150 tons a month.⁵⁴

There was another factor, Berkley believed, which was significant in the question of the narrow-gauge line. The magnificent scenery through which the road would run was sure to attract tourists; and the mineral springs said to exist near the foot of the Continental Divide, if opened up by a railroad, might well become the site of a popular resort.⁵⁵

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ *Colorado Banner* (Boulder), December 20, 1877; *Boulder County News*, December 14, 1877.

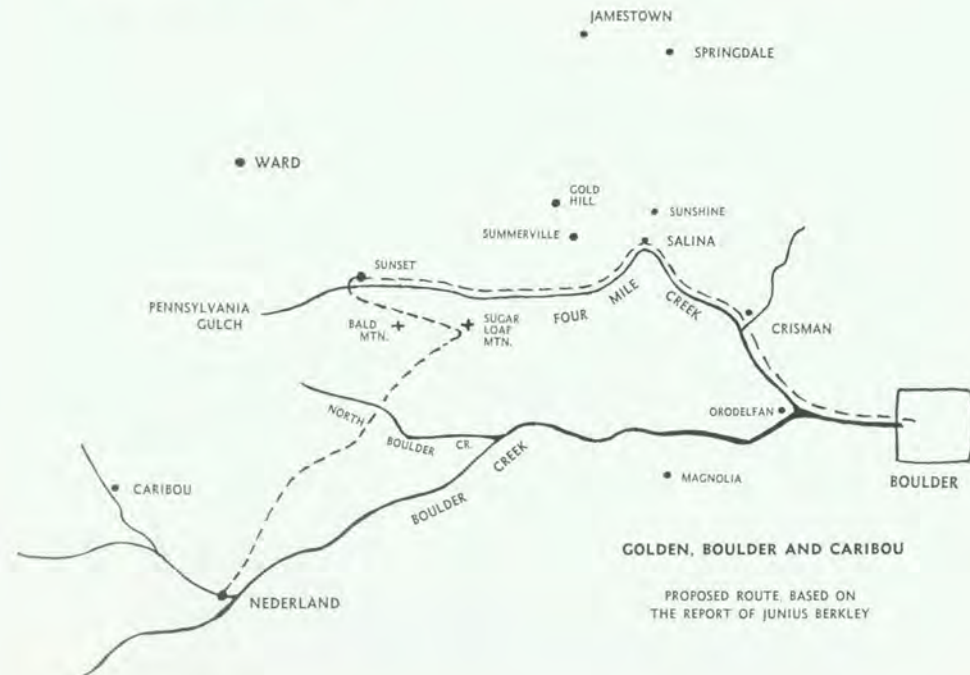
⁵⁷ *Colorado Banner* (Boulder), December 20, 1877.

⁵⁸ *Boulder County News*, December 21, 1877.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, December 14, 1877.

⁶⁰ *Boulder County News*, December 7, 1877.

Not surprisingly, Berkley's report was heralded by the Boulder newspapers which received copies. The benefits such a road would bring to Boulder were almost incalculable, they exclaimed.⁵⁶ A line to Caribou or Nederland would mean the development of practically every hill in the county and a consequent growth in the business of outfitting and supplying the miners.⁵⁷ As the report pointed out, the miner was basically a consumer and everything he used had to be carried to him.⁵⁸ Conversely, because the miner was a producer of ores and precious metals, the ore markets, if not the large-scale reduction works themselves, would be located in Boulder.⁵⁹ Certainly the possibilities for the future, as the papers saw them, were limitless. The *Boulder County News*, in particular, was eager for the road to be started as soon as possible because it felt that the Colorado Central, in the process of building an extension from Black Hawk to Central City, might carry the line on to Nederland and thus cut off Boulder from the valuable trade in its own mountains.⁶⁰



The Golden, Boulder and Caribou branch to Marshall was completed by mid-February as the directors had anticipated, and the opening was properly celebrated with the excursion party hosted by Lyster and the Moffat brothers. On March 5, 1878, the engineer brought the first carloads of coal over its tracks and into Boulder.⁶¹

What of the narrow gauge into the mountains? Berkley had made his report in December. On the first day of March David Moffat, accompanied by D. M. Edgerton, vice president of the Kansas Pacific and president of its subsidiary company, the Denver Pacific, and several other men, identified only as New York capitalists, went over the proposed mountain route.⁶² Five days later Theodore Lyster, Thomas Moffat, Junius Berkley, Lemuel McIntosh, and John Bush chartered the Boulder, Central and Utah Railway Company with a capital stock of three hundred thousand dollars. The road was to go from Boulder, via Nederland and Caribou, to Central City, with branches to Black Hawk, Idaho Springs, and Georgetown, and from Nederland to Hot Sulphur Springs, then by the most direct and practicable route to Utah territory. In addition, branches were to be constructed to the several mining towns and camps along the route.⁶³ The Golden, Boulder and Caribou mountain railroad, in other words, was to be supplanted by the even more ambitious line of the Boulder, Central and Utah. The money for this new road was to be supplied by the Kansas Pacific.⁶⁴

The desire to build west to Utah to a connection with the Central Pacific at Salt Lake, and thus place Denver on an east-west line between Kansas City and San Francisco, had been present throughout the 1870's. David Moffat began his years of effort to build a trans-mountain railroad in 1872 as a director of the Denver, Georgetown and Utah, which had never advanced beyond the paper stage. A year later he became associated with the Denver, South Park and Pacific which, though not going to Utah, did propose originally to cross the Continental Divide more than one hundred miles south of Denver.⁶⁵

The Boulder, Central and Utah represented another of Moffat's several attempts in these early years to build a railroad through the mountains. The road was never constructed, al-

though partial surveys of the route to Nederland, which was identical to that proposed for the Golden, Boulder and Caribou, were made in the spring of 1878.⁶⁶ A year and a half later more surveys were conducted and Berkley began securing rights-of-way through Boulder and up Boulder Canyon.⁶⁷ The project was abandoned, however, when the Kansas Pacific was consolidated with the Union Pacific in 1880.⁶⁸

After March 6, 1878, what was originally to be a branch to a coal bank constituted the main line of the Golden, Boulder and Caribou Railway Company. Connecting with both the Boulder Valley and Colorado Central, the six-mile road, built to haul coal from the Marshall mine, began to do just that. Its freight cars, furnished by the Denver, South Park and Pacific and Colorado Central railroads,⁶⁹ had a capacity of approximately ten tons of coal.⁷⁰ During the first year of operation, twenty-five thousand tons of coal were carried over its tracks. In the following year, 1879, the tonnage hauled increased to fifty thousand,⁷¹ or almost one-fifth of all the coal produced by the mines of northern Colorado.⁷² An average of fifteen to twenty carloads a day passed over the line in this year.⁷³ The Kansas Pacific had contracted for a large proportion of the coal, and the *Boulder News and Courier*, noting the traffic, remarked that things were lively on the little road.⁷⁴

In November, 1879, Lyster announced that the Golden, Boulder and Caribou would build an extension to the Fox coal mine, three-fourths of a mile northeast of the Marshall mine.⁷⁵ Michael Fox had opened the bank the year before; as its output sometimes reached fifty tons a day, such a spur would be

⁶¹ *Boulder County News*, April 19, 1878; *Colorado Banner* (Boulder), March 28, 1878; April 14, 1878.

⁶² *Boulder News and Courier*, October 17, 1879; October 24, 1879; October 31, 1879; November 7, 1879.

⁶³ Moffat's next attempt to cross the mountains west of Boulder was made in December, 1880, with the incorporation of the Denver, Utah and Pacific. Work was started in South Boulder Canyon in 1881, but the following year the road was sold to the Burlington, which eventually abandoned the proposed line (Boner, *The Giant's Ladder*, pp. 47-49). Berkley and Bush were involved in a similar attempt. They became directors of the Greeley, Salt Lake and Pacific in 1881, which did build a road from Boulder to the mouth of Pennsylvania Gulch on the same route as that proposed for the Golden, Boulder and Caribou and the Boulder, Central and Utah (Crossen, *The Switzerland Trail of America*, pp. 15-26).

⁶⁴ Poor, *Manual of Railroads*, p. 919.

⁶⁵ Interview with Executive Director Robert W. Richardson, Colorado Railroad Museum, Golden, May 5, 1967.

⁶⁶ *History of Clear Creek and Boulder Valleys*, p. 421.

⁶⁷ *Denver Times*, December 31, 1879.

⁶⁸ *Rocky Mountain News* (Denver), November 22, 1879.

⁶⁹ *Boulder News and Courier*, January 10, 1879.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, November 14, 1879.

⁶¹ *Colorado Banner* (Boulder), March 7, 1878.

⁶² Davis, "Railroad Era in Colorado," March 3, 1878.

⁶³ Boulder, Central and Utah Railway Company, corporation files, No. 145 (March 6, 1878), Recorder's Office, Boulder.

⁶⁴ Davis, "Railroad Era in Colorado," March 6, 1878.

⁶⁵ Boner, *The Giant's Ladder*, pp. 38-39.

quite practical.⁷⁶ The nearby Black Diamond mine, operating on a small, sporadic basis, also added its coal, as often as it was extracted, to the tonnage carried by the railroad.⁷⁷

During these first two years of operation, the line, according to the *Rocky Mountain News*, paid very well. The paper credited the road's light operating expenses and excellent freight as the factors responsible for its financial success.⁷⁸

Toward the end of 1879, however, the Golden, Boulder and Caribou was affected by events occurring in the general railroad picture of northern Colorado. In that year Jay Gould, who had held a controlling interest in the Union Pacific since 1873, leased the Colorado Central for his company and also gained control of the Kansas Pacific.⁷⁹ Gould and his associates decided that rather than continue paying the Golden, Boulder and Caribou to haul coal, it would be more economical for the Kansas Pacific to buy the line.⁸⁰ Moffat, evidently, was willing to sell. Berkley prepared an inventory; and on November 23 Lyster and Augustus A. Egbert, superintendent of the Colorado Central, inspected the road, locomotive, and engine house.⁸¹ Moffat and Gould concluded the sale in New York the next day.⁸² Thereafter, the stocks and bonds of the railroad were held by the trustees of the Kansas Pacific Railway Consolidated Mortgage.⁸³ Two months later, in January, 1880, the Kansas Pacific and the Denver Pacific were consolidated with the Union Pacific and its leased line, the Colorado Central, to form the Union Pacific Railway Company.⁸⁴ The Golden, Boulder and Caribou now operated as part of this system.⁸⁵

Coal was becoming a big business in Colorado in the 1880's. The boom in railroad construction at the beginning of the decade, the increased demand for iron and steel, and the growth of the smelting industry all contributed to the rising production.⁸⁶ As the *Boulder News and Courier* noted in 1880, the two

prerequisites for the development of the Boulder County coal fields, a market and carrying facilities, had been fulfilled; and the coal mines might become as great an asset as the gold and silver mines.⁸⁷ By the following year the coal trade had assumed "magnificent proportions."⁸⁸ A year later the paper reported with obvious pleasure that the principal mining centers of the county—Langford, Louisville, Canfield—had produced 247,000 tons in 1882. With a minimum value of \$2.50 a ton, coal, indeed, was paying well.⁸⁹

In addition, a new mine had been opened by the Marshall Coal Mining Company at Langford (the name of the town was



The settlement of Langford, popularly known as Marshall.

changed in 1882 but more often than not the old one was used) and both mines were maintaining good levels of production.⁹⁰ From 1881 through 1885, excluding 1883, an average of 47,038 tons a year was taken from the slopes at Marshall.⁹¹ At the Fox mine, too, coal was being extracted on a regular basis, though in smaller quantities. In this same period, excluding 1883, an average of 23,490 tons came from the mine annually.⁹²

With the Marshall and Fox mines producing consistently and no slackening in the need and demand for coal, the Golden,

⁷⁶ *Colorado Banner* (Boulder), March 6, 1879; *Boulder County Herald*, February 18, 1880.

⁷⁷ *Boulder County Herald*, February 18, 1880.

⁷⁸ *Rocky Mountain News* (Denver), November 22, 1879.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, November 20, 1879.

⁸⁰ *Boulder News and Courier*, November 28, 1879; Robert M. Ormes, *Railroads and the Rockies: A Record of Lines in and near Colorado* (Denver: Sage Books, 1963), p. 257.

⁸¹ *Boulder News and Courier*, November 28, 1879.

⁸² *Rocky Mountain News* (Denver), November 25, 1879.

⁸³ *Report of the Directors of the Union Pacific Railway Company to the Stockholders, For the Year ending December 31, 1881*, p. 9.

⁸⁴ Brayer, "History of Colorado Railroads," in *Colorado and Its People*, II, 646.

⁸⁵ *Report of the Directors of the Union Pacific Railway Company to the Stockholders For the Year ending December 31, 1879*, p. 15.

⁸⁶ Fritz, "Mining in Colorado," in *Colorado and Its People*, II, 508.

⁸⁷ *Boulder News and Courier*, December 31, 1880.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, December 30, 1881.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, January 5, 1883.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, December 30, 1881; "Place Names in Colorado (M)," *The Colorado Magazine*, XIX (January, 1942), 20.

⁹¹ *Boulder News and Courier*, December 30, 1881; January 5, 1883; manuscript history book, Colorado Coal Mine Inspection Department, Denver.

⁹² *Ibid.*

Boulder and Caribou was in an enviable position. The entire tonnage from the mines, except that sold at Marshall, was carried over its tracks at a charge that varied each year from 7.7 cents to 8.6 cents per ton per mile. The railroad's total income from freight, available for 1883, 1884 and 1885, averaged \$28,641.12 a year.⁹³

The *Railroad Commissioner's Report, 1885*, in which coal is listed as constituting ninety-six per cent of the line's freight, is probably representative of earlier years as well. The remaining percentage consisted of stone, steel, castings, lumber, agricultural products, and miscellaneous merchandise—goods and products bound for the mines and the small community of Marshall which had grown around them. In one twelve-month period alone, the Golden, Boulder and Caribou freight train, loaded to capacity for the slow, twenty-minute run into Boulder and almost empty on the return trip, traveled over six thousand miles between the two towns.⁹⁴

The road did a negligible passenger business, however. Only 271 persons, at a fare of twenty-one cents each, rode the train in the year ending June 30, 1885.⁹⁵ The Golden, Boulder and Caribou made money by carrying coal and very little else. After paying operating expenses, taxes, and annual interest on the bonds, its average net income for each year from 1881 through 1885 was \$8,966.82. The railroad was able to pay dividends totaling \$15,000 in 1882, 1884, and 1885.⁹⁶

Without question the road was a financial success. There was no doubt, though, that a direct line between Denver, Marshall, and Boulder would be much more economical and profitable.⁹⁷ Accordingly, the Denver, Marshall and Boulder Railway Company was chartered on May 18, 1885, by Union Pacific men to purchase the property and rights belonging to the Denver, Western and Pacific, which had gone into receivership. The incorporators intended to finish the Denver, Western and Pacific

⁹³ *Report of the Directors of the Union Pacific Railway Company to the Stockholders For the Year ending December 31, 1884*, pp. 36, 125; *First Annual Report of the Railroad Commissioner of the State of Colorado for the Year ending June 30, 1885* (Denver: Collier & Cleaveland Lith. Co., 1886), p. 458; *Report of the Directors of the Union Pacific Railway Company to the Stockholders For the Year ending December 31, 1886*, p. 40.

⁹⁴ *First Annual Report of the Railroad Commissioner, 1885*, pp. 457-59.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 457.

⁹⁶ *Report of the Directors of the Union Pacific Railway Company to the Stockholders, 1884*, p. 36; *Report of the Directors of the Union Pacific Railway Company to the Stockholders For the Year ending December 31, 1885*, p. 36.

⁹⁷ *Report of the Directors of the Union Pacific Railway Company to the Stockholders, 1886*, p. 40.

line between Denver and Boulder by way of Marshall.⁹⁸ The new railroad reached the mines⁹⁹ the following spring. In September, 1886, the entire business of the Golden, Boulder and Caribou was diverted to the Denver, Marshall and Boulder tracks.¹⁰⁰

For eight and one-half years the Golden, Boulder and Caribou had connected the coal mines at Marshall with the railroad outlets at Boulder. In doing so it served a definite contemporary need and played a direct role in the development of a valuable Colorado resource, thus contributing in a small but significant way to the growth of the state from 1878 through 1886.

Built to a relatively unexploited bank in the decade when the demand for coal first began, and operated during years which witnessed an increasing need for its freight, the Golden, Boulder and Caribou made money as it fulfilled an important function. Though the line to Marshall was only a small portion of the railroad David Moffat and the directors had hoped to build, it was the part that was within their reach. They had aimed high—Nederland or Caribou—beyond what was realistic and what the times could support; and in this they were typical of most Colorado railroad promoters and incorporators in the 1870's and 1880's. Yet the road to the Marshall mine was their first goal and in this they were completely successful.

When the Golden, Boulder and Caribou ceased operations, it was not because the mines were depleted or because there was no longer a market for coal. The line was a victim of progress and the Denver, Marshall and Boulder railroad represented a more efficient way of transporting coal from Marshall to distribution centers. After eight and one-half years, the Golden, Boulder and Caribou had served its purpose.

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⁹⁸ Denver, Marshall and Boulder Railway Company, corporation files, No. 761 (May 18, 1885), Recorder's Office, Boulder.

⁹⁹ Augustine Langford died in 1885. At the end of that year the Marshall Consolidated Coal Mining Company was organized to work the mines. Among the incorporators were Jerome Chaffee, Walter Cheesman, and George Kassler. Kassler had become cashier of the First National Bank of Denver in 1880 after David Moffat was named president. Marshall Consolidated Coal Mining Company, corporation files, No. 1575 (October 30, 1885), Recorder's Office, Boulder; Boner, *The Giant's Ladder*, p. 44.

¹⁰⁰ *Report of the Directors of the Union Pacific Railway Company to the Stockholders, 1886*, pp. 27, 40.

Unionization in Boulder and Weld Counties to 1890

BY DENNIS S. GROGAN

It was late in the summer of 1859 that the red subsoil east of Boulder yielded its first coal deposits to the fuel-starved settlers of gold-rush Colorado.¹ Early demand for the black nuggets augured well the future of the coal mining industry as prices skyrocketed,² and camps at Erie and Lafayette blossomed to accommodate the miners. Such developments indicated that coal mining would become one of the earliest established industries on the Colorado frontier.

The decade of the 1860's, however, witnessed a hiatus in the growth of coal production due to a combination of adverse factors.³ The dislocations of the Civil War accounted for some of this retardation. More importantly, the transportation and capital resources of the coal mine owners north of Denver had reached their limits. All of the coal mined around Boulder had to be shipped by wagon to Denver markets or to the mountain towns; such inefficiency kept prices high and profits marginal. Lacking a source for capital accumulation or an influx of outside money, the operators' methods of coal extraction remained primitive.

Without business growth, the cause of unionizing the coal miners failed to emerge as a labor issue before 1870. The small number of miners and their low productivity obviated the desire or need for a coal miners' organization. In addition, the small size of the Boulder area coal operations facilitated exchange of demands and encouraged a singleness of purpose between oper-

ators and laborers. In short, economic conditions were not conducive to labor organization.

Moreover, the men who were Colorado's first coal miners were not particularly inclined to cooperate with each other. The transients, the foreign-born, the unskilled, and the failures gravitated to the mines. This heterogeneous grouping made mutual cooperation among the miners difficult, especially in a frontier setting where social organizations were traditionally absent.

Not until the early 1870's were the coal miners of Boulder and Weld Counties disposed to coalesce into informal bargaining bodies. At the Briggs mine near Erie in Weld County the miners went on strike in February, 1871, in protest over a new company rule.⁴ The Boulder Valley Coal Company, which owned the Briggs mine, wanted the miners to screen the coal before shipment. Labor leaders L. N. Herring, Mike Kirby, and Thomas Higgins defiantly led the miners on a march to Erie, where a riot between strikers and nonstrikers broke out.⁵ Weld County Sheriff George Brush and Arapahoe County Sheriff David Cook quelled the outbreak with assisting posses. The instigators were arrested, tried, and fined for conspiracy. The Erie miners returned to work on company terms, and thus Colorado's first coal miners' strike came to an ignominious end.⁶

Labor agitation before 1874 was minimal in the northern Colorado coal fields, however, and early efforts at organization languished. New mines tunneled into the gently rolling plains at a rapid rate. Payment and conditions improved markedly for the miners, nurturing a sense of well-being. Wage scales increased from \$1.25 per day to \$1.25 per ton (about \$3.00 per day) and better machinery was introduced after 1870. The general faith in continued economic growth waxed when Ferdinand V. Hayden announced, somewhat optimistically, that the Boulder-area anthracite veins were the largest west of the Mississippi.⁷ In those early years the demand for labor seemed inexhaustible to the sanguine coal miners, and this euphoria suppressed any instinct to unionize.

In the transportation sphere, the early 1870's saw the development of railroads into the Erie area, greatly stimulating coal

¹ *Rocky Mountain News* (Denver), August 13, 1859.

² *Ibid.*, September 29, 1859. The price was quoted at \$1.00 per bushel.

³ U.S., Congress, House, *Mineral Resources of the United States*, by David T. Day, H. Misc. Doc. 4, 50th Cong., 2d Sess., 1889, p. 216.

⁴ *Daily Central City Register*, February 10, 1871.

⁵ *Ibid.*, March 3, 1871.

⁶ *Rocky Mountain News* (Denver), February 25, 1871.

⁷ *Boulder County News*, March 22, 1872.

production.⁸ The Denver and Boulder Valley Railroad was completed from Brighton to Erie on a route near Lafayette by late 1871. The national economy had fully recovered from a moderate post-war depression and was showing signs of mushrooming into a runaway boom.

In September, 1873, the financial bubble burst, and the Erie mines were immediately forced to cut back on production.⁹ The Boulder County mines at Lafayette were able to continue at just below previous levels, however, because they were not solely dependent on railroad consumption, as were the Weld County mines near Erie. The intimate economic relationship between the Denver and Boulder Valley Railroad and the Erie mining operations only aggravated the plight of the individual miner. The Denver and Boulder Valley owned eight thousand acres of coal lands; this road, controlled by the Kansas Pacific and a consortium of eastern investors, leased mine sites to coal entrepreneurs in exchange for marketing rights. The coal produced was far in excess of local demand and was shipped to Greeley, Cheyenne, and even to western Kansas.¹⁰ Economic contraction over such a large marketing area multiplied the effect on the operators and, ultimately, on the miners.

By November, 1874, the situation had become intolerable for the miners of the Golden mine near Canfield, only two miles from Erie. Resentment over a threatened reduction of wages from \$1.25 to \$1.00 per ton brought the simmering labor pot to a boil. Rumors of a general strike throughout northern Colorado, distrust of a new steam winch, and dislike of the mine superintendent, W. J. Curtice, all helped to precipitate organized action. The culmination came with the formation of a local union on November 9, 1874.¹¹ Within two days George Ardat emerged as the head of the union, which consisted mostly of miners but also had a few outside workers. With all of the one hundred miners at the Golden in opposition, the Boulder Valley Coal Company quickly acceded to the union's demands; Henry Bates, an ex-mayor of Erie and part owner of the Boulder Valley Company, commented on the lack of violence during the wage altercation.¹² When about one hundred miners at the nearby Baker mine attempted to strike for higher wages and

⁸ U.S. Congress, House, *Mineral Resources of the United States*, by Albert Williams, Jr., H. Misc. Doc. 75, 48th Cong., 1st Sess., 1883, pp. 44-46.

⁹ *Mineral Resources of the United States*, 1880, p. 216.

¹⁰ *Boulder News*, January 8, 1875.

¹¹ *Rocky Mountain News* (Denver), November 10, 1874.

¹² *Ibid.*, November 11, 1874.

to join the nascent union, however, Edward B. Light, owner of the Erie Coal Company, responded by hiring a new mining crew. Threats of violence repulsed the strikebreakers, which prompted Light to write an open letter to the Governor and the People of Colorado, seeking protection for his property rights and for the freedom of contract rights of his new employees.¹³ Light and the Baker strikers reached a compromise agreement in mid-December, 1874. This mildly successful union undertaking was the first of its kind in the Colorado coal industry, and it was to set the pattern for future organizing efforts in the Boulder and Weld County mines.¹⁴

As a result of the 1874 success, miners at other Erie and Lafayette mines hastened to form local unions. These were not primarily social organizations, but rather were constituted as bargaining agencies. On the national scene, the Miners National Association of the United States of America had been formed in October, 1873, and the Erie and Lafayette locals soon wished to affiliate with this organization. The local Colorado leaders were, at first, attracted by the promise of access to a strike fund. The National's creed urged its members to sue employers for injury compensation in states where there was no liability law and also advocated the use of all political weapons in the laborer's arsenal to safeguard miners' interests.¹⁵ Yet by 1875, however, the Miners National could claim only two locals and 242 members in Colorado.¹⁶ Lacking an economic foundation of national prosperity the National was short-lived, and it became legally defunct by mid-1876.

An attempt in Colorado on March 18, 1875, by Joseph E. Bates, superintendent of the Boulder Valley mine, to reduce wages indicated that public opinion was solidly behind the avowed purposes of the coal miners' unions.¹⁷ When the miners struck, the Boulder Valley Company retaliated by trying to hire a new set of men. The employment campaign proved to be a failure, and editorial opinion corroborated other indications of

¹³ *Rocky Mountain News* (Denver), December 6, 1874.

¹⁴ An interesting repercussion of the 1874 strike revealed the social and economic mobility possible in an underdeveloped region. Eighteen disgruntled miners on strike formed the Cooperative Mining Company and obtained mineral rights to what would become the Mitchell Mine (*Greeley Tribune*, December 15, 1875). They had no liquid capital, but only their own labor to exploit the abundant coal resources. This safety valve for economic frustrations could only have been possible in an industry with a very low cost of entry.

¹⁵ Arthur E. Sufferin, *The Coal Miners' Struggle for Industrial Status* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1926), p. 26.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 30.

¹⁷ *Boulder News*, March 19, 1875.

general public apathy to the company's methods.¹⁸ The victory for the miners was additionally prestigious because the Boulder Valley Company, owned by a group of Denver businessmen, was by far the largest coal producer in the area.¹⁹

Though the country was still in the throes of the 1873 depression, in April, 1877, the Knights of Labor decided that the time was auspicious for expansion into the northern Colorado coal region, and Charles Vaughn and William Thomas appeared in Erie to create an affiliated assembly. Both men were experienced organizers and were determined to bring the gospel of the Knights into this semi-frontier area.

In an effort to dramatize their appeal, Vaughn and Thomas took their recruiting drive directly to the grounds of the Boulder Valley mine on April 17, where they were unceremoniously ejected by Joseph Bates after a bitter argument. On April 19 the Knights' representatives called for a miners' meeting, to be followed by a torchlight parade through the streets of Erie.²⁰ Neighboring local union members were also notified. In a fiery oration Vaughn urged the miners to join the Knights of Labor to signify their regional solidarity and to insure their bargaining power.

On the evening of the miners' rally, however, Judge Arthur N. Elliott of the Weld County Court authorized Weld County Sheriff John McKissick to forcibly detain Vaughn and Thomas from any further unionizing activities. When Sheriff McKissick entered the lyceum hall to make the arrest, he took with him mine owners Sam Logan, General H. B. Bearce, and Max Greenfield, as well as Joseph Bates and Boulder Valley foreman John Rowe, all staunch and well-known anti-union men.²¹ When the purpose of this delegation was announced to the audience, a wave of anger and resentment swept the miners into the streets of Erie, and fifty men started down the road toward the mines with torches in hand. At the first mine, the Baker, they set fire to the storage building and the winch house. The sight of the blaze sobered the enraged miners and they scattered into the night. The gauntlet thrown by Judge Elliott had been accepted with a vengeance. Vaughn and Thomas were tried, convicted, and fined \$1,000 for inciting a riot and threatening property.²²

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, March 26, 1875.

¹⁹ *Greeley Tribune*, December 15, 1875.

²⁰ *Denver Daily Tribune*, April 20, 1877.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² *Ibid.*, May 8, 1877.

The cause of the Knights in the coal industry lay dead, not to be revived for more than a year.

Coincidental with business recovery and vigorous railroad construction in the spring and summer of 1878 came renewed efforts to institute a Knights assembly in August, 1878.²³ This time the movement was led by local union heads W. E. McCoy and Ray Smith of Erie, and the acceptance of these personalities assured the establishment of a Knights assembly. The Erie assembly (Number 771) began with sixty members and was soon joined by the Lafayette assembly. Together they represented about five per cent of the coal miners in Boulder and Weld Counties.²⁴

The advent of the Golden, Boulder and Caribou Railroad into Marshall, south of Boulder, was instrumental in the formation of another local union in 1878. The Marshall coal banks contained some of the richest deposits in the northern fields and needed only a transportation outlet to be further capitalized. The railroad requested that the Marshall miners sign a group agreement guaranteeing production of an additional two hundred tons of coal per day after the line was completed.²⁵ Once

A rare interior view of the Marshall coal mine.



they realized their superior bargaining position, the miners seized on the expedient of a local union. With a floor on production levels, these miners were assured a non-seasonal bargaining position when the Marshall Coal Company was faced with a year-around demand for their coal.

This advantage that the Marshall union enjoyed was manifested in December, 1879. A strike at Como in South Park, over the hiring of Chinese labor, made coal from the northern deposits in great demand. The miners at the Black Diamond and Fox mines in Marshall struck for higher wages and the miners' unions at the Boulder Valley and Star mines in Erie and Canfield followed suit. They demanded \$1.25 per ton to offset the summer slack period and to compensate for the rise in the cost of living. These miners well understood the workings of the Colorado coal business, for they knew that the northern operators were in the process of fixing coal prices at \$5.00 per ton to exploit the Como strike.²⁶ Within twenty-four hours, the Marshall Coal Company had agreed to the union condition. The Boulder Valley and Star Coal Companies, however, rejected the proposed settlement, even though the Kansas Pacific was complaining of a shortage of coal for its locomotives.²⁷ While the Marshall mines were starting operations, the other companies hired a group of Italian miners as strikebreakers. On December 20 the Erie-Canfield companies capitulated to the unions after the strikebreakers had been forcibly excluded from the mines.²⁸ The Marshall miners' cause had been considerably aided by the relative inflexibility of the labor and coal supply in the Marshall area, whereas the miners around Erie were subject to more economic variables.

The entry of the Colorado Central system into the coal lands between Marshall and Erie in 1880 gave birth to the mining community of Louisville. Within six months the population exceeded 500, and the primary mine, the Welch, employed 175.²⁹ Since the Welch was a newer mine, the dangers inherent in digging coal were not so great as at the more established mines.

²³ Carl W. McGuire, "History of the Colorado State Federation of Labor, 1896-1905" (unpublished Master's thesis, Department of History, University of Colorado, 1935), p. 26.

²⁴ See *First Biennial Report of the Bureau of Labor Statistics of the State of Colorado, 1887-1888* (Denver: Collier & Cleaveland Lith Co., 1888), pp. 80-81.

²⁵ *Rocky Mountain News* (Denver), December 12, 1878.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, December 10, 1879.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, December 17, 1879.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, December 21, 1879.

²⁹ *Boulder County Herald*, October 20, 1880.



*Railroad promoter
and mine owner
Charles Clark Welch
had served in the
legislature of
Colorado Territory.*

This fact served as a rationalization for the owner, C. C. Welch, to offer only \$2.50 per day wages rather than the usual \$3.00-\$3.50.³⁰ The miners followed the traditional pattern by waiting until winter before presenting their conditions for future work to Mr. Welch. The union at the Welch, though inexperienced, had planned well. It ordered a sit-down strike of all mine workers, including outside laborers. After only three days Mr. Welch conceded, under the pressure of fleeting income at the peak production season.³¹

As a result of this success, the three major coal-producing areas of Boulder and Weld Counties, Erie, Marshall, and Louisville, came under disparate but effective local union control. (Union jurisdiction did not usually extend beyond the confines of a single company's holdings.) A large part of the union achievement was due to the highly competitive and atomistic nature of the coal industry in northern Colorado. The unions could coordinate their demands with price wars with devastating

³⁰ *Boulder County Herald Supplement*, March 31, 1880.

³¹ *Boulder County Herald*, December 29, 1880.

effectiveness.³² In turn, the triumph of the local union as an economic lever precluded the necessity of a regional or national unit of organization.

The creation in 1881 of the Miners and Laborers Protective Association of Boulder and Weld Counties indicated that the social needs of the miners were not to be ignored. Dances, concerts, and lyceum lectures filled the calendar of events. This ambitious plan encompassed Louisville, Lafayette, Erie, and Canfield in an attempt to provide leisure-time activities for the miners.³³ The implication was that a labor union served economic ends, but could not fit the mold of a social organization.

Trouble for the local unions was already on the horizon as the golden era of the 1870's was setting. The decade of the 1880's radically altered the pattern of natural resource development in Colorado. In the coal industry, the larger and richer beds of the central and southern portions of the state were destined to outstrip the north.³⁴ As a consequence, the northern fields ceased to reap the rewards of rapid growth. In fact, production stabilized at about 250,000 tons per year by 1883.³⁵

The impact of these changes on the coal miners' unions in Boulder and Weld Counties had a negative effect. Wages increased slightly but working conditions, safety standards, and layoff practices needed revisions which were not easily amenable to strike pressure. The northern coal industry overcapitalized and experienced diminishing returns, and thus the operators were less able to meet union conditions. Moreover, confusion over the means and ends beneficial to coal miners occurred within the local unions. They continued to use the same means, but were seeking different ends; consequently, labor-management relationships deteriorated.

Another change in the coal industry in the 1880's was a trend toward absentee ownership. Large purchases by the Union Pacific Railroad of coal lands east of Louisville were typical of this tendency.³⁶ The Union Pacific leased the mineral rights for these lands to individual developers, who assumed all of the investment risk; mines such as the Star, Rob Roy, and Mitchell were bought by out-of-state interests.³⁷ With the prospect of

outside investment came petty speculation.³⁸ Unfortunately, by 1880 northern Colorado coal mines required constant improvement just to maintain established production standards.³⁹

The separation of ownership and management created a communication problem for the miners' unions. Any existing sense of unity between miners and operators made possible by physical proximity soon vanished. The sheer distance of many owners, some in Denver, others more remote, complicated the dialogue in all labor disagreements. In self-defense, the miners eventually resorted to political action and regional unions.

Coordinated strike action occurred in the fall of 1882, when five hundred Canfield miners walked out on November 1 at the Star and Mitchell. To present their demands the two unions chose G. T. Bailey, who argued that mining had become so hazardous and difficult that an increase in wages was justified.⁴⁰ On November 2 over two hundred Louisville miners at the Stewart climbed on the bandwagon to request a raise from \$.80 to \$1.00 per ton. The dual strike was not planned in advance, but the Louisville union seized on the opportunity of the Canfield strike to fortify its position. The maneuver rewarded the Louisville strikers with a ten-cent raise on November 20.⁴¹ Lack of unity sent the Louisville union back to work without a twinge of conscience that the Canfield situation remained in trenchant deadlock. Though the Star miners finally won on January 1, 1883, the result might have been decided sooner had the unions been in close alliance.

During 1882 and 1883, labor leaders heightened public awareness of the dangers involved in coal mining. While recruiting in the southern Colorado fields, Knights of Labor organizers Charles J. Driscoll, Joseph R. Buchanan, and John L. Lewis hammered the high mine accident rate into the public attention.⁴² The revelations of these men and of the local leaders in the north shocked the popular sensibility. Even the state legislature was aroused sufficiently in March, 1883, to pass an act creating a Colorado coal mine inspector.⁴³

³² *Boulder County Herald*, February 16, 1881.

³³ *Second Biennial Report of the Bureau of Labor Statistics of the State of Colorado, 1889-1890* (Denver: Collier & Cleaveland Lith Co., 1890), p. 64.

³⁴ *Rocky Mountain News* (Denver), November 23, 1882.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, November 21, 1882.

³⁶ David McClurg, "The History of Labor Organization in Colorado Coal" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Department of Economics, University of California, Berkeley, 1957), pp. 81-84.

³⁷ *First Biennial Report of the Bureau of Labor Statistics of the State of Colorado*, p. 296.

³² *Rocky Mountain News* (Denver), November 23, 1882.

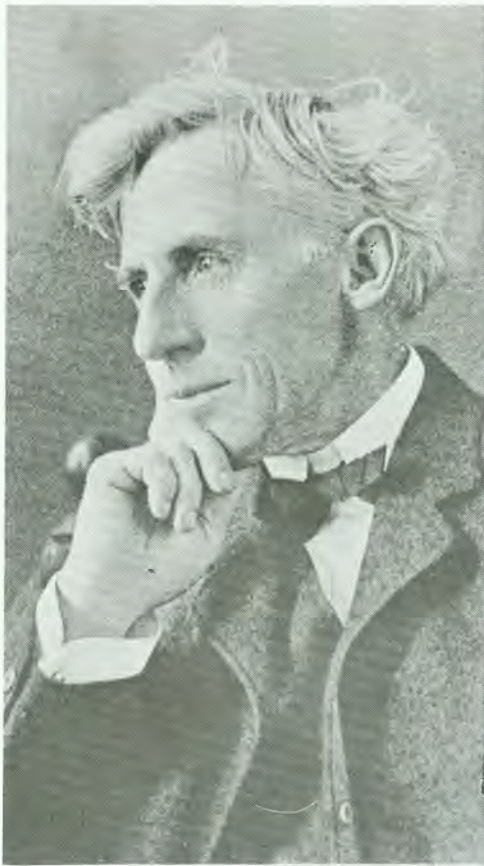
³³ *Boulder County Herald*, May 4, 1881.

³⁴ Colorado Bureau of Immigration and Statistics, *The Natural Resources and Industrial Development and Condition of Colorado* (Denver: Collier & Cleaveland Lith Co., 1889), p. 39.

³⁵ *Mineral Resources of the United States*, 1880, p. 216.

³⁶ *Boulder County Herald*, August 24, 1881.

³⁷ *Rocky Mountain News* (Denver), December 25, 1885.



Labor leader Joseph
R. Buchanan
recounted some of
his experiences in
THE STORY OF A
LABOR AGITATOR,
published in 1903.

The coal mine inspector was granted the power to examine the safety precautions in all mines and to enforce state regulations by fining any deviating operator. Every biannual inspection checked on telephone communication, ventilation, elevators, and tunneling methods. In addition, no children under twelve or women were allowed to work in the mines.⁴⁴ John McNeil, the first inspector, served notice on the operators that civil suits would be brought against any violator.

Earlier disunity among the local unions in northern Colorado evaporated in October, 1884, when all of the unions called a strike in sympathy with the striking El Paso County coal miners who were being inspired by Driscoll, Buchanan, and Lewis. From October 28 to November 3, the northern unions considered

their demands, and on the latter date a regional conciliation board was organized by the strikers on an *ad hoc* basis. This board met with a panel of mine operators and presented requests for an increase in wages and for union-approved checkweighmen.⁴⁵ The El Paso miners adamantly insisted on a halt to the practice of hiring Chinese and Negro miners as strikebreakers and replacements.⁴⁶ Most of the Boulder and Weld operators acquiesced to the conciliation board on November 9, but two northern mines and the El Paso mines remained closed. The El Paso County miners were dealing with the Colorado Coal and Iron Company, which refused even to negotiate until a few days before the final settlement on December 24. The miners at the Boulder Valley and Welch mines continued on strike without assistance until January 16, 1885, when their wages were raised.

Two months later, in March, 1885, the National Federation of Miners and Mine Laborers was organized, adopting as its policies the right of miners to employ checkweighmen, the abolition of screens, the semi-monthly payment of wages, and the eight-hour workday. Vastly improved transportation facilities placed previously isolated coal-producing areas in competition with each other. This new national organization was an effort to counteract the deleterious effects of a national market on the local unions,⁴⁷ and several of the Colorado unions rushed to join the National Federation.

The Knights of Labor felt their position endangered by this rival activity, and they made preparations for a general coal strike in the Rocky Mountain area in October, 1885. The leaders singled out the Union Pacific supply mines as the primary targets in northern Colorado. The miners in Erie, however, were unwilling to follow their leaders Buchanan and Lewis, because of fear that the operators would introduce Chinese labor.⁴⁸ The press hailed the Colorado failure as the demise of the "labor agitators and trouble-makers."

That the Knights' system was insufficient and that the local unions needed cohesion became obvious when violence erupted at the northern coal mines in November and December of 1885. Members of the Louisville Knights assembly in the Welch mine

⁴⁴ U.S., Congress, House, *A Compilation of the Labor Laws of the Various States and Territories*, H.R. 1960, 52d Cong., 1st Sess., 1892, pp. 78-84.

⁴⁵ The checkweighmen calculated the amount of coal dug by the individual miners to determine earnings. Invariably these men were hired by the company and were therefore assumed to be partial to the operators.

⁴⁶ *First Biennial Report of the Bureau of Labor Statistics of the State of Colorado*, pp. 139-40.

⁴⁷ Suffern, *The Coal Miners' Struggle*, p. 35.

⁴⁸ *Rocky Mountain News* (Denver), October 18, 1885.



In this photograph of the Marshall Consolidated Coal Mining Company the town of Louisville is in the background on the right.

struck on November 20 in protest over a proposed wage reduction. This mine had been leased to the Marshall Consolidated Coal Company earlier in the year, thus bringing together two of the most productive mines in the vicinity. The wage rate at the Welch was a scandalous \$.92½ per ton (about \$4.00 per day). On November 30 Wilber Jones and David McKinley, labor contractors, openly solicited miners in Louisville for \$3.00 per day.⁴⁹ An irate group of about forty strikers assaulted the two contractors, beat them, and dumped them beside the road outside town. Frank C. Wallace, the general manager for the Marshall Company, was outraged upon hearing the news, although he was shrewd enough to identify the weakness of the unions as a lack of coordination. Wallace, however, fearful of more violence, settled the Louisville dispute with a tactful compromise solution on December 6. He was still intent on reducing labor costs, as he used the recent settlement as a ruse to lower wages at the Marshall mine.

The December 15 wage announcement raised a furor among the Marshall union miners, and they quickly voted to strike. Patrick Greene, the union leader, recognized that the Marshall Company could fill its orders for the railroads from its Louisville mine. The union's position was a tenuous one as a result of Wallace's actions, and the company refused negotiation even as December neared an end. In a desperate attempt to force the company to come to terms, a small band of strikers retaliated in frustration. At three o'clock on the morning on December 30, these firebrands hijacked a locomotive standing on a siding near the mine. They moved the engine several hundred yards down the track, tied and gagged the engineer, and returned to set

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, December 1, 1885.

ablaze the buildings and coal piles at the Marshall mine.⁵⁰ This blatant act infuriated public opinion to the point that the union cause fell from popular favor.⁵¹ After the strike at Marshall failed, mine operators stood on higher ground than they had ever known.

This loss of local union prestige, coupled with the February, 1886, meeting of the first interstate joint conference of miners and operators, convinced local union leaders in northern Colorado that a regional unit of labor organization was essential for continued success. The conference had fixed wage scales for the various districts of Pennsylvania, Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, and West Virginia,⁵² and had created a general board of arbitration and conciliation composed of ten union and ten management representatives. Of the utmost importance was that the conference had been recognized by political groups and that public opinion welcomed the movement.

With these goals in mind, the Coal Miners' Federation of Northern Colorado was organized in Louisville in July, 1886.⁵³ The new group called for fair wages and a halt to discrimination against union leaders on the part of the mine bosses. It was governed by a standing executive board, which was granted full authority to adjust differences between labor and the mine operators.⁵⁴ The development of the Coal Miners' Federation therefore coincided with the trend on the national level to consolidate local coal miners' unions under centralized authority, and to enter the political and public relations activities.

Political lobbying became one of the Colorado Federation's primary functions and an area of notable success. In 1887 the Colorado Legislative Assembly outlawed black-listing by employers,⁵⁵ making the use of a black list in hiring a misdemeanor punishable by a fine of not less than \$50.00 nor more than \$250.00.⁵⁶ In the same session a bill was approved prohibiting mine employers from hiring any boy younger than fourteen under pain of a \$10.00 to \$50.00 fine for each offense.⁵⁷ The

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, December 30, 1885.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, January 8, 1886.

⁵² Suffern, *The Coal Miners' Struggle*, pp. 39-40.

⁵³ Hazel Alice Glenny, "A History of Labor Disputes in the Northern Colorado Coal Mining Fields with Emphasis on the 1927-1928 Strike" (unpublished Master's thesis, Department of History, University of Colorado, 1938), p. 69.

⁵⁴ *First Biennial Report of the Bureau of Labor Statistics of the State of Colorado*, p. 82.

⁵⁵ *Compilation of the Labor Laws of the Various States*, pp. 87-88.

⁵⁶ *Third Biennial Report of the Bureau of Labor Statistics of the State of Colorado, 1891-1892* (Colorado Springs: Gazette Printing Co., 1892), p. 203.

⁵⁷ *First Biennial Report of the Bureau of Labor Statistics of the State of Colorado*, p. 491.

Born in Scotland,
John McNeil came
to the United States
in 1876 at the age of
twenty-three to work
in the mines.



Federation was also influential in the creation of new powers for the coal mine inspector. At the same time the bureau of labor statistics was begun, formulated on the basis of models already existing in other states. Interest in labor as a whole accelerated with attention focused on arbitration laws, lien laws, prohibition of convict labor, equal pay for women, shorter work days, and education of wage earners.⁵⁸

The coal mine inspector's office and the bureau of labor statistics consistently supported labor's cause. John McNeil, coal mine inspector until 1893, submitted partisan labor legislation in his personal campaign to secure the health and safety of the state's coal miners. In its first biennial report the bureau of labor statistics advocated compulsory arbitration,⁵⁹ and also proposed continued legislative efforts to improve labor's economic and social position. These favorable governmental policies amply vindicated the existence of the Coal Miners' Federation.

The Knights of Labor did not fare as well as the Federation, and as late as 1886 only represented about ten per cent of the

miners in the northern Colorado coal fields.⁶⁰ Though the national membership was higher, the Knights felt compelled to institute the National Trades Assembly Number 135,⁶¹ in order to group the local miners into a national unit. As a result, the union miners in Boulder and Weld Counties polarized into differing labor organizations.

In practice, however, the two groups often cooperated. This harmony was most clearly expressed by the dearth of strikes between 1886 and 1890 in the northern fields.⁶² In 1889, in the legislative arena, they lobbied jointly to have the conspiracy law modified to exclude labor unions. This new provision allowed two or more persons to organize, provided no threats of bodily or financial injury were used.⁶³ Evidences of greater coordination at the local and regional levels in the Colorado coal unions were reinforced on the national scene.

The final push for a national coal miners' union began in 1888. The organized miners were having the ground cut out from under their union efforts as a result of the competition for members between the Knights and the National Federation. Accordingly, a movement started to amalgamate the two existing bodies under a common executive board.⁶⁴ At a December 5, 1888, convention the Progressive Union of Miners and Mine Laborers was created. It was given broad controls over strikes and revenues, which made it reminiscent of the Miners National of the mid-1870's.

However, the Knights' National Trades Assembly was restive under the strict supervision of the Progressive Union's executive board and the Knights pushed for a structural reorganization. Consequently, at a December 18, 1889, convention, the United Mine Workers of America was founded in an effort to unify the coal miners of the nation without sacrificing the unique features of the Knights or the National Federation.⁶⁵ What amounted to a confederation of unions still sustained the concept of centralization of authority and of unity of policy inherent in the Progressive Union.

⁶⁰ Carroll D. Wright (comp.), *Third Annual Report of the United States Bureau of Labor Statistics* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1887), p. 52.

⁶¹ Vernon Jensen, *Heritage of Conflict: Labor Relations in the Nonferrous Metals Industry up to 1830* (Ithaca, N. Y.: Cornell University Press, 1950), p. 44.

⁶² *Fourth Biennial Report of the Bureau of Labor Statistics for the State of Colorado, 1893-1894* (Denver: Smith-Brooks Printing Co., 1894), pp. 78-80.

⁶³ *Second Biennial Report of the Bureau of Labor Statistics of the State of Colorado*, p. 60.

⁶⁴ Jensen, *Heritage of Conflict*, p. 78.

⁶⁵ Christopher Evans, *History of the United Mine Workers of America* (Indianapolis: n.p., 1920), II, 13-19.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 67-68.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 168.

The northern Colorado unions reaped immediate benefits from the national rearrangement. The Knights Assembly at Erie aligned itself with the United Mine Workers by becoming the first local in Colorado in 1890.⁶⁶ Competition between rival unions ceased, and henceforth the Boulder and Weld coal miners identified themselves with a common national labor movement. The formation of the United Mine Workers closed a chapter of localism in the history of unionization—a history that included the northern Colorado coal diggers.

In summary, the early unionizing efforts of the coal mines of Boulder and Weld Counties were directed by a variety of determinants. The fluctuations of the economy affected laborers' inclinations to organize in the beginning. The prosperity of the early 1870's suppressed any desire to form unions; on the other hand, the depression of 1873 stimulated unionization. A more subtle cause and effect relationship to gauge was that between the industrial maturity of the coal mining enterprise and the structure of labor organization. Hypothesizing from the northern Colorado example, the increasing enlargement and consolidation of mining operations militated for a corresponding centralization of leadership among the unions. Even though the unions believed that they were the source of change, the changes they sought in the area of labor costs were of only superficial importance in comparison with the development of transportation, markets, and corporate size independent of union action. Certainly as the capital requirements of coal mining increased, the relationship of worker and owner was fundamentally affected. Where ownership and management were separated, the manager often had no direct economic interest. This meant that the director of mining operations could better resist strike pressure. The operators persisted in asserting their right to bargain as individual employers with their particular employees. Collective bargaining was introduced locally, but difficultly, on the part of the miners. The emphasis of the operators was upon resisting the recognition of the unions and the implications of collective dealings.

The coal industry was characterized by variable resources and costs, by a productive capacity in excess of demand, by an irregularity of demand, and by a high degree of competition. Both worker and owner suffered the consequences. The over-

development of the industry and the price cutting to extend markets resulted in generally depressed profits. For the miners, reductions in wages and lack of employment followed. The miners also suffered under the abuses introduced by the operators as a means of obtaining or of retaining competitive advantages. To put the concept of collective bargaining into effective operation, the miners gradually learned that organization had to be extended beyond localities to larger areas.

The regional and national union principle found disfavor among miners for a few very good reasons, however. Public opinion in Colorado frowned on the national organizations. Also, locals had a higher survival rate than nationals during economic depressions. Most crucial, however, was the miners' faith that small unions could adjust to local conditions easier than national unions. Wages came to be fixed at various mines to compensate for differentials in labor costs. The thickness of seams, the quality of the coal, the transportation outlets, the productivity of labor, and the relative mining dangers all contributed to determining the competitive wage market.

The move to a regional or national affiliation was inevitable for the local miners' unions. Part of the answer was that locals could not influence political or public opinion because of their small size and restricted resources. As for strikes, experience had proven that striking locals placed a disproportionate burden on the few miners involved, while the other mines remained in operation. A general strike was gradually accepted as more effective in establishing uniformities in safety standards and in raising the level of conditions and wages. These were the goals in the minds of the northern Colorado miners in 1890.

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⁶⁶ *Third Biennial Report of the Bureau of Labor Statistics of the State of Colorado*, p. 63.