

INVENTORY

WILL C. FERRIL COLLECTION

# 233

COLORADO HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
OCTOBER 1984

INVENTORY: WILL C. FERRIL COLLECTION

INTRODUCTION:

Will C. Ferril, noted writer, first paid official of the Colorado State Historical and Natural History Society, and secretary of the Colorado Academy of Science, was born in Lawrence, Kansas on August 28, 1855, the son of the Reverend Thomas J. Ferril and Minerva Hornsby Ferril.

Ferril received most of his education in Missouri, earning degrees from Lewis College and the North Missouri State Normal School. Concurrent with his studies at the Normal School Ferril studied the law. Upon completing his degrees Ferril relocated to Bentonville, Arkansas where he served as the principal of the Bentonville High School. Once again, during his spare time Ferril studied the law.

In the late 1870's Ferril moved to Colorado, initially settling in Silver Cliff. He engaged in mining and journalism. He was employed by the Silver Cliff Miner, the Silver Cliff Daily Republican, and the Daily Prospect. Ferril also did some free-lance writing during this time period.

In 1882 Ferril became a part owner of the Silver Cliff Daily Herald. The following year, at the solicitation of soon-to-be-famous Eugene Field, Ferril relocated to Denver. He continued his budding newspaper career by becoming the city editor of the Denver Republican. Ferril was the city editor from 1885 until 1887 at which time he joined the staff of the Rocky Mountain News. His stint with the News was short-lived. After only one year Ferril returned to his position at the Denver Republican.

During the 1890's Ferril became a regular contributor to the Commonwealth, a magazine founded in 1889. The Commonwealth, which received considerable acclaim nation wide, was begun in an attempt to promote a better class of literature in the West and the South. Like the magazine itself, Ferril received considerable praise for his articles. His writing was characterized by accuracy, detail, and thought provoking subjects. Also, during this time period Ferril embarked on a career as a syndicated writer. His articles appeared in leading newspapers throughout the United States.

In August 1896 Ferril left the world of newspapers and magazines to become the first paid curator at the Colorado State Historical and Natural

INVENTORY: WILL C. FERRIL COLLECTION (Cont.)

History Society. He took to his new career with as much enthusiasm, energy, and talent as he had as a journalist. Indeed, Ferril's contributions to the Society helped to ensure its success.

As curator, Ferril instituted an educational program. He encouraged classes of all ages to visit the museum to observe its collections. On numerous occasions Ferril presented lectures to the visiting students. In addition to launching the educational program Ferril began to actively collect and preserve the contemporary newspapers that recorded the growth and progress of the region. This systematic effort to obtain Colorado newspapers marks the beginning of the Society's library. Ferril's next move was to expand his collecting scope to include all types of historical documents-- correspondence, diaries, family histories, reports, maps, photographs, programs, and the like. Since the Society had no funds to buy materials for its collection, Ferril appealed for donations.

In 1897 the Society admitted a large number of associate members. As a result six new departments were organized-- Botany, Zoology, Geology, Microscopy, Physical Science, and Nature Study.

Ferril was also instrumental in acquiring desperately needed operating funds. He convinced the legislature to pass two bills that provided for a salary of \$600 for an assistant curator, \$750 for binding newspapers, and \$1000 for publications. The bills, although successfully piloted through the General Assembly, were vetoed by the Governor. The long appropriation bill which did become law provided for a pay increase for the curator and an annual budget of \$600 for expenses.

During Ferril's years as curator the Society grew enormously both in its number of departments and its collection of relics, documents, pictures, and specimens. This enormous growth resulted in the need for larger and better accommodations. A new building was erected adjacent to the capitol grounds.

Concurrent with Ferril's years as curator, from 1898 until 1909 he was the secretary of the Colorado Academy of Science, a part of the Colorado State Historical and Natural History Society.

Not long after the completion of the new museum Ferril lost his position

INVENTORY: WILL C. FERRIL COLLECTION (Cont.)

as curator in 1910. He returned to his previous avocation as a journalist. His first project was editing Sketches in Colorado. In 1912 Ferril purchased the Rocky Mountain Herald. He was the proprietor and editor of the paper until 1934.

In 1936 Will C. Ferril, a man dedicated to accurately recording and preserving the past through his careers as a journalist and a curator, passed away. In both professions he earned the admiration of his fellow workers and the general public. What he left behind, his fine writing and the foundation upon which the Colorado Historical Society developed and progressed, are to this day appreciated by the general public.

SIGNIFICANCE:

The collection is comprised of correspondence (1897-1908), a narrative entitled "Denver's First Capitol" (no name, no date), and scrapbooks. The correspondence was written to Ferril while he was curator of the Colorado State Historical and Natural History Society. The correspondence throws light on the early days of Colorado and the activities of her pioneer inhabitants. The researcher can learn about Christmas and New Year's celebrations in 1859, Pike Peakers, the Colorado Springs Flower Carnival, the first public schools in the region, and the first white children to be born in counties throughout Colorado.

PROVENANCE:

The collection was created by Will C. Ferril during his years as the curator of the Colorado State Historical and Natural History Society.

INVENTORY: WILL C. FERRIL COLLECTION (Cont.)

- BOX I
- FF 1: Correspondence, 9/1/1897-8/7/1897
  - FF 2: Correspondence, 8/8/1897-8/10/1897
  - FF 3: Correspondence, 8/11/1897-8/19/1897
  - FF 4: Correspondence, 8/20/1897-9/8/1897
  - FF 5: Correspondence, 9/9/1897-9/26/1897
  - FF 6: Correspondence, 12/3/1897-6/10/1899
  - FF 7: Correspondence, 2/27/1900-5/6/1908
  - FF 8: Narrative: "Denver's First Capitol," no name, no date
- BOX II SCRAPBOOKS OF CLIPPINGS: "Historical," "Obituaries," and "Historical Miscellaneous"
- BOX III SCRAPBOOKS OF CLIPPINGS: "Scientific" and "Resources"