

An Inventory of the Papers of

JIM BAKER

(1819-1898)

Collection Number 29

A Holding of the
Library of the Colorado Historical Society
Denver, CO 80203

Processed by Aleks Humeyumtewa
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BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Jim Baker was a genuine pioneer of the West who achieved legendary status through his exploits on the American frontier. He was one of the first men to venture into Colorado territory and make it his home and he was one of the most important and knowledgeable pioneer scouts in the region, leading all types of expeditions into the unexplored reaches of the American wilderness.

Jim Baker was born December 19, 1819 in Belleville, Illinois. He was a crack rifle shot at a very early age and he quickly tired of the routine farming life of his family in Illinois. Around the age of 18 or 20, Baker left home and traveled to St. Louis, Missouri, which at that time was the very edge of American civilization. There he met Jim Bridger, who was in the process of recruiting men to travel west for the American Fur Company. Baker signed a contract obligating himself to an eighteen-month trapping expedition and, in May 1839, Baker, with the rest of the fur company's recruits, left St. Louis and headed up the Missouri River to the Platte River area in Colorado and Wyoming.

When his contract expired, Baker returned home to Illinois, but his adventure in the west must have affected him greatly, because he only stayed at home for a short time. Less than a year after his return, Baker again ventured into the Rocky Mountain region, where he began his life as a mountain man.

His life in the Colorado wilderness became legendary, and almost any heroic exploit that can be named was attributed to Baker. It is said that Baker fought bravely in several skirmishes with Indians; that he was the most trusted scout and guide for John Fremont and Governor William

Gilpin; and that he was close friends with other famous men like Kit Carson, Ceran St. Vrain and “Uncle” Dick Wooten. A story is told of how Baker killed two bears using only his hunting knife. He was renowned as the toughest man around. It is also said that in 1857 he went to Utah with Captain Marcey and his troops to fight the Mormons.

Baker did spend a lot of time with Indians and seems to have been practically adopted by a Shoshone tribe. He was respected for his knowledge of the mountains and his ability to interpret for explorers venturing into the Indian areas.

In 1859, Baker and his Indian wife settled on a homestead in what is now North Denver. He built an adobe house and built and operated a ferry service and toll bridge across Clear Creek. He operated a store and a trading post and he continued to work as a guide into the mountains.

Baker found it difficult to remain permanently settled and, in 1869, he left Denver to live for a time in a tepee in Middle Park. He also spent some time operating a coal mine on Coal Creek, near Erie, Colorado.

In 1873, chafing from the encroachment of civilization into Colorado, Baker and his family moved to a new homestead located between the towns of Savery, Wyoming and Slater, Colorado. He built a fort-like cabin on the Little Snake River and worked raising cattle. Baker remained a fixture in Colorado life and he was still seen often in Denver. He died in Wyoming on May 15, 1898. The “Jim Baker Cabin” is now (1992) located in Frontier Park, Cheyenne, Wyoming.

SCOPE AND CONTENTS

This collection spans the years 1873 to 1972 and includes information on the life of Jim Baker. The series includes Biographical Material, which contains manuscripts about Jim Baker; Correspondence; Legal Material, which contains a summary of land deals involving Jim Baker; Literary Material, which contains typescript stories by Mrs. William Stepp about Colorado before the turn of the century; Magazine & Newspaper Articles; and Miscellaneous Material.

The provenance of the collection is unknown. There is an abundance of printed sources on Jim Baker, including a biography by Nolie Mumey, entitled The Life of Jim Baker, 1818-1898: Trapper, Scout, Guide and Indian Fighter (Denver, Colorado: World Press, 1931).

COLLECTION CONTENTS

Biographical Material (undated)

FF	Description	Date
1	Biographical manuscript titled "Jim Baker, The Noted Scout and Guide," by Joseph Baker, son of Jim Baker	undated
2	Biographical typescript and microfilm of "Jim Baker, The Noted Scout and Guide," by Joseph Baker (three copies)	undated
3	Notes regarding the life of Jim Baker	undated

Correspondence (1924)

4	Letter to Charles B. Roth from Mrs. Cyrus Beard, State Historian of Wyoming, regarding the history of Jim Baker	8/19/24
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Legal Material (1873-1885)

5	Summary of land deals involving Jim Baker by the Landon Abstract Company	1873-1885
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Literary Material (undated)

6	Typescript titled "Flying Trees," by Mrs. William Stepp	undated
7	Typescript titled "The Frontier Is Gone," by Mrs. William Stepp, in which Jim Baker is mentioned	undated

- 8 Typescript titled “Manitou,” by Mrs. William Stepp, in which Jim Baker is mentioned undated
- Magazine and Newspaper Articles (1882-1911)
- 9 Transcript of newspaper article from The Denver Tribune regarding the life of Jim Baker 6/10/1882
- 10 Transcript of newspaper article from The Denver Tribune-Republican regarding pioneer hunters 1/24/1886
- 11 Transcript of newspaper article from The Denver Tribune-Republican containing an interview with Jim Baker 7/10/1886
- 12 Transcript of newspaper article from The Denver Tribune-Republican regarding Joseph Baker’s prison sentence for stealing horses 11/6/1886
- 13 Transcript of newspaper article from The Dallas Morning News regarding the life of Jim Baker 2/10/1889
- 14 Transcript of newspaper article from The Denver Republican regarding the life of Jim Baker 2/11/1889
- 15 Newspaper clipping from The Denver Post regarding the movement of Jim Baker’s cabin 7/21/07
- 16 Magazine article titled “Jim Baker: The White Injun.” By Edwin L. Sabin Jan 1911

- 17 Article from The Mountain State Monitor undated
Regarding Jim Baker's cabin

Miscellaneous Material

- 18 Transcript of interview of Mrs. William Stepp, neighbor of Jim Baker from 1861 to 1864 3/14/34
- 19 Report of examination of skeletons found On the homestead site of Jim Baker 9/15/72