

Alice Hiltz

James McPhelemy, and his wife, Ann, were both Irish; and their daughter, Alice, was born in Ireland in October, 1861. The family came to the United States in 1867 and located at Lawrence Mass. for six or seven years. Then Tom Starr, a prominent pioneer placer mine owner of California Gulch, went east for a visit, and married Alice's sister. With him, he took a tame fawn, and some bars of gold from his mines. Starr's gold and stories created great interest amongst the McPhelemys in the mountains of Colorado, and so they decided to locate in the west. They and the Starrs came to Denver, traveling by rail, in the year, probably, of '74.

They spent a week in Denver purchasing an outfit, and awaiting three wagons that came down from California Gulch to meet them. They departed from Denver with four wagons, and 22 people in the party. Traveling by the way of the Garden of the Gods, where they camped for a day and night, they came on, over Ute Pass, up through South Park to the Salt Works, then down Trout Creek to the Arkansas and Cottonwood creek. During the trip, which required a week, and which was finished without incident, four scouts always rode ahead of the small wagon train as an ambush by Indians was feared.

Alice's new home was a three-room log cabin, with a fireplace, and boasting a board floor. The homemade furniture was rough but substantial. Prints and reproductions were clipped from magazines, news-

papers, or from any source obtainable, and were edged with homemade frames of straw.

Ranches already established when the McPhelemys reached the Cottonwood, were the Frank Loan ranch, three Mahon ranches, Thompsons ranch, two Gray ranches, Maine's ranch, and the Baird ranch. Frank Loan sold his ranch to James McPhelemy, who also homesteaded 160 acres, the latter included the greater part of the site of Buena Vista.

(In the earlier days the post office was located at Baird's ranch--Helena established in '68 by John McPherson. Later it was taken, by force and removed to the Cole place on Trout Creek, where it retained its original name. It was next moved to McPhelemy's ranch and renamed Mahonville with James McPhelemy serving as postmaster. He was also the first postmaster at Buena Vista)

The nearest school was located at Brown's creek with Judge Dyer the schoolmaster. He was a great friend of the McPhelemys and visited with them often. He tutored Alice, and proved to be a jolly sort, adaptable to any contingency, and very dependable. (Although the McPhelemys did not become directly involved in the "Lake County War", Alice vividly remembers the incidents leading to, and the brutal assassination of Judge Dyer at Granite. That terrible affair was a shocking blow to the god-fearing people of Lake county, and the McPhelemys felt their loss keenly.

"Father" John L. Dyer--Judge Dyer's father--was also a welcome visitor and friend of the family's. On one occasion, Father Dyer arrived at the ranch about midnight, and Mrs McPhelemy arose to feed him. His were rare visits, thus he was doubly welcome. The entire family tumbled out of bed, even at that late hour; and lengthy, much-wanted religious services were held.



A continual open house was maintained at the ranch, and Mrs McPhelemy always had a light in the window at night to guide any lonely traveler to their cabin. Everyone was welcome, and there was always room for one more at their table.

(The Utes, whose camping site was close to the ranch, came to visit them often. Colorow was a frequent visitor, and they were all very fond of Mrs McPhelemy's sweetened biscuits. There were many pictures of Christ, and religious subjects, on the walls of the cabin which seemed to fascinate the Indians, and before which they repeatedly crossed themselves. They never proved troublesome.)

In '78 or '79 it was decided to establish a school in that district. A small, one room cabin was erected on the McPhelemy ranch, and Alice was chosen as teacher. There were seven pupils, the eldest being Charles Woodard, fifteen, whose father was killed on his ranch at Trout Creek by Tom Walker. After having taught about six weeks, Alice, who was then a minor, was for this reason, replaced by another teacher.

According to Alice Hiltz, Major W. M. Kasson, who formed the Buena Vista Land Co. in August, 1879, approached the ranchers on the Cottonwood to acquire land for the townsite. James McPhelemy, as did others, agreed to apportion off forty acres each for that purpose. Just what the nature or terms of the transaction were is not known, but in some manner Kasson swindled them of the titles to their land. McPhelemy did, finally, secure again, the ownership of four or five acres.

When the town was first founded it laid entirely west of the tracks. Among the first merchants were Calder, Krause and Rollandet, G. F. Bateman, and M. J. Marks. Many of the first merchants were Jews. The town grew rapidly; its population exceeding 1,000 by the end of its first year. Richard Wise was the first mayor.

(The pioneer church organization was the Methodist, followed

next by the Episcopal, and then the Catholic. James McPhelemy donated the land for the Catholic church site, and Tom Starr donated the lumber for the erection of the building. The lumber was made at Starr's mill near Poncha.)

The early days of Buena Vista were wild ones. Some claim that, for a brief period, Buena Vista was even more wild and bloody than the frontier towns on the U. P. Railroad. At one time there were 27 saloons and 3 or more dance halls, all operating at full blast. The coming of the railroads made the town wilder--and more thriving. Buena Vista was prosperous and enjoyed a substantial growth until silver was demonetized.

(The post office was moved to town and located in the general store of Wade & Mead, and, as mentioned before, James McPhelemy continued to serve as postmaster.) Alice served as his clerk and distributed the mail. There were many gamblers and other members of the sporting element, who had assumed aliases or were receiving mail under several names. For these Alice had a special mail box, and she gave out the mail to them through a broken pane in the front window.

While serving in this capacity Alice met John Hiltz, to whom she was happily married at Leadville in 1883. He was engaged in mining at Leadville where the young couple made their home for two years. They then established their home at Buena Vista, and Mr. Hiltz became a salesman, traveling over the entire state. He passed on in 1933. Mrs Hiltz, in good health, still makes her home in Buena Vista.

*Alice G. Hiltz*