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## The Founding of Salida, Colorado<sup>1</sup>

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A party of Denver and Rio Grande Railroad engineers, working under the supervision of Gov. Alexander C. Hunt, surveyed the townsite of South Arkansas (Salida) late in April, 1880. William Van Every, Governor Hunt's agent, made additional surveys early in May. The original plat, which was not filed in the office of the County Clerk until 10:30 a. m., September 21, 1880, included the following area: Front Street to Fifth Street and from D Street to L Street.

The town was located, not as a result of the growth of early settlements, but in the same manner and for the same purposes as Colorado Springs, South Pueblo, and later, Durango. Land constituting South Arkansas, as it was primarily laid off, was homesteaded by Luther Baker and Josiah Hulbert, their dates of entry being February 16 and 18, 1880. Baker and Hulbert subsequently sold their homesteads to Governor Hunt, each receiving \$500. Other land was homesteaded later and several additions were made to the town, which included the two Van Every homesteads, or the Eddy Addition on the upper mesa; George W. Haskell's homestead and addition; and D. E. Kelsey's homestead and addition. R. N. Scott homesteaded the land constituting the Babcock addition in 1879.

One century prior to the founding of South Arkansas, or in 1779, Juan Bautista de Anza, Governor of New Mexico, visited this region. He was leading a punitive expedition against some Comanches, who, under their leader, Green Horn (Cuerno Verde), had been murdering Spanish settlers. He led a force of 645 soldiers and about 200 friendly Yutas (Utes) and Apaches into the San Luis Valley and across the mountains to the Arkansas near the site of Salida.

The next important advent of white men into this region was the expedition of Captain Pike. Marching through Trout Creek

<sup>1</sup>The material for this article was gathered from the records in the County Courthouse, City Clerk's office, early files of the *Mountain Mail*, from Mr. Arthur Ridgway, Chief Engineer of the D. & R. G. W. Railroad, and from pioneers of the Salida region.

\*Mr. Carroll of Salida prepared this article recently while working on the State Historical Society's C. W. A. Project.—Ed.



Pass and down the stream, he and his men reached the Arkansas, just below where Buena Vista is now located, on December 18, 1806. Christmas was spent in the vicinity of what is now the Sneddon Ranch, a few miles north of Salida. The half-starved explorers succeeded in killing eight buffaloes near Brown's Canon. The region was visited on numerous occasions by trappers during the next half century, but they left little record.

In 1839 a small group of emigrants bound for Oregon, instead of following the usual route, traveled up the Arkansas to its source, crossed the divide and went down the Blue River. Between 1841 and 1843 Rufus Sage, trader and trapper, visited this region. In 1845 Fremont passed down Trout Creek to the Arkansas and then followed that stream or a tributary to Tennessee Pass. Captain Gunnison explored Poncha Pass in 1853 and named it Gunnison Pass. In August, 1855, Colonel Fauntleroy, with four companies of soldiers, crossed over Poncha Pass to the Arkansas in pursuit of a band of refractory Utes led by Blanco. About twenty miles from Poncha Pass—where the Ute Trail meets the Arkansas, according to Mr. Arthur Hutchinson—the soldiers discovered the Indians' encampment, and in the surprise attack which followed completely routed them, killing forty and wounding many others.

This region was the home and hunting grounds of the Utes, though visited occasionally by Arapahoes, Cheyennes, and probably other tribes. The Utes, under the leadership of Shavano, Colorow, and Ouray, were on friendly terms with the settlers in the upper Arkansas Valley. Their existence was a roving one, and after the advent of the settlers they usually passed through the valley twice yearly en route to and from South Park and the plains on hunting trips or war expeditions against their traditional enemies, the Arapahoes and Cheyennes. On these trips they usually sojourned in the valley for a month or so, their favorite camping grounds being at Poncha, on the Arkansas, just above where Salida is now located, and on Brown's Creek.

Then came the "Pikes Peak" excitement with its host of eager gold-hunters. The inevitable overflow occurred in 1859 and 1860, with prospectors scattering to the mountains. Some of these pioneer prospectors tramped through South Park, crossed Park Range, and discovered placers in the northern section of what is now Chaffee county.

The first placer claim to be located and worked was discovered by Dr. Earl and his party at Kelly's Bar, four miles below Cache Creek (Granite) in the early spring of 1860. (Historian Hall claims that this discovery was made late in the fall of 1859 but not reported until the following spring.) In April, 1860, the Tabors,

accompanied by Nathaniel Maxey and S. P. Kellogg, located placer claims at the mouth of Cache Creek. They found considerable gold—and black sand; having no quicksilver, they could not separate the two. (These claims later proved to be among the best paying in the state.) Discouraged, and lured by tales emanating from California Gulch, they departed for that location, having spent less than a month at Cache Creek.

The first prospecting for mineral in the vicinity of the South Arkansas River was in the year 1863, when Nat Rich led a party of Georgia miners to Weldon Gulch on Mount Shavano. Some gold was found, and the excitement spread. By fall there were approximately 1,000 people prospecting in or near Weldon Gulch. No paying mines were discovered, however, and the camp was abandoned.

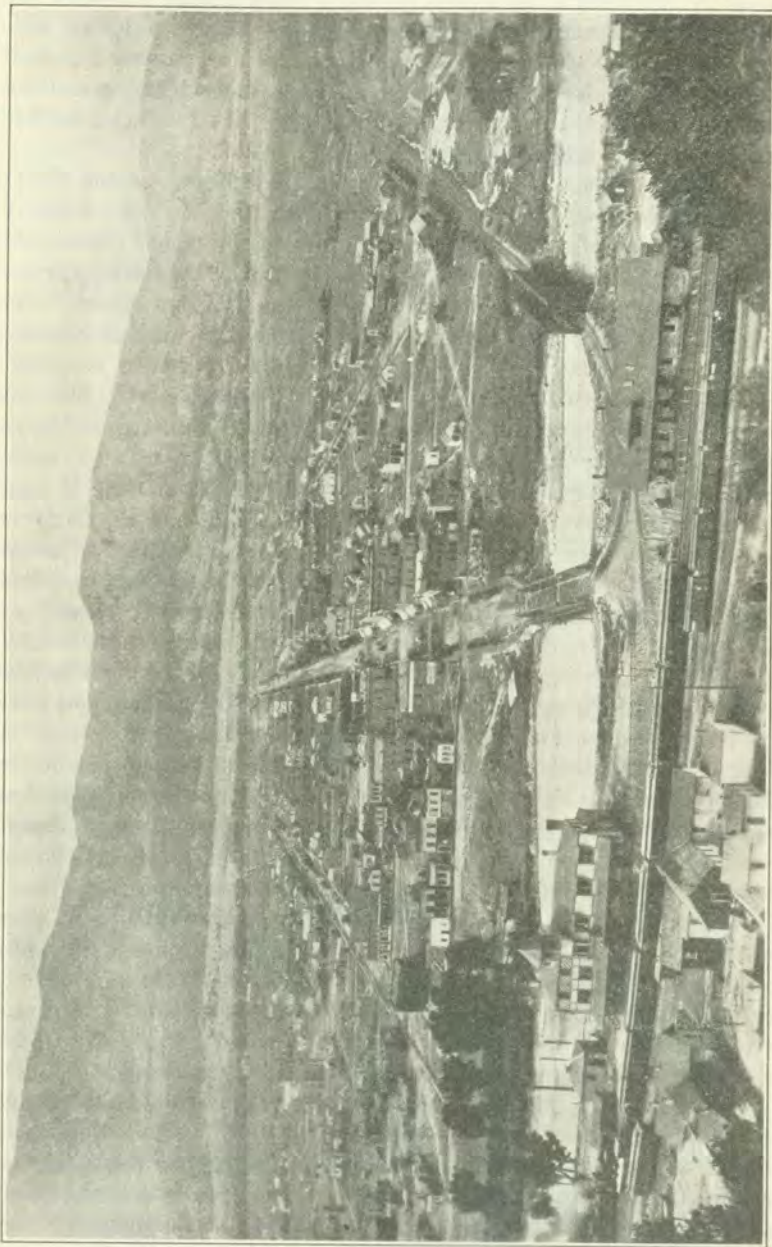
Many of the prospectors were formerly tillers of the soil, so, disappointed in their mining ventures, they instinctively began looking about for homesteads. The first rancher in the upper Arkansas Valley was Frank Mayol, who settled at what is now known as Riverside in 1863. Mayol packed seed potatoes in from Castle Rock to plant his first crop, which he sold in the adjacent mining camps at 50 cents per pound. That same year the first settler located on the South Arkansas. He was John Tanassee, an Italian, who homesteaded 160 acres, and took the first water for irrigation out of the river. He also brought in the first cattle. Tanassee's ranch later became the property of Noah Baer, and part of it is now known as the Swallow Ranch.

The next settlers were Nat Rich and Bob Hendricks, who, in 1865, built a cabin on the site of the present town of Poncha; John Burnett settled on the river above them the same year. Judge Elias F. Dyer settled on what was later known as the Boon Ranch. (Judge Dyer was assassinated at Granite, presumably by a vigilance committee, on July 3, 1875.) Charles Peterson and John McCalmont located in Adobe Park in 1865, followed by the Spragues, Spauldings, and Nolan. The Webers came in 1866, located on the Tanassee ranch for a year, then homesteaded a ranch on a bench above John Burnett's ranch. Brown's, Gas, and Chalk Creeks were settled contemporaneously.

In 1865 John McPherson settled on a tract of land—about where the state reformatory is now located—and the following year established the first postoffice in this part of the country, naming it Helena. With his influence another postoffice was established on the South Arkansas in 1868, with Ira King as postmaster.

Captain Meriam located the Hortense Mine on Mt. Princeton in 1870 or 1871, which was probably the first silver producing mine





SALIDA IN 1887

in Chaffee county. A year or so later the Murphy group of mines was discovered in the same district by Abe Wright. In 1878 N. D. Creede, grubstaked and directed by Hugh Boon and a brother, discovered mineral in paying quantities, and located the Monarch and Little Charm mines. Discoveries were then made at Whitepine, followed by a mining boom throughout the region. Towns sprang into being, including Chaffee City (Monarch), Garfield, Maysville, Shavano, and Whitepine.

The rapid influx of people into Leadville and the upper part of old Lake county and the constantly increasing business following the rich mineral discoveries there, made a division of the county almost imperative. This was done on February 8, 1879, and the newly created county was named Lake; while the upper, or northern, section of the original county of Lake was named Carbonate county. This did not prove to be satisfactory, however, so two days later Carbonate was renamed Lake, and the new county, Chaffee, in honor of Senator Jerome B. Chaffee. The seat of old Lake county was at Granite, and so it remained as such for the new county, while the seat of Lake county was located at Leadville. The area of Chaffee county, as first created, was 1,189 square miles—some changes have been made since—and it was, and is, bounded on the east by Park and Fremont, on the south by Fremont and Saguache, and on the west by Gunnison county.

In the fall of 1878 a party of Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe engineers, anticipating the construction of their railroad through the Grand Canyon of the Arkansas, laid off a town about one mile below the confluence of the Arkansas and South Arkansas rivers, and named it Cleora, in honor of the daughter of William Bales, the owner of Bales' Tavern and stage station. The town flourished in 1879, and by the spring of 1880 had a population of about 600. Cleora seemed to be advantageously situated as it was a point from which the whole interior of the state might easily be reached.

Then the Denver & Rio Grande won the right to extend its railroad through the Grand Canyon of the Arkansas, and began building to reach Leadville, the San Juan country, the San Luis Valley, and the western part of the state. In the spring of 1880 the railroad reached Cleora, which began to boom; but about the same time the town's populace began to hear disquieting rumors that Cleora was not to be made the division point, and that a new town was to be founded further up the river. Thereupon a delegation set off posthaste for Colorado Springs to interview the promoters of the railroad to ascertain the truth. When Governor Hunt was asked why he didn't favor Cleora as a townsite, he replied, "God Almighty makes a townsite, not men!" Realizing



the truth of this statement, the delegation returned to Cleora as fast as it came, and the town commenced to move, bodily and en masse, to South Arkansas.

Once the newly founded town became an established and known fact the rush to it began. There seems to be some doubt and argument as to what was the first building erected in South Arkansas; some aver it was Van Every's building, while others are positive it was a saloon building, which was erected in the following manner:

Freighters, en route to Leadville, were encamped on the site of the new town. With them was Joe King, who, desirous of engaging in the liquor dispensing trade, was seeking a location. One of the "mule skimmers" suggested that, inasmuch as there was a town laid off there, it should be as good a location as any. King agreed, but at the same time confessed that he had no material with which to erect a building, nor a stock of liquor. This did not deter the enterprising "skimmers," for they promptly halted some freight wagons loaded with lumber for Leadville, and forcibly took enough lumber to erect a small shack; and then secured two barrels of whisky in the same manner. Someone donated a tin cup, and King was soon behind his bar, such as it was, doing a brisk business. The shack thus erected was a clapboard affair, about twelve feet square, located on the second lot on the east corner of F and Sackett Streets, and facing F. It was either torn or burnt down soon after.

The railroad was completed to South Arkansas on May 1st, and the station—a box car—was opened for business May 20th.

The first merchants were Webb and Corbin, who moved up from Cleora and located on the west side of lower F Street. Their first place of business was a tent, boarded up; later they erected a substantial frame building. The Hawkins House and Grand View Hotels were moved up from Cleora, as were various other buildings. Other early comers were G. F. Bateman, who moved from Buena Vista and located a hardware store on West First Street; and G. D. Moll, who opened a tobacco shop. The Chaffee County Bank, W. E. Robertson, president, issued its first draft on June 1st; and the Bank of South Arkansas—Dewitt, Hartzell & Co.—opened for business June 10th. The two banks consolidated in April, 1881. The first brick building in Salida was erected on F Street in the summer of 1880 by the Chaffee County Bank. There was soon a laundry, too—operated by Sing Lee, the only Chinese to locate in Salida during the early days.

On May 28th a printing press was moved from Cleora and assembled while the carpenters began to erect a building over it.

Under very trying and adverse circumstances the first paper was set up and made ready for print, excepting the banner, or heading, which had failed to arrive from Chicago. George Smith, a merchant, solved the problem, however, by drafting the letters on to a pine board for a heading. Thus the town's first newspaper, the *Mountain Mail*, was published on June 5, 1880. The editor was M. R. Moore, the publisher, H. C. Olney. The *Mountain Mail* was a well set up, two sheet, seven column weekly, published on Saturday; the rates were 10 cents per copy, or three dollars per year—in advance.

Included in the advertising of the first issue were the following cards: McIntire & Bean, Feed Merchants; Roller & Twitchell, Furniture & Undertakers; Peter Mulvany, Wholesaler; Smith's Clothing & Dry Goods Store; G. F. Bateman, Hardware; J. J. Harris and W. E. Wilson, Grocers; Henry Mack, Lumberman; M. M. French, Drugs; Rowe & Thompson, Club Room; Richard Devereaux, Saloon; also two hotels, two barber shops, and another furniture store, and lumber dealer. Professional cards included: R. S. Hallock and R. F. Parsons, Physicians and Surgeons; W. S. Smyth, and Baker and Simmonds, Attorneys; Hugh Moore, Notary Public and Real Estate Agent; J. R. Kissler, Architect; and H. Fielding, Contractor. The Boon brothers were advertising for 150 men to work on the construction of the Monarch toll road.

The Denver & Rio Grande advertised two daily trains each way with Pullman Palace Sleeping Cars, Horton Reclining Chair Cars, and Observation Cars, and daylight trains through the Grand Canyon of the Arkansas. This service was east of South Arkansas as the railroad did not reach Buena Vista until June 5th.

There was an article on mining terms, for the benefit of the tenderfoot, in which it was mentioned that a ton of gold was worth \$602,875 and a ton of silver, \$37,709.57; a story of the mining strike in Leadville was given; and several columns of local and personal news were included. In an article concerning the activities of the town, the following facts were given:

In the first week of the town company's—so called—founding Van Every and Fisher, agents, sold lots to the amount of \$10,000, the second week, \$9,000, and the third week, \$12,000, receiving \$200 for the inside lots and \$800 for the corners; there were forty-five buildings completed or under construction, and work was to be started the following week on many more; a number of residences were to be constructed at once (J. H. Hardy's was the first completed); an irrigation ditch from the South Arkansas had been dug to bring water to every lot within the city's limits; a bridge was badly needed and would soon be constructed, across



the Arkansas at the foot of F Street—the first bridge being at the foot of K Street; and it was further stated that South Arkansas was the liveliest town in Colorado.

Early in June Barlow and Sanderson moved their stage offices to town, and Bales' Tavern and stage station were subsequently closed. Captain John T. Blake, Cleora's postmaster, made arrangements to send the mail up every evening, after the arrival of the trains, to W. W. Roller, who distributed it at his store. A few days later Captain Blake began the erection of a postoffice and store building on the upper west corner of First and F Streets; and on June 19th the Cleora postoffice was transferred to the new town. The postal authorities then named the new postoffice Arkansas—a postoffice near Poncha had the title of South Arkansas—which brought forth a howl of protest from the inhabitants.

The following month Governor Hunt suggested "Salida" as a fitting and appropriate name, which, he explained, was Spanish for gateway. He emphasized that the correct and more musical pronunciation was "Sah-lee-dah." The name was adopted; but his wishes, as far as pronunciation was concerned, were little heeded. For a year following, or until the postal and railroad authorities recognized the new name, there was much confusion, as the postoffice was called Arkansas; the railroad station, South Arkansas; while the citizens proudly referred to the town as Salida.

Though there was much agitation about the installation of a municipal water system during the first year of Salida's birth, wells supplied water for domestic use—the first being located in the square near the corner of First and G Streets—until September, 1882, when the water works was completed at a cost of \$17,500. The spring which supplied the water, and is yet the source of Salida's water supply, is located on what was then known as Ira King's ranch, about three miles above town. The completion of the water system was an occasion of which the citizens of Salida were rightfully proud; and the achievement was flaunted before the citizens of Buena Vista, who had contemptuously referred to Salida as "the little town on the sand bar."

During the very first month of Salida's existence there was serious discussion about incorporating the town, and on July 22nd there was a petition for this purpose, signed by forty-six Salida citizens, filed with the county judge. The election was held on August 23rd, when the incorporation was defeated by the sporting element, 92 to 64. The substantial citizens of the town were not to be deterred, however, for on October 4th ballots were again cast, the result being 72 to 0 for incorporation.

The first municipal election was held at Roller's real estate office on October 25th. A light vote was cast, and a straight "People's" ticket was elected: For mayor, J. E. McIntire won from W. W. Wightman; for recorder, R. B. Hallock defeated W. P. Moore; and O. V. Wilson, W. F. Galbraith, R. Wyman, and R. Devereaux were elected trustees. Their first meeting was held on Saturday, October 28th, when the primal ordinances were framed, and the following appointments made: W. A. Hawkins, police magistrate; L. W. Craig, treasurer; S. L. Ryan, attorney; and Jim Meadows, marshal, the latter to receive sixty dollars per month. An appropriation of \$260 was made for the erection of a calaboose. A volunteer fire department was organized one year later and the city made an allowance of \$300 for equipment.

An intense rivalry existed between Buena Vista and Salida, with other towns taking sides according to their locations. Buena Vista watched the growth of the town on the South Arkansas with ill-concealed and growing alarm, while she openly poked fun at it. The editors of the newspapers boasted of their own town's superiority and derided the other. A vote to determine the location of the county seat was included in the general election on November 2, 1880, which complicated the situation. Salida accused Buena Vista of irregularities in the printing of the ballots, and of preparing to have 500 illegal votes cast. Election day came and with it victory for Buena Vista, with a total of 1,100 votes polled in her favor. Salida received but 147; Nathrop, 800; Granite, 67; miscellaneous, 13; total, 2,137. (It must be remembered that women had not the right to vote.) The election was declared unconstitutional, but the Supreme Court decided in favor of Buena Vista.

On August 3, 1881, a mass meeting convened in Governor Hunt's building for the purpose of taking action towards locating the state capital at Salida; and a delegation was sent to the Canon City convention the following month. Captain Blake was the foremost man in this movement and contended that Salida had the best water available, the most agreeable climate, and was the geographical center, and would soon be the railroad center of the state. To strengthen its cause, Salida agreed to donate 160 acres of land; as much of it as necessary to be used for the capitol site, and the remainder to be sold and the proceeds used to aid in paying for the erection of the building. Salida, though supported by Leadville and other towns in the vicinity, never had a chance. After the overwhelming defeat the *Mountain Mail* came out with the statement "We didn't want the capitol anyway; just the advertising and publicity!"



Though the *Mountain Mail* failed to mention it, school was first held in a rough, clapboard storeroom located on First Street about one block from the present railroad crossing. There were about forty pupils, ranging from six-year-old children to young men and women, and the term lasted two months. On April 18, 1881, a school was started for a term of three months in Hallock's building with Miss Jennie Smith as teacher. Governor Hunt's headquarters building on lower E Street was also used as a school-room. This building was the first two-storied one in town. On October 15, 1881, Governor Hunt donated half a block at the corner of Third and D Streets for a school site. The new schoolhouse was completed at a cost of \$3,000 the following October and school immediately commenced therein with ninety-five pupils in attendance. The following year there were 225.

The first religious services were conducted by the Reverend James Peterson, a Presbyterian minister, in Van Every's Hotel on Sunday, June 20, 1880. Services were later held twice a month by the Reverend J. L. Merritt in Governor Hunt's building. In November Governor Hunt donated two lots on the corner of Third and F Streets for the Presbyterian church site, and a contract was given to Bower and Davis for the erection of a frame structure twenty-six by forty feet, which was completed on Saturday, June 22, 1881. Services were conducted there the following day. Reverend R. M. Whaling was the first regular minister. Governor Hunt later gave sites to other churches at the corners of Fourth and D Streets, and construction of the Methodist church was begun soon after.

The first child born in Salida was Bert Ohmert, on July 26, 1880, the son of Mr. and Mrs. W. S. Ohmert, and the grandson of Jessie W. Ohmert, pioneer miner and rancher. Jessie Ohmert was the first to manufacture bricks in Salida, while his son, W. S. Ohmert, was the earliest to engage in the ice business.

The first wedding also occurred in July. On the fourteenth Miss Pearl Fry, daughter of the proprietress of a local millinery store, was married to A. H. Vernon of Maysville, Judge Pickney officiating.

On July 30th W. W. Cole's circus, "mammoth and stupendous," which required three special trains to transport it to Salida—according to the advertisements—gave a performance for one dollar, with almost everyone in the region in attendance.

The first social function was a dancing party at the Ramsdell residence early in July with twenty couples present. In September the Hutchinson family gave a concert, and a dancing party was

held at Bales' ranch. A ladies' church society was formed and met in October at Mrs. Moore's home; later a social was held at the home of J. P. Smith. The Salida dancing club was organized in December, and a Christmas ball staged at the Hawkins House. Construction of the Dickman opera house, at the east corner of Second and F Streets, was begun in November, 1881, and completed a few months later at a cost of \$8,000. It was Salida's first show house and finest building at that time. The opera house was a two-story structure, forty by eighty feet, and was the scene of many gay festivities. The first performance was a home talent affair, followed later in the season by "Uncle Tom's Cabin."

The continuation of Salida's growth and prosperity through its first summer and early fall was due to the fact that it was the forwarding point for the Gunnison, San Luis, and San Juan districts. Though officials of the railroad reassured anxious citizens that Salida was to be a division point, no further preparations or construction was carried on there as all efforts were being expended on completion of the railroad to Leadville.

Then about September 1st work was commenced to span the Arkansas River at Salida. The bridge was completed, and the first rail laid on the Marshall Pass route on September 20th. About the same time work was started on the roundhouse and the stone depot. The stone for the depot was quarried near Nathrop, and the building was completed in October. An addition to the depot was erected the following year, and another in 1882, which made it "an elegant and substantial depot, the best in the state." That winter (1880-1881) work was begun on the filling in and enlarging of the yards, also coal chutes and trainmaster's residence were built. The railroad hospital was located in Salida in 1882 and that fall erection of the shops was begun. The Monte Cristo Hotel, which succeeded Gray's Hotel as the official railroad hostelry, was completed and furnished, at a total cost of \$38,000, in May, 1883.

Salida citizens were greatly excited over reports of a short line to be built from Denver through Platte Canon to South Park, and down Ute Trail to Salida. Survey of the route was begun on Ute Trail in February, 1881, and work started at Hecla Junction in June, which was completed to the Calumet iron mines, where ended Salida's hopes of being on a direct rail route to Denver.

Prices in the newly founded town were moderate, with native lumber selling at \$32 per thousand feet, best Denver flour \$4.25 per hundred pounds; butter, 30, and ham, 14 cents a pound, and eggs 30 cents per dozen. Nor was the town "wild and woolly"



during its first year. Such a period did occur in 1883. Though Marshal Meadows was wounded in his first "roundup" of undesirables, there was not a fatal shooting until almost a year after the birth of the town, when, on April 11th, Charlie Roth killed John Elliott in an altercation over a woman.

Salida's growth was not phenomenal by any means, yet it was steady and substantial, excepting for a short depressing period during its first winter, which started when the rails reached Poncha. Then the construction crews were moved to Poncha and that town was made the forwarding point. The editor of the *Mountain Mail* admitted that Poncha was experiencing a wild boom; and though Salida was the most quiet town in the state, it was still the "boss" of that vicinity. The editor of the *Chaffee County Times* at Buena Vista was joyously positive that Salida was "played out." He was mistaken. Before spring many people were bidding Poncha adieux and returning to Salida, which began to thrive again. Once more the *Mountain Mail* enumerated the town's growth and merits. It also mentioned the fact that Salida was surrounded by rapidly developing mining camps, which included the Orient, Kirber, Whitepine, Monarch, and Calumet districts, also placer mining on the Arkansas.

Governor Hunt, because of his extensive real estate interests, "pushed" the town, and established his headquarters there in August. He announced that a company would begin to lay pipe for the purpose of bringing the waters of Poncha's hot springs to town, and that he would donate lots worth \$6,000 to anyone who would agree to erect a \$50,000 hotel thereon. Neither one of these worthy ideas ever materialized. Governor Hunt also promised to donate shade trees to the town upon its incorporation. Whether or not he actually did is not recorded, but quite a number of trees were set out in 1881.

On June 1, 1880, the town's population was 353, increasing to 750 by the first of the year, and amounting to 1,500 in 1882. (None of these figures included the floating element.) Local railroad receipts for the month of July, 1880, were 6,000 passenger and \$49,000 freight; the local tonnage for the year totaled 4,693 tons forwarded and 19,382 tons received. For the year of 1881 the receipts were 2,537 tons forwarded and 9,929 tons received; freight receipts were \$64,620.98 and passenger receipts were \$59,340.91. (The decrease in tonnage of almost 50 per cent was due to the fact that Salida was no longer the forwarding point.) Postal receipts for that year were: Stamps sold, \$1,786.53; stamps cancelled, \$1,699.25. There were twenty-two business structures, 24 resi-

dences, and 20 tenements—for railroad workers—completed, and twenty-five other buildings under construction in 1881.

So we find Salida, before the close of its second year, not built "on a sand bar," but substantially founded, with the roots of commercial and social progress deeply embedded and its future assured.