

John Mathews

I was born in Illinois and came to Pueblo in March, 1872, walking all the way from Cherokee County Kansas. I followed different outfits, eating and sleeping, where I could secure such accommodations by performing some service to earn them. Two months elapsed before I finally reached Pueblo, where I got a job for a day loading wool in the narrow gauge cars, which held but four or five sacks, and for which I received fifty cents.

The D&RG Railroad had built to Pueblo, ceased construction, and dismissed their, or its, construction crews; consequently Pueblo was flooded with men seeking work and jobs were scarce. I succeeded in getting a job herding sheep for a man by the name of Aiken. I was located on Turkey Creek, near Pike's Peak, when one day a cloudburst occurred and a wall of water ten feet high came down the creek and swept away at least 300 head of sheep. Losing my job--without receiving a cent of pay--I returned to Pueblo and worked at various jobs during the next few years.

June 15, 1875, I, with my mother, brother, and sister, came to Burnett's ranch on the South Arkansas above Poncha, and I rented the ranch on shares. The crop of wheat, oats, peas, and potatoes, was planted, and conditions gave promise of a good year; but the grasshoppers came in July, and when they left the country was barren and desolate. They left their eggs, so the next year the little grasshoppers

ate everything green as fast as it came up, thus that year was a barren one, too. The second year of the grasshopper plague I was on the Maxwell ranch, which I had also leased on shares; and that fall I hadn't one animal or chicken left, besides I was in debt.

In the spring of '77 I went to Granite where I worked in the Granite House hotel for awhile before I secured work at the placer mines on Cache Creek. I placer mined there for three seasons, returning to the South Arkansas in the winter to hunt and to work for the ranchers there.

During this time I squatted on some land the rights for which I later traded to an itinerant salesman, named Feathers, receiving a sewing machine and \$1 50. The town of Maysville was located on this land, and Feathers profited handsomely.

While I was working at Cache Creek H. A. W. Tabor offered me a partnership in two claims at Leadville if I would develop them. I was receiving \$7.50 per day then and needed every cent of it to support my folks; so I was afraid to take a chance and refused the offer. Later the claims sold for a tidy sum.

In 1880 I entered the employ of Frank Hayden at his ranch a few miles above Granite. Hayden homesteaded part of this ranch, and later hired his men to 'pre-empt' 160 acres each for which he paid them \$1 50. He then bought William Champ's ranch--the upper end of the valley--for \$10,000, thus making the Hayden ranch the largest in the Upper Arkansas Valley. Acquiring the large ranch proved to be a good investment for Hayden. The ranch produced 600 tons of hay, which, during the Leadville boom, or for a period of three years, brought as high as \$125 per ton, and never falling below \$25.

That same year John Weir came to the ranch seeking employment and I gave him a job. He married Hayden's daughter and later became owner

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of the ranch. Many times placer mining companies attempted to buy the Hayden ranch, offering as much as \$100,000 for it, according to rumors, but the owner would never sell until last year (1933) when John Weir sold to some mining company--probably because he wished to retire.

During the rush to Leadville I erected and operated a "stop-
ping place" on the ranch. I served meals, at fifty cents each, and fed and stabled stock. The business proved to be profitable as traffic by the ranch was heavy.

On one occasion I had to make a business trip to Cleora and returning to the ranch I camped at the big cut near Pine Creek. The next morning, traffic was streaming past, I completed my preparations to depart and drove to the edge of the road to await my chance to enter the traffic to continue my journey. Well, there was such a continual flow of teams and various vehicles that I found it impossible to drive out on the road. That night I was still waiting; and camped again at the same spot!

I spent the winter of '80 and '81 in the new town of Salida. The following year I bought the squatter's right of a ranch on the Little Cochetopa creek, then my brother and I homesteaded an additional 160, making a total of 320. There I have been, on and off, ever since.

I spent about five years in the Cripple Creek district where I entered the employ of the Crestone Mining Co. It was I who discovered the rich ore for them in the Jack Pot mine, which they had leased. Later I was manager of the Jack Pot. Following that I worked for various other mining companies. I then returned to my ranch on the Little Cochetopa, and am now making my home at Poncha.

John Matraev