

Early Days at Brown's Canon and Vicinity

My father, Griffith Evans, who was born in Wales in 1834, emigrated with his parents to America in '53; and came to Colorado from Dodge City Kansas in '74. He went to Brown's Creek, Chaffee County (then Lake) and there bought the squatter's right of Henry Weber's ranch which numbered 160 acres. Our family, including myself, came out the following year.

The first settlers to locate on Brown's Creek, or vicinity, was some miners who came from Cache Creek to spend the winter and founded a small settlement about a half a mile from the Arkansas river and named it Brownsville. The Gillilands were the first ranchers, having settled on the creek in '64. During the following year of 1865 John Coon settled on Gas Creek. He was one of the ringleaders of the "Lake County War". Charles Nachtrieb's ditch rights on Chalk Creek dated from '67; so he must have settled there in '66. Matt Johnson settled on our ranch in the late sixties, while the McCormicks settled here about the same time as my father, and Guire located here later.

Crops were scanty and farming not very profitable. My father opened a store on the ranch during the first year, and he purchased his stock of merchandise in Canon City. Prices were comparatively low, as far as I remember. We sold a good grade, guaranteed miner's boot for \$6. There were many miners below us on the Arkansas and they bought their supplies from us, giving gold dust in payment. Father kept the gold in a pint bottle, which, when filled, he gave to a freighter to deposit it in the bank at Colorado Springs.

(The first postoffice was located at Harrington's ranch on Gas Creek. Harrington also operated a store. In the spring of 1875 the post office was moved to our ranch and father served as postmaster. Still later it was located on Ehrhart's ranch. The first school was also located on Brown's creek on our ranch before we came, and religious services were held there every few months.)

I remember that soon after we came to Brown's creek a band of Utes camped on our ranch. I procured an old pistol of my father's and in company with an other boy sneaked up to a little bluff overlooking the camp to "kill an Injun". About this time a brave set out, with a rifle over his shoulder, for our store. He saw us, emitted a mighty whoop, flung his gun to his shoulder, and pointed it in our direction. With a dash of speed, that would have done credit to any Indian, we left the scene; in fact, we ran so fast that I lost the barrel of the pistol I was carrying and I never did find it.

(During the Lake County War my father was held up by the vigilantes, taken to Nachtrieb's ranch on Chalk Creek, and was given a mock trial after which he was freed. Merriam was taken that day, also, and was hung until he was almost dead. Spies were about our ranch every night until father threatened to kill the next one on sight. We were left in peace after that.)

When the railroad was being built through Brown's Canon a man by the name of James built and operated a saloon near our ranch. The construction crews, of course flocked to the saloon and I saw as many as fifty of them at one time lying on the ground drunk. They were a wild, rough lot.

Dr. A. E. Wright discovered the Mary Murphy mine, the first of any importance in the St. Elmo district. In 1880 my father opened a store about two and one half miles from the Mary Murphy. Early in the spring

of '80 he engaged an engineer and they laid off the town in about six feet of snow. He named the town Forest City, which was appropriate, as it was necessary to cut down a heavy growth of spruce and pine before the town could be built. The postal authorities, however, would not accept the name, so, my father, who had recently read and was impressed with the noel, St. Elmo, named the town after the story.)

When the snow melted and disappeared, later in the year, the rush to St. Elmo began. Some of the first merchants were Frances Brothers, general store; W. S. Raymond, Hardware; T. J. Ehrhart, Feed Business; and the Whitney and Clifton Hotels. There were also some Jew clothing stores. W. A. Rogers was the first constable. The first school was started, I think, in '82 with about fifty pupils. There were no churches but religious services were held in the schoolhouse.

By fall there were at least 500 people in St. Elmo and vicinity. In 1883 operation of the Mary Murphy mine was carried on at full blast, and there were about 500 men employed there. Colonel Frink of St. Louis was the manager and he had assistants, master mechanics, foremen, and mechanics aglore. The ore was shipped over the South Park railroad to the Grant smelter at Denver.

In 1922 the company that owned the Mary Murphy suddenly closed down the mine and mill and a watchman to guard the property was retained for two years then his pay was stopped. The mill, with its expensive and extensive machinery, other equipment, tools, and supplies was left unguarded and at the mercy of the elements. The tramway, with its miles of heavy cable slowly became a victim of the weather and much of the cable is now rusted away. All supplies, etc., were stolen; and in 1932 a trucker from Iowa went there and stole everything possible, even ruining the machinery by breaking it with a sledge in order to obtain

the babbitt and other metals.

E. Wilbur, roadmaster of the South Park Railroad, usually took a flat car behind the passenger train to the top of the pass, and then, when he was ready to return, rode back down the hill on the car, using a brakeclub to control it. Mark Twain was visiting in the vicinity, and, hearing of Wilbur's fast trips down the mountain, he decided to make the trip and enjoy the scenery. The trip was probably wilder and faster than he had bargained for and when he climbed off of the car at the end of the ride he insisted that Wilbur found it necessary to tie a rope around an Irishman and throw him off to serve as a brake.

In 1886 the family departed from St. Elmo and returned to the ranch and then we children attended school in Denver. The following year my father passed away at the ranch. My mother is still living and makes her home in Denver, while I have continued to farm and live on the ranch at Brown's creek.

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