

From F.B. Agee, Salida,  
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D

STATEMENT OF ARTHUR HUTCHINSON

Mr. Hutchinson stated that his mother, Annabel McPherson, then twelve years of age, came to this part of the country in 1860 with her mother, her father, John McPherson, an uncle, Murdoch McPherson, her older brother, C.H. McPherson, and her younger brother, John McPherson, who died at Poncha Springs about a year ago. There was another girl, Sarah Porter, of the same age as Miss McPherson in the party.

They left Wisconsin on June 18, 1860. There were about fifteen wagons in the party, all drawn by ox teams except one four-horse outfit. After they crossed the Missouri River at Council Bluffs, they frequently encountered the Plains Indians. These Indians were different from those that they later met in Colorado in that they always carried their shields and were naked except for breech clouts. There were no actual hostilities between the Plains Indians and their party, though the Indians would frequently intercept the trail in front of them and then dash down upon them with a yell, frightening the oxen. Quite often a wagon tongue would be broken by the oxen whirling a round.

A woman, however, was wounded and afterwards died in an immigrant party just ahead of them. This party had made some trade with the Indians and gave them money in the transaction. The Indians became dissatisfied and angry, and threw the money down on the ground. The woman jumped out of the wagon and started picking it up, whereupon one of the Indians shot her in the stomach with an arrow. The McPhersons met a man from this party hauling the woman back to Council Bluffs in a wagon to enable her to get medical treatment.

While crossing the plains the little party narrowly escaped disaster through all of their oxen being stolen one night. Two men on horseback, rather suspicious looking characters, overtook the party and followed it for two days. They then disappeared and a few nights later the oxen were stolen. Fortunately the man with the four-horse outfit was very careful of the horses. He would not allow them to graze far from camp in the evening and always brought them into camp early where he would tie them up for the night. Consequently the thieves were unable to also make away with the horses.

When they discovered the theft the following morning, Murdoch McPherson and three other men of the party mounted on the horses, immediately set out in pursuit. After a forty mile chase, they overtook the thieves at nightfall and recovered their oxen. Stranded on the desolate plains of Nebraska, remote from



civilization, and surrounded by hostile Indians, there is no doubt as to what the fate of this little party would have been had they been unable to recover their oxen. There is also little doubt as to what would have been the fate of the two thieves had they not made their escape before the pursuers came in rifle range of them.

The party pushed on across the plains. One afternoon they met a Pony Express rider, who informed them that the Indians were on the warpath, that they were massacring all of the immigrants to the west and burning all of the Pony Express stations, killing the tenders. A halt was called and a council held. Some were for turning back immediately, some for putting themselves in a state of defense, and some for waiting a few days to ascertain if the rumor was correct. All of the men were for taking the women and children to the nearby sandhills and hiding them for the night; but the women said they preferred to remain with their husbands, come what might. The men then put the caravan in as good position of defense as possible, and slept that night with their guns at their side. It was also the first night they had camped in a coyote country. About 3 a.m. the coyotes started their mournful howls, which threw the party, with their already overstrained nerves, into a state of high excitement. They thought it was the Indians. The men sprang to arms and awaited their coming; but when daylight finally came, it found everything peaceful. They decided to continue on, and afterwards learned that, although Indians had burned an express station or two, the Pony Express rider's story had been greatly exaggerated.

After weeks of travel across the plains, during which they encountered daily immense herds of buffalo, they finally reached the Arkansas river, whence they followed its course to Canon City, arriving there in October 1860. After resting a few days, they journeyed northward into South Park where they remained a short time and then proceeded onward to California Gulch, the old Oro City mining camp.

While they were camped at Canon City, a large band of Ute Indians stopped over night there. They were all in war paint, with the large yellow crescents on their cheeks and streaks of red under their eyes, presenting a terrifying spectacle. The Indians went on eastward, but returned in three or four days with a large number of Cheyenne scalps. They again camped across the river from them, and throughout the night gave a war dance with continuous beating of the tom-toms, in celebration of their victory. These Indians did not molest them.

The McPhersons remained at Oro City until about 1865 when the first mining excitement there commenced to die down, after which, with others, they pushed on down the Arkansas and settled near the present town of Buena Vista.



At the time the McPherson party left Wisconsin, Murdoch McPherson was engaged in the lumber business, and hauled his saw-mill along with him across the plains until he reached South Park. The mill was unloaded there and set up. Shortly afterwards, he sold it, but it was operated there until a great many years later.

Mr. Hutchinson mentioned that his mother in later years often recalled the days in the early 60's around the Ore City camp. Not a small portion of the camp was made up of what were known as the "Georgia Miners", who had come West during the early part of the Civil War. There were many picturesque characters and the men commonly had long hair and were clad in buckskins. Occasionally news would reach camp of a battle between the Northern and Southern armies. Sometimes it would be a Union victory; sometimes a Confederate. Heated discussions would usually follow which would wind up in a general fight between Southern and Northern sympathizers. The Union men were, however, stronger in the camp, and the Southern sympathizers usually came out second best in the encounters. About once a month, mail would reach camp and usually with it a few jugs of whiskey. There would be a general celebration and wild times among the men. At such times, Col. Austin, a very dignified, gray haired old ex-army officer could be seen with his plug hat and Prince Albert coat mingling with the rest of the crowd with their long hair and buckskin shirts, presenting a rather incongruous appearance in his rough surroundings.

Mr. Hutchinson stated that his father, Joseph Hutchinson, came to what is now Chaffee County in 1866 at the close of the civil war. He served throughout the Civil War in the Union Army as Captain of Company D of the 18th Indiana Infantry; was wounded at Vicksburg; later, on his recovery, was transferred to Texas; and at the close of the war was on Provost Marshall duty in New Orleans.

Shortly after his arrival in this part of the country, he went to work for Bailey and Gaff, who at that time had extensive mining interests around Granite. Later he went into the cattle business, and shortly afterwards, Bailey and Gaff formed a partnership with him, each putting in \$10,000 at the start, and then adding to it from time to time. They ranged their cattle up around Tennessee Pass and as far south as Saguache in 1871. One lot of ~~xxxxxx~~ 500 steers, which they shipped to market, averaged 1100 pounds each. At that time, cattle were loaded out on the railroad, at Deertrail, east of Denver, if trailed over the South Park route; or at Las Animas if trailed down the Arkansas river. At the time he settled in the country, the Ute Indians were traditional enemies of the Arapahoes and Cheyennes, and a big battle, lasting 3 days, was fought between them on the mesa west of Salida, several years prior to the advent of the white men. Subsequent to the coming of the whites, the Utes made frequent incursions into the Arapahoe and Cheyenne country to the north and east, usually returning with a great many scalps. In 1868 while on one of these raids, a big battle was fought in South Park



with the Cheyennes and Arapahoes. Upon the return of the Utes to the Arkansas Valley they had a war dance near present John Davidson ranch. As they danced the Indians became wilder and wilder. They would dash into the creek with their horses full speed; quite often several horses would be down in a tangled mass with their riders.

This section of the country being near the border line between the Ute territory and that of the Cheyennes and Arapahoes, it was not uncommon to see signal fires long after the whites had started to settle the country. The Ute scouts in the vicinity of Canon would signal, by means of smoke during the day and fire at night, the approach of the Plains Indians, to give warning the different bands throughout the mountains to meet and repel the invaders.

Joe Lamb, who afterwards killed one of the two Espinosas that ~~he~~ committed the numerous murders in South Park in 1863, was in this part of the country during the early 60's. He and another person were camped on Currant creek northeast of the present town of Galida, on a hunting and prospecting trip. While there, a band of 50 or 60 Cheyenne Indians came to their camp and wanted something to eat. The band was made up entirely of bucks with no squaws along, and since it was on Ute territory it was evident to Lamb and his companion that they were out on a raid. Lamb was friendly to the Utes, and after the Cheyennes had left his camp and it was sufficiently dark that he could travel without being detected, he made the trip to the camp of a large band of Utes under the command of Chief Colorado some 10 or 12 miles distant. He reached Colorado's camp about midnight. There was a solitary Indian guarding the ponies and the rest were asleep. He inquired of the Indian for Chief Colorado. The Indian pointed out Colorado's tepee, whereupon Lamb went there, awoke him, and informed him in regard to the Cheyennes. He stated that in two minutes the entire camp was in an uproar. It was too dark to set out immediately, but they were after the Cheyennes by daylight, encountered them the following day, and defeated them. Lamb claimed Colorado never forgot this favor. Several years later, he became lost while making a winter trip through South Park country, but finally happened upon Colorado's camp. Colorado extended him a very hearty welcome and fed and cared for him until he was able to continue on with his trip.

In 1867 or '68, John McPherson, grandfather of Arthur Hutchinson, established the first post office in this section of the country. It was a few miles to the south of the present town of Buena Vista, on the Arkansas River, and was called Helena. At that time the mail was brought in from Fairplay to Helena, then down the Arkansas and into the San Luis Valley to Saguache and Del Norte. He stated his grandfather was instrumental in the starting of a number of other post offices in this section. A small nucleus of settlers would become established, whereupon they would ask for a post office. The postal officials would instruct John McPherson to look into the matter to see whether a post office was justified, which quite often would be followed by the



establishment of an office and the appointment of a post master. One such post office was established on what is now the Scanga place on the Little Arkansas in 1868. It was called South Arkansas, and Ira King was the first post master. The mail was rather light in those days. He mentioned that after Ira King had been post master a short time he decided to give it up. He came down to the McPherson place with a small box under his arm, which contained all of the mail on hand at the office. He turned over to John McPherson, stating he wanted to resign, that he was not sufficiently "edicated" to be a post master, whereupon a successor was appointed. The Mexicans who were in the country at that time always referred to the Little Arkansas as the "Rio Nipeste" and also to the post office by the same name, probably having reference to the curative properties of the water from Poncha Springs along this river.

The first settlers on the South Arkansas river (Little Arkansas) were Nat Rich and Bob Hendricks, who built a cabin on the site of the present town of Poncho Springs, in 1865. Later, ~~in~~ in 1868, Rich sold his "squatters rights" to Joseph Hutchinson. Rich was quite popular with the Ute Indians, with whom he went by the name of "Nav-a-et". After the McPhersons moved to the Rich place, Indians coming in unaware of the change would say: "This Nav-a-et's camp. Three sleeps, you go. Nav-a -et heap good man. You no good."

A few years later an election precinct was established, extending from Brown's Creek to the Saguache County line and from the Fremont County line to the Utah state line. At the first election eight votes were cast. Settlement was slow in this part of the Arkansas valley in the late 60's and early 70's, and was confined entirely to lands immediately adjacent to the streams. J.E. Correll was on the present Veltry place and William Bale occupied the present Sterling Jones ranch. Noah Baer had settled on a tract of land which has since been split up into several ranches. Otis White, whose land has also since been divided into several ranches, was here, and John ~~McPherson~~ Nelson owned the present Starbuck, Dobbie, Fuller, Plimpton, and Jay ranches, and the ground now owned by the city of Salida. Joseph Hutchinson owned the present Hutchinson place, and the McPhersons were located on the site of the town of Poncho Springs. John Burnett had settled on the Burnett ranch above Poncho Springs; John Mundlein was located on his present place; and the Boone boys on what is now the Velotta ranch. Tennessee originally settled on what was afterwards the Noah Baer ranch. Christensen was on the present Hutchinson ranch a short time. King, Cox, and Shriver were on the Scanga place, where the first post office was established.

Later James Maxwell had it, and then it was sold to Peter Carruth. A few years later G. Hunzicker, Martin Hickey, Charles Whitson, Wm. Dunn, Tom Maxwell (son of James Maxwell), and the Matthew



boys came to the country. John Volk ran a blacksmith shop where Poncho Springs now stands.

Over in Adobe Park were Charles Peterson, Wm. McCalmont (now the Glenn ranch), Tom Cameron, Ed Naylor, James Rule, O.E. Harrington, the Spragues, Briscoes, Geo. Williams, Omertz, M. Johnson, Wm. Bacon, and John Hamm, who had adjoining ranches, John Weldon, and Bradt, who made the Land Office surveys of this part of the country.

The country continued to settle up and the poll books of an election held on October 3, 1876, shows 71 voters in the South Arkansas precinct.

It was necessary for John Matthews to make a trip back to Pueblo shortly after his arrival here in 1874. As he was driving past the Gorrell place on the Little Arkansas, Mr. Gorrell came out and asked him where he was going. Matthews informed him that he was making a trip to Pueblo, whereupon Gorrell asked him to take \$500 for him and deposit it in the Canon City bank at Canon. Matthews demurred, informing Gorrell that he was a total stranger to him and he did not want to accept the money. Gorrell informed him he would rather take chances on him than have the money about the cabin. Matthews took the money, deposited it in the Canon City bank and upon his return to the Poncha springs country, turned over the certificate of deposit to Mr. Gorrell.

Among the happenings in the 70's, Mr. Hutchinson mentioned the incident of the two horse thieves who were killed near the present town of Buena Vista. They came from the country around Fort Garland, hotly pursued by the sheriff. At that time Joe Hutchinson had a round-up camp near the present Velotta place. The sheriff came to his camp and deputized him, Tom Walker, Marion Boone, and John McPherson. They overtook the two horse thieves just this side of Buena Vista. They opened fire on Boone and Walker, who returned the fire, killing both of them, whereupon it was discovered that one of the horse thieves was a woman dressed in man's clothes. They were buried under the large pine tree in the gulch just below the town of Buena Vista.

James Maxwell, the father of Mrs. John Burnett, died in 1870 at their place on the Little Arkansas. Mr. Hutchinson recalled Mr. Maxwell being taken seriously ill, and Jack McPherson making a night ride to the Mayal place near Buena Vista. Mayal, who was one of the first, if not the first settler in that part of the country, had served as a medical ~~xxxxxx~~ officer in the



French army, prior to his coming to the United States. Mayal set out for the Maxwell place, but Maxwell died before or shortly after his arrival.

Mr. Hutchinson recalled many experiences with the Indians in the early 70's. Quite often supplies were stored at the Burnett place for distribution to the Indians. He mentioned the x rather poor judgment of the Government officials in the class of supplies which they would buy and send out for the Indians. There would always be a large quantity of sugar in each ~~as~~ consignment. The Indians, of course, knew little or nothing of the use of sugar in cooking. The barrels would be rolled out of the warehouse, the tops knocked in, and then the squaws would all help themselves, usually wasting a great deal by scattering it about the ground in the general scramble, and then they would have a big feed on what was left.

He recalled a Lieutenant Spear who quite often made the trip through the country en route to the Ute Agency on the Los Pinos with which he had some connection. He stated Lieutenant Spear commonly stopped with his grandparents in making the trip and on some occasion gave his grandmother a wonderful collection of sea shells. A number of years later, a lady was visiting with his grandmother and greatly admired these shells, which were on the mantelpiece, stating they reminded her very much of some shells she had gathered many years before with a young Army Officer on the coast of Virginia. Upon inquiry, it was found that the young Army Officer's name was Spear, and these were the same shells she had collected with him.

During 1879 or '80, there was quite a settlement of well-known and distinguished people at Poncha Springs. Among them were Boyd and Haynes of the Boyd & Haynes Stage Line, Van Kleet, Jay Cook, one time governor of Ohio, whose daughter was engaged to Fred Grant, son of General Grant; Jessups, Jay Scott, the Magraders of Civil War fame, one of the Cramps of the Cramp Ship Yards. He mentioned that Mrs. Van Kleet's name was Goodhue prior to her marriage and she had been presented to Queen Victoria of England. He stated she used to give a big feed to the "kids" about once a week to which everyone would be invited.

He mentioned that General Phil Sheridan came through this country in 1879 on his way to the Ute reservation to round up the Indians for their trip to the new Reservation in Utah; General Grant passed through on his way to Lake City in 1880, and General George B. McClellan also visited the region in 1881. Richard K. Fox came to Gunnison in the early days about 1882. Susan B. Anthony and Lucy Stone came to Poncha Springs about the same time, and E.A. Buck, editor of the Spirit Times of New York, came to Gunnison and was interested in the Gunnison Democrat for many years.



The present Buck Block in Gunnison is named in his honor.

Mr. Hutchinson mentioned that the first lumberyard in this country was started in 1879 at Poncha Springs by a Mr. Thomas, an uncle of Neil Davenport. In 1875 the Boone brothers had a tie camp on South Arkansas near the present town of Garfield. He mentioned having in his possession an old paper drawn up by his grandfather McPherson, who was a justice of the Peace and Probate Judge, by which Boone Brothers signed over a certain number of ties to a party by the name of Hunter in consideration of so much money to be advanced to them. Tom Starr several years later started up a mill near Mears Junction, which was operated by his uncle, Tom Owens, afterwards burned to death in the Poncha springs fire.

The starting of the livestock business was almost concurrent with the settlement of the country. The first herd brought in was by Tennessee in the late 60's. Shortly afterwards, his father, Joe Hutchinson, brought in some cattle and during the 70's owned the largest herd in the country. Most of the settlers, however, had from 150 to 175 head. Joe Hutchinson branded 977 calves from his herd during the summer of 1876, and 1100 head the following summer. Some of the Hutchinson cattle were grazed in the vicinity of their ranch on the Little Arkansas, some in the San Luis Valley, and some around Kauffman cut-off. At one time, Joe Hutchinson contemplated the purchase of the Baca grant in San Luis Valley and sent Bailey to look into the proposition and to make an offer of \$25,000 if it looked all right. Hutchinson thought it would make an excellent sheep range, but for some reason the deal was never consummated.

At the time the country was settled, deer were very plentiful. There were some elk, but no buffalo, although there were a great many buffalo skulls around the country. From the best information obtainable at that time from the Indians, it was reputed that there was a very severe winter back about 1844 and practically all of the buffalo perished. The few remaining ones were exterminated before the coming of the white men. Beaver were everywhere plentiful and during the winter of 1870 a trapper by the name of Wilson succeeded in getting 60 pelts from the Little Arkansas south of the Hutchinson ranch. Antelope were particularly plentiful in the foothills and valley country, and large herds were frequently seen around Missouri Park. Fishing was exceptionally good in both the North and South Arkansas, and it was not uncommon to catch trout weighing four or five pounds. This part of the country was well-known for the good catches of trout and people came from miles around to camp and fish. At one time in the 70's a fish canning factory was contemplated here.



Upon being asked regarding early forest fires, Mr. Hutchinson mentioned counting the growth rings on a pinion tree growing from an old charred stump, which indicated that a fire had swept through this country as far back as 1732. He mentioned also that there is a layer of charcoal three inches thick about 7 feet below the surface of the ground from the Hill place to the Fair Grounds, indicated that in pre-historic times that part of the country must have been heavily timbered, and the timber destroyed by a fire. It is also rather evident that severe erosion in the mountains must have followed this fire from the amount of silt and soil which has since accumulated above the old charcoal bed.

Mr. Hutchinson mentioned that the Cameron range was burned over in 1868 or '69 and that the roar of the flames could be plainly heard at their ranch on Little Arkansas. Cleveland Mountain was burned over prior to the settlement of the country; Poncha Mountain was burned in 1879. This was known as the year of very severe fires, which practically burned all summer. There was a dense pall of smoke, which at times entirely obscured the sun and when the sun was visible it had the appearance of a large red ball. During the day a dense column of smoke more than two miles wide could be seen rolling up into the skies. At night there was a red glare similar to that of the pictures of the eruption of Mt. Vesuvius. The fire on Bear Creek occurred in 1884, burned practically all summer, finally sweeping over the top of the divide to the northwest side of Methodist Mountain. The fire on Pass Creek was started in 1902, burned two or three weeks, after which a heavy rain came on June 9th, which partly extinguished it. Everyone thought it was out, but later it started up again and burned for several weeks longer before it finally went out.

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