

**“Readers Refuge” article for April 21, 2010**, meeting at 7:00pm at the Cheyenne Mountain Heritage Center, 1118 W. Cheyenne Road

The following piece is taken from the book *Memories of a Lifetime in the Pikes Peak Region* by Irving Howbert. (1925)

### **The Pikes Peak Region Becomes My Permanent Home**

Late in the summer of 1860, father and I, accompanied by Mr. Girten, a friend of ours, made a trip to Colorado City, father having been favorably impressed with that locality at the time of his visit there a month previously. Our traveling equipment consisted of two horses and a light wagon with the necessary provisions and camp outfit. We necessarily camped out every night, as at that time there were no inhabitants in all the region between Hamilton and Colorado City.

Our route from Hamilton was easterly down Tarryall Creek across the South Park, over the low mountains on the south side of Tarryall Creek to the Platte River; then up Trout Creek, following a road located substantially as is the present one that passes through the town of Florissant; and then eastward across the Divide and down Fountain Creek to Colorado City.

The first night out of Hamilton we camped near one of the small branches of Tarryall Creek. While Mr. Girten and I were preparing the evening meal, father took his rifle and went off to a rocky hill near by, hoping to find game of some kind. In less than an hour he returned with a two-year-old mountain sheep, which he had killed not far away. We delayed supper that we might have some of the meat. I thought it the best flavored and tenderest I ever had eaten.

Manitou springs then were known by some as the “Soda Springs” and by others as the “Boiling Springs.” The only spring to which any attention was paid was the large one on the south side of the creek, now covered over and used by the bottling works. The wagon road from the mountains to Colorado City ran close to this spring. Attracted by it, we remained there an hour or more drinking the water and watching the great volume of gas coming from its depths. Scattered around the spring we saw many beads and Indian trinkets that had been left as an offering by some recent war party.

All of the Indians of this region believed that the “Great Spirit” dwelt in this spring, that the bubbles coming up through the water were the result of his breathing, and that it was necessary for them to make offerings to Him whenever they passed by to insure success in warfare and in the pursuit of game, and no Indian ever failed to do so.

The wagon road from the Soda Springs to Colorado City followed an old Indian trail most of the way. This trail had been widened where it ran through thickets of choke-cherry, currant and other bushes, and was a fairly good road.

On reaching Colorado City we went into camp at the upper end of the town near Camp Creek. Colorado City was a place of somewhat more than three hundred houses, most of which were built of logs, some hewed, but a majority in the rough. However, many of the business houses had square fronts made of lumber, which gave the principal street a more attractive appearance than was usual in a frontier town. The main business street was Colorado Avenue, the residences being located along parallel streets. As I recall it, the town covered much the same ground that it did at the time of the consolidations with Colorado Springs in recent years, excepting that in the early days the houses were more widely scattered.

The first formal action toward locating the town of Colorado City was taken August 13, 1859, by M.S. Beach and R.E. Cable, acting for the Colorado City Town Company which had been organized in Denver the day before. The town site covered about twelve hundred acres of the north side of the Fountain between Camp Creek and the Monument. The town had a boom during the remaining months of the year, about two hundred houses were built that fall and winter and half as many more the following spring; but that marked the apex of Colorado City’s growth for many years thereafter.

In a general way the courts for trial of criminal cases at that time were made up, as in Denver, of all the men of the vicinity who could be brought together on short notice. The crowd elected from one to three of their number to act as judges for each special case. These judges called witnesses, took evidence in the presence of the assembled crowd, and this gathering then decided by vote as to the guilt or innocence of the accused.

An instance of this kind had occurred in Colorado City a month before, at the time father was there. As he and Reverend Mr. Johnson were riding into town they saw a large crowd around a pile of lumber, adjacent to the principal street. They rode over to find out what was going on, and ascertained that a Mexican was on trial for theft of a horse the previous night. It appeared that the Mexican had stolen the horse from the outskirts of town and then started with it for New Mexico, but had been followed and captured before he reached Pueblo. The people assembled to try him had elected three persons to act as judges, one of whom was Benjamin F. Crowell, afterwards one of the most prominent citizens of the county. These judges had appointed a sheriff for the occasion, who had charge of the prisoner. In addition they named one of the bystanders, who was supposed to have some knowledge of the law, as a prosecuting attorney, and still another to defend the prisoner. When father and his companion arrived, the evidence was being taken. A short time after, there being no further witnesses to examine, the judge submitted the matter to the crowd, asking all who believed the Mexican guilty and were convinced that he should be hanged, to walk across the street. This everyone did, excepting the two ministers. Whereupon, the judges pronounced sentence of death and instructed the sheriff to see that the prisoner was hanged forthwith. At this juncture the ministers asked the privilege of saying a few words, which was granted. They called attention to the fact that hanging a man was a serious affair, and sought to hold religious services before the execution took place. This the crowd refused, saying that they would finish the matter in hand first and attend services later. Without further delay the Mexican was marched off to a tree that stood in a gulch on the south side of the Fountain, just above the mouth of Camp Creek, and in less than thirty minutes from the time of his conviction, he was executed.

The show place of Colorado City at the time of our arrival was a small tract of land east of town in the valley of the Fountain that was under cultivation by irrigation, a method of farming unknown to the people of the regions whence most of the gold-seekers came. Only recently had it dawned upon any of those who had come to the Rocky Mountains seeking gold, that there might be other industries in the Pikes Peak region besides mining. Few of them had the least idea that the lands of this arid section could be made of any value agriculturally, but those who visited the garden tract and saw corn and all sorts of vegetables growing luxuriantly as a result of irrigation, came away with new ideas as to the possibilities of this country. Already they had discovered that these great plains were admirably adapted to stock raising, and now it was proved that by irrigation methods, they could be made great agriculturally as well.

While here on his visit a month before, father had taken up a tract of land east of Monument Creek in what is now a part of Colorado Springs. This land, as I remember, extended from the lower end of the present Colorado College grounds northward, paralleling the creek to what is now the town of Roswell. It is my impression that he had no definite idea at the time as to what he would do with the claim, but a visit to the irrigated garden tract having shown him the possibilities of agriculture here, he decided to secure title to land somewhere in this vicinity. He believed that owing to the fertile soil of its valleys, its mild climate, and scenic attractions, there was a great future for this immediate region. However on this later trip, a visit to the Monument Creek claims and inquiries concerning the flow in that stream, convinced him that the water supply was too limited and uncertain and that, even if it were abundant, ditches to conduct it to the land on which he had filed would be very expensive to construct. Having reached this conclusion, he abandoned the Monument Creek claims and a few days later found a vacant tract of land along Cheyenne Creek, about half way between its mouth and Cheyenne Canon, which he filed upon and arranged for the construction of a claim cabin. This was necessary in

order to show the public that the tract had been taken up in good faith. At approximately the same time that we took up our Cheyenne Creek claim, others were doing the same thing at various places along the Fountain and its tributaries, wherever water for irrigation purposes could be obtained and bought to the land without too much cost. Within the next year or two a large acreage of land along these streams was brought under cultivation. This was fortunate for Colorado City, as the development of this agricultural industry was the principal thing that kept it from dropping out of existence.