History of San Juan County
Chapter XVI-XX, 1882-1884
By Albert R. Lyman, 1918

1881-1882 **CHAPTER XVI**

Horse-thieves, hostile Indians and the domineering old San Juan have almost cause[d] us to forget the little swarm of children in Bluff and in Montezuma, who should be going to school. But the County Superintendent, Kumen Jones, did not forget. In the Fall of 1880 he had them promptly rounded up in the log meeting house, laying the foundation for such scholastic training as the new County could afford.

Miss Harriet Parthenia Hyde, afterwards Mrs. Amasa M. Barton, taught the school at Montezuma; and Miss Ida Evelyn Lyman, afterwards Mrs. H. Joseph Nielson, taught the school in Bluff. Of the names and number of the children in the upper school there is no accessible record, but in Bluff there were between thirty and fifty youngsters, representing all the five grades of that day, where "readin' and writin' and 'rithmetic" constituted the massive corner stones in learnings splendid temple.

Of those youngsters in that first Bluff school, we have the names of Charles E. Walton, Jr., Francis Nielson, Caroline Nielson, who is now Mrs. Wayne H. Redd; Lucinda Nielson, now Mrs. Frank H. Hyde, Magnolia Walton, now Mrs. John Bailey; Leona Walton, now Mrs. Francis Nielson; Mary Jane Perkins, now Mrs. Heber Wilson.

It is reported that the school of 81-82 in Bluff, was taught by Charles E. Walton Sr. The old log house had come to be known locally as the school house, though it was not provided with many of the charms intended to lure the young idea from the pleasant haunts of his truancy. It did not turn the wind where they boys hadn't contrived to poke out the chinking, for a secret communication with the blessed outside; but when it rained, or when the snow melted, there were few strictly arid zones under the dirt roof. And sometimes the monotonous regularity of the drip, drip, from that roof, was relived by the sliding through of a gob of mud big enough to fill an old shoe.

On the 26th of February 1882, "Uncle" George Sevy having moved away, Kumen Jones was called to succeed him as First Counselor to Bishop Nielson, and L. H. Redd Jr., became Second Counselor. In the following April, the San Louis and San Juan Mission was divided, and Platte D. Lyman became President of the San Juan Stake, which included corners of Colorado and New Mexico.

The Co-op store was organized in Bluff on April 24th, with Platte D. Lyman, President; Jense Nielson, Vice-President; Charles E. Walton, Kumen Jones and Hyrum Perkins, Directors; L. H. Redd, Secretary; Benjamin Perkins, Treasurer. The store opened on the 11th of June, stocked to meet the needs of the people

in the fort, and to trade with the Indians. Joseph A. Lyman was salesman. On the 6th of the following November, the store declared a ten per cent dividend.

The ditch, and those hundred rods of cribs, began in November, 81 monopolized the working force of the fort all winter. In March, with the end of the job still far away, they began in their weariness to wonder whether there was not, in all this broad San Juan County, a better place to build a town, and cultivate the soil. This talk resulted in a meeting where it was agreed to send three men on an exploring trip towards the Elk Mountain. The days they spent were to be credited as so much time on the ditch.

Joseph F. Barton, Platte D. Lyman and Orrin Kelsey explored what they called the "Little Valleys", east of the mountain, located the most promising stretches of land, and started on westward to explore the mountain. They missed the Indian trail which leads up from Milk Ranch, and had to leave their horses at the foot of a rock-bound hill. But they climbed up afoot, walked over the Elk Mountain to the head of Dark Canyon, and back that day to their horses. They seem to be the very first white men to enter that region, and they found it, with its forests of grass and brouse, vastly different to what it has become since.

Whatever new hopes may have been aroused by these locations in the Little Valleys they were abandoned on the 2nd of July when a visit to the water there found it altogether too low for irrigating purposes.

Sometime in April the Bluff men heavy a long weary sigh and turned the water in the dtich, upon which they had spent more than five months of hard work. The stream trickled nicely along until it reached the cribs, and there is disappeared That foundation of houses and brush and stone, covered over with sand, was too porous to hold water. The tired men scratched their heads and scowled, they had learned to believe and disbelieve with every arbitrary decision of this arbitrary old river. But after a long time, the stream progressed a little, and they knew the place would hold when it had filled up with sediment.

The water reached town on April 29th, and all hands made a rush to prepare a little ground for planting. The river came up over their temporary dam, whittled out their headgate, and carried away, by May 6th, thirty rods of their ditch above the cribs.

Some of the ants in that fort-hill may have been discouraged, but they still acte[d] like ants. On May 8th, one of them wrote, "Yesterday we decided that our only hope for a crop this season, is in making a new ditch at the head. So today we have commenced laying off 214 rods of ditch, which will have to be made before we can get water in town. This makes our ditch five miles long from the head to the fort."

And out of that fort went all the able-bodied male ants next day, to make 214 rods of ditch. By their determination, and by that other quality, which Bishop Nielson, in his broken English called the "stickiti tooti", they opened the newest ditch, May 27.

The water came down again, and they proceeded to the land with plows and seeds. They planted a variety of things, and a liberal acreage of corn and sorghum. About July 22, we read: "The river is down, and all hands are cleaning out and deepening the ditch," but they kept the water.

In the fore part of that month, the Utes shot down some of the Bluff cattle in Butler Wash, and stole a number of horses, which the Navajos brought back and returned to their owners.

On September 13th, Kumen Jones, Platte Lyman, and Benjamin Perkins went down the river to hunt cattle stolen by the Navajos. Crossing over at Rincon, they traveled up Chinle Wash to the country of Chief Hoskay, from which they took five head of Bluff Cattle. Recovering these animals had to be accomplished by persuasion only--any gunplay would have been courting trouble.

August and September had been fearfully dry, but rain broke loose on the 16th, and the next day a booming stream came down Cottonwood Wash, and spread out over much of the best crop in the Bluff fields. The situation looked awfully dubious that day, but next morning the flood had gone down, leaving the corn and sorghum standing in an unapproachable sea of mud. It could not be hauled soon enough to escape the frost, but the corn and fodder served a good purpose just the same, and the sorghum went duly through the mill, and its justice became number one molasses.

The cane haulings, the sweet odor of boiling juice, the fermenting piles of pomace and those never-to-be-forgotten candy pullings, that took in all the kids and lasted until the small hours of the morning came to Bluff every fall for years thereafter, with the regularity of the yellow leaves.

1882

CHAPTER XVII

Sometime before the summer of 1882, John Holyoak settled at what became known as Peak City, from a prominent peak on the hills near by. It was also known as Holyoak, and had a Post Office and a store to trade with the Indians. Peak City reached the summit of its glory as a settlement in the spring and summer of 1882, when John Robb and James Dunton joined Holyoak in his efforts to redeem its waste places. But Robb and Dunton gave it up in October or November, and the remaining settler moved sometime later to Montezuma.

A short paragraph is about all this history can devote to that unfortunate enterprise, though the particulars of its perils and hardships, the hopes of its

settlers when they came, and the adverse conditions attending their departure, would no doubt make an interesting story. Its lonesome cabins and its rude chimneys became the doleful abode or rats and chipmunks, until the pestulent river whittled the sand from under them, and scattered their logs along winding banks.

Montezuma made a little growth in those first two years; besides a man named Robinson moved in from somewhere, the Allans came from San Louis Valley in June 1881, and this original settlement still had reason to hope for first place as to size and permanency among the town of the county.

It seems they had no such distress as the people in Bluff with the water question. While the lower colony went to the end of its wits and its strength in building the cribs, and hunting in vain in the wishwashy quicksands of the valley for a permanent head to their ditch, the upper colony relied on its waterwheels, which had been giving great satisfaction. Father Allan is reported to have said of his wheel again and again, "It's aya fine, I'd wish nothing better."

Sometime in November, '82, a Mrs. Peter Tracy was murdered near the mouth of McElmo. The deed was charged to the Navajos, a great stir was made about it by certain men living near by. Soldiers were sent from a post in Colorado, and they camped for sometime near the scene of the tragedy, county officials went in accordance with their obligation to make an examination of the premises. These officers were never convinced by the appearance of the body, nor by the way it was buried into the ground without their permission, that the Indians were guilty.

Tracy's body was buried near the river, which afterwards cut into the grave and washed it away.

About the time of Tracy's death, a fracas between white men and Utes somewhere above McElmo, resulted in the shooting of a Ute, and prospects of a serious outbreak. The particulars of this affair seem to be lost.

Though the Utes refrained from going on the warpath, they shot down quite a number of cattle belonging to Bluff, leaving the cattle to rot where they fell. At the same time, feed being short on the reservation, the Navajos brought their flocks of sheep over to the north side, skinning the county as they went, and scattering the stock of the settlers away into the breaks and trees. To the petitions of the Bluff people for protection from these disastrous invasions, the Indian agents informed them that the Navajos had as much and perhaps more right in San Juan County than the Mormons. In this connection, it should be said for Captain Dority and later for a Captain Williams, that they recognized the claim of the colonies for protection from these hungry Navajo herds, and ordered the red men and their animals back to their own side of the river.

It is recorded that on the 7th of November, 1882, an election was held in Bluff to vote for Territorial Delegates to Congress. Thirty votes were cast, every one of them for John T. Caine.

The monotony of the water question in Bluff might have been relieved a little, if there had been a place to anchor a vessel (wheel). No such place could be found along those shifting banks. In the fall or early winter, they began on their ditch again, hoping by much time and earnest effort to secure their work against the river. During December, January and February, and indefinitely into the spring of '83, they concentrated their man-power on that ditch. Their returns for these hard efforts, both in their immediate and their more remote future, are almost too discouraging to tell.

Yet Bluff was growing in numbers. In November and December of '82, two good sized companies of settlers arrived from Iron County, Utah, and by January 15th, they had fifty men at work on the ditch, and nearly fifty families in the fort.

They celebrated Christmas and the New Year as only people who can find such celebrations sweet respite from grinding labors in weary wilderness. Their children thronged the old log school house during the day, and the place became the scene of many a merry party in the long winter evenings. The entertainers who applied their talents for the comfort and cheer of those occasions, still live by their words, their music, or their acting in the memories of men and women now scattered from Canada to Mexico.

Charles E. Walton was comedian, tragedian, or anything else the stage demanded. Brother Samuel Cox, known as "Ginger", from the color of his long patriarch beard, could fiddle and sing until he beguiled his hearers into blissful forgetfullness that they had ever wandered far away from the permanent haunts of men to this strange region. "Uncle Ben" Perkins could dance and frolic like the spirit of old Wales on a lark, and sing "Pull for the Shore" or "Nora Darling", with the proficiency that gets indelibly into the memory.

About the last of January, Heber J. Grant, and Brigham Young, Jr., of the Quorum of the Twelve in the Mormon Church, came to Bluff as special visitors, by way of Burnham, now Fruitland, New Mexico. The people of Montezuma joined in the two days of meetings, where the whole situation was reviewed, and the mission given encouragement to make a fresh start.

In December, '82, great excitement had spread through San Juan and away into distant states, over the reports of a wonderful copper mine southwest of Bluff, which was said to have sold for a quarter of a million dollars. Numerous outfits of various kinds, going to and from the rich region, passed the little fort very often during the winter, sometimes reporting new discoveries of fabulous richness.

1882-1885 **CHAPTER XVIII**

The early history of San Juan County is wrapped up in the history of Bluff, and the history of Bluff, is to a great extent, included in the war which was waged, the attacks and counter-attacks, the plots, surprises and defeats along the battle front on the Bluff ditch.

As stated before, the people began in November of December, 1882 and worked ate the ditch until spring, with a force which sometimes included fifty men. On May 7th, 1885, one of them wrote, "the ditch requires almost the entire attentio[n] of all hands. The water has been in the fort, but owing to the constant breakage of the banks, nothing has been done yet towards plowing or planting."

And that constant breakage seems to have gone on with little to relieve the monotony until June. Under date of July 4th is written, in the diary referred to above, "everybody has been busy for a month planting, and now the head of the ditch is filled two feet deep with sand and will have to be cleaned out before we can get any water."

This cleaning held the attention of all hands ten days, and anyone who has worke[d] a whole day in the blinding heat of those gray cliffs, will recall that a day is not counted so much in hours as in quarts and gallons of streaming perspiration. Let no one assume to tell or deny it who has not had gallons and gallons of actual acquaintance with it.

If those toilers experienced any satisfaction at getting the water in after it broke out, they must have been much satisfied, for they turned it in afresh every so many times each month. "The ditch has broken a great many times" says the diary, for August first, "and the crops have suffered seriously in consequence."

It seems that no decisive stroke or drive was made from either side in the fight, and there was no stay of hostilities until the close of the irrigation season in the fall. And when, while the solons of the fort held council of war in the log school house, the river muttered in diabolical communication with itself about a plan for maintaining its absolute supremacy.

Of that council in the school house, held December 3rd, we read "In the evening a meeting of the irrigation company was held, at which an entire new board of trustees was elected, and a tax of $29.00 per acre was levied to complete the ditch. This swells the tax to $69.00 per acre, making a total of $48,300.00 on 700 acres, and the end is not yet."

When we discover in the wake of these things, a sentiment bordering on discouragement, we must not be startled; but let that rest for the present, to consider other things which happened in that year 1885.

Late in April, or early in March, the Navajos brought a stock of measles to the two forts, and many children took the disease. One of Marriman's boys died at Montezuma on the 7th of March. It should be explained here that the solitary little fence, near where Montezuma used to stand, encloses the graves of the little girl and her brother instead of the little girl only, as at first reporte[d.]

Between the fifteenth and 20th, Samuel Rowley's little boy died in Bluff, and was the first to be buried in the present cemetary on the hill above town. Roswell Stevens and others had been buried in the sandhills to the west; but their bodies all but one, were removed to the flat top of the gravel hill, where a great company of those early pioneers have since lain down to their last sleep.

About the middle of March, Benjamin Perkins, Samuel Wood and Platte D. Lyman went with a team and a wagon and some saddle horses to the Little Valleys to build a house and a corral. They found the country pretty much occupied by the sheep and horses of four Navajo families, whom they persuaded to move back towards the river.

It seems the improvements these three men began, were later included in what became the Milk Ranch. But their efforts at improvements were cut short the third day when, in the evening, they saw two Utes driving some Bluff horses. They followed the thieves until dark, and in the morning they followed the tracks to the pass between First Valley and Comb Wash; feeling that they should get word at once to Thales Haskel, and finding it uphill business to guard their horses and make any improvements at the same time, Platte Lyman rose at once to Bluff and the others moved the camp after him.

Haskel and three other men left on the 21st, returning two days later with two horses they had taken from the Utes. But they had seen nothing of the horses which were driven though the pass to Comb Wash. As soon as possible, he took five men and went again. Accounts of this second trip seem to be lost.

The Utes looked with ugly disfavor on the efforts of the colony to stock the range and though they cherished this excuse for stealing horses and eating beef, they had emphasized their feelings, after every unpleasant contact, by shooting cattle, and leaving them to rot on the hills. In answer to the Bluff men's efforts to build in Little Valleys, the Utes stole more horses, and when Haskel, by his magic personality, took these horses back to their owners, more cows were found dead on the hills. In July Thales Haskel and Kumen Jones, having been selected as missionaries to the Indians, made a special trip among them, studying their language and their customs, explaining the purpose of the settlements on the river.

Every year was demonstrating more clearly, that if the colony was to survive, it must have something more reliable than the Bluff ditch. To discover this more reliable something, there was a growing eagerness with all concerned, and on

the 2nd of August, Kumen Jones, Hyrum Perkins and Platte D. Lyman started on an exploring trip to Elk Mountain.

In the Little Valleys they met a band of Utes headed to Mancos Jim, who registered his sullen objections to any white man entering this last splendid hunting ground where the Ute reigned supreme.

The Bluff men tried their powers of pursuasion, and the Utes began a council among themselves. Whatever the prevailing sentiment in that council, the decision probably went by default, when the three explorers pushed on toward the mountain.

But they knew no trail, they had been compelled to leave there horses and go it afoot when they tried it before, and now they must find an entrance to this unknown region, besides hazarding the possibility of hostile acts from these savages who could easily cut off their retreat, these savages whom they had displeased by going on towards the mountain.

But among those Utes was a slender youth, who, according to his own story, had imbibed from Haskel a pronounced friendship for the Mormon settlers. That youth was Henry, and he deserves honorable mention as a peacemaker, who held to his worthy policy from that day forward.

When the explorers had gone over the hill and out of sight from the Ute band, and were wondering which direction to take, the youthful Henry came dashing up from one side, and showed them the trail. Farther on he appeared again like a hovering spirit, told them more about the trail, and again disappeared. He followed them thus cautiously, showing them the trails, ad the choicest places of Elk Mountain.

On the mountain the three explorers met Moancopy Mike and his disciples, all of them "heap mad". They looked down their black noses, and pushed out their flannel lips in rank disapproval of this unwarranted attention. Getting Mike alone, the Bluff men sounded the depth of his terrible mad, with a big slice of bread and molasses. When he had munched the last of it, with a perfectly audible relish, he looked better. "Now little bit mad," he affirmed. They took the hint; another slice would cure him. "Me no mad," he grinned after that second slice, and went on to say how the others were angry without a cause, but he was "tooitch tickaboo."

The party went on by Wooden Shoes to within twenty-five miles of the river looking for a place to make a road, but no such place was there for them to find. However the waving grass on the mountain seemed to suggest the very policy which has since given Bluff something vastly more substantial than that ever failing ditch.

1882-1883 **CHAPTER XIX**

That Co-op store which the Bluff people organized in '82, dovetailed into their affairs like a thing made to order. It paid well from the first. They bought Navajo wool and pelts and blankets, loaded their freight teams to and from Durango making the freighting so profitable that each stockholder seized eagerly on his turn when it came to make the trip. This local freighting, and revenue from the store, provided a way for the people to stay in San Juan long enough at a time to make a start in the cattle business which afterwards became their strong hold.

On the freight road and on the range, they traveled and rode in companies of two or more for the mutual protection it gave them against the Indians. They were too few in number to wage successful war on the river unless they made a united attack, and they had neither means nor time to fence each field separately. So their fields were enclosed in one fence, the burden of the ditch feel on all alike, and mutual consent, and mutual interest, determined the nature of their effort at home and their journeys away. The store had to be a co-op, its books lay ever wide open, with all its accounts perfectly good. Besides this cementing actio[n] of the Church within, and the repelling stillness of the wide solitude without, united the little community together as a family, who mourned or rejoiced over the success or misfortune of any one of its members.

The Navajos came with their produce to trade in the little log store, which was generally surrounded with a motley tangle of cayuse saddle ponies, rawhide ropes, bundles of wool and pelts, and snarling mangy dogs. Trading was, to the Navajos, a rather festive occasion, deliberate and long drawn-out. They camped near by until it was finished to their satisfaction, crowding against the rude lumber counte[r] in noisy talk and laughter, and always a stifling cloud of tobacco smoke. Besides that first dividend, which the store declared when it was less than five months old, on May 7th, 1885, when it was still less than eleven months old, it declared another dividend of twenty-five percent.

In that summer of '83 the fort was broken up. Men began moving their houses out to their town lots, leaving the much trodden little area, so long the sanctum and security of the people, to be plowed as part of a private garden. The clang of Amasa Barton's mighty hammer, as he fashioned the iron at his forge, was no longer the musical clock-tick of the whole community, and children who had frolicked together like lambs of a herd, thought it rather strange for each family to occupy a little reservation of its own.

But above the success of the store, and above every promising aspect of the colony loomed the dark cloud of failure and heavy expense on the ditch. Discouragement dimmed the achievements of the water wheels at Montezuma, and grew into general unrest. William Hyde resigned his place at the head of the Montezuma Branch, and started a store at Rincon, ten miles below Bluff. He was succeeded at the Branch, and also in the position of Probate Judge of the County, by John Allan, Jr.

In September, Marion Lyman, of the Quorum of Apostles, and John Morgan, President of the Southern States Mission, attended a Quarterly Conference in Bluff. They looked at the ditch, and listened to adverse reports of the situation, but made no definite recommendations. The feeling of unrest grew as fall advanced, and many of them, as they stirred their boiling vat of molasses, believed they would never boil sorghum juice on the San Juan again.

In October, President Platte D. Lyman went to Salt Lake City, by way of Durango, Pueblo, Salida and Gunnison County, and reported the mission to President John Taylor, and the General Authorities of the Mormon Church. "They were somewhat divided," he says, "with regard to continuing that mission, under the unfavorable circumstances which have so far attended it."

In December, a letter came from Erastus Snow, releasing all who were dissatisfied but implying that the Mission should be maintained. Most of the men came down from Montezuma and attended a meeting, December 3rd, where "propriety of leaving the place was freely discussed." When it was put to a vote, the majority wanted to remain, at least to try the country another season, though some were in favor of staying whatever the next season should bring forth.

With the question thus settled by vote, the proceeded to improve the homes, haul wood, and prepare for the winter. A building crew began a fourteen foot extension on the log school house, sawing out the end thereof, splicing and adding other ram's-horn logs to lengthen the devious walls around what served for ten years thereafter as a stage. To what extent the performances on that stage are responsible for the fact that Bluff really endured, may only be guessed. The spiritual, society and educational life eminating there from, was life indeed to the drooping mission.

With the new stage ready December 22, they prepared a holiday celebration calculated to chloroform all discouraging memories and revive the splendid chivalry which danced on the bare rock, and relished a diet of parched corn on the Colorado three years ago.

They had programs and parties, they danced and sang and even the glad peel of wedding bells were added to the music of their celebration. The murmur of the menacing old river, and songs from Indian camps beyond it, mingled in the genial accord with the echoes. A military blast from Charles E. Walton's bugle, returned in sweet response from the cliffs, and announced the hour of each event. It is related that the home of Kumen Jones was crowded to its capacity with a dinner party, and that Theodore Moody and Laura Barney were married on Christmas Day.

1884 **CHAPTER XX**

The winter of 1883-84 brought many storms, more often rain than snow. Early in January, the feed became so poor on the range near Bluff, that 255 head of their cattle had to be moved in to the Lake Country near the Colorado River.

They began sometime in the winter to remake the ditch, and aside from the death of two babies, nothing happened to break the steady monotony of their labor. Joe Nielson's first child, a girl, died in January and Kumen Jones' first child, a boy, died in February.

The showers became more frequent in February, and heavier and more frequent in March. By the 15th, the river had raised seven feet, cutting away and filling up great sections of the newly made ditch. A dark raging torrent, loaded with drift and stinking loud with filthy sediment, came roaring from Cottonwood Wash, backing up ten inches deep on the floors of houses in the southwest corner of town and the fort. It played sad havoc with a lot of pig pens and chicken coops, buried a great quantity of shocked corn deep in the mud, and deposited a foot and a half of worthless white sand on some of the choicest farming land.

As that time the floods from Cottonwood spread over a wide level delta to the river, cutting no channel at all. Sometime afterwards, the people ran several plow furrows straight down across the delta, and the place is now marked by the wide sand wash bounding Bluff on the west.

In the fore part of March, while on a trip into the Lake country to look after the cattle,Platte D. Lyman, L. H. Redd and John Adams, explored Red Canyon, hoping to find a better way for a road to the settlements. They found no impassable place in the canyon itself, but where its box opens into the gorge of the river, there is no opening in the opposite wall. The spent sometime prospecting afoot and found what seems to be the mouth of White Canyon, through which a road has since been built to Dandy Crossings, and up on Trachyte Creek.

In April the rain came in showers more violent than before, and the flood water from Cottonwood raised to a higher mark in the houses.

On the 20th, Mitchel and his son-in-law, who lived five miles from Montezuma, had trouble with the Navajos, killing one and wounding two others. They sent at once to Fort Lewis for soldiers, but the two settlements and especially the lone farms were at the mercy of the Indians if they had chosen to take vengeance on them. At that time, Mrs. Jane Allan and her four small children were alone on a farm about four miles from the place of the trouble. Old Peejo, a Navajo, came to the opposite bank of the river and called up to them, telling them to stay home, and assuring no one would be hurt unless they went away.

When the Navajos knew the soldiers were coming, they moved back two days journey from the river, and did not venture to appear, even in Bluff until May 4th.

It is worthy of mention here that they realized their quarrel was not with the people of the two settlements, towards whom they maintained a friendly bearing.

The heavy showers continued in May, and floods from the hills ripped the new ditch crosswise, and filled it with sand in a manner truly disheartening. As if this were not enough, the old San Juan, revelling in its supremacy, tore the headgate from its moorings, took back for its own wallowing ground the country around the head of the ditch itself cover "most of our labor this past winter."

By May 20th, the people had very little hope left of establishing themselves permanently on the river, and meeting together, they wrote a letter to President John Taylor, "setting forth some of the obstacles they had to contend with, and asking for a release from the mission, unless suitable help were forthcoming to enable them to stay. The letter told their sacrifices of effort as compared with their returns, and was signed almost unanimously by the people.

So far as Bluff itself was concerned, then or since, from a monetary view point, its heaviest totals have ever been in the wrong column. It was a mission, not an enterprise for gain. Its people went there to honor that call, and they wanted an honorable release before moving elsewhere.

And still the rains descended, the floods came, and the old river seemed bent on retaking every acre of its ancient dominion. By June 8th, it reached a mark higher than ever before in their acquaintance, taking the water wheels of William hyde and William Adams, away to mix with the first heaps, or deposit in the distant Gulf of California.

Sometimes the water ran down the Bluff ditch, but there was little planted for it to irrigate, the people expected to move away as soon as their release had time to come. The range was unusually good, but times were dull, and money scarce.

The flood season reached its height about June 18th, when its black torrents raised two feet above all former records, and came with a roar and a crash of waves and drift t make a drive which should put all former efforts to shame. It wiped most of the remaining ditch in fury off the map, and whisked its mighty drift log over the place in vicious satisfaction. It snatched the remaining water wheels from their anchors at Montezuma, or buried them up in the sand. It swept Mitchel ranch acre by acre with all improvements, into the shapeless heaps and banks along its course. The water stood two feet deep in Adams' house in Bluff, and four feet deep in the store buildings of the Hyde trading post at Rincon.

There was no cottonwood tree, not combination of trees too big above Montezuma, a stream headed down between the houses and the cliff leaving them on an island in the river with the water up all around. Mrs. Jane Allan, her small children and "Auntie" were there alone, and "Auntie" tried with a fire shovel to turn the water from the house; as well as call "Whoa boy" to that ripping river.

The flood soon stood a foot deep in the house. Some of the chickens took to the trees, others went swimming away or tried to ride the jostling drift.

It was ten o'clock in the forenoon, and the two women and children watched the passing current on all sides, wondering what was to become of them, as they stood in the water or perched on chairs or tables.

Bob Allan, one of the boys, was at Montezuma fort when the big rush came, and realizing the peril of the folks at home, he put spurs to his horse, and dashed up the river. Into the stream he rode, and made his way to the houses. How much higher the water would raise, and how soon the houses would go, no one could tell. Hitching a team to buggy, he tried to drive to the bank, it was too deep there was danger of the buggy turning over. Getting back to the houses again, he mounted his horse, tied one end of this lasso rope to a molasses boiler, and getting as many of the folks in the strange ark as it bid fair to carry, he began towing them towards the bank, the lasso was made fast to his saddle-horn. That box-like iron-bottom boiler was by no means a safe ferry boat, yet it answered the purpose, and after three of four trips the family and some of their household stuff was safely landed on the bank.

Then the Allans built a rude shelter of cottonwood limbs, to fend them from the fierce June sun, and watched to see what the stream would do to their homes. There was Mrs. Allan's home, "Auntie's" home, and the home of John Allan, Jr., each comprising two well built log houses. As the river fell, it began to cut, and swerving out from its natural course, reached for the houses until it undermined and carried away the last one, and then, as if with premeditated plan, it left the north side of the valley a worthless patch of white sand, and confined its water to the south side.

At Montezuma, it ate up the fort, and reached with cutting current for the houses which had been too high for the flood.

Harriman's house was built on a rock, and when the river had accomplished its angry purpose and retired in contentment to the south side of the valley, that house was the sole surviving mark of what had been Montezuma. The fields and orchards were no more. The site of Montezuma was a yawning gap in the sand, with an extra cove in one side which seemed to have been made to take in William Hyde'[s] house, the newest and best home there, and the very last one the river could reach.

Thus with poor little Bluff, despoiled and water soaked, the only place to escape the complete vengeance of the river, the San Juan Mission awaited the release which they felt sure President Taylor would soon send them.