History of San Juan County
Chapter XXVI-XXX, 1886-1888
By Albert R. Lyman, 1918

1886 **CHAPTER XXVI**

It would be unfair to the people of San Juan to omit mention of a bill presented to Congress, which had for its object the making of a Ute reservation in San Juan County, Utah. The possibility undid at once the thing so lately accomplished by the visit of Joseph F. Smith and Erastus Snow. The element of uncertainty in the life of the mission returned, like a chronic ailment returns, after the short-lived effect of insufficient medical attention.

The blighting weight of this question mark hung heavily on every undertaking in the County for the next seven or eight years. Men of today, who look with critical eyes at the efforts made in those years in Bluff and around Blue Mountain, should make full allowance for the paralysing effect of this Reservation Bill, pending in Congress. There was little inducement to launch out and improve, when the Utes themselves were pointing out which house and farm they would claim when the Mormons had been removed.

In spite of these things, President Hammond built a substantial stone house, with two rooms and a shingle roof. Its striking contrast to the mud-roofed cotton-log homes of the town may be guessed from the idea of a little girl who asked her mother if all the houses in Salt Lake City were as good as President Hammond's house.

In spite of the reservation question, Bishop Nielson always said stay. He repeate[d] that he had helped build six towns in Utah, that Bluff was the most difficult of them all, and that here he wanted to spend his remaining years.

In would hardly be right to say the Bluff ditch was the same as before, unless it be with the understanding that the troublesome institution was never the same during any two successive months of its perilous existence. It called for scraping, shovelling, riprapping, and a great many rare qualities of persistence and benevolence, which were sometimes at a rather low ebb.

The riprapping, a process of fortifying against the river, by laying loads and loads of brush and small tress along the bank, and weighting them to their place with other loads and loads of stone, denuded many a bar of its thrifty young cottonwoods, and cleaned up the ready stone from the base of the cliffs. But the cottonwoods sprang up again like so much big hay, and the cliffs required only a little dynamite to replenish the supply of stone. As against this endless supply, the river always whittled away the riprapping, making an endless demand, and the process could have become co-eternal with the river, but for the need of eternal men to keep it going.

No history of the Bluff ditch should progress far without mentioning Hyrum Perkins; not only because he traveled on the trot and never tired, but because he grew into the workings of that ditch as a vital part of it, and was the heart which propelled its life blood, twenty-five years later.

The hopeful plans of 1880, which contemplated twenty miles of farms along the river, simmered down to the Bluff ditch, and even that was too much. At best it watered only seven hundred acres, and the number soon dwindled to three hundred.

But somehow the work, the failures, and the hardships, tasted sweet to the people "I think we were as happy, and possibly more happy in our poverty", says Kumen Jones, "than we are now in our prosperity. I think too, we are just as good, and perhaps better men then than now."

With all their Indian troubles of early and later years, a rough-hewn understanding gradually took place between them. The Indians knew the Mormons stood for law and a square deal, and the Mormons knew the Indians could be relied on to help nail any white outlaws who took refuge in the country. This became a whole some factor in turning away desperadoes, who otherwise would have infested the rocks and canyons like mice in an old granary. But they feared the whites because of the Indians, and they feared the Indians because of the whites.

The settlers learned too, that the Indians have a peculiar conscience and standard of honor, to which they adhere more ore or less in all their affairs. "If you find them stealing, you can whip them like a dog, and they take it. But if you don't know, and still you blame them they put up a fight. If you trust them, they feel honored and will not betray the trust If they find you want to treat them like human beings, they appreciate it more than most white men," says Kumen Jones.

It may be positively stated with no fear of successful contradiction, that a feeling of kindness for the red men of both tribes prevailed in Bluff. The chorus of their "Hi ya ya", as they sang and danced in their camps, inspired neithe[r] fear nor anger in the hearts of the settlers. The performance was often watched by a crowd of young folks, who now in their middle age remember with kindness most of the braves who took part in the dance.

It is claimed that C. E. Walton, Sr., taught the Bluff school in 1886. In that year Willard Butt ran a dairy at what has since been known as the Milk Ranch, an[d] the Barton-Hyde sheep were summered on a part of Elk Mountain.

While at his dairy alone one day that summer, Willard Butt was visited by old Whiskers, who pulled out a long gun and ordered dinner. The fact that no "chuc[k] was cooked made not the least difference, Whiskers wanted dinner.

Seating himself comfortably he followed the unwilling dairyman with his gun while the "chuck" was being prepared, and then munched it down in great satisfaction.

The cook naturally formed a fierce resolution to return the compliment with compound interest at the very first opportunity. That opportunity came when Willard met the old Piute alone on Dodge Point, he remembered the resolution, considered the stooping figure of the old man completely at his mercy, and let him go his way in peace.

The memory of the accounts of those quite days in early Bluff leave a real regret that they should never return. The days when Samuel Cox led the choir, when fervent words of encouragement sounded from the old log house every Sunday, when "Sister" Haskel was the nurse, the doctor and the surgeon for all the sick, leaves fond images and echoes which may never fade.

One man relates that as he passed the log meeting house on a hot summer day, a friendly old cow, having sought the shade inside, stood peacefully chewing her cud in the open doorway.

1886 CHAPTER XXVII

The Rincon store, which was begun in '83 by William Hyde, came to include his son-in-law, Amasa Barton and others. As early as the spring of '85, Amasa Barton moved there with his wife and babe, took over the management of the trading post and began making improvements.

He contrived a treadmill, run by a donkey to raise water for his little farm, and later put in a water wheel. His home and his store buildings were located on a low ledge, safely out of reach of the greatest floods, and all his improvements were prepared with rare skill and patience. Few men have made cottonwood logs look more like they really had a right to be used in a wall, for Barton was a natural-born mechanic acapting himself to every new field of his activity.

On the 9th of May, old Eye, a presumably friendly Navajo, with whom they had been acquainted for years, came to Rincon early in the morning, bringing with him a younger man, a stranger, whose face indicated that he was a bully and a bad character. But no one suspected them. Eye came as he had many times before, for he had traded with them and worked for them, and their business had always been mutually satisfactory. It was while working for Barton months earlier that this Navajo had been struck with a flying gad and lost one of his eyes, hence the name.

When he came to the trading post early on the morning of May 9yh, it was to make an exchange for some jewelry his wife had pawned in the winter. But he offered in exchange only a broken pistol which was of uncertain value, and Barton refused to accept it.

When breakfast was ready he took them to the house and fed them, after which the three returned to the store and continued the wrangle over the pawned jewelry. Eye and his friend became ugly, and insisted on making the exchange whether or no. Barton had no gun handy so he ordered them out of the store, and started from behind the counter to see that they went.

By a quick movement they lassoed him around the neck, and tried to drag him over the counter, he was large and powerful, and the effort resulted in a delayed struggle. Hearing a noise, Mrs. Barton hurried over, looked in the store and offered her services, but she had lately got up from a sick bed, and her husband sent her back to the house. Again she started, this time with a gun, but fearing it would be taken from her, she returned again.

About this time the bully shot at Barton and missed him, struck Eye in the heart. The wounded Navajo bolted from the door, and succeeded in running around to the back of the house before he dropped, and his slayer had no way of telling how badly his associate was injured. At the sound of the shot, Mrs. Barton's mother, Mrs. Hyde, ran to the store, reaching there in time to see her son-in-law fall with his head on the doorstep, having been choked to unconsciousness with the rope around his neck. The bully shot at him once in the back of the head with his revolver, and then, yielding to the white woman's effort to push him aside, he went around the store to see what had become of the other Navajo. What he saw aroused his anger afresh, and returning, he pushed Mrs. Hyde aside, and fired another bullet into the wounded man's head as he lay unconscious on the doorstep. Then shouldering the body of his fallen companion, the bully staggered to the boat, and crossed to the other side, lay the dead man on the bank, and disappeare[d] among the hills.

Cheerpoots, Posey and some other Utes watched the whole affair without taking part, and to these men Mrs. Barton turned for help in moving her husband to the house. She locked the store, and writing a note, offered Cheerpoots fifteen dollars to deliver it in Bluff with all possible speed; he took the note, and was gone like a spirit.

Then six or seven Navajos came down to the boat from the south side and started over. Consternation and terror afresh filled the stricken home. Barton lay helpless, and perhaps only partly conscious under a shed by the door, and his wife and her mother and two babies were entirely at the mercy of the savages, whatever they should choose to do. No white man was nearer than Bluff, ten miles away.

As the Indians approached the house, Mrs, Barton asked her husband to close his eyes and appear to be dead. He did as she wished, and his appearance may have had a tendency to relieve the situation. The Navajos lined up, guns in their hands in front of the shed, and the women waited in awful fear to know what they

wanted. When they demanded admittance to the store, Mrs. Barton opened the door, and left them to help themselves.

While they made free to load up with whatever took their fancy, one of their own people called to them long and loud form the cliff south of the river, telling them to beware, the Mormons were coming. Cheerpoots had made wonderful time indeed. It is said that within an hour and fifteen minutes from the time he left, Kumen Jones and Platte Lyman rode up to the house at Rincon. The Navajos left with their plunder and crossed the river but a few minutes before the two men arrived.

The message brought by Cheerpoots was hurried straight on by the hand of John Adams to Joseph F. Barton, the wounded man's brother at Recapture on the river, where he found nooning with his freight outfit, and he was the next one to reach Rincon.

Several others left Bluff that day for the scene of the trouble and when evening came, Peter Allan and John Adams were the only men in town. Withe the approach of night came a sense of lonliness and fear, which brought all the women and children to one house. It is related they stayed at the home of "Aunt" Kisten Nielson, and Peter Allan and John Adams stood guard with guns until morning.

Bob Allan took the news to Milk Ranch, where his father was running a dairy. At the ranch he found his father, his two sisters, aggie and Lizzie, also Miss Magnolia Walton, Miss Stella Hyde and her brother Frank Hyde. It was decided the young folks should go to Bluff without delay, they started on horseback, and covered those thirty odd miles in record time, leaving the senior Allan to guard the ranch.

While Amasa Barton hung there, between life and death, his brain oozing out thoug[h] two great holes just back of the crown of his head; Doctor Winters was camped at Soldier Springs, and could have given such assistance as medical skill affords, if his presence had been known. But it was not known until later, and one of the saddest tragedies of the county hurried on towards its ending, with the anxious friends and watchers believing no competent skill could be found within a hundred and fifty miles at least.

1886 **CHAPTER XXVIII**

Five or six men stayed at Rincon during Amasa Barton's illness. The women and children were left pretty much along, but the Bishop and others assured them there was no danger, that the authorities of the church had promised them protection from the Indians, and that the promise would be made good.

Shortly after the body of old Eye was dumped on the south bank of the river, the Navajos came in the night, covered it over with dry wood and burned it.

The bullets in Amasa Barton's head seemed to have lodged back of his eyes, causing blindness, and producing darkened areas on his face. Careful nursing restored the proper color, but the prickly-pear poultices and everything else they tried, failed to stop his brain from oozing out through the ghastly wounds. With one side paralysed, and his comprehension more or less dimmed, he sang and prayed and talked, and seemed to realize with one of his songs that "he waited by the wayside with his load."

His friends and attendants hoped as against fate for his recovery and omitted no effort which they had reason to believe would bring it about. He retained his consciousness, such as it was, almost to the last moment, and he died on the 16th, exactly a week after the shooting. The funeral was held at Bluff, and the body was interred in the gravel hill above town.

While the wounded man lay between life and death, the question of war or peace debated itself in the minds of the Navajos. Some of them thought that if the white man died there would be no reason to prolong the quarrel. Others thought the death of more white men would be necessary to make things right. While the anxious watch continued at Rincon, they discovered a large man coming to the river from the south, he came straight on and into the house, a superior type of manhood It was Tom Holiday, and his conciliatory tones were dignified by his great size and magnetism. He wanted no more trouble, and desired to have the matter fixed up and forgotten. The Bluff men gladly agreed to his propositions.

But in spite of Holiday, and perhaps in spite of other men who approved his policy there was a hot-headed element among the Navajos which refused to let the affair drop. Several days after the funeral a company of from seventy-five to a hundred of them rode into town with blackened faces, and demanded to know whether the people wanted to fight. Bishop Nielson met them near the old log store, and Kumen Jones acted as interpreter.

"We will talk with you as friends," said the Bishop, "But friends do not hold thei[r] guns while they talk. We have no guns, if you want to talk, stand your guns again[st] the store, and sit here in a friendly circle."

Some of them dismounted and leaned their rifles against the log wall, while others continued sullenly on their horses with their weapons in their hands. The talk went on just the same, and the Bishop's broken english was translated into Navajo.

"The Mormon captains sent us here to teach you ways of peace," he continued. We don't fight, we hire our fighters. It you want to fight us we will send for them."

"No! No!" protested the Navajos with upraised hands, realizing it meant the coming of soldiers, and some of their older men recalled experiences they had had with Kit Carson's troops years before.

When they had been assured that the Mormons neither wanted to fight nor to employ fighters, but preferred peace, there was a great handshaking all around, and the Bluff people prepared a big eat, with the red men accepted and disposed of without delay. General good feelings prevailed.

But before the visit of this Navajo band, while it was generally known they nursed some sort of grievance, a Mr. Grant who had been herding sheep for the Rincon store, reported the unsettled state of affairs to Captain Dority at Fort Lewis in Colorado. The captain came with from fifty to seventy-five men, and camped at the mouth of Recapture Creek, five miles from Bluff. While he stayed, the Indians were more peaceable and law-abiding than ever before or since.

The captain expressed his willingness, or even his eagerness to arrest the young fellow who did the shooting at Rincon, but he pointed out that a complaint would have to be made, a warrant issued, etc., which process entailed a merciless amount of red-tape in those territorial days. In due time, however, though the captain and his men had gone back to their fort, Mrs. Amasa Barton made a trip to Provo, where she swore out a complaint against the man who killed her husband. A warrant for his arrest was placed in the hands of the United States Marshal, but the arrest was never undertaken. The criminal proceeded redhanded from the scene of his cold-blooded murder to enjoy his liberty as before, and has not been molested by the law in all these thirty years.

The Rincon store was bought out by the San Juan Co-op, the goods removed thither and the houses left vacant. Sometimes those carefully built rooms gave temporary shelter to travelers, but they grew silent and neglected, and the moaning stream gave forth no such hopeful shower as when the talented builder was beautifying the low ledge and cultivating the sandy bottom below it.

1887 CHAPTER XXIX

In April '87, Frederic I. Jones and C. E. Walton went to LaPlatta, New Mexico for seed grain, which they obtained through Bishop Luther Burnham from the tithing office of the Burnham Ward. They arrived at South Montezuma on May 3rd, and planted oats, wheat, and potatoes.

Fred Adams, John Bell and Parley Butt were also on the creek that summer. Jones and Butt brought their families on the 18th of June, and it seems that no other families came that summer. In the latter part of the month they began work on the North Montezuma ditch, in which they were joined by George Welden and one of the McConkie boys.

But Carlisle, the cattle man, seemed to think this ditch building a violation of his rights, and he ordered the ditch crew to leave, gave them ten days to get out of the country, and threatened to "make it hot for them" if they had not disappeared by that time. The work came to a temporary halt, and the little forc[e] held council as to what they should do. They were not fighting, not were they cowards, and they believed their undertaking perfectly legitimate.

Since it was in response to a call from President Hammond that they had gone to make settlement in the country, they decided to send F. I. Jones to see the President where he was visiting at Mancos. From Mancos the two men went on to consult certain land records and a lawyer in Durango. The lawyer assured them Carlisle's claim to the Blue Mountain was illegal, though he could give no definite information about the land immediately affecting the ditch.

While the business hung thus in uncertainty, a man named Fritz came along and told them he had worked for Carlisle, that he had filed on the land in question and was going to deed it to his employer, but that an unpleasant falling-out had cancelled the agreement. Going to the lawyer's office, he made out a quit-claim deed in favor of Jones and Hammond, and then added, "Tell Carlisle that if he makes trouble, I'll appear against him for defrauding the Government."

Thus enlightened on the situation, and with the advantage of the quit-claim deed, the ditch crew proceeded with their work. No attempt was made to carry out the bluff, the ten days, the other days besides, expired peacefully, but the feelings of the cattle interests towards the proposed settlement were not friendly and trouble seemed to smoulder as it waiting for a breeze to fan it into flame.

The cowboys placed claims on much of the choicest country, hoping to head off the settlers.

In the latter part of that month, June, President Hammond and Peter Allan went up from Bluff to survey the new town, which so far had been called Hammond. The President, however, did not like the name, and asked them to find something else. C. E. Walton suggested Monticello, and the name has held for thirty years coming to stand for the long persistent fight and the triumph over a multitude of unpleasant things around Blue Mountain.

The survey of the townsite was completed July 4th.

Sometime in the spring of '87, the first dry farming ever done in modern times around Blue Mountain, was conducted on a small scale by F. I. Jones. Proceeding on the belief that where grass grows luxuriantly without artificial irrigation, wheat ought to grow; he selected and fenced a small patch of ground west of what in now Lauritz Mortensen's farm. He obtained some Odessa wheat, a variety with small hard kernels and black chaff, and after preparing this small patch, he planted the wheat. It came up and matured fairly well, but was not

harvested. The volunteer crop next year was better still. This was a very small beginning, but it was a demonstration, and it had its wholesome effect in the country, as we shall see later on.

In the late spring or early summer, while the new settlers were farming at South Montezuma, and making such preparations as they could to move to Monticello the next spring, the Ute known as Wash came in reporting a dead white man somewhere up the creek. Parley Butt went with him and found the body of a man named Hopkins. He had been cooking for the L. C. outfit and someone had apparently shot him from ambush while he waited on a log fence for the outfit to return. He had crawled a short distance from the fence before he died.

A lone track was found not far from the place, and it may have been the Utes who did the killing, though they protested strongly against the charge. The blame, however, seems to be laid on the Navajos, with whom Hopkins had been in an unpleasant mixup sometime before.

The body was too badly decomposed to be moved, and was rolled into a hole made nearby for the purpose. At the head of Devil Canyon near the wagon road, a stone may be seen in the scrubby oak brush. That marks the place where the unfortunate cowboy found rest.

Though the Utes are generally exonerated from the blame of this killing, they are reported to have been more or less hostile during that summer, and a company of soldiers came in answer to someones call and camped at a certain spring west of Monticello. The place is still known as Soldier Spring.

From the crops at South Montezuma, they harvested two hundred and twenty bushels of wheat, and a hundred and eighty bushels of oats. The threshing was accomplished by driving horses back and forth over the straw, and the grain was cleaned by a little fanning mill.

The last thing that fall, they hauled some logs from the mountain and a load of lumber from Mancos, preparatory to building at Monticello early in the spring.

The precious grain raised at South Montezuma they put securely under cover, and leaving a man to guard the place for the winter, they all moved to Bluff. But the man followed them at Christmas time to take part in the celebration, and somehow he failed to return. Later, when certain of the new settlers went up to see how matters stood at their farm, "Our friends from the north had carried off one-third of the grain," says F. I. Jones, " but this was perhaps for rent on the country, which they pretended to own."

1888 **CHAPTER XXX**

In the spring of 1888 a company from Texas arrived at Bluff with 2,000 head of long-horned, narrow-hipped cattle. For the lower country they made their headquarters at Rincon, and they appropriated some of the best springs and choicest parts of Elk Mountain.

Their claim to that mountain was indicated by the ponderous brand: E L K M. which they smeared along the side of each new calf, reaching indefinitely from its neck to its tail. This, besides cutting the calf's right ear off close to its head, was supposed to settle all doubts as to where it belonged.

And those Texas calves, the memory of them stretches the mouth of cowmen to this very day. They were big, blocky fellows during the first two or three months of their lives, and as yearling steers they made a fairly good impression. At two years old you might fancy you looked at them through the wrong end of a field glass, at maturity they seemed to be a compromise between a joke and a nightmare. They had profound vertical width of vitality across the region of the heart, and a spread of cork-screw horns like a grandfather billy-goat. But their backs had longitude without latitude, and they sloped off to nothing behind like the spinning end of an old style top.

John Crosby and a man named Reed managed the outfit, and though they played the game fair, and took no undue advantage of their neighbors, the men in their employ were often doubtful characters who found the remoteness of San Juan a delightful escape from righteous vengeance in the regions from which they had fled. They carried guns long and short wherever they went, and once in a while they got a hunch from some strange quarter and departed suddenly between two days from their new retreat.

The coming of the Texas outfit to occupy so much of the newly purchased Elk Mountain, and to possess a great part of the range which was coming into recognition as the main hope of existence in the new country, was not exactly a cause for rejoicing among the pioneers. It was of course public domain, and free to all comers, from Utah and from Texas alike. But when these gun-laden adventurers boasting their successful flight from reeking escapades in distant parts, made their intention of swarming into the dances and social function in the old log meeting house, they heard the official verdict of disapproval from the amusement committee.

Those dances and friendly gatherings in the old log hall had lost Samuel Cox and his dear old fiddle, and C. E. Walton had gone with his horn to settle at Blue Mountain. Sometimes Thales Haskel made music for the dance with an accordion, and sometimes the music came only from a harmonica, accompanied by an organ. If harmonica and accordion were both non-est, Hyrum Perkins could sing quadrilles and waltzes like a phonograph. In spite of their homliness, and in spite of their lack of any fastidious culture, the doings in the old log hall held a dignity and sacredness which admitted of no rude invasion.

The riproaring men of the Texas outfit seemed to think that if he bought a clean shirt, and possibly a pair of trousers, and girded his neck with a red bandana handkerchief, he was fully eligible to all the honors and privileges of this country ball room. He generally removed his spurs, though he did not always venture to remove his last revolver. Worse than his gun, was the bottle concealed on his person, or hidden outside in a nearby fence, for he must be well primed with whiskey to make the occasion comport with his lofty ideals.

This is no reflection on people from Texas, nor on cow-punchers in general. The Elk Mountain Cattle Company, as they called themselves, had men from all over the west, and from Crosby and Butler and others who deserve honorable mention, if thei[r] names were at hand, they graded in rank to the fellow who hung his shirt on the corner of the house at Rincon, that they gray livestock within it might race up and down to their death hunting for him.

Some of the best of the outfit were even asked to come, if they desired, and take part in the dance, but when they came in great numbers without invitation, the committee preferred to meet them at the door and refuse them admittance. Their indignation rose up in a hot flame, and prospects for quick and serious trouble were mighty good. Some of them, however, listened to reason, and later went in and took part in the dance with the understanding that whiskey and certain other things would not be tolerated.

Those who didn't go in, nursed their wrath to keep it warm for a more favorable opportunity. Sometime later they tried to get up a dance of their own in "Father" Allan's dooryard, but he objected, and the attempt failed utterly. They fired their guns as they rode out of town late in the evening, but they were followed promptly up and told it wouldn't do, that the people simply would not stand for it.

About this time one of their number had a quarrel with Poke, the now notorious Ute, and when he was about ready to shoot the troublesome red man, Haskel interferred. "Are you crazy?" demanded the old Indian missionary. "Don't you know that if you kill one of these Utes they'll wipe the whole business of us?" It was a bold intervention, and the cow-puncher fairly choked with his mighty oaths of protest, but the old gray-beard prevailed without a gun.

A few days later when Kuman Jones came to their camp at noon, he found them heaping curses on the name of Bishop Nielson and "Father" Allan, but in particular on "old man Haskel".

"Hold on boys," he said, "don't you think it brave to sit here and curse old white-haired men? That old man Haskel could run any two of you off the flats. Another thing, is it brave for armed men in a peaceful town to fire their guns in the dead of night? No one is frightened but nervous women and sick children, is it brave to frighten them? If I ever saw a bunch of cowards it's right here."

That afternoon one of them, a desperate fellow, finding favorable opportunity said, "Jones, you told us the truth; I'll never carry my gun in town again."

It was never the intention to exclude the cowboys altogether. As time went on, better understandings resulted in fairly agreeable relations between the pioneers and the newcomers, but the order of things in the old log hall was never changed for the worse by anyone.