History of San Juan County
Chapter XXXVI-XL, 1890-1892
By Albert R. Lyman, 1918

CHAPTER XXXVI

It seems that none of the early pioneers of San Juan foresaw how eagerly their adventures would be sought after by future generations. What happened was commonplace at the time, everyone knew it and no one saw fit to make a record of it. Secretaries and clerks were appointed to take note of sacred transactions, but other matters even more interesting, though far from being sacred, are not included in any minutes of meetings, nor or any ward records. The date, place, occasion, etc., are now often matters of disagreement and contradiction by those who should remember.

One of the earliest events definitely fixed for the year 1890 in Monticello, is the birth of the first girl baby, Anna Jones, now Mrs. Thomas A. Jones of Blanding. She was born in April. Earlier than this we get glimpses of a cold winter and deep snow, which held the people near to their low log cabins. But for want of definite notes those winters, as they live in the memory, are all very much alike.

Sometime previous to this year, Mons Peterson had opened a store in Monticello, and with one of his spring shipments of goods came a small quantity of liquor. It is claimed that this liquor was ordered not to be sold at large, but for speci[al] cases where it would be used for medical purposes. All the same, when the load in which it was packed became fast in the mud on Peter's Hill, and had to wait while the driver went to Monticello for another team, it was discovered by the cowboys, who went through box after box till they found a jug of the precious liquid and swilled it down without ceremony.

When the team from Monticello started for town with that load this drunken gang followed up with swagger and noise, and at the store they simply took possession of house, wagon, goods and the whole place, driving Mons Peterson away, and threatening to shoot him if he should attempt to return.

All the pent-up hell which had festered in their souls since the first arrival of the settlers, was turned loose to race through the streets, to shoot and yell and curse until the hideous echoes reached far away over the green hills, while women and children cowered in terror behind the uncertain shelter of their log walls.

They shot though the wagon again and again. They threw canned goods up and fire[d] at them in mid air. Bolts of cloth were taken from the shelves, and loose ends wrapped to the horns of their saddles, while they raced away to see how far they could ride before the last of the roll should straighten out in a long waving ribbon behind them. Sides of bacon were slit with their knives, shot through and thrown into the dust of the road.

One fellow who became too full and stupid to go on with the performance, fell from his horse at the bars of a certain corral, and as they raced back and forth they spurred their horses over his prostrate form, firing their revolvers into the ground near is head until they plowed up the earth and scattered the dust all through his hair.

As these drunken savages galloped through the streets, they ordered the settlers wherever they met them, to dance, and threatened to shoot the heels from their shoes if the refused. William Bronson, Sr., was ordered by Bill Johnson to dance "You're a scoundrel!" protested Bronson, too refined to use more vicious language and though the bullets stirred the dust near his shoes, he flatly refused to lift a foot.

While all these things happened in the street near his home, F. I. Jones cared for his sick wife, hoping for her sake they would not call on him, but at the same time keeping his eye on them, and on a trusty gun hanging on the wall.

"I'm goin' to make Jones dance, or kill 'im," boated Johnson, starting for the little log house, gun in hand.

"That fellow can't come in here." said Jones to his prostrate wife, at the same time taking down his gun and starting to meet the drink-crazed cowpuncher. Just what might have happened, and what it might have led to is hard to guess, but Johnny Gibson happened down the street at that moment, and took a friendly shot at Johnson, who answered in the same genial voice. Starting for each other, they met half-way, and clinching, fell into the ditch. When they had wallowed around in the mud in each others embrace for a few minutes, they compromised the row by agreeing to go together in search of more drink.

In Peterson's store little escaped the destructive touch of the mad vandals. They shot through bolts of cloth and other goods on the shelves. They slit sacks of sugar from end to end and scattered it in the streets.

Removing all barriers, they rode through the house, breaking and rending left and right. They could come on the keen jump to within a few feet of the door, but their horses would slow up in spite of their fierce rowels, while they went cautiously through the house.

The best shot of the many which were fired that day, was fired by Johnny Gibson who, in his drunken attempt to shoot his terrified horse, sent bullet through his own foot.

When night came on, this drunken rabble took as many of their horses as possible into the store, and kept them there until morning. And in the gray dawn of that morning, when the booze was all drunk up and no more with which to

prolong the agony, that store looked as if it might have been a roosting place for fiends of the infernal pit.

It is related that some of these fellows, when they sobered up promised to pay Peterson for all the damage and trouble they had caused him, and it is further related that they never kept that promise to the extent of one cent.

Another event without definite date, which seems however, to follow closely on the heels of this drunken brawl, is the arrest of Johnny Gibson by Joe Bush. It is of particular interest because of the way it turned out, for when Gibson was told to consider himself under arrest, he raised his hand with a gun in it, and Bush shot his arm and his side all to rags. Cases like this, where the law held firmly to its course, were like oases in the blistered plain, and indicated the coming of the time when Monticello would prevail for the cause of law and order.

1890 CHAPTER XXXVII

The splendid isolation of early San Juan should have made it an ideal retreat from the vicious elements which distract human comfort in more populous centers. It should have been a place to hold uninterrupted communion with nature in a quiet solitude. But the solitude was not always as profound, nor as sweet and free from danger as a classical dreamer might imagine. To be short, it was corrupted with men and men were corrupted with a variety of things.

The way in which they import that corruption in jugs and bottles from afar would stir the interest, the amusement, the disgust or the warpaint of the most apatheti[c] old hermit in the mountains. They brought it with infinite care on pack horses, in saddle pockets, or closely guarded in flasks near their hearts, as if it were the precious elixir of life. Sometimes it arrived in the reliable care of the pious and unsuspecting, but it always arrived. And like the little spark which had made its way the length of the fuse to the dynamite, its arrival marked the jarring loose of general pandemonium.

But in spite of the drunken men's inordinate desire to exhibit themselves before everybody within a days ride, the big toot did not always happen in town. On several occasions the traveling stranger came suddenly onto this element of corruption in the solitude where it ordered him from his horse or his wagon and forced him to cut pigeon wings to the tune of a Colt 45, which plowed up the dust around his flying feet. Sometimes besides requiring him to dance, it relieved him of his loose coat, or took his boots or overalls as a special premium.

A Mexican coming a-foot from New Mexico to hunt a job, met the dangerous element in the form of two men near Piute. Giving them to understand that he had one chance in a thousand of getting away alive they took everything from the pockets of his ragged clothes, which however, was little more than a prayer book, a few letters and tokens and a photograph of his wife.

A certain man coming up Peter's Hill met the dread element only half exploded. "Drink," it yelled.

"I never drink," faltered the man timidly.

"I tell you to drink," the thing repeated, offering the bottle with one hand and raising a gun with the other, and the man drank.

Jim Thompson, a late arrival from New Zealand, came with team and wagon to look at the country around Blue Mountain. From his camp at the foot of Peter's Hill, while he slept, the corrupted element drove away his horses, and while he plodded through the mud and snow to find them, it robbed his wagon of all it wanted and fired its pistols through what it didn't want, including the wagon box. Wet, hu[n]gry and cold, Thompson found his way to Monticello, believing he had fallen into a real den of thieves.

Many a good horse left to graze on the hills was found by the dread element, and never seen again in San Juan. That element was a bird of passage, coming today, gone tomorrow, selling its plunder from afar committing its depredation afresh and loading up with all it could carry preparatory to seeking new quarters[.]

Up to 1890, the road from Bluff to Monticello had followed up the left rim to Devil Canyon to its head, crossing South Montezuma at the base of the mountain and going thence northeast to Monticello. In winter months, this road was burie[d] under two to six feet of snow, and was pretty much out of the questions from Dece[mber] to April. Some of this snow could be avoided by a road which led down Montezuma to Verdure, and from there north.

In 1890 a road, at least it was called a road in that day, was opened across Devil and Long Canyons to Verdure. It was a huge improvement on the old route, though the dugway gave a false impression as to where the canyon got its name. "Yes, this is Devil Canyon alright," the stranger would say, hanging like grim death to the old spring seat. Those wonderful old dugways are still strewn with telltale boards and spokes and felloes, dating from the reluctant haste with which certain freight outfits descended at the bottom of the canyon.

Recapture too, was the scene of many thrilling adventures, both along the hillside on its north, and in the crooked wash where every now and then a raging flood played freaks with the crossings. Travel was very irregular, and sometimes no wagon broke the track for weeks at a stretch. And woe to the team which faced the shifting soil on Bluff Bench after one of these long intervals. The road was simply a barren path through the drifting sand, into which the wheels sank a disheartening depth, coming slowly up therefrom with the miserable substance sliding from every spoke.

But the cream of this ancient highway was generally to be found in Cow Canyon, a narrow defile in the cliff through which rainwater found its way from the bench to the river. It was never intended for a roadway, and every shower wiped it clea[n] of all loose dressing intended to modify the intolerable bumps on the solid rock. Such invincible Road Supervisors as Hyrum Perkins tried one scheme after another shooting down tons and tons of rock for the cliff above, but it was ground to sand by the wheels and hoofs, and it went away in the floods. Many a belated teamster thought it best to leave his load at the top until morning, and many a load started up from Bluff to stop indefinitely in the canyon.

Sometimes for weeks at a stretch, the only way was by the Jump, three miles up the river; a six-mile muleshoe curve to get a mile away. It was a long, long way in those days from Bluff to Monticello, in fact, measuring distance by the present means of travel, it was about three hundred miles. The two places were not connected by a mail route, and each one occupied a wilderness all its own. A telephone line had not yet been dreamed of, and in case of serious sickness or death, a horsemen rode a lathering mustang over the long road.

1891 CHAPTER XXXIX

Referring again to that corruption which somehow never failed to arrive in jugs and bottles, in the summer of 1891, a ponderous flask of the vile stuff arrived in Monticello for Tom Roach. It is not necessary here to relate who took pains to bring it in, bringing it in was no great offense, drinking it was no great sin, and whatever a man did after he drank was no great crime "because he was under the influence of liquor." At least that was the popular argument, through the reader of this account may take issue from it.

Roach himself was out of town, and the said flask was delivered to his wife, who dared do nothing but keep it for him since he knew it was coming. But she declared in tears to the neighbors that it meant danger to herself and others when he drank it.

He had ordered the stuff for the part he expected to take in the celebration of the 24th of July, and it seems he refrained no longer, and by evening his little supply of common sense was pretty much perverted. Still he must go to the dance, he had doted on making there a gallant display of his manhood, and he must carry his revolver or the display would be too tame, especially since most of the dancers would be without firearms.

Dazed and staggering, he watched eagerly for the occasion to make his intended display, but everyone treated him with civility and the prospect looked rather dull HE would have to make the occasion himself. In the Quadrille, the popular dance of the time, it was customary in the "alaman left," to swing twice around, but the corruption had left Roach with barely the equilibrium to swing once.

Exercisin[g] his muddled spirit-level to stand up after his "once around," he saw Peter Bailey still swinging his partner. He grasped this as the opening to start something and pulled out his pocketknife, he fell with fury on unsuspecting Peter. The music and the dancing stopped, different ones seized the drunken fellow, and all became confusion.

"Turn 'im loose, I'll take care of 'im, called someone near the door, and Joe McCord tried to reason with the furious Roach, pleading with him to be peaceable and assuring him that no one meant him any harm. Out though the door they went. McCord still trying to inject a little reason into Tom's inflamed intellect. But Tom wanted no reason and no peace, he had set out for something quite different. Jerking out his revolver, he shot McCord, and then held up the crowd demanding money.

Nearly everyone had left the hall, and stood aghast in the moonlight at the sight of the fallen McCord and his slayer's gun pointed at them. By the way, this gun was not now loaded, certain of the cowboys had previously emptied it of all but one cartridge. But the crowd knew nothing of the emptying trick, and Joe Nielson, Harry Green, Bob Hott and others, shelled out such loose cash as they had in their pockets and threw it at his feet.

When the main part of the dancers crowded out the front door to watch the trouble others climbed through the back windows to make their escape unseen. Among this latt[er] number was Frank Adams, whose object was to get a gun and protect the defenseless crowd from further outrages of this drunken fiend. He went to the home of C. E. Walton where he found a rifle over the door, and hurried back to the excitement in the moonlight.

Roach had ordered a horse, and someone of his own calibre was getting it ready with all possible speed, while he held the people from getting outside help until it should arrive. With matters hanging in this suspense, Frank Adams came up wit[h] his rifle, and was covered at once with the desperado's revolved, but it clicked vacantly, being empty. Almost simultaneously the rifle was discharged at Roach, but through some terrible mistake, it missed its red-handed mark and struck Mrs. C. E. Walton near the heart. "I am hurt," she said simply, falling in the arms of her son, and though she spoke again, she lived but a few moments.

A sickening chill ran through the crowd, it was indeed a midnight scene of horror which would sink indelibly into the memory of everyone present. First the cold-blooded murder of McCord as he pled for peace and fair play, and then the fatal shot which brought death to a lovely woman who had endeared herself to all who knew her.

The horse Roach ordered, was brought, and its footfalls died away in the distance as he fled like Cain from the smoking blood of innocence. The sorrowful

task of preparing the two bodies for burial occupied kindly hands the remainder of the night.

Early in the forenoon of the 25th, a horseman urged his lathered pony into Bluff, and related what a bottle of whiskey had done for Monticello since the precious evening. Everyone wanted to attend the funeral, and shortly after noon several wagons loaded with sympathizing friends, started across the soft, blistered road. Evening black clouds arose and the night came on with thick darkness and driving rain. Sending men ahead with torches to find the road, the company continued onward. Bishop Nielson's wagon ran off the grade and tipped over but gathering around it they rolled it back into place, and reached Monticello in time for the funeral of the 26th.

It is only fair in connection with this painful accident, to give the unanimous verdict which exhonerates Frank Adams of all blame in the affair. What he undertook to do is only what others wanted to do, and its failure may not be placed with any blame on him.

Another feature of this 24th of July celebration, was planned by some of the cowboys for the special benefit of F. I. Jones who as the ecclesiastical head of the community, had become the particular object of all their jealousy over the general growth and success of the community. They had agreed with each other to lasso him when he entered the log hall in the evening, to pull him by hand to where the horses were stationed, and then mounting to drag him out of Monticell[o] and indefinitely away over the hills.

But there was a man named Freeman who had moved with his family to Monticello, and he deserves to be remembered as a reliable factor for order and a square deal He discovered this fiendish plot, and though it was too late to send word to Bishop Jones, he loaded his double-barrel shotgun and stood guard over the horses intended for the game, determined to balk the program if it could be dome by the well-directed contents of his gun. He waited long in the shadow, hoping the Bishop would get wind of the plan and stay at home. And his hoped were not in vain, for though everyone had reason to expect the head of the Ward at the party, he did not come until called for by the tragedy late in the night.

When the usual calm followed the fateful celebration, Freeman sought the Bishop and asked him why he had not come to the dance. The Bishop relates that he did start with his wife for the party but the farther he went, the more clear to his spiritual instincts came a voice commanding him to go back; he saw no reason why he should not attend, but the voice was too plain to be misunderstood, and after explaining it to his wife, they talk it over and returned home.

Whatever Freeman's belief as to spiritual instincts, he shed tears when he heard the Bishop's story, realizing keenly what would have happened but for this real or imaginery voice.

1891-1892 **CHAPTER XL**

In 1891, or in 1892, the Texas outfit manifested a willingness to sell their holdings in San Juan and a company was formed in Bluff to consider their terms. The deal was closed for twenty-thousand dollars and the ELKM band became the property of the new company, which included nearly everybody in town.

The deal marked an important improvement in the country-s complexion, and it was followed by a general and wholesale rounding up of the long-horned cattle, and when they were sold off, the range was left near the original type of Utah stock. The Bluff people thus became the sole heirs to the country, which they had but begun to utilize when the great herd arrived from Texas. The Elk Mountain and the southern and western part of the County lay open again to their cattle and sheep, the cabins at Rincon were deserted, and the San Juan Co-op put a stock of goods in the old Barton store and opened a business with the Navajos. Wayne H. Redd and Christian L. Christensen were clerks there at different times in the life of the new store.

In 1892 the Monticello Co-op came into existence in Monticello, with F. I. Jones as President, and Charles E. Walton, Sr., as clerk. The building was an unpretentious log affair, located southwest of the more recently erected church building.

Sometime in the early nineties the bill was killed which had proposed to make a Reservation of San Juan, and the chronic unrest to show promising symptoms of yielding to fixed and steady purpose. Kumen Jones jarred loose from the conventional stupor of mud-roofed houses and laid the foundation of a neat stone dwelling. It was a brand new precedent, opening an era which should make Bluff known far and near for its neat comfortable homes.

But the settling of the Reservation question did not settle, and has not yet settled the Ute question in San Juan. That question lived on with the Utes themselves, sometimes expressing itself in inter-tribal feuds among them, and sometimes reaching unpleasantly into the affairs of the white population, Instances of disagreeable contact are too numerous to be recounted here, for sometimes they concerned individuals only, and sometimes those individuals were defenseless women and children.

Mancos Jim presented himself one day at the door of a certain house, where a woman and her small children lived, and asked for something to eat. The woman hesitated about preparing the meal. having other duties pressing upon her. But the old Ute read lines of fear on her face, and more in the faces of her children and demanded that certain items of food be prepared for him to eat. When the troubled mother still hesitated, he drew a match from his pocket a declared if the

meal were not prepared at once, he would fasten the door upon them and set fire to the house.

He ate a square meal and at the same time left an indelible impression of his face on the minds of the four little girls, and four women still recall savage lines. Of course "Old Mancos" has long since become peaceable and what he did before the influence of civilization modified the barbarious training of his former days, should not be remembered against his gray hairs.

Among these wild men of the hills, whose training accounted simply to falling a prey to the fierce passions of their nature, it is not surprising that there are a few notorious incorrigibles. But it is rather surprising that among this particular few, the invincible reaper should have dealt so many telling blows.

One of these incorrigibles was known as "Bob" and it was necessary that he be taught the first rudiments of good behavior towards white women. The task of teaching him devolved on Fred Adams, who used a three-inch board to impress the youthful Ute with the salient features of the important lesson. Bob later contracted some strange disease and disappeared from the red ranks.

Another incorrigible, going by the name of "Grasshopper", happened among other offenses, to steal the horses of Paddy Soldiercoat. And Paddy happened to be the wrong man from whom to steal horses, for he camped on the trail of Grasshopper while Grasshopper stretched that trail out long and thin, with a big dust on the front end of it, and Paddy in desperate pursuit half a day behind. The lead dust came panting up the river into Bluff, and Grasshopper in this proud red shirt,rode full whip through town and off to the east. Then came the second dust headed by Paddy with gun and warpaint. He too, disappeared to the east, and no one knew for months how the trouble terminated, for though Paddy came smiling back, that smile was the mysterious crypt which no white man could interpret.

But a boy herding sheep near the mouth of Recapture, came one day to a pile of stones, and under it a skeleton in a red shirt, and in the center of the forehead was a round hole. Later on, Paddy's mother and grandmother told how they had cried and watched and waited while the chase went on, how their hearts had ached, and how at last they were filled with joy that the boy had slain his enemy[.]

Another Ute who fell at the hands of his own people, was Bridger Jack, though it must not be implied that he was other than a fine specimen of Indian, both physically and mentally. His mental genius and exalted him to the dignity of medicine man, but for some inexplicable reason, his medicine was adjudged to be bad. And for making this bad medicine, they pursued him as he ran, shotting him again and again until he fell from his horse, and then putting a sure bullet

through each arm and each leg to break the evil spell of some of his bad medicine.

Another tragedy happened among the Utes on the backs of Cottonwood Wash within a stones0throw of Bluff, when Posey shot his squaw. He claimed it was an accident, and there is no right good reason to dispute his claim.

The unfortunate woman lay three days on the coarse blankets of her wickiup, while they tried by their strange incantations to correct the fatal effects of the terrible bullet. "Aunt Jodie" Wood and other women went from town to relieve her sufferings, all to no avail. She died and was burned in a cave west of town, nea[r] the mouth of Buck Canyon.

Two youngsters who rode out on their ponies in the evening to see what might yet be smouldering in the great smoke, were discovered by Posey while back in the cave away from their horses. He charged upon them with his cayuse, struck at them with his quirt, pursued them over the sand hills until they were more dead than alive, and one of them still has weak lungs because of that long run. Dr. Francis P. Hammond was one of those youngsters, and the other is digging up the history of San Juan.

The Utes on the north, on the east, and the west of Bluff prowled about uncertainly, and in varying numbers, but the Navajos on the south were ever a fixed quantity, living always up to and generally beyond the confines of their Reservation. They learned that Sunday was a home day for the people of Bluff, and it pleased these missionary settlers to hear them inquiring as to when and how often the day arrived. But gradually it leaked out that they had inquired with motives quite different from what the people intended; Sunday was the day of days for the Navajo to go forth in safety to plunder the range near town, to drive off the newborn calf, or butcher the fat cow.

Many a time not far from town, in jungles of young cottonwoods, familiar old milch cows have been recognized by white skulls with bullet holes centrally above the eyes. This Navajo custom of observing the Sabbath day may date indefinitely back into the eighties, but the people were slow to discover it. Once made, however, the discovery became a snare to the Sunday cattle thief, as we shall see later on in this account.