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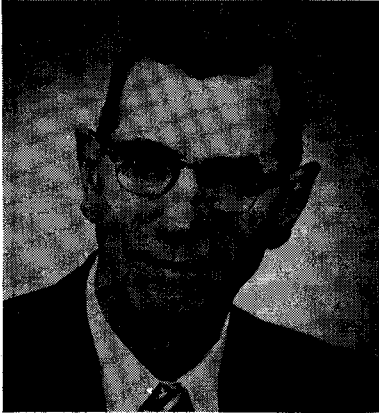
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Early Mining in Colorado

EARLY MINING IN COLORADO

By HAROLD E. POPHAM



Harold E. Popham received his LL.B. degree from the University of Kansas in 1906, and was admitted to the Kansas bar in the same year. In 1909 he became a member of the Colorado bar. He served from 1929 to 1933 as a Deputy District Attorney, and is a long-time member of the Denver and Colorado Bar Associations. He is also a member of Phi Delta Phi Legal Fraternity.

Let me say in the beginning that this is not a history but simply a reminder of a few highlights of the discovery of gold and other minerals in Colorado and a reference to some of the results. There are numerous histories of Colorado and writings which one may read for details. I am indebted to "History of Colorado" by Judge Wilbur F. Stone and "Colorado" by Hafen and Hafen for many facts herein.

"Colorado" is a beautiful name. It is Spanish and means red color or red colored. It comes from the numerous red rocks which outcrop in the foothills of various mountain regions and show in the canons of streams, causing those streams to take on a reddish color after heavy rains.

The first mining in Colorado is reported to have taken place 200 years or more before the discovery of gold in what is now Colorado. Old excavations which have been found in the hills date back many years.

In the days of the Spanish conquest, Don Juan de Onate, in 1591, is said to have found and worked placer mines on the west side of the Sangre de Cristo Mountain Range above Fort Garland between the Culebra and Trinchera.

The prospecting which began in our territory in 1858 and 1859 produced evidence of excavations in various localities which no doubt were made by early Spanish explorers. Some are found on tributaries of the San Juan and Gunnison Rivers, and it is speculated that they were made by Ribera (Rivera) and his followers.

One of the earliest prospecting expeditions supported by records was led by Juan Rivera in 1765. This party, composed mostly or entirely of New Mexicans, explored the southern base of the San Juan Mountains and went into the valleys of the Dolores and Gunnison Rivers. They found some silver ore on a branch of the San Juan River and gave the name La Plata (silver) to the stream and the La Plata Mountains.

William N. Byers is authority for the story by a prospector

named Samuel Stone. It states that in 1859, near the headwaters of the Big Thompson, he and his party discovered evidence of an ancient mining camp and close by deep excavations. They retrieved a small copper distilling outfit presumably used in making liquor from the native wild berries. Nothing more is known of this early-day party. It is thought that it may have been a Portuguese expedition whose members were victims of the Indians and never returned to Mexico. I believe it is on Buckskin Creek that flows through Alma that there are several Arrastra. These were crude dragstone methods of crushing ore, an old Spanish device. An inquiry at Alma will show the road.

Zebulon M. Pike tells of one James Purcell who disclosed to him how he (Purcell) had in 1802 found gold on the head of the Platte River and had carried some in his leather pouch for months and then threw it away, being in doubt he would ever again see civilization. More than fifty years later valuable gold placers were discovered in this region in South Park.

There are various other reports of gold discoveries in earlier years at the foot of the Rocky Mountains in localities that have never produced in paying quantities or developed into mines, among these are reports that hunters and trappers at times brought small quantities of gold to the trading post at the mouth of Clear Creek between 1832 and 1837. Discoveries are also reported near Vasquez in 1843-1844, on Cherry Creek in 1848, on the Cache la Poudre where it leaves the mountains in 1849 and on Ralston Creek in 1850.

In 1858 a prospecting party was formed in Georgia by William Green Russell. In this party were his two brothers, Joseph D. Russell and Dr. Levi J. Russell, and a few other white men. They were joined by other whites from time to time on the way. By prearrangement a Cherokee party of fifty men from Oklahoma also joined up with them at a spot a few miles west of what is now Larned, Kansas. At this time they had fourteen wagons, thirty yoke of oxen, two horse teams and approximately twenty ponies.

They traveled up the Arkansas and cut across northward, east of Pueblo, prospecting Fountain Creek, the Platte, Cherry Creek and other streams they encountered. The group numbered 104 persons at one time. On June 24, 1858, they camped near the junction of Cherry Creek and the Platte. This created an historical date. From here they separated into groups and prospected Ralston Creek, Clear Creek and as far as Boulder Creek but disappointment was the lot of all. Most of the party turned back toward home in a

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few days, the Cherokees leaving as a disgruntled body. William Green Russell, who was experienced in mining in Georgia and had made two trips to California, was not ready to give up. He called the remaining group together and told them he would stay if two men would remain with him. Twelve indicated their desire to stay. It should be understood that all this early search for the precious metal by people coming to this territory was for placer gold and placer ground that would produce gold visible to the eye. Thus early efforts were confined to the streams.

This small group of thirteen started up the Platte and soon found a small bar that panned well but was shortly exhausted. One hundred dollars of pay was recovered. This presumably was in the fore part of July, 1858. A short time afterward two of the group, while hunting antelope for food, came upon a patch of promising sand and gravel on Dry Creek, that now runs through Englewood, and close to the present site of that city. The men panned this to exhaustion, and the deposit paid about ten dollars per man. Reports of this discovery spread through Kansas and Missouri and started a rush of gold seekers to the so-called gold region. Thus while the first authentic gold discoveries in what was later called Jefferson Territory, now Colorado, were in 1858, the amounts were small, probably not exceeding from \$1000 to \$2000 in value. On the other hand, reports of the discoveries sent out over the country were greatly exaggerated. In the meantime, other groups of gold seekers had crossed the plains to the foothills of the Rockies, all of which resulted in the founding of Denver in the fall of 1858.

THE JACKSON DISCOVERY

George A. Jackson, from Missouri, together with Tom Golden and James Sanders came to this country in 1858 and erected a log cabin on the present site of Golden. That city was named after Golden. In December they started out to look for gold in the mountains and sighted a herd of elk. Golden and Sanders turned aside to hunt elk, while Jackson proceeded up Clear Creek with two dogs, a blanket, rifle, coffee, a tin cup and rough bread. The going was tough at times and there was heavy snow to contend with. Eventually, he came to the hot mineral springs, at present Idaho Springs, where he shot a mountain sheep for food. He was snowbound for a day and prospected for two days with no encouragement. The next day he moved upstream a short distance to a spot where the sand and gravel looked more promising and camped under a fir tree. He kept a big campfire going all day and night which thawed the ground. The next day, a bright one, he started to dig with his hands and hunting knife, using his tin cup to pan with. There he found pay sand, also a small gold nugget. He worked one more day and his hunting knife was worn out. All his crude work resulted in the recovery of about one-half ounce of gold. Being out of food supplies, he returned to the cabin at Golden. This discovery was in the fore part of January, 1859, but was kept secret.

In the spring, Jackson returned and took out placer gold worth from \$4,000 to \$5,000. This discovery was of immense importance to the territory and the Great West. Many of you have seen the

Jackson monument in Idaho Springs erected to commemorate the event.

THE GREGORY DISCOVERY

In the spring of 1859, John H. Gregory, from Georgia, discovered rich placer ground at the site of Black Hawk and on May 6, 1859, found a rich lode or vein near the present location of Central City. This was of the utmost importance as it was the first find of a vein of quartz-bearing gold. It turned the tide toward the search for mineral bearing veins or lodes in the mountains, as distinguished from placer ground.

The discoveries of Jackson and Gregory saved the Pikes Peak gold rush of 1859 from ignominious failure and were the greatest events in the founding of Colorado. Horace Greeley visited the mining camps in June, 1859 and recommended the creation of a new state. Denver was now on its way. William Green Russell returned to this part of the country about June, 1859, with about 170 followers and went to Central City. He soon made discoveries not far above Central City and the town of Russell Gulch was named after him.

In 1860, prospectors swarmed over the mountains in all directions, and new discoveries were made in various localities, such as on Tarryall Creek and Fairplay in South Park, Breckenridge, Boulder region and in California Gulch, near Leadville, where Oro City (Gold City) was formed (now completely extinct).

The discovery of mineral bearing lodes was followed by the development of the smelting industry to treat the combinations of ores. This could be a story in itself.

I mention some other famous mining areas: San Juan region and Silverton; Lake City; Creede, in which David H. Moffat and other Denver men were interested; Ouray and the famous Camp Bird Mine in which Thomas F. Walsh made a fortune; Georgetown, primarily a silver camp; Telluride, including the spectacular Liberty Bell, Smuggler-Union and Tomboy Mines. From Telluride on one side of the mountains, toward Red Mountain on the Ouray-Silverton Highway, on the other side of the mountains, a distance of about six miles, the country is highly mineralized. It is controlled by Idarado Mining Company, and one may go from one side of the mountain to the other through workings of the Company.

Last, we might mention world renowned Cripple Creek, with its fabulous millions discovered in 1891 by the poor cowboy, Robert

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Woback, who tried hard to interest various persons and ended up with a few paltry hundreds of dollars.

The discovery of lead carbonates carrying silver at Leadville in 1874-75 was one of the most important finds in the West. The story of Leadville is the story of H. A. W. Tabor. Tabor, a storekeeper, grubstaked two shoemakers named Riche and Hook who went up on Friar Hill, not considered very promising, and worked many days. Finally a shot exposed a rich vein, later named the Little Pittsburg, and Tabor was on a smooth road to wealth. He also became interested in the Chrysolite and the Matchless which added to his millions. But, alas, the panic of 1893 and the repeal of the Sherman Silver Purchase Act brought ruin to the silver mining industry and Tabor's fortune was gone with the wind. He later died penniless. On the other hand, a number of fortunes of Denver's prominent citizens was founded on Leadville mines. If you would wander to the top of Friar Hill at this time, all you could see would be a few depressions on the bare surface to mark the Little Pittsburg, a log cabin and a few shaft riggings on the famous Matchless.

THE GUGGENHEIM FAMILY

Leadville was the primary cause of the Meyer Guggenheim family becoming interested in the smelting industry. Meyer Guggenheim emigrated to America from Switzerland in 1847 with his father and stepmother. The family settled in Philadelphia. In his younger years, he had been a tailor, a manufacturer of essence of coffee, a manufacturer and seller of stove polish and soap, a merchant and an importer. He had seven sons and three daughters. By 1881, he was considered wealthy.

Through Charles H. Graham, a Philadelphia friend of Meyer's who came to Leadville, Meyer purchased an interest in the AY and Minnie lode claims in California Gulch for about \$5,000, and he came out to look over the situation. This was in 1881. Shortly thereafter, a rich strike was made on the AY claim. These lodes made one of the bonanzas of Leadville history. The ore was primarily silver and lead, and millions were produced. The story is told that Meyer having examined some of the smelter returns from the mine and being impressed with the smelter charges said he was on the wrong side of the mining business and should get into smelting.

In 1888, Meyer and his sons turned to the smelting business making their first investment in that line in the Holden Smelting & Refining Company which was later acquired by the Globe Smelting & Refining Company. Edward R. Holden and the Guggenheims then formed their own company and erected the Philadelphia Smelter in Pueblo which prospered. Meyer's sons, Benjamin, William, Simon and Solomon were actively engaged in the business.

In 1899, eighteen of the largest smelters in the country combined and organized The American Smelting and Refining Company. The only large one in Colorado not joining the combine was the Philadelphia in Pueblo. However, within two years the Guggenheim interests joined the smelter trust, and in doing so obtained control of The American Smelting & Refining Company.

For a rather full story of the Guggenheim family pertaining to

the smelting trust or industry, I refer you to the Master's thesis of Donald F. Popham (1950) to be found in the University of Denver Library. In connection with the examination of titles to the AY and Minnie lode claims and others, I have obtained copies of the wills of most of the members of the Meyer Guggenheim family. Some are long and created notable foundations, while some are fairly simple, disposing of millions of dollars in a few lines.

The early days of Colorado developed numerous able and noted lawyers. Among the more prominent were Henry M. Teller, U.S. Senator, Secretary of Interior and again Senator; Willard Teller, a brother of Henry, very able, but not in politics; Edward O. Wolcott, U. S. Senator and orator; Thomas M. Patterson, U. S. Senator and publisher of the *Rocky Mountain News*; Charles J. Hughes, Jr., U. S. Senator; Charles S. Thomas, Governor and U. S. Senator; James B. Belford; Hugh Butler; Alfred Sayre; Henry C. Thatcher and many others.

CARNOTITE

The decline in the mining industry in Colorado has been revived by the discovery and development of rare earth minerals. At the forefront of the chase is uranium, vanadium and molybdenum.

In 1899, C. Fridel and E. Cumenge of Paris announced the discovery of a new mineral (carnotite) obtained from M. Poulst of Denver. It came from Montrose County. Vanadium had been identified as one of its ingredients. That summer, the government sent representatives into Montrose, Mesa and San Miguel Counties where attractive deposits were found. Responsible investors became interested. It was established that radium and uranium were present in the ores and by 1914 considerable mining was being done. Most of the product found its way to Europe. Then came World War II and the atomic bomb which touched off a search for uranium ores, and a great, almost new, mining industry was going at terrific speed.

It is said there are more than two hundred kinds of minerals in Colorado.

Yes, Colorado is a beautiful state with a beautiful name. Until recently, it was said to have fifty-two peaks, 14,000 feet or more in height. Through the enthusiasm of certain Colorado Mountain Club members and the re-survey of heights, two more have been added. It has been my privilege to stand on the top of fifty of them and near the top of the others. One may see mountains by hiking and riding over certain areas, by driving an auto on paved highways over a few passes, by looking down from an airplane, but until he has driven a car to the end of some ancient wagon road in a clearing in the timber, shouldered his pack and started to trudge toward the top of a high peak that is still out of sight, and experienced the elation of reaching the goal and looking out over the world from its majestic heights, he has not really seen the mountains and made them his.