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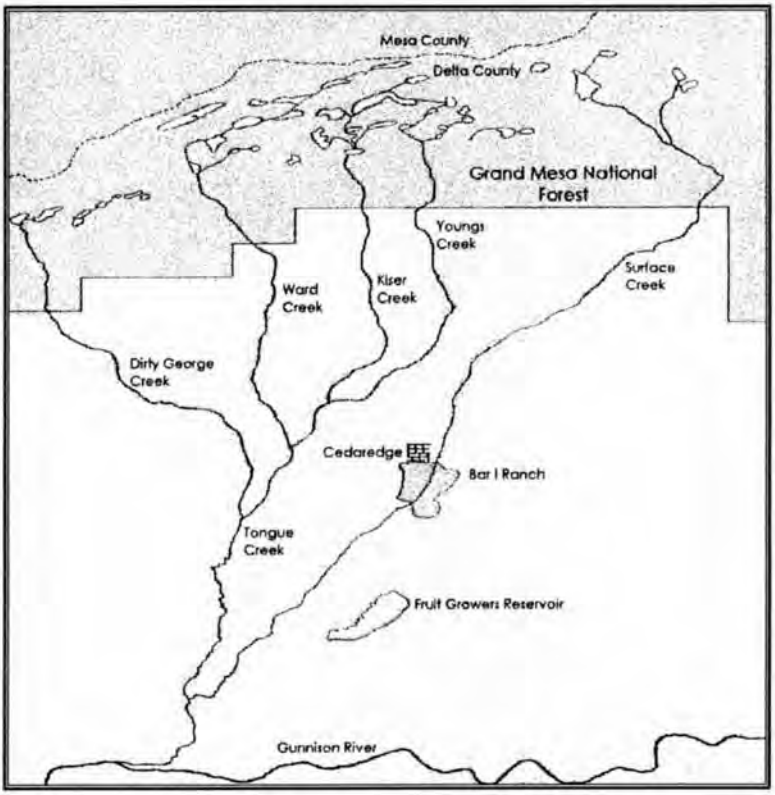

Uncommon People in an Uncommon Valley: Homesteading in the Surface Creek Valley

A Short History of Bowie, Colorado

MESA STATE COLORADO

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THE COVER: Map showing Surface Creek Valley. Map courtesy of Wiley Scott Brady.

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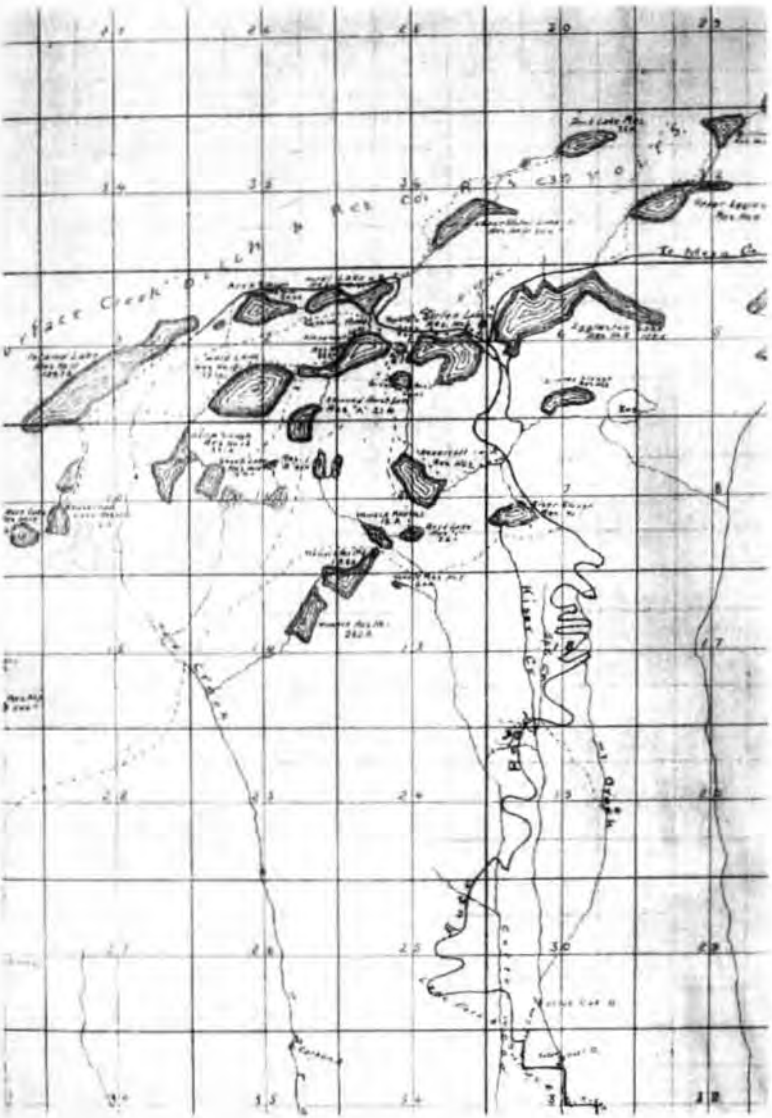

Photo of old hand drawn plat map of Grand Mesa, post card circa 1920. Original map may have been the work of Eugene Rowell.
(Photo courtesy of Surface Creek Valley Historical Society.)

Uncommon People in an Uncommon Valley: Homesteading in the Surface Creek Valley

By Wiley S. Brady*

The settlement history of the Surface Creek Valley is the story of a diverse group of rugged and hardworking Westerners. Their efforts and labor changed a mountain valley at the foot of Grand Mesa into a prosperous farming community. The catalyst for the spirit of cooperation was water. Water is basic to human survival; it has determined much about human relations, particularly in the arid regions of the American West. This paper is a case study of the infrastructure of water in the Surface Creek Valley, located in Delta County on Colorado's Western Slope. The focus of this paper is 1880-1900, that time when this valley was first settled and an irrigation system established. This is the story of how harnessing and storing water resources forged a sense of community in the Surface Creek Valley.

The works of several historians—William Cronon, Gilbert Fite, Robert Wiebe, Donald Worster, and Frederick Jackson Turner—are all important in interpreting the relationship between land, water, people, and the world view that developed in the Surface Creek Valley. Each of these historians postulates that people believed moving west provided opportunities for success. They agree that the arid land of the west required that

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frontier individualism give way to cooperation. The time frame, the 1880s and 1890s, was also important because it was a time of nervous tension in America. Donald Worster describes it as an era of transition; America was beginning to shed the chains that caused it to be a second rate nation and to experience the freedoms that made it a nation all others tried to emulate. Tensions in society resulted from America watching individualism replace agrarianism and the yeoman farmer ideal, an important component in the world view of America since the time of Thomas Jefferson. America believed the West was shrinking and the ability to settle on good land was disappearing. Nothing could have fired that thought more than the findings of the 1890 census which inspired the historian Frederick Jackson Turner's 1893 paper entitled "The Significance of the Frontier in American History," confirming the end of the frontier; the result was what historian David Wrobel has called "frontier anxiety," a feeling of uncertainty in America that the end of free land decreased opportunity and generally disrupted the quality of life in America.[1] Frontier anxiety led people to think in new ways about the West. One of the new ways was making arid land productive through the use of irrigation.

In his famous essay "The Significance of the Frontier in American History," historian Frederick Jackson Turner hypothesized that farming frontiers developed only after other kinds of frontiersmen had prepared the way.[2] His taxonomy holds to the fact that each phase of progression is likewise a step toward a more civilized society. Turner's 1893 thesis described the progression of the West in the following manner: "The unequal rate of advance compels us to distinguish the frontier into the *trader's frontier*, the *rancher's frontier*, or the *miner's frontier* and the *farmer's frontier*."[3] This was certainly not the way things worked out along Surface Creek.

The progression in the Surface Creek Valley was the *homesteader, cattle rancher* or *farmer, ditch company membership,* and *commercial agriculturalist.* Much of this took place almost simultaneously, but nonetheless, each stage had to

occur for growth to take place. Proof of this can be seen in the water records of the area. Briefly explained, the Surface Creek Valley opened for homesteading in September of 1881. The Bar I Ranch was founded in the same year and many of the ditch filings also have 1881 dates (see table 1). The details on ditch filing will be explained later. The first orchards in the area were planted around 1884-85. This progression brought about changes in individual thinking. Water was a case in point because it required cooperation to build reservoirs, a system of ditches, and agreements about division and utilization of the water resources and monitoring the allocations of water. According to Turner's taxonomy, settlers coming to Colorado faced many challenges in the nineteenth century. They wanted to transform parcels of land covered by sagebrush, piñon, and cedar into land for cattle, grain, or orchards. After finding land available for settlement, they went about securing a reliable water source and began the process of clearing and cultivation.

Land in the Surface Creek Valley was opened under the Homestead Act of 1862, which allowed persons to claim 160 acres of land if they put the land to use—a labor intensive process of clearing, cultivating, and raising either crops or livestock on it for five years. Early pioneers homesteaded the area in 1881 and many moved in just after the Ute Indians had been removed to reservations by the U.S. Army. To remain on the land acquired by the Homestead Act, the settlers in the Surface Creek Valley needed water. Water in the area came from five major creeks running off Grand Mesa: Surface Creek, from which the valley takes it name, Kiser Creek, Ward Creek, and Youngs Creek (all named for early settlers of the valley) and Dirty George Creek. More than eighty natural reservoirs on the top of Grand Mesa feed these creeks, providing as much irrigation water as the reservoirs built on many of the rivers of the Great Plains provided at that time.[4] Obviously, there was a substantial amount of water. Could the pioneers find a way to catch and distribute it?

The geography and climate of Grand Mesa and the Surface Creek Valley proved helpful for these early settlers. Grand Mesa is one of the world's largest flattop mountains.[5] Because of its flat top, much of the water does not run off in the spring, but is stored in its lakes in much the same way as large dams store water on rivers. Over millions of years the geologic phenomena of sedimentation, volcanic action, and erosion created the Grand Mesa.[6] At one time, the top of Grand Mesa was the floor of an inland sea. Volcanic action created lava which overlaid layers of sedimentary rock created by this inland sea, and prevented the easy erosion of the sandstone, siltstone, claystone, and shale that formed as a layer of sedimentary rock.[7] Over time, the lava field became basalt. Since this layer of basalt formed over the less stable sedimentary rock, the basalt layer shifted and settled, forming sills and dikes. The low-lying areas known as sills filled with water and formed small ponds. As erosion continued, these ponds became lakes. The dikes or ridges that formed served as diversions or dams, forcing snow melt to be channeled into the lakes. Early erosion caused by this channeling of melted snow cut the creek beds, making the irrigation process easier for pioneers by providing ready-made canals. Not only was the geography beneficial for the storage of water, but it also provided a climate suitable for agriculture.

Situated on the southern slope of the Grand Mesa, the Surface Creek Valley is protected from harsh winter conditions. The majority of snow falls on the top of the mesa and snow in the valley usually melts rapidly due to the valley's southern exposure. Frost was a lesser problem in the valley than out on the plateau where crops were more exposed. These factors convinced early settlers they had found a place suitable for homesteading if they could secure enough water for their land. At the end of the nineteenth century the valley was not much more than sagebrush and cedars. Many of the early settlers were able to determine the land was fertile. A common saying was: "If it'll grow sagebrush, it'll grow anything! All we need is water!" Early pioneers began to search for answers in order to begin

farming and ranching in this promising valley. A day's trip by horse and wagon to the top of the mesa, nearly four thousand feet above what would become Cedaredge, they found the solution. The lakes on Grand Mesa would provide the water necessary to transform this sagebrush and cedar-covered land into farms, orchards, and pastures. All the settlers needed to do was find a way to transfer this water from the lakes to the valley. Even with these lakes to serve as natural reservoirs, these early pioneers achieved a modern miracle by building an irrigation system that has gone predominantly unchanged, except for repair and overhaul of dams, for more than a century.[8]

In addition to getting water to the land, the pioneers wanted to be certain they actually controlled the water they planned to use. Two forms of water rights existed in the United States at this time and still exist today: Riparian (Eastern) and Prior Appropriations (Western). *Riparian Rights* are those of the landowners adjacent to rivers and streams and originated in English Common law. They allow landowners adjoining lakes and rivers to withdraw "reasonable amounts" of water so long as landowners downstream are not reasonably damaged.[9] *Prior Appropriation* is the western system of water appropriation. It establishes water rights based on the priority of water used: under it, an individual's right to a specific quantity of water depends on when the use began. According to this system, the first person to use the water from a source establishes the first right, the second person establishes the next, and so on.[10]

These Western water rights (Prior Appropriation) were derived from the same process used for filing mining claims. Like mining claims, a user had to file, put the water to beneficial use, and use that water with due diligence. This meant that ditches had to be dug, for the person that diverted the water first, secured the water right.[11] Because of problems over water, the state passed a series of laws governing water use. The first of these laws appeared in the Colorado state constitution in 1876, then in 1879 and 1881 laws were added to create ten water districts that in most cases included a complete watershed. These

laws also provided for a water commissioner and gave jurisdiction to district courts to settle water rights disputes.[12]

These laws guided the settlers of the Surface Creek Valley. Historian Gilbert Fite states: "Pioneer western irrigators were strong individualists, but a majority of them soon saw that without group control of water resources confusion and conflict would hamstring the development of irrigated agriculture."[13] The early pioneers of the valley created ditch companies quickly after staking out their homesteads. Fite goes on to say: "Westerners who had to rely on irrigation did not adapt existing institutions to new conditions, instead they created entirely new institutions to meet their peculiar needs."[14] Again the Surface Creek Valley serves as a perfect example. The people in the valley adapted irrigation projects to their "peculiar needs."

Fite gives valuable insight into how most irrigation problems were handled in the early years of settlement. "By 1880 it was apparent that agricultural expansion in the arid region would be severely limited unless larger and more efficient irrigation systems made better use of the water. In other words, most of the land that could be irrigated easily and with simple techniques had been taken up."[15] The problems included building a system with adequate capacity to store the massive quantity of water needed and financing it. The Grand Mesa alleviated such concerns because the lakes contained enough water for all.

While other parts of the state built large singular reservoirs for their irrigation projects, the settlers of Surface Creek used the natural reservoirs provided by lakes on Grand Mesa. All they needed to do was connect these lakes together, thus creating one massive irrigation system. This occurred within the course of five to ten years after the first filing for water rights on the lakes. As early as 1881, men were digging ditches off of the tributaries, using picks, shovels, and, in the case of the bigger ditches, a device known as a fresno, a horse or human drawn device that worked much like today's road graders.[16] These ditches followed natural drainage patterns and many ditches ran through the middle of property rather than at the property lines as

is the common practice today.[17] As it became necessary to divert water from its natural flow, proper grade had to be maintained. To do this, workers used a piece of hose approximately ten feet long along with two buckets. The process involved a man pouring a bucket of water into the hose at one end, and then timing it to see how long it took to fill a bucket the same size at the other end. The general flow varied but a steady stream into the bucket, which filled in one minute, was considered on grade. This process was repeated over the distance of the path of the ditch. The Granby Ditch is a case in point.[18] It was cut as a lateral ditch along the side of Grand Mesa. Because of this, it was necessary to insure that the ditch had a sufficient grade to keep even a minimal amount of water flowing between the two main tributaries of Dirty George Creek and Ward Creek. This same procedure was used when connecting lakes to form a logical storage sequence.

In the period between 1881 and 1899, pioneers put the water right laws to use. They not only claimed the ditches and tributaries, they claimed the very sources of the water, the lakes on Grand Mesa. Table 1 provides a summary of the number of ditches dug, the acre-feet of water carried by each ditch (an acre-foot of water is figures as the amount of water necessary to cover one acre of land a foot deep in water), the lakes dammed, and the acre-feet of water held in these lakes from 1881-1900. An appraisal of these figures documents the magnitude of the work done by these early settlers.

Historical data about the ditches and reservoirs provides more than facts; it chronicles the early homestead activity in the valley. The first ditches in the valley were cut off from Surface Creek in the fall of 1881.[20] Each allowed the owner of the land to begin farming. Surface Creek had nine ditches diverting water from it by December 1881. By December 1900 that number would reach twenty-nine.[21] Most were small personal ditches, but in 1881 the Alfalfa Ditch (located on the east side of what is now Colorado Highway 65 from the Cedaredge city limit to the Fruit Growers Reservoir east of Eckert, a distance of about five miles)

Table 1

Year	Number of Ditches Dug	Cubic Feet of Water carried	Lakes Dammed	Acre-Feet of Water held
1881	3	134.5	0	0
1882	9	46.23	0	0
1883	7	57.73	0	0
1884	4	34.5	0	0
1885	3	24.6	0	0
1886	6	50.25	4	3340.14
1887	1	1.00	1	307.80
1888	0	0	4	2264.36
1889	0	0	13	2647.30
1890	0	0	5	250.03
1891	0	0	2	67.30
1892	0	0	3	170.52
1893	0	0	5	764.15
1894	0	0	11	1047.08
1895	0	0	5	295.03
1896	0	0	17	1147.30
1897	0	0	0	0
1898	0	0	8	3743.01
1899	0	0	2	76.01
1900	0	0	0	0
Totals	33	348.81 cu. ft.	80	13,120.03 ac. ft

This table was composed from data contained in the original court filings dating from 1881 through 1900. Copies of these records are located the offices of the Grand Mesa Water Users in Cedaredge, Colorado.[19]

was built to supply water for the Bar I Ranch.[22] One of the early cattle ranches in the valley, the Bar I Ranch, was established in 1881 and held claim to approximately 840 acres of land.[23] The appropriation for the water for the town of Cedaredge was filed on 17 December 1881.[24]

In addition to the filings on surface water, many people also filed on the numerous springs in the area. Over time, most of these springs were added to the water usage of the town. Not until 1887 were the first filings made on the lakes that feed Surface Creek.[25] This was most likely due to the fact that the area had enough water to supply the need during those early years. However, this situation would not last. Like most areas in the state, as agriculture expanded, so did the need for water. The Surface Creek Drainage opened up about thirty-four square miles of land for cultivation by 1900, and most was opened by 1885. Unlike Surface Creek Drainage, Tongue Creek Drainage required maintenance of more than one tributary.

The Tongue Creek Drainage includes Dirty George, Youngs, Ward, and Kiser Creeks. These creeks provided settlers with a good supply of water. Water for Tongue Creek's drainage comes from the western chain of lakes on Grand Mesa. In the fall of 1883, the first ditch stemming off Dirty George Creek was cut.[26] During that year, two ditches were cut off Dirty George Creek and by 1899 the total had increased to six ditches. The most significant was the Granby Ditch, cut in 1894 to divert water from Dirty George Creek to Ward Creek, a distance of about four miles.[27] Dirty George Creek made agriculture possible northwest of Cedaredge near a settlement known as Coalby. It was not until 31 August 1893 that rights were filed on the lakes that feed the Tongue Creek Drainage.[28] On 19 December 1883, filings were also made on the Delta Pipeline to provide that town, located at the confluence of the Gunnison and Uncompahgre Rivers, with domestic water.[29] The last two creeks, Youngs and Kiser, were developed in fall of 1885 and spring of 1886 respectively.[30] Youngs Creek has no major ditches, but this does not make it any less important to the valley. These two creeks provide water from

Digging of Kiser Reservoir circa 1898. Photo shows the degree of labor required to create adequate water storage. (Photo courtesy of Mary Kiser, Cedaredge, Colorado.)

the central reservoirs and lakes on the Grand Mesa. They supply water to an agricultural area west of Highway 65 and north of Cedaredge. This area is one of the prominent orchard areas in the valley. Without proper irrigation the available land in the area would have been of little use for agriculture.

The Tongue Creek Drainage, with its three creeks, opened up approximately sixty-one square miles of land for possible agricultural use. Each of those square miles contains 640 acres of land. Work on this drainage progressed as needed. There would be times when the work was spread out over a large portion of that sixty-one square miles, and times when the work was concentrated to very small areas. Combined, these two drainage systems opened up nearly one hundred square miles of land for possible homesteading. Thanks to the natural geographic features of Grand Mesa, large sums of money were not needed to build the irrigation system for the Surface Creek Valley.

Historian Gilbert Fite emphasizes that building most irrigation systems required large sums of money. Often farmers had to turn to outside sources for capital.[31] The outside capital usually made the situation difficult for farmers because they had to pay off the loan, as well as deal with outside speculators who tried to exert control over local affairs. Farmers in the Grand Valley for example, found that money problems brought outside control.[32] Those in the Surface Creek Valley had a different, almost unique, situation; they did their own work, financed their own operation, and remained firmly in control of their lives. It is amazing that they could dig their ditches, dam lakes, and establish a water system that has endured for over a century without outside money or machinery. Many settlements looked for this kind of independence, but the Surface Creek Valley was among the few areas in the state that achieved it.

They accomplished all this both individually and collectively. To solve part of the financial problem and to prevent arguments over use of the water, farmers formed ditch companies, which were associations of farmers that helped divide water among the farmers and maintain the ditches and the dams

on the lakes. At the time of incorporation ditch companies established assessments, a monetary amount paid by each member for use of the water. These funds provided money to pay for repairs and purchase of equipment to build the ditches and dams. As ditch companies formed, another transformation occurred: a sense of community developed among the water users. This transformation was not a physical one, but rather a mental one. The Surface Creek Valley was beginning to take on the characteristics of a community. Up to this point, much of the preparation for and work on creating a homestead had been of an individual nature. However, the individual work was transforming into a group or community process. This change in thinking from *me* to *we* parallels the progression of water projects in the valley.

Individualism yielded to group identity for practical reasons. One of these reasons was that the mood of society was changing. America, in general, was becoming a nation where groups of people united behind a common cause, most frequently in the work place. In the Surface Creek Valley local conditions also fostered a sense of collective identity. One man alone had not built their irrigation system; these early pioneers knew and accepted that reality. Without lamenting the sacrifice of their individualism, they set in motion the forces that would result in the formation of the Cedaredge community.

The friendly relations between farmers, the Bar I Ranch, and the people of Cedaredge reveal how solid the sense of community was in the Surface Creek Valley. Much that has appeared in historical scholarship indicates that cattlemen wanted to control large expanses of land, and therefore resented "sodbusters" and townspeople. Facts about the Surface Creek Valley do not support the standard interpretation. The Bar I Ranch deeded a parcel of land for the town site and the ranch was the southern border of the town. Obviously the ranch had no intention of maintaining its land by discouraging the development of a town.[13]

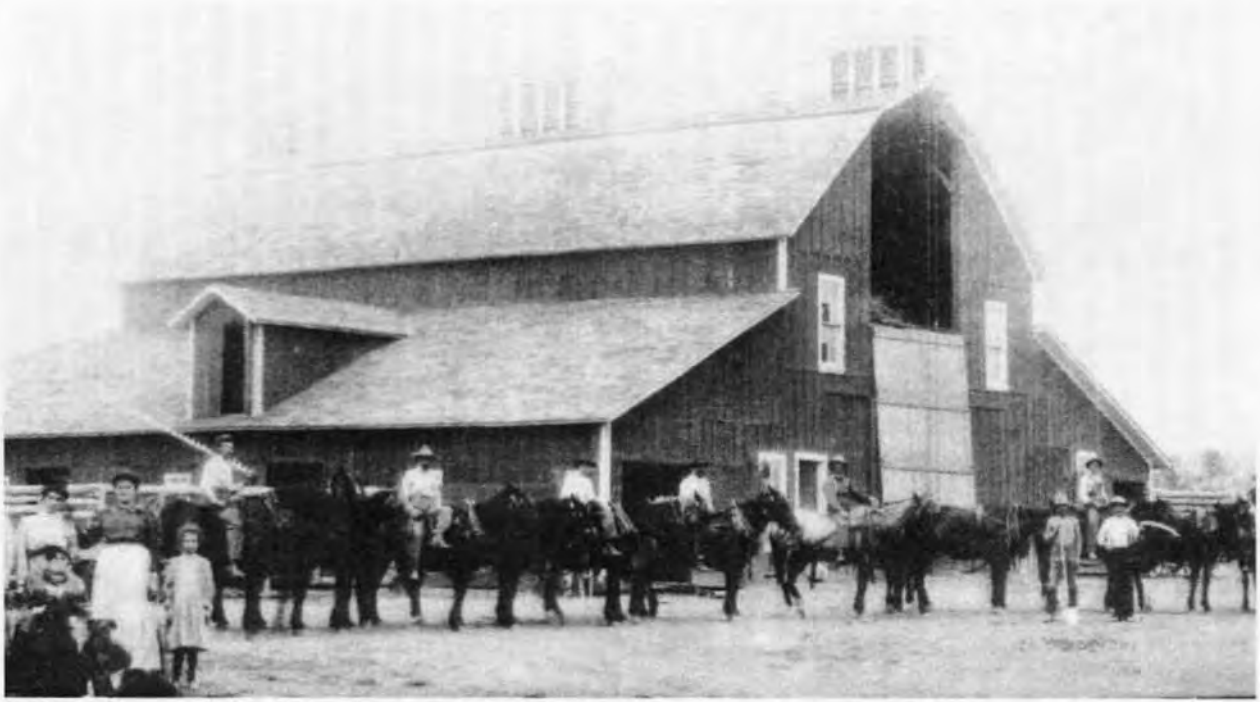


Photo of the Bar I Barn circa 1890s. This barn once stood on the site of present day "Pioneer Town" Cedaredge, Colorado. (Photo courtesy of Surface Creek Valley Historical Society.)

The development of the town can also be explained with reference to historical works by historians William Cronon[34] and Robert Wiebe.[35] Both of these scholars conclude that population centers develop when and where a hinterland becomes populous and productive enough to support them. Their theory is that as areas move from a subsistence agrarian society to a commercial agrarian society, it is necessary for a town to spring up in these areas to handle business. As early as 1882, the need had developed for blacksmiths, lumberjacks, and merchants. Cronon makes an obvious point: rural people and town people depend on each other for survival.[36] Wiebe addresses this point: for a time a community and its hinterland can remain self-sufficient; interdependence and insolation are what he calls "island communities." Eventually, of course, "island communities" are pulled into the American mainstream. The concept of "island community" does perhaps explain the strong bond that held together the Surface Creek Valley in its early history.

While the Surface Creek Valley existed as an "island community," the Bar I Ranch served the area well by offering such services as livery (boarding and sale of livestock) and hauling freight.[37] The ranch became the economic and social center of the valley in the early days. Geographic isolation fostered mutual dependence. The market for farm produce was a local one, restricted more or less to the other settlements within close proximity of Cedaredge and the Bar I Ranch. Also the ranch provided most of the employment for early settlers. Because of this, most of the settlers knew each other both on a personal and a professional basis.

As the area developed, the town of Cedaredge became a focal point for the valley. The area around the town of Cedaredge (or Cedar Edge as it was originally named before the postal service made it all one word in 1894) was just what the name implies: the town at the edge of the cedars.[38] The cattle industry and local orchards were prospering. In 1895 the Surface Creek Valley shipped a total yield of apples equal to that of the Great Northwest.[39] With this increase in prosperity, the town continued

to grow to support the local farming and ranching industry—or was it the other way around? Either way, neither the town nor agriculture would have developed without the water projects.

The settlers of the valley had already begun water projects on an individual level, but now they were ready to consolidate their individual efforts into one central project. A higher degree of group cooperation was required for this. One of the areas that required cooperation was allocating shares of water. Shares told how much water an individual could use. Usually water is transferred from a reservoir or canal directly to an individual's ditch. The water in the lakes on Grand Mesa is quite different because water is transferred from lake to lake, and then down the mountain. This practice allows lower lakes to drain first, and then be replenished from lakes higher up. This allowed water to be used out of the lower lakes before it evaporated or dried up. Since water from each individual's holdings could not be transferred directly to that person, all holdings were pooled and then each person took his fair share. The Homestead Act required that forty acres be in cultivation in order to secure a water right.[40] To solve this problem in the Surface Creek Valley, a group of settlers filed as a ditch or land company. The Bar I Ranch did much of the filing on Surface Creek under the title The Surface Creek Land and Cattle Company.[41] This process became necessary in the early years of the valley, because some individuals had not "proved up" (made improvements and placed in cultivation) at least forty acres of land.[42]

Building dams on the lakes required cooperation. Damming the nearly eighty lakes used to support the irrigation system was a prodigious undertaking. To give a clearer picture of the magnitude of work done, it is important to chronicle each creek and the lakes that feed it individually. Lake filings took place after the first ditch filing. The gap between filings varied from months to nearly ten years.[43] Two forms of filings took place: individual filings which occurred mostly on the Tongue Creek Drainage and collective filings by ditch companies which occurred mostly on the Surface Creek Drainage. Regardless of

Photo of the town of Cedaredge circa early 1900s. (Photo courtesy of Surface Creek Valley Historical Society.)

the drainage and the type of filing, one factor remained constant. Once filings were made on the lakes, the work of building dams, enlarging and linking lakes, and utilizing the creeks as canals could not be accomplished by one man. By reviewing statistical data about the magnitude of work done on the lakes that feed into each creek, one gets an impression not only of how the work progressed physically but also how the idea of cooperation must have progressed mentally.

While Kiser and Ward creeks were the last to have ditches developed on them, they were the first to have filings made on the lakes that fed them. Ward Creek was the first to have filings made on it. On 11 August 1886, filings were made on Alexander Lake, Deep Ward Lake, and Deep Slough. Alexander Lake had a dam built to a height of eight feet, and it had a storage capacity of 193.24 acre-feet of water. The dam on Deep Ward Lake was thirteen feet tall and had a storage capacity of 932.5 acre-feet of water. Deep Slough had a dam built to a height of ten feet, and had a storage capacity of 148.4 acre-feet of water. The filings were made by the Surface Creek Ditch and Reservoir Company and were used to irrigate 6,000 acres of land owned by members of the company.[44]

Filings on Kiser Creek followed those on Ward Creek by only a month. On 6 September 1886, the Surface Creek Ditch and Reservoir Company filed on Eggleston Lake and Barren Lake. Eggleston Lake had a dam built to a height of twelve feet and a storage capacity of 1,272 acre-feet of water. Barren Lake had a dam built to a height of fourteen feet with a storage capacity of 794.4 acre-feet of water.[45] With all of its filings combined, by 1900 the Surface Creek Ditch and Reservoir Company controlled 5913.4 acre-feet of water contained in twenty-one lakes or reservoirs.[46]

Surface Creek saw filings made on the lakes that served as its headwaters on 25 June 1887. The Weir and Johnson families filed on the reservoir that bears their names. This reservoir had a dam built to a height of ten feet, ten inches, and had a storage capacity of 307.8 acre-feet of water and was used for the irrigation of 240 acres owned by Albert Weir, Emma Weir,

Silage Silos of the Bar I Ranch circa 1916. Used to store feed for winter livestock.
(Photo courtesy of Surface Creek Valley Historical Society.)

Amanda Hart, and Walter Johnson collectively.[47] Other prominent lakes that were filed on before the turn of the century were Park Reservoir on 1 October 1888, Bonita Reservoir on 7 August 1893, Leon Park Reservoir on 27 August 1894, Trickle Reservoir on 25 July 1895, and Vela Reservoir on 1 September 1896. At some point in time Park and Trickle Reservoirs were combined into one lake now known as Trickle Park Reservoir.

Youngs Creek was the next creek in line to see filings on the lakes at its headwaters. On 31 December 1890, Martha Peterson filed on the Carbonate Camp Reservoirs 5, 6, and 7. She also filed on Carbonate Camp Reservoirs 1, 2, and 4 which are on the Surface Creek Drainage. The combined water of these six reservoirs provided the Peterson family with 174.89 acre-feet of water to irrigate 150 acres.[48] Other lakes on Youngs Creek include Youngs Creek 1, 2, and 3, but they were not filed on until the first decade of the twentieth century.

Dirty George Creek was the last creek to have water filings made on its headwaters, collectively known as the Granby Lakes. These eleven lakes were filed on between 31 August 1893 and 31 August 1896 by the Granby Ditch and Reservoir Company with the filing made in August, September, or October of each year after a summer's worth of work had been done. The total amount of water controlled by the company was 646.08 acre-feet of water for irrigation of the 760 acres owned by the members of the company.[49]

While most of the valley had little problem with water, one area just east of Cedaredge did. In 1896, the settlers of Cedar Mesa, located just outside of Cedaredge, were in dire need of water. This mesa had no tributary to provide it with water and no reservoir to serve as its headwaters. The solution was the building of the Cedar Mesa Ditch and Reservoir. Work began on 1 December 1896. This reservoir had a dam built to a height of twenty feet, and had a storage capacity of 133 acre-feet of water used to irrigate the combined four hundred acres of land owned by the shareholders.[50] Claim was made on the Cedar Mesa ditch on 15 September 1894. This ditch brought water onto Cedar Mesa via a gauging station on Surface Creek that was built in that same year.

On 15 October 1898, work commenced on Fruit Grower's Reservoir outside of Eckert. A dam was built to a height of thirty-six feet, and provided storage capacity for 3,400 acre-feet of water. The water used to fill this reservoir was runoff water from irrigation north of the reservoir. Most, if not all, of this water would have come from Surface Creek as its point of origin. This reservoir opened up two thousand acres for cultivation.[51]

One thing indicated by all the figures about storage capacity and acres on irrigated land is that people and entities in the Surface Creek Valley devised an equitable division of water where the amount of water each company or individual controlled nearly equaled the number of acres being irrigated. Exactly how these allocations were determined is not clear, but they had determined that it was necessary to control enough water to get them through the drought years as well as the years when water and weather both cooperated. Between 1881 and 1900 the combined acreage under irrigation in the Surface Creek Valley was approximately 19,639 acres with approximately 19,494.52 acre-feet of water claimed.[52]

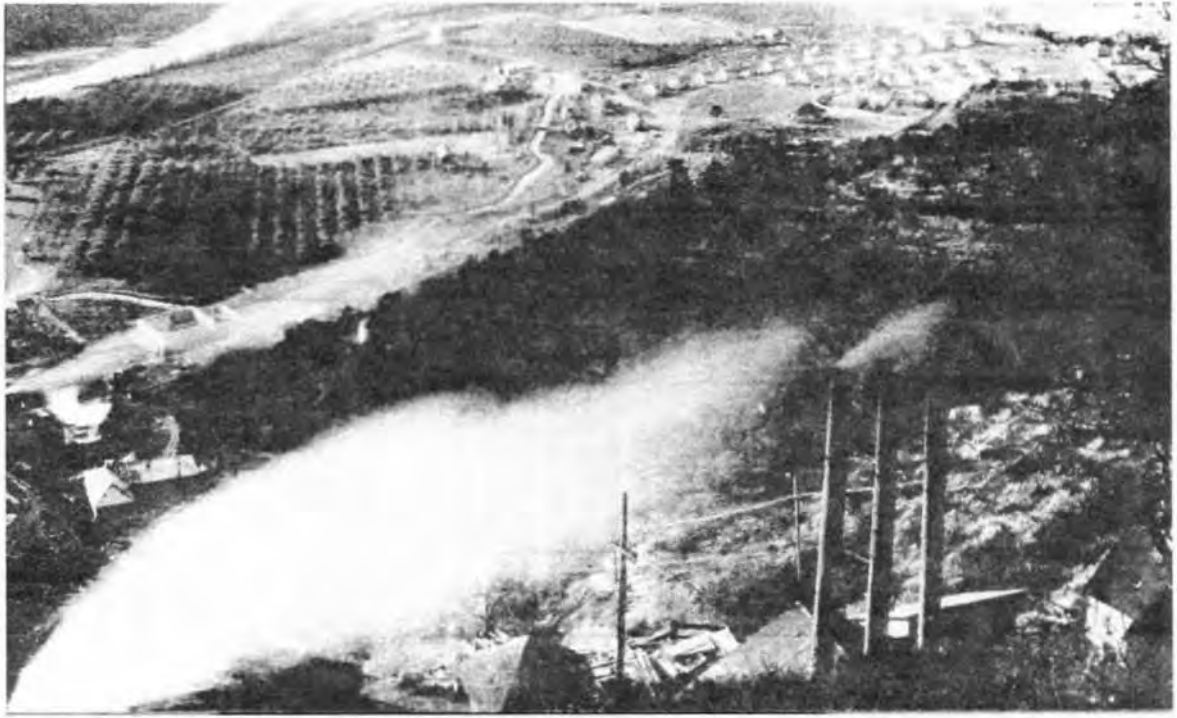
The figures from the preceding paragraphs, along with table 1, show why the water projects and building of dams and ditches were more than a one-man job. This being said, the only way to accomplish these tasks was through cooperation. It is through harnessing and storing the water resources that a sense of community was forged in the Surface Creek Valley. While water was certainly not the only factor that drove the idea of community spirit in the valley, it was obviously the most influential. The work and foresight of these early pioneers forged a legacy for this valley that is an important part of the history of the Western Slope of Colorado. The early settlers of the Surface Creek Valley made it a hospitable and productive land where people could raise a family and make a living off the land. Their willingness to seek out a place as unique as the Surface Creek Valley, put down roots, and establish a community is a testimony to the good that can be found in us all.

Notes

[1] David M. Wrobel, *The End of American Exceptionalism: Frontier Anxiety, From the Old West to the New Deal* (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1993), viii.
[2] Frederick Jackson Turner, *The Significance of the Frontier in American History* (Lexington, Massachusetts: Heath and Company, 1972), 3.
[3] Ibid.
[4] District Court of Delta County, Colorado, Grand Mesa Water Users Records (Cedaredge, Colorado), Ledgers 1 & 3, data computations made by the author from copies of court filings contained therein. Hereafter referred to as GMWU. (Each ledger contains a Table of Contents for the ditches and lakes.)
[5] James Keener and Christine Bebee Keener, *Grand Mesa: World's Largest Flat Top Mountain* (Grand Junction, Colorado: Grand River Publishing, 1989), 13.
[6] Ibid.
[7] Ibid.
[8] Dan Hawkins, presentation delivered to the Surface Creek Valley Historical Society, tape recording, Pioneer Town, Cedaredge, Colorado. Dan is a relative of Eugene Rowell the early surveyor and engineer of many of the ditches on Grand Mesa.
[9] Mary Ellen Wolfe, *A Land Owners Guide to Western Water Rights* (Boulder, Colorado: Robert Rinehart Publishers, 1996), 172. To better understand these procedures read Donald Worster's *Rivers of Empire: Water, Aridity and the Growth of the American West* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1985), 83-96.
[10] Wolfe, *A Land Owners Guide*, 171.
[11] Ibid.
[12] Gilbert Fite, *The Farmers' Frontier: 1865 - 1900* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Wilson, 1966), 184.
[13] Ibid., 192.
[14] Ibid.
[15] Ibid., 186.
[16] Dan Hawkins, presentation.
[17] *Grand Mesa National Forest Map* (Denver, Colorado: Regional Office, U.S. Forest Service, 1995).
[18] Dan Hawkins, presentation.

[19] The author maintains an annotated copy of both ledgers 1 and 3. Each ledger contains approximately 300 individual entries. To document each page used is far too detailed. Each ledger also contains entries for other watersheds besides the Surface Creek Valley area.
[20] GMWU Ledger 1, 8.
[21] GMWU Ledger 1. Data computations made by the author from copies of court filings contained therein.
[22] Ibid.
[23] Eda Baker Musser, *Trails and Trials* (Delta, Colorado: Mrs. Kelso Musser, PO Box 610, Delta, Colorado, 81416, 1986), 78.
[24] GMWU, computer printout of all filings to date, annotated copy in possession of the author, Cedaredge, Colorado.
[25] GMWU Ledger 3, 601.
[26] Ibid, 557.
[27] Ibid. Distance figured using *Grand Mesa National Forest Map.*
[28] GMWU Ledger 3, 620.
[29] GMWU, computer printout.
[30] GMWU Ledger 1, 11-12.
[31] Fite, *The Farmers Frontier,* 187.
[32] For an excellent study of the construction and financing of another irrigation project in western Colorado, see Don Davidson, "The Grand River Ditch: A Short History of Pioneering Irrigation in Colorado's Grand Valley," *Journal of the Western Slope* I, No. 4 (Fall 1986): 1-30.
[33] Hazel Baker Austin, *Surface Creek Country* (Delta, Colorado: Delta County Independent, 1977), 3.
[34] William Cronon, *Natures Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West* (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1991). This source is an excellent read on the development of Chicago and the Midwest around the turn of the 20th century.
[35] Wiebe, *The Search for Order.*
[36] Cronon, *Natures Metropolis,* 97.
[37] Austin, *Surface Creek Country*, 2-4.
[38] Ibid., 3.
[39] Carl Abbott, Stephen J. Leonard, and David McComb, *Colorado: A History of the Centennial State,* 3rd ed. (Boulder, Colorado: University Press of Colorado, 1994), 181.
[40] *The Land and the Law: Vacant Government Land Located by Counties: A Billion Acres Open to Homestead Entry and Purchase: How to Get It* (St. Paul, Minnesota: Webb Publishing Company, 1914),

51-64.
[41] GMWU Ledger 1, data computations made by the author from copies of court filings contained therein.
[42] John Weitrich, interview by author, 11 July 2000, Pioneer Town, Cedaredge, Colorado. Weitrich is the son of one of Cedaredge's early pioneers.
[43] GMWU Ledger 3, data computations made by the author from copies of court filings contained therein.
[44] Ibid.
[45] Ibid., 605.
[46] Ibid.
[47] Ibid., 650.
[48] Ibid., 617, 618, 619, 651, 653, 655 (each page contains the filing for that reservoir).
[49] Ibid., 620, 621, 622, 623, 630, 631, 632, 633, 637, 648 (each page contains the filing for that reservoir).
[50] GMWU Ledger 3, 677.
[51] Ibid, 681.
[52] GMWU Ledger 3, data computations made by the author from copies of court filings contained therein.



Town of Bowie, circa 1922. (Photo courtesy of Hazel Barnes.)

A Short History of Bowie, Colorado

By Tiffany Bailey*

Bowie, a small town located in the Gunnison River North Fork Valley of western Colorado, is a coal-mining ghost town. Bowie boomed in the early to mid-1900s and slowly faded out of existence in the early seventies when natural gas began replacing coal. Today, the only remnants of Bowie are a closed-up mine, a few old houses, and some worn-out railroad tracks. The people who lived in Bowie say that it was a wonderful place. Unlike the political, material, chaotic, and often corrupt atmosphere of other coal company or hard-rock mining towns, Bowie harbored a peaceful family-like environment. What was this town about besides coal, and how did the social stability and economic cooperation within the community reinforce the unique character of Bowie?

Coal mining towns shared many similarities with hard-rock mining towns. In the following respects, Bowie was no different than other mining settlements: its economy boomed, then busted; a stockholder's company owned the mine and a large percentage of the property in town; risks from mining and related illnesses existed; and the men and women who lived in Bowie adhered to distinct gender roles. However, Bowie was atypical because the King Mine company treated its workers well. Miners' unions therefore arrived late in the town, and then

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organized and operated peacefully. Also, unlike other company towns that forced their employees to "sell their souls to the company store," the people in Bowie enjoyed a degree of consumer and occupational freedom. The town had a diversified economy, which included agriculture that helped support miners and their families during the mine's slow season. The population was relatively homogenous and healthy, and people established roots and a sense of community.

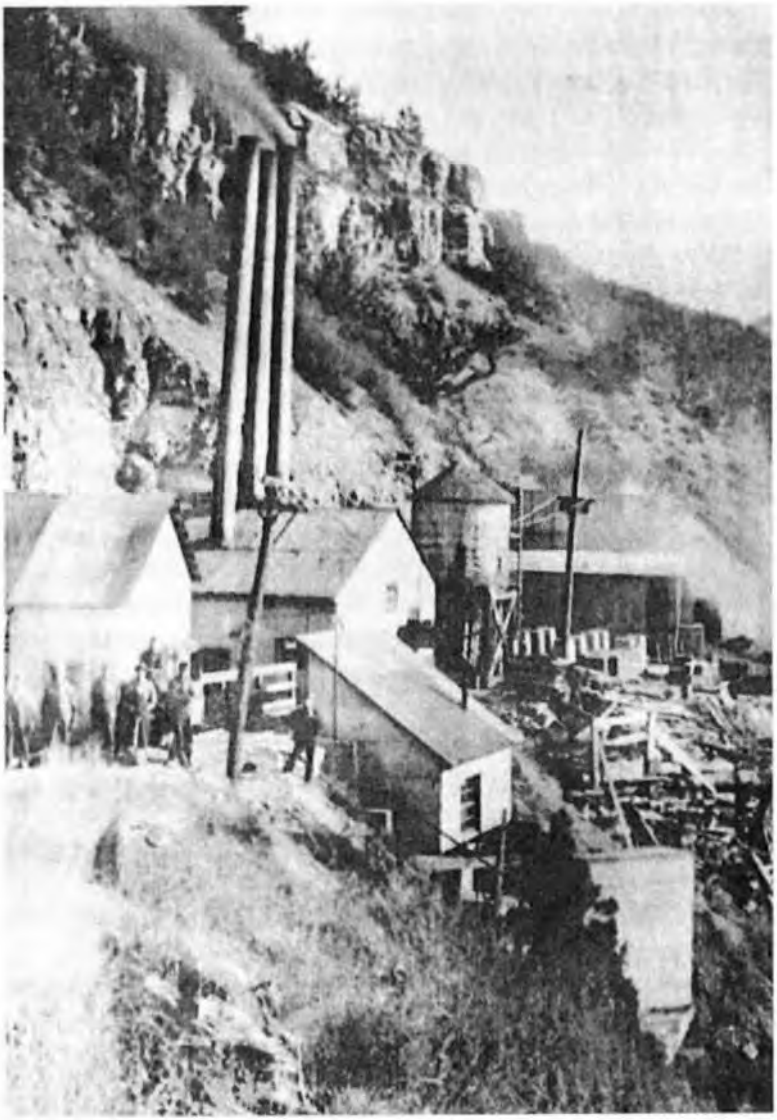
In comparison to the rest of the western world, the production of coal as a fuel developed late in the history of the United States. Not until the mid-nineteenth century did coal become marketable, and valuable in the eastern United States, and nearly a half a century passed before coal production became significant in the American West. The plentiful supply of wood and the difficulty involved in igniting coal contributed to the lateness of coal production. During the preindustrial period, there had not been a large demand for fuel and energy, but as the United States industrialized, the demand for coal (which produced over twice as much heat energy as wood) increased.[1] The many uses for coal and consumer demands eventually escalated its market value. Coal was used for everything from heating a woman's cook stove to fueling large steel and railroad enterprises. Skill in coal mining came to the United States with immigrants from Europe who knew mining but wanted to escape the slave-like conditions of mines in northern and eastern Europe. Such laborers, who immigrated to the United States from the 1860s to the early 1900s, became what historian Richard White called "Free Labor ideologists."[2] Followers of this ideology believed that if they worked hard and faithfully for their employer, they would eventually be their own bosses.

Miners came to America hoping to achieve their goal of economic independence. Near the turn of the nineteenth century, immigrants found employment difficult and frustrating due to the overwhelming numbers of miners in the east. As a result, some turned to the West for new prospects. The West evolved quickly as the government and entrepreneurs linked the east coast and the

west coast with the Union Pacific Railroad, which rumbled through Colorado. Colorado quickly became the gateway to the West, and a convenient refueling point for western capitalists' industries.

Hard-rock mining and the Pike's Peak gold rush of 1859 accelerated the dawn of coal mining in Colorado. The deforestation around mining towns due to overwhelming construction demands, and the establishment and build up of Denver as a supply depot for miners, created a need for a better fuel source. Colorado's coal industry, unlike hard-rock mining, was not established by a few lonely prospectors who got lucky and went from rags to riches overnight.[3] Rather, it was an enterprise built by third- and fourth-generation Americans, with established reputations, experience, and familiarity with the business. Innovative men, such as General William Palmer and Alexander Hunt who helped finance and develop the Denver & Rio Grande Railroad, made things happen.[4] Palmer and Hunt envisioned Colorado as a cornucopia of natural resources waiting to be transformed into commercial products. Industrially, Colorado had the potential to develop and expand. However, economies based on extractive industries, such as mining, fluctuate because they depend on continued mineral removal and distant capital investors. Financially, Colorado relied on European and eastern investors. After the turn of the century, Western Slope communities grew and industrialized as Colorado became the country's eighth largest coal producing state.[5]

The coal mining industry contributed significantly to the state's economy by the late 1800s and early 1900s, but the romantic image of hard-metal mining towns overshadowed the contributions of coal mining to the economy of Colorado. Like the minerals they excavated, hard-metal towns represented glitter and glamour. Although these towns' populations did not compare to large cities, socially and culturally they resembled mini-metropolises, while coal towns were smaller and inhabited by people of modest means.[6] Like gold and silver mining, coal created its own boom-and-bust towns. Across the state, isolated



View at the mine mouth showing steam engine plant, water tower, mine cars and various out buildings, circa 1922. (Photo courtesy of the Paonia Museum and North Fork Historical Society.)

mountain towns sprung up as a result of coal mines, but significantly declined with the discovery of cleaner energy sources. Consequently, coal produced ghost towns in Colorado.

Colorado's first high-production corporate coal mines developed in the northeastern and southeastern portions of the state in the 1880s. These mines supplied energy to the industrializing community of Pueblo, and the state's growing capital, Denver. Coal mining became a cornerstone of western Colorado's economy, but often metals such as gold, silver, copper and zinc were the principal building blocks. Hard-rock mines drew people, miners, and the railroad over and through the rugged terrain of the Rocky Mountains. Many coal mines in western Colorado began as a miner's hope for gold, but ended in the discovery of coal, which was worthless to a single man, but a mother lode of energy for industrial corporations. However, the highly valued get-rich-quick materials, such as gold and silver, even in small quantities, took precedence over coal. It took time for the coal industry to solve problems, such as transportation though the Rocky Mountains and the fact that plains and Front Range communities obtained coal from the mines in their part of the state.

Initially, coal mining developed on a small and local level in western Colorado. One of these places was the North Fork Valley, where Bowie was located.[7] Small and isolated farm and ranch communities needed coal to warm their homes during the long winter months, but shipped-in coal was expensive. Consequently, men purchased small claims, took up their picks, and dug into the mountain sides which yielded a substantial amount of bituminous coal—a specific type of coal that contains volatile hydrocarbons (a powerful fuel coal).[8] If a specific location contained an adequate coal wall and was easily accessible, a man then recruited a few friends or partners. Armed with picks, shovels, lamps, mules, and a mine cart, they mined enough coal for their families. Extra coal was traded with members of the community for other necessities. As the demand for coal grew, these small mines, known as "wagon mines," began

to produce more for trade and sale. However, their market for coal remained local, primarily due to the cost and burden of transportation.[9] The nearest railroad depot to the North Fork Valley was Delta. Often the roads leading to Delta were treacherous and primitive dirt roads.

Around the turn of the century, companies and investors began showing an interest in the rich coal deposits in the North Fork Valley. They seized the chance to purchase land cheaply. According to the provisions of the Coal Lands Act of 1873, claims fifteen miles or more from a railroad could be purchased for as little as ten dollars, or for twenty dollars if the land were within fifteen miles.[10] Many of the early claims made in the North Fork Valley were ten-dollar claims, because the population had not grown to the extent that they needed railroad transportation for freight and passengers. Even with good coal deposits available at discount prices, it was difficult for the Western Slope to attract investors into an area without railroads, because commercial coal mining required more than local markets. Fortunately, the ranching and farming communities up the valley were prospering, and this generated talk that the railroad would soon expand into the North Fork another twenty to thirty miles. With the railroad's plans for expansion, it became much easier to get investors interested in coal ventures.[11]

The first large company-owned mine in the Valley was the Somerset Mine (located about fifteen miles northeast of Paonia, Colorado), purchased in 1902 and operated by the Uintah Coal & Fuel Company, a successful mining corporation from Colorado's southeastern coal fields. Other mines, both corporate and locally owned, developed as a result of the Somerset Mine's success. Small coal companies and railroads needed each other in western Colorado's coal industry.[12]

The King Mine, owned and operated by Juanita Coal & Coke Company, opened shortly after the Somerset Mine. H.B. King, C.M. Morris, and A.B. Farrows started the company on May 16, 1902, in Pueblo, Colorado.[13] The owners and stockholders, a group of prominent citizens from Pueblo,

Colorado, agreed to purchase a large but inexpensive coal claim in the North Fork Valley of western Colorado. Mining stock in the North Fork Valley sold for approximately fifty dollars a share. Small but highly productive mines often had only five to ten major stockholders. The King Mine stood approximately seven miles up the Gunnison River from Paonia, a few miles west of the new Somerset Mine. The company hired an engineer, a geologist, and laborers, to make four entries in their claim. Entries are specific portals drilled in the mountain's surface, the point from where the rest of the mine would branch out and where the extracted coal would be hauled out of the mine. One of the entries showed signs of transportation complications because of its position across the river from the railroad, and two other yielded a lower quality coal, so the last entry became the focus of production.[14] The company called the site Reading, and named the mine the King Mine.[15] C.W. Morris became the mine's first general manager. Competent in his abilities, he, nonetheless, found it difficult to run a mine in western Colorado and be the president of Juanita Coal & Coke in Pueblo.

In 1903, a branch of the Denver & Rio Grand Western extended its track from Delta eastward, following the Gunnison River, passed through Paonia, and extended up the valley to a turnaround point at Somerset. The "iron horse" was a blessing to the entire North Fork Valley because, in addition to coal, it transported crops, livestock, fruit, and other products, and thereby encouraged farmers and ranchers to produce and market more agricultural goods. Thus, the North Fork experienced its first boom.[16]

The King Mine prospered along with the rest of the valley. The mine's thick coal wall exposed a substantial quantity of high-quality coal. During this time good coal sold for around $1.50 a ton.[17] The mine's coal supplied coke and steel companies with fuel and the people in western Colorado and eastern Utah with heat. Stockholders, although pleased with their investment and Morris's management of the mine, sensed that an on-site general manager would prove more efficient.[18] Consequently,

Mahlon Thatcher, a stockholder of Juanita Coal & Coke, and the president of the First National Bank of Pueblo, recruited Alexander Bowie for the job. Thatcher and Bowie had met several years earlier, and Thatcher knew and respected Bowie's knowledge of mining and the coal industry.[19]

Bowie, like most early Colorado miners, was an immigrant. Bowie began working with his father in the mines in Scotland at age ten. He started out as a lamp boy, responsible for keeping the miners' lights illuminated, and worked his way up, learning different tasks in the mine. At that time mining was like craftsmanship and trade because miners began as apprentices, learned skills from their fathers or mentors who eventually passed their jobs onto them. The process was designed to teach miners well because incompetence creates danger in mining. At twenty, after already spending several years in a mine, Bowie immigrated to Nova Scotia, and then came to the United States.[20]

After his arrival in the United States, Bowie worked in the Ohio coal fields. He quickly decided to better himself, elevate his career, and improve his professional position, so he began to study mine safety and engineering, and in 1877 received a mine inspector's certificate.[21] During this time, he moved to Pennsylvania, the heart of United States coal mining, and became the state's first mine inspector. The job proved overwhelming because conditions in Pennsylvania's mines were among the nation's worst, and the paltry support from companies made reforms hopeless.[22] In addition, concerns for his new wife and young family propelled Bowie to escape from the Pennsylvania camp towns and move west in the early 1880s. Throughout the rest of the eighties, Bowie worked in mines in Kansas, New Mexico, and Colorado. For a time he settled in Gallup, New Mexico, where he helped organize the Caledonian Coal Company.[23] Bowie stayed with that company for eight years, but in 1906 the King Mine persuaded him to come to Colorado and become the mine's new general manager, a position that would remain in the Bowie family for nearly seventy years. People associated the family with the mine to such a degree that many

"Miners were required to live in Bowie when the town was first established. When unions got stronger, some miners chose to move because houses weren't modernized."

(Clippping from the *Paonian* courtesy of the Paonia Public Library.)

persons mistakenly believed the Bowies owned the mine.[24]

Prior to Bowie's arrival, the company contracted the building of bunkhouses, offices, boarding houses, and a home for Bowie and his family. This officially established the community as a mining camp town.[25] Camp towns were owned by mine companies, and miners and their families rented their homes and often purchased their supplies from company stores. The King Mine also supplied the mine with a blacksmith shop, a steam plant, stables, and mules. The company originally requested the name of Reading for their mining town, but the State Postal Department rejected it. Consequently, in honor of the mine's new general manager and the town's first postmaster, Bowie became the town's official name.

Over the next several years, the camp and mine prospered. Construction of tenant houses, school houses, and general stores, began in 1907. The company reinvested its profits in the mine by building a tramway from the railroad to the triple (the device that loaded coal into railroad cars), which replaced wagon transport of coal. In addition, the company purchased a steam-powered fan to improve ventilation, and in 1915 added an electric lighting plant and a powder house.[26]

Living conditions and the relationship between citizens in Bowie differed from those of other mining towns. Because Bowie was so isolated, its people had to cooperate to survive, and they developed a sense of pride in their community. Although Juanita Coal and Coke met government standards for a company town, the enjoyment of life in Bowie truly came from the people. Hazel Barnes, a resident, recalled a life of little means, "We never lived it up or had the good life, but it was a simple quiet life."[27] The citizens kept the streets clean, the water safe, and pollution to a minimum. They also managed to take care of most of their health problems.[28] There was a doctor in Paonia, and one of Alexander Bowie's sons was a doctor in Somerset, but transportation and cost limited people's visits to doctors. Only in extremely serious circumstances did people obtain professional medical care. Home care and remedies such as sassafras tea and

Bill Sanford, Con Aime, Joe Fisher, Martin Kuretich, Sr., Larry Luckner, Tom Lalten, Joe Surroz, Gus Johnson, John Kuretich, John Nelson, Jim Aime, Pete Dodez, Frank Ellena, Gus Hedman, Carl Smith, Jerry Molloush, Ed Sandifer, Frank Gugerich, John Pavolich, Matt Mihelich, Joe Pavlisick, Jim Marta, John McVain, Sid Snooks, George Davies, and Mike Lesac. (Photo courtesy of the Paonia Museum and North Fork Historical Society.)

tonics were cure-alls. Bowie experienced bouts with scarlet fever, chickenpox, and other childhood diseases. Death from illness, however, was unusual.[29] Bowie's infant mortality was low in comparison to other mining towns. Childbirth was not always easy: some women did it alone, some had a midwife, and occasionally doctors assisted. Alice Abseck was born in a hospital, but she recalls her brother's birth on the kitchen table.[30]

As the camp developed into a town, a stronger sense of community emerged. The men who came to Bowie differed in character from typical transient miners. People from eastern Europe—mostly Germany, Italy, and Yugoslavia—who had families and years of mining experience settled in Bowie and made it a good place to raise their families. Ethnicity and belonging to the same social class helped prevent the social divisions and prejudices which characterized the larger coal towns on the Eastern Slope where differences in race, culture, and social status sometimes erupted into violent crimes. About the only kind of snobbery in Bowie was "the pecking order," where persons gauged others by the length of their residency in Bowie. Former citizens of Bowie recall it as a peaceful and law-abiding place where "everybody knew everybody. It was a family atmosphere."[31] Because of this miners and their families chose to remain in the town for extensive periods.

By looking at the generalization about mining towns and the people in them offered by authorities in the field, one can gain an appreciation of the uniqueness of Bowie. Mining created strong, silent, and callous men. Walk-in mines hardened men; and the coal towns were often dreary and depressing. Often people were not emotionally attached to their communities and hoped to someday leave the towns. In addition, company ownership, the quality of people attracted to these towns, substandard medical care, and poor sanitation disheartened people.[32] Typically, townspeople did not take actions to improve their communities or accept civic duties and responsibilities.[33] Neglect resulted in pollution, tainted water, filth, and garbage which, in turn, produced diseases that swept through communities and killed in

large numbers. Poorly preserved foods and high infant mortality rates destroyed citizens' morale.[34] Social tensions ran high in towns because merchants and farmers resented anything associated with the mine. Miners often isolated themselves, shunning others in the community.[35]

Bowie differed from such mining towns. There, residents nurtured a commitment to place and a desire to improve the community. Strong relationships between miners and other members of the community maintained the social and economic order and function of Bowie. Miners, farmers, ranchers, and merchants formed an economic chain—each occupation provided a link and depended on the others for specific needs. Due to the town's interdependence, economic fluctuation at the mine had a ripple affect in the town. During World War I and World War II, the mine operated at full capacity most of the year and the whole area prospered. In peacetime, the mine nearly shut down during the summer months and people had less money. According to Hazel Barnes "the mine whistle called miners to work about once a week during the off months."[36] In most mining communities, this would have caused social upheaval, strikes, and miners moving to other locations. The people of Bowie made the best of the situation. The community counteracted mine unemployment by putting miners to work on local farms and ranches. The summer and early fall months were the busy seasons for farmers and ranchers, so they usually hired extra help during these months. Who was better to hire than neighbors? The system worked well by discouraging transient workers and kept labor turnover to a minimum. This, according to historian Andrew Gulliford, protected Bowie from disruptive influences.[37]

The fact that unemployed miners could find other kinds of work during slow periods at the mine made Bowie more stable socially than most other mining towns. According to historian Ronald Brown, labor turnovers caused upheaval in mining towns.[38] He argues that the rugged and dangerous nature of mining attracted young, unmarried and unattached men, especially in hard-rock communities. "Unburdened by

conventional ties, they (the miners) had no compunction about pulling up stakes and moving on."[39] Men who mined coal were similar to hard-rock miners. They were strong, proud, independent, young men when they first went into the mines; but they usually married and assumed the responsibility for wives and children. Some even supported a widowed mother or small siblings. When others looked to a miner for support, he lost much of his freedom. Many would feel trapped and resentful toward the company that employed them, rented the house to the worker, and expected everyone to shop at the company store.

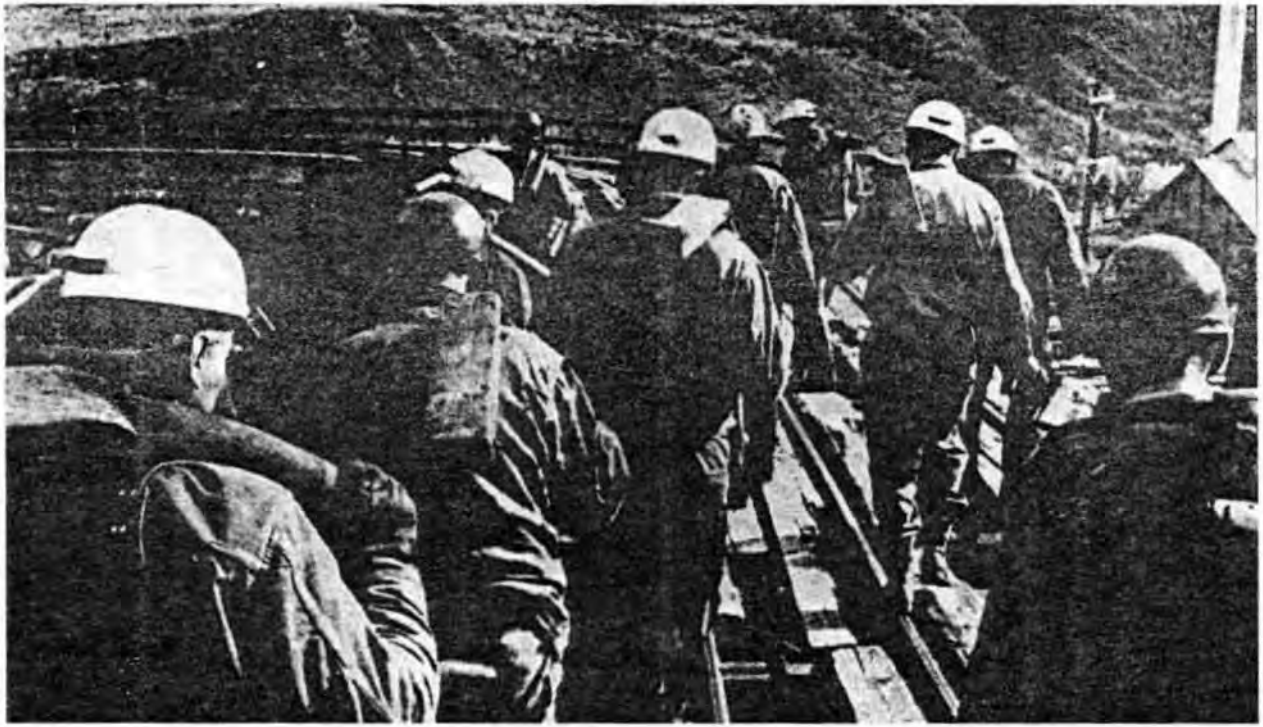
The men of Bowie differed in character from typical transient or oppressed miners. Primarily eastern European men with mining experience settled in Bowie, and did everything they could to promote a stable and protected environment for their families. A sereneness developed in Bowie as a result of men coming together from common backgrounds and similar economic conditions. Adolph Pavlisick, whose family owned a company store in town and worked in the mines most of his life, said that the miners and their families in Bowie took care of one another. Children seemed to have ten fathers and several adoptive mothers watching over them. Comparatively, Bowie demonstrated a moral consciousness not found in most other mining towns. Bowie, for example, did not have a red-light district which was a standard feature of most mining districts.

The people of Bowie trusted the company that employed them, something not typical in most mining communities. With the supreme power to improve, destroy, or control, mining companies played an important role in the physical and emotional well-being of the communities. Companies often abused their power to save money. A refusal to make improvements in living and working conditions created animosity among the miners. Hostilities often erupted into violence, especially in Colorado's eastern mining counties, such as Las Animas and Boulder, where the state's two largest mining corporations, Colorado Coal and Iron and Northern Coal and Coke controlled company towns. There, around the turn of the

century, war broke out between large companies and union miners. The dispute lasted for more then twenty years.[40]

According to accounts from miners and the citizens of Bowie, the Juanita Coal and Coke Company and Mr. Bowie took good care of their employees and their families.[41] In 1916, the company purchased stock from the local ditch company to supply the town with water. Alice Abseck, who grew up in Bowie, remembered her house being painted and fixed up by the company every couple of years, something that was almost unheard of in other company-owned towns.[42] The company built its own power plant to supply the mine with safer electrical devices, steel replaced less stable wooden structures, and the installment of hoists lessened the loads in steep parts of the mine. Even after Bowie's death in 1917, his sons and grandsons continued to make Bowie a pleasant and safe place to work and live. Because of the company's preventive and safeguarding effort, miners in Bowie felt comfortable at work and at home. Consequently, union affiliation did not arrive in Bowie until 1933. Few strikes occurred in Bowie, and miners of the North Fork Valley chapter of United Mine Workers of America (UMWA) held their meetings in the Bowie Dance Hall.[43] Having a union helped miners receive benefits, such as paid vacations and health care, and ensured the enforcement of federal regulations involving wages, work hours, social security, and updated training.

The union also enabled miners to get medical care for occupational injuries and illnesses. Such benefits were vital to workers because mining is one of the world's most dangerous professions.[44] Miners tried to conceal the magnitude and range of dangers they faced in order to protect their families from worry.[45] Hundreds of factors created hazardous situations. Strenuous tasks, dark tunnels, deep shafts, slippery surfaces, explosives, heavy machinery, hazardous gases, temperature changes, and human error endangered miners. According to most miners, it was just all in a day's work, and they learned to emotionally adapt to the nature of their job. Some men believed in a type of miners'



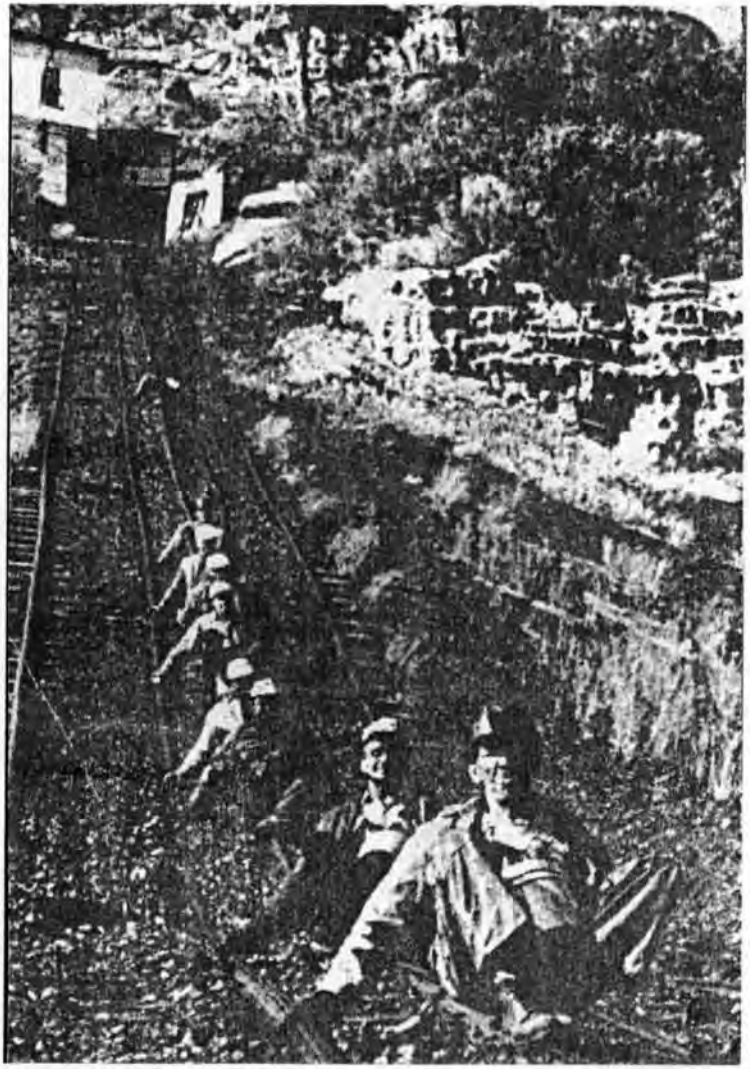
"The Bowie crew prepares to boat down into the Valley." (Clipping from the *Paonian* courtesy of Betty Chapman.)

fate. On one hand, if they paid attention, read the warning signs, such as the smell of kerosene before an explosion, or the rustle of the rafters before a cave-in, they would survive. On the other hand, if they did their part and still did not survive, then it was their time to go regardless of the precautions they took.[46]

Former miners interviewed for this paper, when asked if they were scared the first time they went into the mines, all said "yes." Dark tunnels, damp shafts, and filthy surfaces all contributed to the eeriness of mines. The glut of fungus, scum, and rats tormented miners. If a light went out, it was impossible for workers to tell up from down. One old-timer remembered his first experience with mining: "I have been in several mines, but the one that left the greatest impression on me was the first time my dad took me in his mine (1925). The peculiar odor and the blackness of the darkness have never left me."[47] Why then did they do it? Some did it for the money, but others did it because their fathers had done it, and they were convinced that their fathers had loved it. To be like them, they, too, would learn to love it.[48]

The most obvious hazards in the Bowie mine were extreme heat and gases. Water in Bowie had a high sulfur content, and that sulfur could react with the heat in the "bone," or earth, and explode. If a room began to smell like kerosene, or a blue smoke appeared, that area was sealed off immediately. The depth of the mine caused the heat; so the deeper the mine shaft, the higher the temperatures. To keep cool, Bowie miners often stripped down to their underclothes, even if freezing temperatures existed outside. Miners called the dangerous mixture of gases found in the mine "Black Damp." The drowsy symptom resulting from Black Damp concerned workers more than the possibility of the gases igniting. Sleepy miners created a real hazard to all employees.

Despite such concerns, the Bowie mine was relatively safe. Only one major disaster occurred. The Bowie mine caught fire in 1941, but luckily it happened on a Sunday, and no miners suffered injuries. With the help of rescue workers, fire fighters, and miners from western Colorado and eastern Utah, the fire was



"Homeward-bound miners, lunch pails between their knees, coast at a steady clip toward town. Several of their boats (invented by an unknown miner in the early 1900s) have been placed on exhibit in museums of American industry. One is displayed in the mining section of the Smithsonian Institution in Washing D.C."

(Clipping from the *Paonian* courtesy of Betty Chapman.)

contained. The mine shut down for six weeks for repairs and inspections. In the early 1900s, approximately, three out of every thousand miners in the United States died on the job.[49] Remarkably, the Bowie mine operated for over sixty years, and its fatalities remained in the single digits.[50] Bowie miners felt strongly about ventilation, fresh air, and emergency exits. They used their union to guarantee their safety.[51]

Despite all that was good about living and working in Bowie—a supportive community, a company that cared about its workers, and vigilance about safety—mining was a difficult and dangerous way to make a living. A miner's body and health broke down by the time he reached middle age, a result of spending twenty to thirty years laboring in a dark hole. Even if a miner managed to escape major injuries, a build-up of multiple minor ones often crippled him. Back pain, stooped shoulder, arthritis, bad joints, broken bones, and burns caused suffering and shortened lives.[52] Although the mining company tried to provide a safe and well-ventilated working environment, time and coal dust were toxic enemies. Coal dust settled in the lungs, and destroyed the respiratory system. One miner remembers even at a young age spiting up black dust. "When you come out of that mine every day covered in dust your body can't help but absorb it. It becomes a part of you."[53] Miners called the illness "Black Lung." According to Barnes, coal dust took its toll on the miners of Bowie; she said: "I can't think of any of the old miners who are left."[54] Ironically, the substance that provided miners' sustenance also killed them.

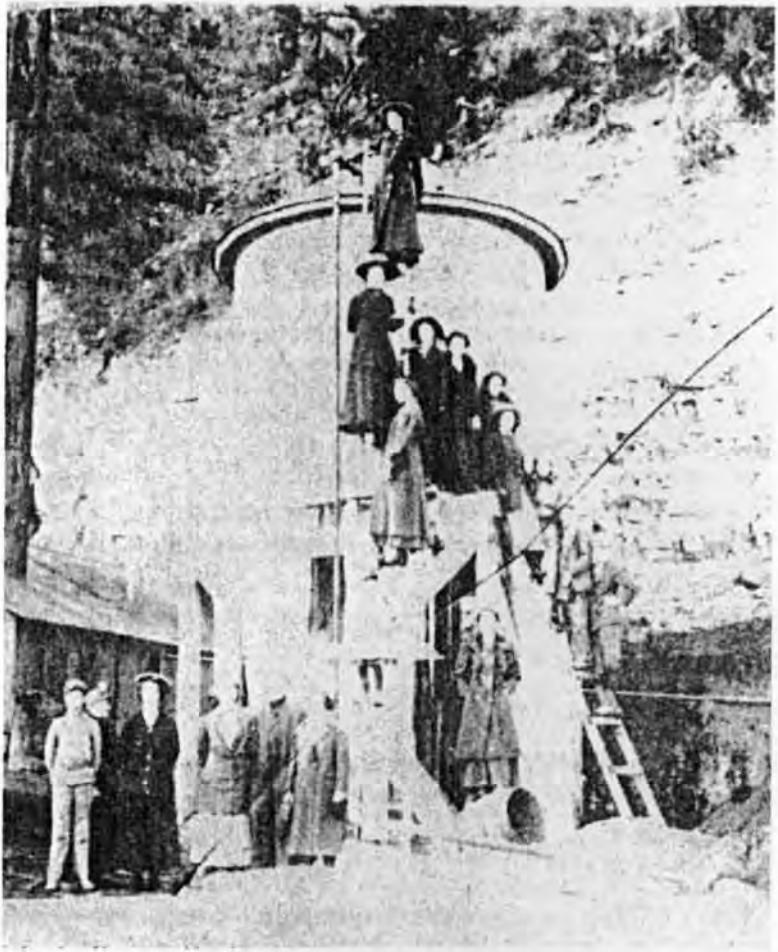
Gender roles in Bowie mirrored those in other mining towns. The men shouldered the responsibility of providing an income for their families and contributing to the economy of the town, while women and children fulfilled their responsibilities in homes and the community. Wives often tried to bring a little extra money to the household by cooking, laundering, and sewing for single miners. Women occasionally sacrificed their privacy for money by turning a spare room or a back porch into a room for rent. Such money bought shoes for children, a cow, or a few chickens.

Women led difficult and physically challenging lives. They woke up cooking and went to bed cleaning. Cleaning was nearly impossible in coal towns; dust covered everything and gave it a dingy look and smell, but women attempted to bring cleanliness into their homes. Lacking today's modern appliances, women worked long days doing laundry, ironing, canning, baking, tending gardens, fruit trees, domestic animals, and preserving and preparing food—tasks which required an incredible amount of time. This was an age when women prepared everything from "scratch."

Women also cared for and raised their families. Perhaps women's most demanding chore was caring for their children, and molding them into worthy adults. Discipline was an important part of raising children; it established individual foundations of honesty, respect, and integrity, which parents expected their children to display. Although men ultimately decided what punishment a child received, women initiated the disciplinary actions. A mother's disciplinary methods were subtle, a type of alarm. She warned her children with a simple look or the way she called out, but if children's behavior did not improve, they heard the dreaded words: "your father will hear about this."[55]

Mothers assigned the chores which children felt disrupted their valuable playtime. Women also nurtured their children academically and theologically. A mother followed her children's progress at school and counseled them on religion, values, morality, and proper behavior. Healthcare also concerned mothers who used teas, salves, hot-water bottles, and cool baths to cure illnesses. After a week filled with so many duties, the women of Bowie welcomed the weekend dances where they could kick up their heels and forget about all their obligations.

Children saw their mothers as guarded, firm, and difficult to understand. It was not until children grew up that they truly admired and sympathized with their mothers. People who lived in Bowie and North Fork Valley cannot imagine how their mothers managed all the things that they did.[56] Hazel Barnes says, "I have



"The way it was in Bowie, 1911. These intrepid ladies climbed the Bowie water tower in 1911 to pose for a picture after their tour of the Bowie Mine, the first to go into production in the North Fork Valley. Alexander Bowie was the mine's founder, and it was called the King Mine of the Juanita Coal and Coke Company. Until 1928, coal was hauled entirely by mules, and the miners' equipment consisted of picks." (Clipping from the *Paonian* provided by Betty Chapman.)

no desire and can't image living a life like my mother's."[57] As for her childhood, Barnes says she would not change a thing.

Growing up in a small town in the Rocky Mountains delighted children. Bowie embraced and watched over its children. The old men told stories and jokes to the boys and girls, and the old women spoiled them with homemade treats. Adventure could always be found, no matter what season. In the winter, snow covered Bowie and turned the town into a winter playground for children. Sledding, snowball fights, and ice-skating were popular pastimes.[58] In the spring, students played baseball, marbles, and cowboys and Indians on the playground. During summer, chores consumed their time, but cooling off at the end of the day in the local swimming hole was always fun. In the fall, children built forts, formed teams, and fought battles. While most of the activities were for boys, girls participated when they could. Girls especially enjoyed sledding.[59] However, there were different roles and social spheres for girls and boys. Girls were expected to be proper, to learn the domestic skills needed to be a good wife, and to spend most of their time helping their mothers in, or near, the house. Boys had more independence. They ran errands and worked on chores outside and away from the home, allowing them freedom to explore and experience more.

Growing up in a mining town did not consist of just fun and games. School was important to families and the community. Two schools existed in Bowie, an elementary school and a junior high or middle school. One teacher taught several different grade levels at each school. High school students, if their family could afford to keep them out of the workforce, finished school in Paonia. The students in Bowie's schools helped those younger than themselves. Under the circumstances, children received a good education. According to Barnes, "One of the best teachers I ever had was in Bowie, and I even went to college."[60]

During the early part of the century, it was normal for children in Bowie to grow up and lead lives similar to those of their parents. Miners' sons often went to work in the mine by age

Bowie schoolhouse, built early 1900s. (Photo courtesy of the Paonian Museum and North Fork Historical Society.)

seventeen and ranchers' and farmers' sons either took over their father's land or found a small place of their own. The daughters of Bowie became brides and followed in their mother's footsteps.

After World War II, Bowie began to change. During the postwar period, the coal market began to decline. Natural gas and cheap overseas oil undercut the coal industry, forcing young adults in Bowie to seek opportunities elsewhere.[61] Communication and transportation systems made the world seem smaller and less threatening; consequently, the young people of Bowie felt less intimidated when leaving home. College became more accessible to middle-class students, and automobiles and paved roads also offered escape from small towns such as Bowie. Miners could now live in the larger town of Paonia and commute to work. Railroads were now used mainly for freight, so they needed less coal. By the late 1960s, talk about the potential of oil shale was commonplace in Colorado, causing power plants and factories to begin contemplating replacing coal with oil shale.[62]

The Bowie family, citizens of the town, and miners fought hard to keep the mine partially open. According to Abseck, the mine had a few good years near the end, but financial losses and the lack of investors forced the mine to close down in 1974. It was sold to Adolph Coors Company of Golden, Colorado. Rumors circulated that the company's negotiations entailed a large coal order and the reopening of the mine, but it did not happen. When the mine closed, the town closed; there was nothing left in the area to sustain even a small population. The small river valley still supports a few local ranchers, but there are no services left in Bowie.

Bowie's fate was predetermined. Mining towns decline unless they are able to reduce their dependence upon mineral removal. This is one of the important factors which separates coal mining towns from hard-metal mining towns. Hard-metal mining communities were able to build small cities which made them desirable to investors and visitors. Cities like Aspen, Leadville, and Telluride capitalized on the old-fashioned romance and attracted tourists.

The Bowie schoolhouse, renovated by the North Fork Historical Society, has been moved to Paonia, Colorado, where it houses the Paonia Museum.

(Photo courtesy of Tiffany Bailey.)

Bowie was not renowned; the coal mining world did not consist of glitter and glamour. There are few books or movies written about the glory days of coal mining, in part, because there were no glory days. Coal mining was hard work and hard living, performed by courageous individuals. Nevertheless, there is a history to all mining communities, whether or not men struck gold, fought for unions, died in devastating accidents, or lived peacefully. Sadly, histories of communities such as Bowie have gone unnoticed. Historian William Robbins compares these tributary towns to streams which provided larger lakes with water.[63]

There are few people left who remember the early days of Bowie. Former citizens of Bowie and members of the North Fork Historical Society are trying to preserve some memories of the community. They organized the move and restoration of the old Bowie schoolhouse from its original location to Paonia, where it is now part of the Paonia Museum. Oral interviews are also being documented and placed in a memory book. Even though Bowie did not endure, its history was unique. The town became a community and developed a harmony found in few other boom-and-bust towns.

Notes

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[3] Carl Abbott, David McComb, and Stephen J. Leonard, *Colorado: A History of the Centennial State* (Boulder, Colorado: Colorado Associated Press, 1982), 283.
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[8] Ibid., 1.
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[20] Ibid., 3.
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[24] Abseck, interview.
[25] Abseck and Bowie, "The Juanita Coal and Coke Company," 4.
[26] Ibid.
[27] Barnes, interview.
[28] Glen Haley, *Sparks Fly Upward: Growing up in the Rockies* (Ouray, Colorado: Wayfinder Press, 1988), 132.
[29] Abseck, interview.
[30] Ibid.
[31] Adolph and Mary Pavlisick, interview by author, 28 September 1997, Grand Junction, transcripts in possession of author, Grand Junction, Colorado.
[32] "A Miner's Life," *Newsweek*, 5 May 1947, 56.
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[34] "A Miner's Life," 56.
[35] Michrina, *Pennsylvania Mining*, 54-57.
[36] Barnes, interview.
[37] Andrew Gulliford, *Boomtown Blues: Colorado Oil Shale, 1885-1985* (Niwot, Colorado: University Press of Colorado, 1989), 181.
[38] Ibid., 178.
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[41] Livingston, "Coal Mining of North Fork," passim.
[42] Abseck, interview.
[43] Livingston, "Coal Mining of North Fork," 4.
[44] Long, *Sun Never Shines*, 28.
[45] Michrina, *Pennsylvania Mining*, chapter 8.
[46] Pavlisick, interview; Michrina, *Pennsylvania Mining*, 140. On page 138 Michrina theorizes that miners accepted responsibility for mining accidents. The agricultural background of miners taught them to be careful around machines, animals, and other dangers. If something happened, only the farmer or man involved was accountable. In addition, given the emotional trauma of their occupation, accepting responsibility for accidents and injuries allowed miners a greater sense of control over their destinies.
[47] Livingston, "Coal Mining of North Fork," 16.

[48] Pavlisick, interview.
[49] White, *It's Your Misfortune*, 281.
[50] Abseck and Bowie, "Juanita Coal and Coke Company," 4.
[51] Robert and Katherine Bowie, interview by author, 28 August 1998, Hotchkiss, Colorado, transcripts in possession of author, Grand Junction, Colorado.
[52] Long, *Sun Never Shines*, 50.
[53] Pavlisick, interview.
[54] Barnes, interview.
[55] Haley, *Sparks Fly*, 72.
[56] Ibid., 167.
[57] Barnes, interview.
[58] Abseck, interview.
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