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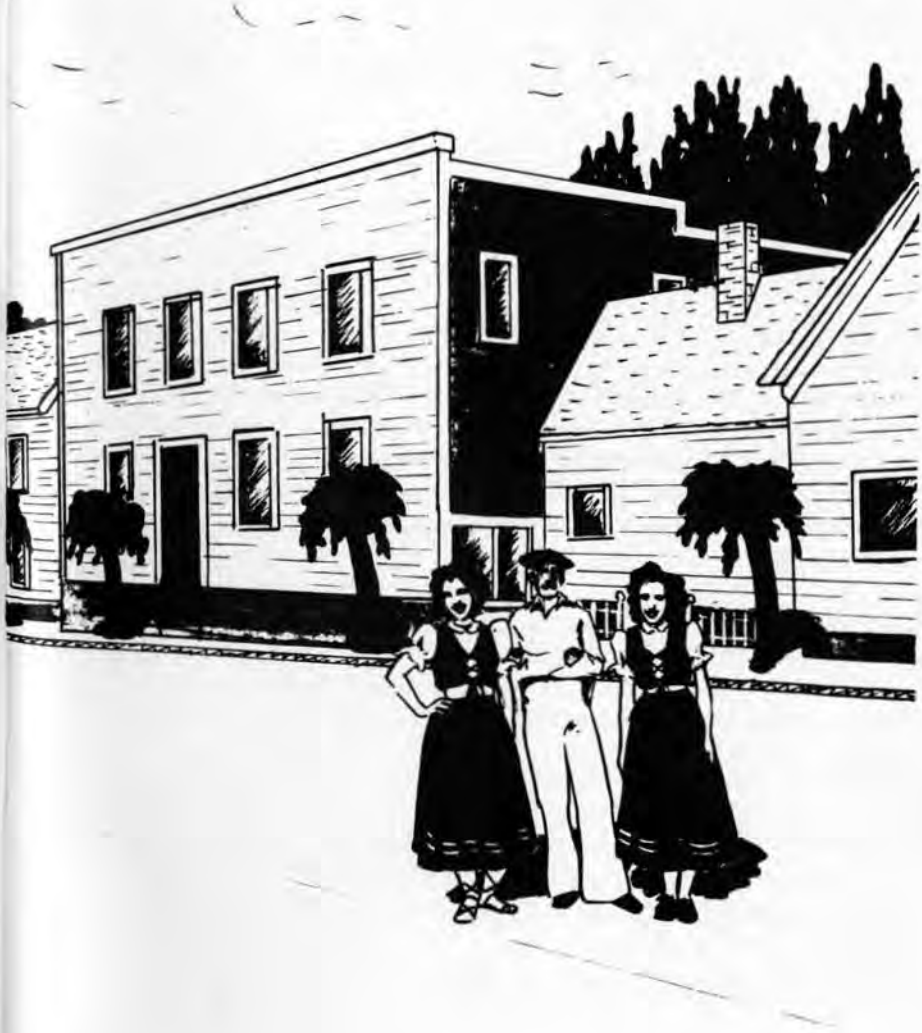

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GUIDELINES FOR CONTRIBUTIONS: The purpose of ***JOURNAL OF THE WESTERN SLOPE*** is to encourage the scholarly study of Colorado's Western Slope. The primary goal is to preserve and record its history; however, articles on anthropology, economics, government, natural history and sociology will be considered. Authorship is open to anyone who wishes to submit original and scholarly material about the Western Slope. The editors encourage letters of inquiry from prospective authors. Complete instructions to contributors to the Journal may be secured by inquiry to: Mesa State College, ***JOURNAL OF THE WESTERN SLOPE***, P.O. Box 2647, Grand Junction, CO 81502

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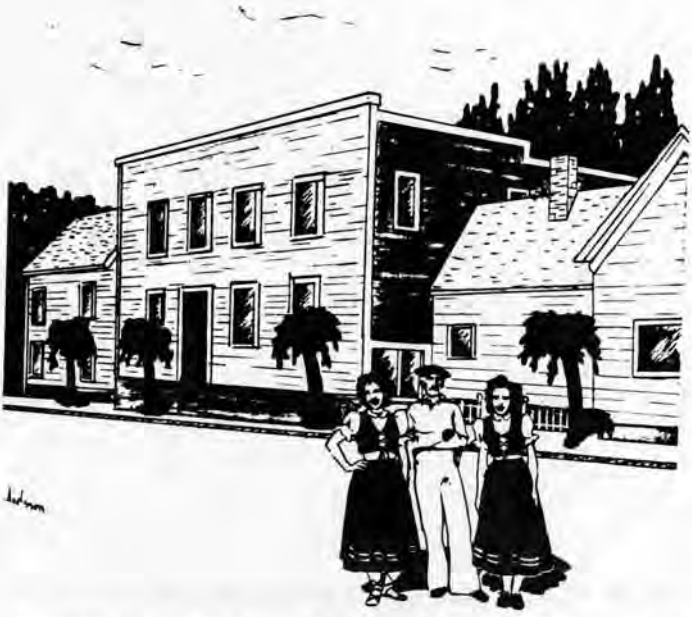
THE COVER: The Journal of the Western Slope was unable to obtain photographs of the Retolaza Boarding House. Daniel Arosteguy provided the Journal photographs of his grandfather's Basque Hotel in Mountain Home, Idaho, from which an artist's rendering was produced. The artist Nicole Axelsson, is a fine arts major at Mesa State College.

Contents



A STUDY OF THE RETOLAZA BOARDING HOUSE AND ITS ROLE IN THE LIFE OF THE BASQUE ITINERANT SHEEPHERDER

By Jeffrey L. Izienicki

Antonio Retolaza's story is not so very different from that of hundreds of other Spanish Basques that came to America in the late nineteenth-century and the early part of the twentieth-century. Born in the Basque province of Bizkaia, in the small fishing village of Esporter off the coast of the Bay of Biscay, Antonio inherited a tradition of immigration to the New World that predates Columbus. Basque seafaring men, in fact, existed in the Americas for the past five centuries and played a prominent part in the success of Christopher Columbus's travels to the New World.[1] The Retolaza family celebrated the birth of Antonio on December 11, 1899. Like so many Basques before him, Antonio answered the call to adventure and fortune from across the sea.[2]

His arrival in New York during the spring of 1916 signaled his new life as an American Basque. During his long

train ride to the American West, he reflected upon the events that brought him to this place so far away from his beloved Bizkaia.

Upon his arrival in New York, a strange new shore, the familiar sound of the waves of the Atlantic lapping upon the shore greeted him. The land, buildings, and people appeared unfamiliar to the 17-year-old Amerikanunk who knew only the bosom of his Basque culture. No one greeted him in the ancient Eushera Basque language. The faces and speech of the various Anglo and other European immigrants created a cacophony of sounds and sights that both excited and confused the young man from Esporter.

As he had done so often during his voyage, Antonio retrieved his "uncle" Tony's letter. As he began reading the message from America, past events rushed to memory to explain this present situation.

When the letter from America reached his village, it was already months old. The simple and clear message stated that the outfit Uncle Tony worked for sought hardworking, trustworthy men to herd sheep, work independently, and rely on their own wits. The work was hard, the pay was good, and an ambitious young man could make a small fortune by homeland Basque standards. To Antonio the letter represented a call to adventure and an opportunity to acquire wealth and gain independence.

After taking his literacy exam and filing his application to immigrate, Antonio formulated his future plans. He would go to America, work hard, and save his money. After a few years, he would return to his beloved homeland in the Western Pyranees with tales of adventure, and money to insure a prosperous future. Then he would wed and raise a family.

As he looked out the window of the train, hurtling through the American countryside, he felt ill-prepared for the reality that unfolded before him. The expansiveness of the eastern countryside, with its dense forests and watery network of rivers and streams, only occasionally interrupted by a town

or settlement, appeared wild and unfamiliar. This strange new land was far-removed from the quiet, pastoral hillsides and patchwork fields of home. The sight of small bands of sheep and goats, reminded Antonio of the familiar rhythmic tinkle of bells and the familiar scents of the Western Pyranees. A sense of pride reminded him that Basques had inhabited the same area of the Iberian peninsula, uninterrupted, from the neolithic period (4000 BC) to the present.[3] Antonio spoke Basque; the only surviving pre-Indo-European language on the European continent, and perhaps in the entire world.[4]

Emerging from his memories of home, Antonio's gaze once again focused on the small train window that mirrored the familiar face of a young Basque, reflecting the distinct physical features of an ancient culture. The dark complexion, the unique cranial formation, dark hair, and even the unique blood composition of his race that separated him from the rest of European cultures, had become a trusted companion for more lonely nights than he could count.

When he closed his eyes he imagined the fortress-like farm houses with the two foot thick rock walls standing against hillsides as sentries, watching the old men working in the fields or tending the grapes, and the women preparing the daily meals. These same massive walls witnessed the glory of Caesar's legions centuries ago, as the Roman Empire reached across Europe, conquered Gaul and subjugated Spain.[5] They stood witness to the centuries of Moorish cultural development after the Arab-Berbers crossed the Straits of Gibraltar into Spain in the eighth century. Now, these were only distant memories to a race of people that considered these invaders interlopers in a land they called home before recorded history. As the familiar sounds and memories mingled with the rhythmic sounds of the track beneath the swaying Pullman car, Antonio slept and dreamed of what lay ahead.

When he finally arrived at Buffalo, Wyoming, his American uncle met him at the station and took him directly to the camp. Over long campfire talks, Antonio learned about

his good fortune.[6] His uncle told him that since the start of World War I, many of the French Basque sheepherders had returned to Europe to fight for France. Their departure severely decreased the availability of quality sheepherders and therefore, monthly wages increased from $40 to $100, and in some areas even higher.[7] Since Spanish Basques remained neutral during the First World War, the flow of Vizcayan immigrants to the western U.S. remained steady during the war years.

During the next two years, Antonio learned the business and life of a sheepherder. He learned to use his dogs and he learned the rules of the outfit. He learned, most of all, the mountains. He became familiar with the topography, the climate, and grazing range boundaries of the Shoshone Range. He worked and lived alone, seeing his uncle or camptenders only when they arrived to replenish supplies. His knowledge of the countryside and his own wits determined whether he and his band of sheep survived. He spent his summers in the high mountain ranges and the winters in the plains below.

Although the pay was good, he saw few people and most of those he saw were other Basque sheepherders that worked for the outfit. After his second season, he became concerned by his lack of knowledge of the English language. Antonio expanded his knowledge of America during the brief conversations he held with his fellow countrymen.

Antonio received word from his uncle to join him in Grand Junction, Colorado, and he felt ready for a change. Joining his kinsman in Colorado caused little apprehension and he willingly gave notice of his departure.

Upon his arrival in Grand Junction in 1918, Antonio found the sheep industry in full swing. Antonio and his Uncle Tony, whose real name was Antonio Coscorrozza, bought several bands of sheep and ran them in the Grand Junction and Gunnison area for several years.[8] On September 13, 1920, however, Antonio and his uncle purchased the boarding house on 224 Colorado in Grand Junction from a former

Basque sheepherder, Jose Ocamica for the sum of $6,223. The terms of the sale called for an annual payment of $1,000 through September 13, 1923 and the balance of $2,223 due on September 13, 1924 with interest paid annually at ten percent.[9] The purchase of the boarding house represented a significant event in Antonio's life because it permanently changed his status from itinerant sheepherder to respectable property owner and accepted member of the Grand Junction business community.

The two-story brick structure with a framed cornice, initially built in 1912 as a hotel, came fully furnished with all the conveniences of the day. Eleven half-sized iron bedstands, fourteen full-sized iron bedstands, twenty-five bedsprings, thirty chairs, twenty-five commodes, two dressers, three stoves, and three pool tables provided the necessary accommodations for the itinerant sheepherder between jobs or convalescence.[10]

The top floor contained a few private rooms and a small dormitory that could accommodate approximately twenty men. The main floor served as a gathering place for guests and contained three pool tables and the communal dining area as the central features of activity. The large kitchen to the rear of the house provided the dominant working area that produced the ethnic meals that guests, visitors, and the Retolaza family shared at the common table. The distinct family atmosphere always impressed the first time visitor to the Retolaza boarding house. Even in the Old Basque country no comparable experience existed that tied these relatively strange young travelers to one another.

Shortly after Antonio and Uncle Tony purchased the boarding house it became clear that Antonio's interests were rooted in managing the boarding house affairs and that Uncle Tony's interests remained in raising sheep. It came as no surprise to the two partners, therefore, that shortly after paying the balance on the note to Jose Ocamica, Antonio bought Uncle Tony's half interest in the boarding house.[11] On August 30, 1924, Antonio Retolaza became the sole owner of

the Retolaza Boarding House and Pool Hall. In the Polk Directory of Grand Junction, Antonio advertised the boarding house as the "Spanish Pool Hall and Furnished Rooms".[12]

Domestic chores like cooking and cleaning accompanied the responsibility of running the boarding house so Antonio wrote his family and explained his need for help. A friend in the neighboring village of Le Quritio had a daughter, Margarita, who wanted to come to America. In a matter of weeks, Margarita found herself cooking for twenty Basque sheepherders and tending the Retolaza Boarding House in Grand Junction, Colorado.[13]

The years from 1918 to 1929 witnessed the zenith of the itinerant sheepherder on the Western Slope. The growth of the sheep industry in Grand Junction, however, represented only one step in the long history of the Basques in the Americas beginning in the late 1500s. In South America they had become a successful and significant ethnic group based on a very lucrative sheep industry when the United States began her struggle for independence. The Basques came to California in the mid-1800s and replaced the Spanish Dons and the failing cattle business with a successful sheepherding industry.[14] In the late 1800s, as the open range became scarce in the far west, the Basques moved their herds eastward to the Great Basin area of Nevada and Utah. The early 1900s saw this trend spread to the Rocky Mountains and the arrival of the Bizkains to southern Idaho and western Colorado. World War I triggered the significant introduction of the Spanish Basques to western Colorado. The initial third of the 20th century witnessed the golden era of the Vizcayan itinerant sheepherder in the northern Rocky Mountains and in particular in western Colorado and eastern Utah.[15]

Grand Junction, became the hub of the largest concentration of Basques located in the region of western Colorado and eastern Utah. High Rocky Mountain grazing meadows and desert valleys between Grand Junction and eastern Utah produced ideal conditions for the herds of the

Vizcayan Basque itinerant sheepherders.

These young, single Basques usually worked for wages and had no permanent residence. They demonstrated marginal use of the English language at best, and little knowledge of American socioeconomic or cultural mores. The socially isolated and itinerant lifestyle left these hardworking immigrant workers outside the political mainstream of Western grazing politics. Under these circumstances, the Basque boarding house became the social and cultural touchstone for Basques in America.

From its opening in 1917 to its final days in 1946, the Basque boarding house owned by Antonio and Margarita Retolaza became an American home for immigrant itinerant Basque sheepherders. The boarding house offered three meals per day, a hearty rose'-during the evening meal and a clean room at a reasonable rate to sheepherders coming from winter pasturing or between work.[16] The term "boarding house", however, fails to encompass the full range of functions provided for the itinerant sheepherders. Its function as a social anchor for thousands of young single teenage men far from home, filled a critical cultural void and helped the sheepherder maintain his cultural identity while he worked alone, far from his native land and family.[17]

Throughout the cities and villages of America during the first third of the twentieth-century, ethnic neighborhoods, ghettos and barrios became the safe haven for Blacks, Asians, Latins, Jews, and Eastern European immigrants who otherwise posed a threat to traditional American society. Various ethnic minorities established communities within communities to maintain their cultural identity and values. A group of small businesses, a handful of professionals, a church or synagogue, an ethnic newspaper, all provided the cultural nourishment necessary to ensure the survival of these ethnic groups. Immigrants in such a neighborhood or barrio purchased food and goods at a locally owned ethnic store and worked for a factory that employed immigrants from the same

country or even the same villages. The neighborhood doctors, lawyers, accountants, bankers, and police officers had the same ethnic roots and often spoke the same language. When a child was born, the local priest or rabbi blessed the family in their own tongue. When a member of the community died the same priest or rabbi praised his or her life in America and remembered their roots in the old country. The community witnessed their passing and celebrated according to the traditional customs of the homeland. The boarding house provided to these itinerant sheepherders this sense of community and family. The Retolaza Boarding House meant much more than just a room and hot meal.

Antonio Retolaza served as a liaison between the Basque sheepherders and the American population in Grand Junction. In this capacity, Antonio frequently assisted the itinerant sheepherders in establishing credit accounts at the local general store or supply shops. For those Basques attempting to invest in their own herds, either as sole owners or in partnership with other Basque herders, Antonio facilitated introductions to the local bankers and attorneys.[18]

In the great tradition of Basque boarding houses, the Retolazas provide an uncommon success story. Financial difficulties and owners returning to Europe caused a rapid turnover of ownership for many of these boarding houses and hotels.[19] The secret to the success of Antonio and Margarita in operating their boarding house for thirty years is therefore worth noting.

Antonio's ability to provide assistance to the itinerant sheepherder with limited education and a poor understanding of the English language, proved valuable to the isolated Basque sheepherder. In most cases the intinerant sheepherder lacked the ability to deal with the Anglo community, in particular the retailers and professional members. Antonio served as business coordinator, interpreter, and often times banker, safekeeping thousands of dollars of life savings for Basque sheepherders who could not bring themselves to trust

Anglo bankers. In financial and business transactions, many sought Antonio's advice and counsel prior to executing any documents.[20] The Retolaza's old world background, their ethnic identity, fluency in Basque, and proficiency in the Anglo culture earned them the right to act on behalf of the itinerant sheepherder in dealing with an otherwise alien and often resentful society.

The boarding house system served as a critical link in securing employment for sheepherders and in locating the isolated herder in order to deliver messages from other parts of the country or from overseas. In its function as an employment agency, the Basque boarding house became the clearing center for employers looking for Basque sheepherders. Upon arriving in town, Basques looking for employment contacted the boarding house for local or regional jobs.

The whole system of boarding houses in the Rocky Mountain region served the Basque community with an informal but effective communication network able to locate young herders when urgent messages from home needed delivery. It is interesting to note that when one of these Basques prepared to return to Vizcaya, other sheepherders gave him letters, gifts, and other articles to be delivered to families and sweethearts. These young men, returning to Vizcaya, carried money earned by sons in America to families in the Basque homeland.[21]

The Basque boarding house was also a place where the sheepherders discussed the current affairs that transpired while they had been herding their sheep high in the mountains, isolated from the rest of the world. The year Antonio purchased the boarding house, the conversation revolved around the sheep and cattle war that had been going on for the past several years around Cisco and Moab areas of eastern Utah.

Many established stockmen considered the itinerant Basque sheepherder, who they referred to as "Bascos", as tramps of the open range.[22] Stockmen of the American west,

who purchased land and invested in cattle, considered the itinerant sheepherder's way of life un-American. They viewed these foreigners as encroaching upon their grazing ranges, with no intention of staying in America. When the Basque sheepherder returned to his native land, he took American dollars with him. Western stockmen viewed this practice as harmful to small-town American economies. Ranchers reacted by establishing anti-tramp measures directed against the Basque sheepherder.

The usual tactics included stampeding the sheep off a nearby cliff or scattering them on the range. One such incident occurred near Crested Butte in 1917, at the height of the range wars when cowboys drove nearly two thousand sheep over a canyon ridge and then systematically clubbed to death the remaining sheep.[21] A similar incident resulted in the destruction of four thousand sheep owned by John Hurburt of Parachute in 1894.[24] Cowboys often shot sheep and stole the herders' horses or mules. In some cases the nature of the violence proved even more serious.

Several years of verbal antagonism and threats between sheepherders and cattlemen around Moab culminated in a shooting on January 15, 1921. Fortunately, only the cattlemen's pride and mule were injured.[25] The outcome of a gun battle involving Charles Glass, a Negro cowboy working for the Turner outfit near Cisco represented a much more serious incident. On February 25, 1921, *The Daily Sentinel* reported "Negro Cowboy Slays French Sheepherder" during the eastern Utah Range War.[26] The report stated that Charles Glass shot the Basque sheepherder in the forehead during an altercation. Glass claimed that the herder encroached three to four miles inside cattle range marked by a recent Utah legislation establishing a line between sheep and cattle ranges. A hearing to determine fault resulted in a favorable ruling for the cowboy.[27]

In 1924, an evening conversation at the boarding house focused on another shooting of a Basque sheepherder in the

mountains nearby. A homesteader came upon a Basque watering his sheep and promptly shot the herder. After a brief trial, the homesteader was acquitted.[28]

As recently as 1932, the boarding house conversation included stories of violence toward Basque sheepherders. One such incident that took place in eastern Utah, involved three local Basque sheepherders. John Lamicq, Jean Urruty and Leon Aribilla engaged in a gun battle with feuding cattlemen while camped on Willow Creek. When the shooting ended, one cattleman lay dead and Aribilla died three days later.[21] Reflective of the times, the two local funeral homes refused to bury the Basque sheepherder. The lonely service at the cemetery for Leon Aribilla was conducted by his two partners and friends, John Lamicq and Jean Urruty. Not all such incidents made headlines, however.

One incident during the early 1930s, involved Antonio Retolaza and his family. At the height of the Great Depression Antonio decided to range some sheep outside Gunnison in an effort to supplement his boarding house income. One morning, while Antonio had gone to another outfit to take care of some business, a half-dozen cowboys from a neighboring stock outfit rode up to the small Retolaza ranch house. They were a tough, range-hardened lot, armed for trouble with dispositions to match. Little Louie Retolaza, not much bigger than a bummer lamb, and his older brother Johnnie remembered their mother walking out to meet the threatening intruders.

As the cowboys approached the house they fanned out and called for Antonio to come out. They were looking for sheepherders, tramps, or any Basque would do. They were determined to cause trouble. The two boys heard little of the conversation but they saw their mother standing straight and proud talking to these tough cowhands in her broken English and heavy Basque accent. Wide-eyed and surprised they watched as the men rode away.[29] Years later Johnnie came to understand what happened that day up on the Gunnison. Margarita Retolaza confronted those cowboys, showing little

fear, defending their right to range their band of sheep. Men of the West rode for the brand and at all times prepared to defend it. The men admired the courage of this tiny Basque woman. In the face of a formidable threat she showed little fear in confronting these dangerous men and defending her family. Those men never returned and the Retolazas pastured their sheep the remainder of the summer without trouble.

Not all the danger to the itinerant sheepherder existed because of the range wars, however. The lonely life style and unpredictable natural elements also posed a serious threat to the sheepherder. One such story that became familiar conversation around the boarding house occurred in the spring of 1910.[30] Two Basque sheepherders began bringing their sheep down from the summer mountain pasture to the high desert winter range. During the moving of the sheep, a freak early winter storm struck and caught them unprepared and far from any feed for their sheep. That evening two feet of snow fell, causing the sheep to huddle from the blinding blizzard. Six weeks later a French Basque herder came upon their camp. He found the two Basque sheepherders surrounded by their faithful dogs, pack animals, and three thousand sheep covered by snow drifts, all frozen to death.

Another topic of conversation that interested the Basque sheepherders in western Colorado concerned a relatively new trend developing on the West Coast. In California, established Basque immigrants and first-generation American born sons and daughters saw a growing involvement in the emerging agricultural industry. Many successful Basque sheep operators purchased land and converted sheep range into agricultural enterprises of alfalfa, grain crops, and citrus orchards in southern California.[31] While both new world and old world Basques moved away from sheep, the Vizcayan Basques of Idaho, Wyoming, western Colorado, and eastern Utah proudly pursued the American Dream as itinerant sheepherders in what was to be the last large area of open-range sheepherding in the American west.

Among the new Basque arrivals at the Retolaza boarding house, the topics concerning politics, grazing rights, and the range wars yielded to more immediate concerns. These new Vizcayans, mostly in their middle and late teens, initially working for wages for other Basque sheepherders, dreamed of purchasing their own herds of sheep, and returning home to a life of ease and pleasure. In some cases they spoke of sending for sweethearts to join them in the American west.

The boarding house facilitated business transactions that saw wage sheepherders pool their savings to buy a band of sheep. One partner tended the sheep, the other continued working for wages to supply cash for supplies. Other purchases occurred when some Basques returned to Spain and sold all or part interest in their bands to relatively new "Bascos". They in turn repeated this cycle and realized a good profit.

Basques of a more ambitious nature discussed fortunes made by their countrymen, over mutton and wine. John Achabal of Boise, Idaho, created an example of what could be accomplished by a Basque starting out as an itinerant herder. He owned 80,000 sheep and employed nearly sixty herders. Jose' Bengoechea, a herder working for wages at the turn of the century, after twenty years of herding, turned his $35 a month wage into the largest sheep operation in southern Idaho, became Vice President of the Mountain Home Bank, and bought a fine hotel.[32] Ample justification existed for remaining in the United States where fortunes could be made by hard-working and ambitious Basques. In fact, the success of John Achabal of Idaho, would be duplicated by a Grand Junction Basque sheepherder by the name of Emmett Elizondo. Mr. Elizondo became the largest sheep operator on the Western Slope and became owner and member of the board of directors of the Fruita Bank.[33] Even the best laid plans of the hardworking and frugal Basque sheepherder, however, were not insulated from economic realities.

While the young "Bascos" envisioned mansions and

PHOTO COURTESY OF DANIEL AROSTEGUY

The Bengoechea Basque Hotel, Mountain Home, Idaho, circa 1990.

PHOTO COURTESY OF DANIEL AROSTEGUY

Pedro Anchustequi with daughters Mercedes and Beatrice.

Historical plaque honoring the Basque Hotel of Pedro Anchustequi.

PHOTO COURTESY OF DANIEL AROSTEGUY

PHOTO COURTESY OF DANIEL AROSTEGUY

The Basque Hotel of Pedro Anchustequi, Mountain Home, Idaho, circa 1960s.

prestige, older Basques reminded them of the reality of the law of supply and demand and fluctuating prices. For example, in the early 1920s herders that bought lambs for $13.05 a hundredweight and sold wool for $.50/lb. saw prices plummet two years later to $7.83 for lambs and $.16/lb. for wool.[34] The ability to invest in sheep for the long haul could make the difference between survival or going home broke. The discussion of financial disaster and range battles between sheep men and cattle ranchers sobered many an evening meal. On the horizon loomed an even darker storm, however, which proved more threatening than a cowboy with a 30-30 or a severe winter blizzard.

The combination of the stock market crash, a severe drought in the West, and falling livestock prices culminated in the enactment of the Taylor Grazing Act of 1934. The act severely impacted the future of the sheep industry, and particularly the future of the "Bascos". The Taylor Grazing Act, in effect, closed the ten western states from the Dakotas to California, to itinerant sheep grazing. The following two year period saw open grazing land shrink dramatically. Public lands increased to over 150 million acres, but its use by itinerant sheepherders became severely restricted and legislated.[35] Thus, the freedom that the Basque sheepherders knew from 1850 in the West, ended abruptly. The bill, introduced by Senator Edward Taylor of Colorado, significantly affected the herders of Wyoming and Colorado.

The new political and economic environment in the late 1930s to the mid-1940s saw many itinerant sheepherders sell or liquidate their herds and return to their homeland. Those who remained enlarged their herds, bought land, increased their operations, and obtained U.S. citizenship.[36] This sequence of events was not coincidental. The allocation of grazing rights to public lands, based on the ownership of private land and water rights, excluded aliens.

The transition from open range to federally controlled grazing ranges adversely affected the local boarding houses.

As Basque sheepherders returned home, they carried with them the tale of shattered dreams and injustices at the hands of the American livestock industry and the American government. Their message to their fellow countrymen was clear; America no longer represented the land of opportunity to the Basque. Basques working for wages for large operators, replaced the itinerant Basque sheepherder and the need for the Basque boarding house became a distant memory. The golden door for Basque immigrants as well as other immigrants, closed and an era vanished.

On June 4, 1947, Antonio Retolaza sold the Basque boarding house and three adjoining lots to George and Esther Knowles.[37] As a sign of the growing agricultural influence in the Grand Valley, the property became Knowles Service and Agricultural Implements. The property later sold to Edward E. Hull, Jr. on October 27, 1952 and the old two story structure with its rich Basque history, became a vacant lot and eventually an overflow parking lot for Two Rivers Plaza.

NOTES

[1]Roger Collins, *The Basques.* (New York: Basil Blackwell Inc., 1987), 50.
[2]Louie Retolaza. Interview by author. 13 March 1991, Grand Junction, CO.
[3]Collins, 100-124.
[4]Ibid., 203-225.
[5]William A. Douglass and Jon Bilbao, *Amerikanuak: Basques In the New World.* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1975), 10.
[6]Retolaza Interview.
[7]Douglass and Bilbao, 260.
[8]Retolaza Interview.
[9]Mesa County, *Grantee Book 250, Page 230.* (Partnership Agreement, February 1920).
[10]Ibid., 230.
[11]Retolaza Interview.
[12]R.L. Polk, *City of Grand Junction Directory.* (R.L. Polk & Co. Publishers, 1941).
[13]Retolaza Interview.
[14]Douglass and Bilbao, 75-95.
[15]Ibid., 250.
[16]Retolaza Interview.
[17]Maria Guccini, sister of Emmit Elizondo. Interview by author. 22 October 1991. Fruita, CO.
[18]Retolaza Interview.
[19]Richard H. Lane and William A. Douglass, *Basques Sheepherders of the American West.* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1985), 102.
[20]Retolaza Interview.
[21]Robert Laxalt, *Sweet Promised Land.* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1957)
[22]Douglass and Bilbao.
[23]Andrew Guliford, Garfield County: *The First Hundred Years 1883-1983.* (Glenwood Springs: Gran Farnum Printing, 1983), 35.
[24]Ibid., 40.
[25]The Daily Sentinel, Grand Junction, CO. 15 January 1921.
[26]Ibid., 25 February 1921.
[27]Ibid.
[28]Douglass and Bilbao.
[29]Retolaza Interview.
[30]The Daily Sentinel, 3 December 1932.
[31]Douglass and Bilbao.
[32]Ibid., 245.
[33]Ibid., 300.
[34]The Daily Sentinel, September 1990.
[35]Douglass and Bilbao, 260.
[36]Lane and Douglass.
[37]Mesa County, *Book 471.* (Warranty Deed, June 1947), 87-88.

THE WESTERN HOTEL OF OURAY
A HUNDRED YEAR HISTORY

By Laura Kuklish

The history of the Western Hotel in Ouray, Colorado, represents something of an economic barometer of the city itself. Originally a hotel and boarding house for miners, the hotel experienced ups and downs along with the city but remains today, a popular tourist attraction.

The hotel, built in 1891, witnessed a very good year for Ouray. The local newspaper commented that Ouray was booming, business was better than it had ever been, there was not a vacant lot in town, and rent prices were very high.[1] The boom reflected the need for more hotel rooms. Only five hotels served a population of 2,500, and numbers increased every day.[2] Fred Mayol and John Johnstone recognized a perfect time to build a new hotel.

Mayol and Johnstone demonstrated considerable business experience and entrepeneurial skills. Fred Mayol, a resident of Ouray since the town's beginnings in 1876, owned the Grand Central Hotel, one of Ouray's best in the early 1880s. He also owned part interest in the Placer Hotel in Dallas, Colorado, and operated a planing mill in Ouray. Mayol

lost all three of his businesses to fires before 1891. Johnstone co-owned John Johnstone and Company until 1889 when his partner, R. R. Joseph, retired. Johnstone sold buggies and farm equipment and operated a blacksmith and machinery shop, and became an active Democrat in Ouray.[3]

The Solid Muldoon, a Ouray newwspaper, announced the building of the Western Hotel on August 7, 1891. The Western Hotel was completed on December 10, 1891, but the owners scheduled the opening for the spring of 1892. A chattel mortgage made on October 5, 1892, listed every item in the hotel. The electrically lighted hotel included the bar room, office, dining room, pantry, side room, kitchen, chambers, balcony, alcove, and laundry. The list of items included everything from four mop sticks to 122 beer glasses. In the bar room, patrons found a well stocked bar with cane and wooden chairs, two poker tables, a hat rack, plush curtains, a clock, and a mirror. The office contained drapery-covered windows, a safe, a small table, and chairs. Lace curtains and window shades accented the dining room along with twelve dining tables and nine side tables. The tables, covered with white tablecloths, held cloth napkins, sugar bowls, vinegar cruets, salt and pepper shakers, pickle dishes, nut crackers, and a complete set of silverware. Kitchen implements included soup bowls and soup plates, dinner plates, meat and sauce dishes, side dishes, pie plates, cups and saucers, glasses, water pitchers, and finger bowls.[4]

The upstairs chambers contained a bed, two mattresses, sheets, a blanket, a comforter, pillows, and a white bed spread. The rooms also included a dresser, a washstand including a bowl and pitcher, a soap dish, a slop jar, and a chamber pot. Some rooms contained writing tables and leather, plush, or wooden rockers. White lace curtains covered the windows. In nice weather, lawn seats and rockers appeared on the balcony over the porch. The laundry room contained tin slop buckets, wash tubs, a wringer, laundry table, and flat irons.[5]

The success of the Western Hotel, dependent on the occupancy of miners, fluctuated with the mining industry of Ouray County. The county was divided into three mining districts: the Paquin District northeast of Ouray, the Sneffels District southwest of Ouray, and the Red Mountain District southeast of Ouray. Most of the "big mines" were located in the Sneffels and Red Mountain Districts.[6] The Red Mountain District contained diversified metals, but silver existed in abundance. The district contained mines such as the Yankee Girl, Robinson, Guston, and the famous National Belle. The men who accidentally discovered the caves of the National Belle related that it was like walking into King Solomon's Mine. The silver-covered cave walls dripped with wealth and beauty. The Red Mountain District began booming in 1881 and continued doing well until 1893, when the Silver Crisis hit.[7] The hotel business and the town of Ouray likewise experienced prosperous years. The Silver Panic hit Colorado in 1893, however, and the new Western Hotel closed.

The Sherman Silver Purchase Act of 1890 supported the price of new silver at, or above the price paid by the United States Mint.[8] Grover Cleveland, elected President of the United States in 1892, supported eastern gold interests more than western silver interests.[9] He asked for a repeal of the Sherman Silver Purchase Act, and in 1893, the price of silver fell and the bottom dropped out of the silver industry. Ouray's economy plummeted.

Fortunately, Ouray's economy depended on metals other than silver. Demand for gold continued as it did for base metals such as copper, lead, and zinc. While the Silver Panic severely impacted the Red Mountain District, by 1896, mines such as the Revenue and American Nettie produced enough gold to lessen the effect of the panic in Ouray.[10] In November of 1893, Johnstone and Mayol sold the hotel to Francis Carney Peter and Joseph Buskirk.[11]

In March of 1895, the *Ouray Herald* announced the re-opening of the Western under the proprietorship of Mrs. Fred

PHOTO COURTESY OF RUTH GREGORY

Blue Room as it appeared in 1893.

PHOTO COURTESY OF RUTH GREGORY

Blue Room as it appeared in 1893.

Mayol and her mother Mrs. Wood. The ladies seemed competent and destined to make the Western the leading hotel of the city. The newspaper felt confident the hotel could prosper if managed properly. The Western Hotel advertised rates of $2.00 and $2.50 a night, and offered special weekly rates. They advertised a central location near the depot, newly furnished rooms, and sample rooms for the display of merchandise by the traveling men.[12] Mrs. Mayol and her mother operated the hotel through January of 1896 and then closed for the winter.[13] In June of 1896, the Western opened again, this time under the management of William Holt and H. P. Foster. Holt and Foster, experienced hotel men, operated the Metropolitan and the Waverly in Denver for almost twelve years. Mr. Foster, a former chef of the famous Southern at St. Louis as well as other elegant hotels, ran the kitchen and dining room. Mr. Holt managed the business.[14] The hotel prospered as the town continued to grow and recover from the Silver Panic.

During this time, Tom Walsh began buying his claims in the Camp Bird Mine. Walsh mined for gold, but the Camp Bird contained other diversified metals. Walsh made his fortune and moved to Washington, but continued to run the mine until he sold it in 1902.[15]

The *Ouray Herald* reported that Holt and Foster spent considerable sums restoring the hotel to its former excellence. They elegantly furnished the hotel with electric lights, electric bells, baths, and other modern improvements. Holt and Foster developed a reputation for fine dining and attractive rooms. Skilled and experienced waiters presided over the dining room, and the Western became a first class hotel for business men and tourists.[16] Among other changes, Holt and Foster reduced the rates to $1.25 and $1.50 a night, and $6.00 to $8.00 per week.[17] They also attached their names to the triangle at the top of the building.

A month after Holt and Foster took over the management of the hotel, an occupant committed suicide from

RALD.

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PROPRIETORS OF

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NEAR TO DEPOT, CENTRALLY LOCATED. SPECIAL RATES BY THE WEEK. REOPENED UNDER NEW MANAGEMENT AND NEWLY FURNISHED.

SAMPLE ROOMS FOR TRAVELING MEN.

OURAY. - - COLO.

Ouray Herald, 1895.

an overdose of morphine in one of the rooms. J. W. McDonald lost his job as bartender at the Beaumont Hotel because of his uncontrolled drinking. A week later, witnesses observed McDonald taking morphine before retiring to his room. His body was discovered with his little boy wrapped in his arms.[18]

The Western Hotel catered to special community occasions such as weddings and company banquets.[19] Traveling sales people often rented a room for advertising their business or trade. They conducted business at the hotel as long as customers responded and when business slowed they moved on to the next town.[20] Mrs. S. M. Bartholmes, a well known business advisor and medical clairvoyant from Denver, set up her business in the Western Hotel. If sickness, death, separation, family problems, stolen or hidden treasures troubled a client she guaranteed that her advice would make the client happier and wiser.[21]

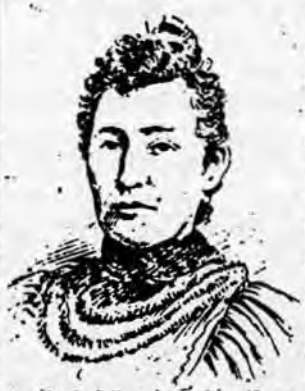
The Western Hotel established a reputation as a medium-priced, respectable hotel. The *Railroad Red Book*, a handbook and guide for travelers, listed three Ouray hotels and their prices: The Western Hotel, the Hotel Wilson, and the Beaumont. The Western's rates were $1.25 to $1.50. The Hotel Wilson, just one block east of the Western on the corner of Main and Seventh Avenue, listed its rates at $1.00 for the European plan and $2.50 for the American plan which included breakfast. These rooms were much less expensive than the Beaumont's which advertised rates of $3.00 and $4.00 a night.[22] The less expensive hotels were more often occupied by travelers and miners, while the Beaumont attracted people with money. Charles Bell, one of the operators of the Camp Bird Mine, rented a suite at the Beaumont as a residence. His wife often ordered T-bone steaks from the local butcher for her dog![23]

Even though the Western maintained a reputation as a respectable hotel, its close neighbors included most of Ouray's dance halls, gambling dens, and the notorious red-light district. The Bon Ton, a dance hall and brothel, stood next to

which an electric current from the phonograph was passed. It gave a new sensation to the deaf person.

[illegible] the Burlington at
G. W. VALLERY, General Agent, Denver, Colo.,
1626 17th St.

Mrs. S. M. Bartholmes,



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A line of warranted Jewelry, Gold Pens, Fancy Goods in latest designs.

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ABSOLUTELY FREE

One $85 Music Box to purchasers of our goods.

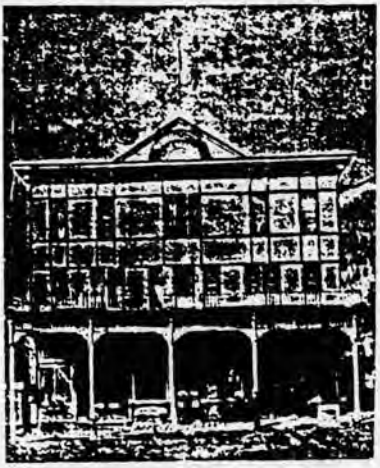
Ouray Herald, December 24, 1896.

the Western, and around the corner on Second Street were at least sixteen houses of ill repute.[24] Although the Western Hotel never served as a house of prostitution, its guests faced a wide variety of tempting, yet taboo, forms of entertainment.

On November 24, 1898, the *Ouray Herald* announced the Holt and Foster purchase of the Merchant's Hotel in Spokane, Washington. Foster left Ouray to manage the Merchant's Hotel and Holt stayed in Ouray to look after the Western. In March of 1899, the *Ouray Herald* reported their departure and a change in management for the Western. Julius Grabow, former manager of the bar at the Western Hotel, became the new proprietor. Later in the month Mr. Ziem joined Grabow in the management of the hotel. According to the *Ouray Herald*, the new proprietors were improving the interior of the hotel by hanging paper, painting, laying new carpets, and re-furnishing many of the bed chambers.[25] In 1899, management shifted again to Thomas Chambers and Company, and then in October of 1900 Mr. C. T. Rogers and his family assumed management of the Western.[26]

Under this management, the Western continued to be a popular place with the community and with hotel guests. The Rogers family worked hard to keep the hotel in top condition. They renovated the hotel by putting new rugs and tapestries in the parlors, and by laying a new wooden floor in the office. The Rogers family moved into a small house next to the hotel because Mr. Rogers wanted a residence that seemed more like a home for his wife and seven children. With seven kids to raise, however, Mr. Rogers found it difficult to live so close to the red-light district. On October 10, 1902, the Ouray Herald printed a city council report in which Mr. Rogers filed a complaint against the places of ill-repute near the hotel. He wanted the council to declare the red-light district a nuisance and force it to move to another location. The complaint was referred to the police, but Ouray was obviously not ready to reform and nothing was done. In October of 1906, Mr. Rogers

WESTERN HOTEL



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Everything First-Class and Service Unsurpassed.

Best Medium Priced Hotel in the San Juan Country.

C. T. Rogers, Manager.

Ouray Herald, October 4, 1890.

PHOTO COURTESY OF RUTH GREGORY

Mr. and Mrs. C. T. Rogers.

and his family moved to Ridgway to run the Mentone Hotel.[26] In 1916, Floro and Maria Flor purchased the hotel from the Buskirk Brothers and the Carney family.[28] From that point, the Flors blest the Western with caring and compassionate stewardship.

The population of Ouray had dropped to about 1200, even though most of the mines were still doing well.[29] The Revenue and the American Nettie continued mining gold. The Camp Bird lay dormant for a couple of years while men completed a tunnel allowing them to bring the ore directly out to the mill. In 1918 they opened the new two mile tunnel.[30] The town did fairly well and many miners needed a place to stay. Occasionally travelers stayed at the Western Hotel, but it served mainly as a boarding house for miners. Maria Flor, known locally as "Ma" Flor, ran the hotel by herself because miner's consumption disabled her husband. A hardworking, respectable, stern, caring, and motherly woman, Maria Flor befriended everyone, expecially "her boys", the miners. The mother of seven childen, she provided time and love for anyone who needed it. Mrs. Flor worked hard to maintain a respectable hotel, and she developed a good working relationship with local business owners. Townspeople of that period who are alive today hold fond memories of her and the Western Hotel.

Marvin Gregory, a local historian, respected citizen and former local butcher, remembers Mrs. Flor as being a "fine old lady" and a good customer who took no nonsense from anyone. She loved chuck steak, and Gregory cringed when she ordered 25 pounds of chuck steak. Cutting that particular cut of meat required a great deal of sawing by hand. To get 25 pounds of chuck steak he sawed from two or more beef shoulders. One day Mrs. Flor sent a miner up to the butcher shop to get some beef liver. She adamantly specified beef liver and not pork liver, which she hated. Gregory seldom acquired enough fresh liver from the local slaughterer to feed all of her miners, so he supplemented his supply with frozen liver. Gregory explained

that the slow freezing method used at that time, changed the look of the meat; the cells looked courser and the color lighter. He sliced the frozen beef liver and hoped Mrs. Flor would not think it was pork liver. Later Mrs. Flor sent one of her boys back to the butcher shop with the sliced meat and a message: "You tell that smart aleck butcher I have been cooking for 50 years and I know a pork liver when I see it!"[31]

Gregory remembers the Western as a hotel for travelers and a place where those on a budget enjoyed lower rates and outstanding meals. Mrs. Flor served meals at a long table, family style, in the dining room. She prided herself on her cooking and advertised her hotel as having the best meals in town.[32]

The Western Hotel bar provided a favorite gathering place for the people of Ouray. The patrons "rubbed elbows" with the people from the red-light district, but the hotel and bar served a good evening crowd in a respectable atmosphere. One of the more colorful regulars, Carl V. "Doc" Bates, gained the reputation of a "good drinking man". Doc Bates wore a big western hat and a gun belt with two guns when he was celebrating. At such times when he got "toasted", he fantasized that he carried on a feud with the marshal. The marshal in Bates' stories was William "Bill" Walker, the local City Marshal and the entire police force of Ouray at that time. Someone usually sent word to Walker that Bates was "gunning" for him. Walker would find him, make certain that Bates appeared to have the advantage, and talk him into going home and sleeping it off.[33] Doc Bates told a lot of stories during those days, and one concerned the flu epidemic during World War I. For two weeks straight Doc Bates did not sleep or untie his shoe laces. He made continuous house calls and sometimes delayed his departure long enough to take a cat nap before going on the next house.[34] During the epidemic, the Western Hotel remained quarantined and it was reported that so many people died, there were not enough coffins to bury all of the bodies.[35]

PHOTO COURTESY OF RUTH GREGORY

Western Hotel Bar, 1955.

The Western Hotel bar was not a rowdy place, but on one occasion Mrs. Flor and her son-in-law, Louis Corrin, became embroiled in a confrontation there. Corrin often drank too much and became violent. Katie, Mrs. Flor's daughter, witnessed the argument and ran towards the office desk where they kept a little gun. Corrin saw her head for the gun and ran as fast as he could out the front door towards Main Street. Katie Flor ran after him and shot at him twice. One bullet hit him smack in the butt.[36]

Mrs. Flor and the Western Hotel survived the Great Depresion even though Ouray lacked money and jobs during that time. World War II soon cured the effects of the depression, not only for Ouray, but the entire country. The war effort required the vast quantities of metal stored in the mountains of Ouray. The mining boom around Ouray meant more jobs than workers. People enjoyed higher paying jobs than anyone locally ever witnessed.[37] The population, which dropped to 731 in 1930, increased at the beginning of World War II.[38] Most major mines prospered during the war. Gold mines stopped producing during the war because the government required no gold for the war effort. Base metals such as lead, copper, and zinc were needed instead. Mines such as the Revenue, Camp Bird, Bachelor, and Idarado operated until the end of the war.[39]

The biggest project in Ouray during World War II, the Treasury Tunnel, began in 1941 to increase efficiency in collecting the ores mined in the Ouray area. Prior to its construction, remote mines such as the Black Bear, the Argentine, the Barstow, the Tomboy, and the Smuggler all required wagons or pack mules to transport the ore. The need of metal for the war effort convinced the government to sponsor a contract to drive the tunnel and connect all other mines to it, giving all the mines the same port of entry and accessibility to the highway. Early in 1945, the government stopped funding the project, and the Newmont Company of New York continued the project as a private enterprise. The Newmont Company

also operated mining ventures in Idaho, and the combination of Colorado and Idaho produced the name, Idarado. The Treasury Tunnel maintained the name Treasury Tunnel, however, in a greater historical sense, it became the Idarado.[40]

As the hotel business prospered, Mrs. Flor continued to do business with people of the community. Frank Massard, the local pharmacist, remembered Mrs. Flor as a wise woman who spoke with an Italian accent. He recalled the Western as a "working man's" hotel. Massard, explaining the social stratification of Ouray during this era, referred to the mine owners, bankers, and people with money as the "four-hundreds" - the elite. Social stratification divided the town into the upper end and the lower end. The upper end was east of Main Street and the lower end was west of Main Street. The Western Hotel, located west of Main Street, was considered a lower class hotel.[41] Mrs. Flor's youngest child suffered a difficult time in school becasuse he was an Italian from the wrong side of town.[42]

Rosie Halls, who worked at the Western Hotel all through her teen years, recalled that culture and language separated the people of Ouray. The Halls family, originally from northern Italy, seldom mingled with the southern Italians. According to Halls, people from southern Italy displayed a different temperament than people from northern Italy, almost as though they came from different countries. Financial status caused further separation between the Italians. The more prosperous Italians lived in the southeast segment of town on Vinegar Hill and, according to Halls, these people cared little for poor people.[43]

The hard times affected Rosie Halls and her family. In 1925, twelve-year-old Halls sought work at the Western Hotel to help support her family. She worked at the hotel in exchange for room and board. Halls remembered Mrs. Flor as a nice woman for whom to work. A strong-tempered woman, the motherly Flor seldom became angry. A typical day for Halls started at 4:00 or 5:00 a.m. when she set the long table

in the dining room for the miners' breakfast. Halls then fixed the men a sack lunch to take with them. She remembered hating to fix their lunches and the men hating to eat them. Halls recalled the difficulty in making a good lunch. A sack lunch usually consisted of a bologna, egg, or ham sandwich, an apple, and a piece of pie. While Halls fixed lunches, Mrs. Flor made a big breakfast of eggs, hot cakes, biscuits and gravy, and always some kind of meat. After the miners finished breakfast Halls cleared the table, set it for supper, and then washed all of the breakfast dishes. Drying the glasses to make them shine, represented a task that Halls disliked because it took too long.[44]

Rosie Halls left for school about 8:00 a.m., then returned to the hotel at noon to help Mrs. Flor serve lunch to the men who stayed at the hotel during the day. Halls ate her lunch, did the dishes, and went back to school at 1:00 p.m. After school, she returned to the hotel and did her homework on a little table behind the stove in the kitchen. When she finished her homework, she peeled potatoes, made beds, and scrubbed the bathrooms. On one occasion as she went into a room to make up the bed, she walked in on a man and a woman in bed together. Halls recalls being so embarrassed she wanted to die.[45]

Mrs. Flor and Rosie Halls began preparing supper at 4:00 p.m. Mrs. Flor made sure suppers included meat and potatoes. People came from Grand Junction to savor her "cannon ball" dumplings, which Floor prepared every Sunday.[46] Mrs. Flor made her Italian dumplings, called canederli, using salami, eggs, bread, parsley, bacon, milk, and flour. Thelma Flor, Mrs. Flor's daughter-in-law, watched many times as Mrs. Flor mixed all the ingredients together, formed it into big balls, and then boiled the dumplings in beef broth. Bigger hands formed bigger dumplings, and Mrs. Flor had very big hands.[47] Halls made all the desserts, such as pies, cobblers, and puddings, because Mrs. Flor disliked preparing them. After supper Halls cleared the table and did the dishes. By the time

she finished at 9:00 or 10:00 p.m. she was very tired. Her hands often dried and cracked from washing dishes as she had no money to buy hand cream. Frank Massard, the pharmacist, sold her "Hines Honey and Almond Cream" hand lotion on credit. She promished that when she got a tip from the miners she would pay for the lotion.[48]

In the evenings, everyone relaxed and enjoyed several different kinds of entertainment. After supper Mrs. Flor went out to the lobby, sat at her table, and played solitare. She often asked Halls to go to the drug store and buy her a dime's worth of peppermint candy. After supper the miners sat around the stove in the bar and talked, drank, and played cards. Mrs. Flor and her son Tuffy both bartended, and Mrs. Flor's daughter, Evelyn, played the piano in the dining room. The neighborhood prostitutes sometimes came to the Western for supper. They arrived dressed in nice clothes and fine jewelry. Halls remembered them as very polite women who always kept their place.[49]

Rosie Halls worked at the Western Hotel until she finished the seventh grade. She moved back home with her parents until graduating from the eighth grade at Piedmont School. The one-room, eight-grade school eight miles north of Ouray, graduated only two students that year and Halls was one of them. During Halls absence from the hotel, her sisters, Ann and Vicki, took turns working at the hotel in her place. After eighth grade graduation, Halls went back to work for Mrs. Flor at the Western.[50]

The Western Hotel prospered during Halls employment. Thelma Flor attributed the prosperity to its proprietor. Mrs. Flor loved her job and never knew a stranger. She loved the people and "her boys" brought her a lot of joy. The men always came to her for advice and sympathy.[51] Halls left the Western when she turned eighteen. She made a lot of friends while she worked there and the miners were really nice to her, but she was never allowed to date them. Halls is grateful because she learned a lot about cooking and keeping

house, but more importantly she learned to be a kind, caring, and compassionate woman.[52]

This caring quality seemed a common characteristic among women in the hotel business. Mary Fedel grew up at the Belvedere Hotel, down the street from the Western. The Belvedere boarded the railroad men, because of its location nearest the depot. Fedel worked for her mother washing, ironing, and making beds at the Belvedere. Even though she worked hard, Fedel enjoyed life because of the good people around her. Fedel developed a lot of special relationships with the men who stayed at the Belvedere, and they all seemed like family.[53]

During this era, when men left their families to find work, women like Mrs. Flor, Rosie Halls, and Mary Fedel made the men part of their families and gave them a home away from home. Fedel explained the importance for women to be hard working individuals, yet to maintain nurturing and feminine qualities. Even though the hotel business brought little money to these women, Fedel said they pulled through all those years just fine because they had each other. Fedel remembered that Mrs. Flor never turned anyone away. It mattered little if they had money or not, no one ever left the Western hungry.[54]

Mrs. Flor continued to operate the Western during the 1930s and after the death of her husband in 1931. The boom period in Ouray levelled off and business in the town stabilized. After World War II, the hotel became too much for Mrs. Flor and her family persuaded her to leave the business.[55] The hotel remained vacant until 1944 when she rented it furnished to Charles Jones for $50.00 a month. Jones continued to run the hotel as a boarding house for miners with the help of his wife, Marian, and Jessie Perotti. Mr. Jones did all of the cooking for the restaurant which was open to miners and the public. He sold beer and whiskey for 25 cents each and "all you could eat" family style meals for 75 cents. The miners paid $60.00 a month for room and board.[56]

Mrs. Flor, pleased with the way Jones managed the hotel, offered to sell it to him for $2,400. Jones declined, but told her of another man who wanted to buy the hotel. Mrs. Flor agreed to the transaction as long as the buyer was a man of good nature. Jones sold out to Mr. Bartol for $2,500, good will, plus $5,000 for the remaining inventory. Mr. Bartol failed at the hotel business after three months, and following unsuccessful efforts by short-term managers, the Western closed during the late 1950s.[57] During this time, the city of Ouray experienced rapid change. It changed from a mining town to a tourist town in a ten-year span. Johnny Johnson hoped to make money from the new tourist boom when he purchased the hotel from Maria Flor in 1961.[58] The hotel re-opened as the Western Hotel and Museum. The museum advertised a "Wild West" theme, and included displays of the rooms of old miners and exhibits devoted to popular Western heros like Tom Mix. The museum business failed to become the tourist attraction that Johnson anticipated, perhaps because the museum failed to represent the local area. The Museum stayed open for approximately ten years and then Johnny auctioned off his museum collection.[59]

Vittorio Ghitti Volpe, of Italy, bought the Western Hotel in 1973 under the name of the Telluride Management Corporation.[60] Rumors described Volpe as a rich Count who bought the hotel, sight unseen, as a gift for an acquaintance, Linda Harvey. Stephan and Karen Kllanxhja, of Grand Junction, managed the Western for Volpe. They lived at the hotel and renovated it in hopes of opening the first floor as a bar and restaurant. During the four years the Kllanxhjas operated the Western, they met frequently with Volpe's agent in Denver, and occasionly met with Volpe at the Brown Palace Hotel in Denver.[61]

Stephan Kllanxhja and Volpe signed a 25-year lease with the understanding that Volpe would provide the money to rewire the hotel and bring it up to code. The Kllanxhjas stripped old paint from the bar and chandeliers, obtained a

PHOTO COURTESY OF RUTH GREGORY

Hotel under the propriertorship of Johnny Johnson.

liquor license, and gained the respect and encouragement of the entire community. Volpe failed to provide enough money and the dream of opening the hotel never materialized for the Kllanxhjas. They later sued Volpe for breach of contract and won.[62]

In 1982, Linda and Larry Rattan, Roberta Peterson, and Robert and Donna Baer purchased the Western.[63] It re-opened with a Gala Benefit Dinner and Ball on May 28, 1983. The new owners worked hard to restore the hotel and maintain the frontier flavor of its earlier days. The Rattan management featured a family style restaurant that served Mexican food in the Monte Alta Room, and a bar that resembled a mining town saloon. During this time, the Rattans made available only seven of the second-floor rooms because the rooms on the third floor failed to meet certain codes. The third floor rooms remain closed to the public. In 1988, the Rattans sold their shares of the hotel to their partners.[64]

Donna Baer and Roberta Peterson operated the Western Hotel during the summer season, from late May to late September. The only heat in the building came from three potbelly stoves located in the bar, dining room, and the side dining room. Because of the lack of heat upstairs, the hotel season depended on mild weather. The new operators renovated the hotel again to meet the needs of a booming tourist town. The old three-story white building received a fresh coat of paint and an outside deck with a beautiful view of Mount Abrams. All fourteen rooms on the second floor opened, including two larger rooms overlooking the balcony, which were beautifully decorated with antiques and private baths. A fine collection of antiques furnished the remaining rooms. These rooms shared a bath at the end of the hall. Hotel guests enjoyed a continental breakfast on the balcony in the cool mountain air. Downstairs, lunch was served on the deck, in the bar, or in the side dining room. The menu featured Mexican food, hamburgers, buffalo burgers, pasta, and a wide variety of salads. In the Monte Alta dining room,

guests enjoyed a true dining experience featuring entrees such as elk, quail, duck, buffalo, pheasant, and steak.

The Western saw a change of ownership again in the spring of 1991. Tom and Tammy Kenning and Carolyn Moorehead of Denver bought the hotel and converted it into a bed and breakfast. The Ouray County Historical Society honored the Western Hotel by commemorating its hundred year anniversary and deeming it historically accurate and unchanged from 100 years ago. The hotel is now a member of the Bed and Breakfast Innkeepers of Colorado and application has been made to be on the National Historic Register.[65]

The Western has witnessed several changes under the new ownership. Tourists enjoy the Western's charm all year long thanks to baseboard, hot water heat installed in most of the upstairs rooms. Hotel guests also enjoy a fine breakfast every morning featuring fresh fruit and homemade bread. Entrees include pecan waffles, french toast with blueberry syrup, green chili quiche, buckwheat pancakes and sausage, or sausage casserole. Lunch and dinner, served in the bar and outside on the deck, feature Mexican food, sandwiches, hamburgers, soup and salad. Following the meal, tourists enjoy the Victorian Musical Review. This melodrama tells about the history of Ouray and represents the music and dress of the early period. The Western has also added a jewelry and fine arts boutique featuring quality pieces and fine craftsmanship.[66] The new proprietors have made many small, but necessary repairs to the hotel. Future plans include renovating several suites and adding managment living quarters to the third floor.[67]

The Western Hotel prides itself in maintaining its historic excellence and in creating a warm atmosphere for all who visit. Throughout its history, the city of Ouray witnessed many changes. Ouray changed from an early mining town full of raw wealth, and eager people looking to strike it rich, to a tourist town known to thousands as the "Little Switzerland of America". Along with the city, the Western Hotel itself

changed, from a boarding house located near the red-light district, to an elegant hotel and restaurant serving hundreds of summer tourists. The Western Hotel, with all its charm and character, represents one of the finest historical features of Colorado's Western Slope.

The author wishes to exprss her sincere appreciation for the time these people took to share their knowledge and experiences: Mary Fedel, Thelma Flor, Doris Gregory, Rosie Halls, Karen and Stephan Kllanxja, and Frank Massard. The author would like to especially thank Marvin Gregory for his never-ending support, time, and knowledge. Mr. Gregory should be commended for his scholarly devotion to Western Colorado history.

Laura Kuklish graduated from Mesa State College in December of 1991, Cum Laude, with a B.A. in Selected Studies-History/Elementary Education.

PHOTO COURTESY OF MARVIN GREGORY

Western Hotel, 1991.

NOTES

[1]*Solid Muldoon*, 2 January 1891.
[2]Marvin Gregory. Interview by author. 30 September 1990, Ouray, CO.
[3]Doris Gregory. *The Western Hotel.* Unpublished manuscript, work in progress. Ouray, CO.
[4]Marvin Gregory interview.
[5]Doris Gregory manuscript.
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BACK ISSUES

Vol. 1 #1 Hard Times But Good Times: Grand Junction Women During the Great Depression
Recollections of the Redlands, 1920-1974

#2 Uncompahgre Statesman: The Life of Ouray

#3 The Grand Junction Town Company and the Land Dispute with William Keith
Book Review - The Great Heritage: A Pictorial History of Grand Junction
The Avalon Theater

#4 The Grand River Ditch
Recollections of Naturita

Vol. 2 #1 The Roan Creek Toll Road
Harvesting Peaches with German Prisoners of War
Historical Notes, Museum of Western Colorado

#2 Birds of Mesa County
Crawford: A Good Little Town
Chinese in Early Grand Junction

#3 Reminiscences of Early Life in Colorado

#4 The Schiesswohl Building: An Economic Barometer of Grand Junction Business Activity 1908-1934
Book Review - The Telluride Story
The New Deal Program as Seen from Loma
The Peach Festival 1887-1909, A Celebration of the Land

Vol. 3 #1 Volunteer to Professional: A History of the Grand Junction Fire Department

#2 "A Monument for Good in the World and the Glory of God": The Parachute Home Culture Club
The Little Empire of the Western Slope: Boosterism in the Early Grand Valley

#3 Development of Grand Junction and the Colorado River Valley to Palisade from 1881-1931, Part 1

#4 Development of Grand Junction and the Colorado River Valley to Palisade from 1881-1931, Part 2

Vol. 4 #1 The Ku Klux Klan in Grand Junction 1924-1927

#2 The Schmidt Family Hardware Store and Grand Junction, A Partnership
Early History of the Grand Junction High School Band
Transcendental Twisted Trees and Enos Mills

#3 The Crawford Mill
The Survival of Judaism in a Far Western Town: A Brief History of the Jewish Community in Grand Junction

#4 Archaeological Investigations at Battlement Mesa
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