

"A GOOD LAND: GUNNISON"

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History 491

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January 1972

## PREFACE

The American West has long held a special fascination for Americans. Throughout the nineteenth century, Americans rushed to the area for the plunder of mountainsides, profiting from the plunder, adventure, and the rugged and unparalleled beauty of the Rockies. Americans today frequent the West examining both the teeming cities and derelict shanties these early fortune hunters left behind them. During an examination of the early West, its people, and its tales, one raises the question as to why some communities lasted and others faded or died. The investigation of the viability of any community will be a complex one involving the elements of its people, its internal structure, and the pertinence of its surroundings. This is the study of Gunnison, both an extremely unique town, and yet, one having the characteristics that any community must build in order to survive.

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A good land, a land of brooks  
of water, of fountains and depths  
that spring out of valleys and hills.

A land wherein thou shalt eat  
bread without scarceness, thou  
shalt not lack anything in it;  
a land whose stones are iron,  
and out whose hills thou  
mayest dig money.

Deuteronomy VIII: 7-9 <sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>A. P. Nelson, Gunnison County, Colorado (Pitkin, Colorado, 1916?),  
p. 38.

In 1853 a small group of men descended cautiously from the mountains of the Continental Divide. For centuries the Western Slope of Colorado had known only the elements and the Indians. These men were to bring the first of a new era to the rich mountains and the valleys beyond.

It was Captain John William Gunnison and his army survey teams who had entered the Ute domain for the purpose of surveying for a railroad route through the Rocky Mountains to the Pacific thus opening the area to white expansion. Gunnison, himself, and several members of his party were not to return from the expedition. They were killed by a band of unfriendly Utes but the remainder of the survey team returned with tales of the riches and beauty of the Western Slope.<sup>2</sup> In 1861, William Gilpin, governor of the territory of Colorado, named one of the most beautiful areas, the Gunnison River and Valley, after his personal friend and the man who had first surveyed and made it known to white men.<sup>3</sup>

The valley, which was once a favorite pony pasture and racing grounds of the Utes, is broad and lush.<sup>4</sup> Its elevation is approximately 7,500 feet and is surrounded by mountains towering to 14,000 feet.<sup>5</sup> Directly north lie the Elk Mountains and forty miles south the Sawtooth

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<sup>2</sup>Sidney Jocknick, Early Days on the Western Slope of Colorado (Glorieta, New Mexico: The Rio Grand Press, Inc., 1968), p. 3.

<sup>3</sup>The Gunnison Review, October 15, 1881, p. 3.

<sup>4</sup>Lois Borland, et al., Historical Sketches of Early Gunnison. Bulletin of the Colorado State Normal School, Vol. V, No. 3, June 1, 1916, p. 25.

<sup>5</sup>Betty Wallace, History With the Hide Off (Denver: Sage Books, 1965), p. 7.

Mountain. To the west are the Palisades and towering Mt. Mackintosh while to the east are the Tomichi Valley and Monarch Pass rising to 11,302 feet.<sup>6</sup> Many streams flow into the area, the largest of them being the Gunnison River and Tomichi Creek.<sup>7</sup> The climate is mild in the valley in comparison to the surrounding mountains. An early resident extolling its potential as a health resort reported the air to be "dry, clear and bracing," and the winters to be . . . simply delightful." The thermometer often goes below zero, but the air is so dry and still, that the cold is not felt. But little snow falls in the valley around Gunnison. During the past winter the snow was never more than a foot deep.<sup>8</sup>

The white man first touched the area in the form of a "cow camp" attached to the Los Pinos Indian Agency. It was "permanently" established in the Gunnison Valley in 1871 and was taken over by Alonzo Hartman in 1872. Several years later he quit the agency and began raising stock thus becoming one of the area's first settlers.<sup>9</sup> However, the true founder of the city of Gunnison is "Professor" Sylvester Richardson who after seeing the area on a geological expedition returned to Denver to stimulate interest in its agricultural and mineral potential. Richardson foresaw Gunnison as the "hub of a wheel" with mining regions encircling

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<sup>6</sup>Wallace, ibid.

<sup>7</sup>Wallace, ibid.

<sup>8</sup>M. G. Mallowney, Gunnison City: The Future Metropolis of the Western Slope (Gunnison: The Board of Trade of Gunnison City, 1882), p. 7.

<sup>9</sup>C. E. Hagie, "Gunnison in "arly Days," The Colorado Magazine, Vol. VIII, July 1931, p. 121.

it at a radius of twenty-five to forty miles.<sup>10</sup> He gathered about thirty persons and set out the following spring of 1874 to found Richardson Colony. There was some fear that the proposed site might be on Ute land but a survey showed it to be several miles east of the 1868 reservation line. With the exception of a few individuals, by that winter the town was deserted due to news of strikes at Lake City and Leadville.<sup>11</sup> In 1877 when Gunnison County was separated from Lake County, of which it had been a part,<sup>12</sup> there was another attempt to organize a town company, but due to lack of interest, it failed. Throughout its early struggles to survive from 1874-1880, Richardson remained its only constant resident.<sup>13</sup> By 1879, however, the towns that had drawn her original population were washing out and minerals were being discovered in the Gunnison area.<sup>14</sup> On June 5, 1879 a new town company was organized. That winter it split into two factions, East and West; nevertheless, the incorporation of Gunnison was completed on March 1, 1880 with F. G. Kubler elected as the first mayor.<sup>15</sup>

It was here that the real fate of Gunnison began to be determined. Her inception was similar to that of multitudes of other mining region

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<sup>10</sup>Borland, et al., op. cit., p. 10.

<sup>11</sup>Sylvester Richardson, "History of Gunnison," The Gunnison Review, May 29, 1880, p. 1.

<sup>12</sup>Wallace, op. cit., p. 18.

<sup>13</sup>Hagie, op. cit., p. 124.

<sup>14</sup>Borland, et al., op. cit., p. 19

<sup>15</sup>Wallace, op. cit., p. 19-24.

towns throughout the western United States. Yet, Gunnison's location and surroundings gave her a uniqueness in the area that contributed to her viability for nearly a century. Her function changed but it was always because of her central location that she prospered. Gunnison experienced her big "boom" period during the early 1880's.<sup>16</sup> She was a vital supply center and touch of civilization for the sprawling mining camps surrounding her. She was also important to the growing cattle industry in the valley and to the railroad as a central point from which to branch out and reach the mountain mining camps and valley stock raisers.

It was mining fever that gave Gunnison its inception and that was the cause of her early growth and boom. It was for mining that the railroad, the business men, and the eastern capitalist came. The Gunnison Review, August 20, 1881 reported "The question is sometimes asked, 'What is there to make Gunnison a town?' We answer, 'The surrounding mining camps which are being opened in every direction.'<sup>17</sup> Indeed, dozens of little camps sprang up with the major camps of Pitkin, Gothic, Ruby and Crested Butte an average of thirty miles distant. The Philadelphia Inquirer stated in an interview with a traveler through Gunnison country, "These places are all

These places are all rich mining camps and are tributary, which makes it Gunnison the great supply camp or distributing depot, not only for Gunnison county but for the entire San Juan country. The place is growing rapidly and it is believed will boast a population of 10,000 next season.<sup>18</sup>

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Borland, et al., op. cit., p. 19.

<sup>16</sup>Borland, et al., op. cit., p. 19.

<sup>17</sup>The Gunnison Review, August 20, 1880, p. 2.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., November 6, 1880, p. 1.

Although it never reached such growth, Gunnison did have much of what mining areas needed. With its 13 rivers and creeks, it had abundant water power for manufacturing and was only a short downhill grade for most of the mining communities. It was, therefore, also a natural rail depot.<sup>19</sup> Gunnison country contains an astonishing variety of minerals. One source lists over twenty-five in varying degrees of abundance, among them being: coal (anthracite, bituminous and coking), copper, fire clay, gold, granite (used to build Denver capitol building), iron, lead, limestone, marble (of all shades and of better quality than Italy's, used to build the Lincoln Memorial), slate and tungsten.<sup>20</sup> At the National Mining and Industrial Exposition in Denver in August of 1882, Gunnison County received the first premium for gold and silver and the first and second premiums for its iron and coal.<sup>21</sup> With this abundance of minerals in such high quality, citizens and eastern financiers dubbed potential Gunnison as the future "Second Pittsburg"<sup>22</sup> and the "Future Metropolis of the Western Slope."<sup>23</sup> They had great hopes for a smelter, iron and even glass factories but due to personal financial failures, decline in the value of silver and insufficient profit, Gunnison failed to become the city of black smoke and moneyed prosperity that its early inhabitants

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<sup>19</sup>Ibid., May 7, 1881, p. 2.

<sup>20</sup>Nelson, op. cit., p. 48-49.

<sup>21</sup>The Gunnison Review, September 24, 1881, p. 2.

<sup>22</sup>Borland, et al., op. cit., p. 29.

<sup>23</sup>Mallowney, op. cit., p. 1.



had dreamed of.<sup>24</sup>

Gunnison grew initially due to the mining in the area. The minerals brought the people, business and money investments but as the mining industry faded and no longer required her banks, stores, rail and potential industry, Gunnison's location and solid foundation saved her from ghost town status.

In conjunction with mining in making Gunnison's location important was the opening of the Ute Reservation. Situated just a few miles east of the Reservation line, Gunnison had been called the "key" to the riches and vast expanse of lands that were to be opened upon the removal of the Utes.<sup>25</sup> When the Meeker Massacre occurred in September of 1879 and it was subsequently established that the Utes were to be removed, miners and homesteaders were jubilant. The Gunnison Review on July 19, 1880 reported that "an army of 25,000 prospectors and miners are in readiness for a grand march to the Reservation." The people of Gunnison saw the opening of the Reservation as "a great advantage to Gunnison and will make a big jobbing trade for the Gunnison merchant." The Ute Reservation bill passed on July 28, 1882 and the towns of Delta, Montrose and Grand Junction and surrounding mining areas flourished with Gunnison as the threshold.<sup>26</sup> Occurring in the early '80's, this key position helped boost Gunnison's boom period and bring the attention of the state and

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<sup>24</sup>Borland, et al., op. cit., p. 27-29, 52-53.

<sup>25</sup>The Gunnison Review, November 27, 1880, p. 2.

<sup>26</sup>Lois Borland, "Ho for the Reservation: Settlement of the Western Slope," The Colorado Magazine, Vol. XXIX, January 1952, p. 56-59.

nation to the developing importance of the area.

While the mines and Reservation were of temporary and boom influence, Gunnison country also had a flourishing stock industry that lent to the growth and, more importantly, the stability of the city. The cattlemen were the first to begin to develop the potential of the Gunnison valley. The first of the ranchers began their ventures between 1874 and 1876, about the same time that the first settlers under Richardson arrived. Some, like Alonzo Hartman, Sidney Jocknick and James P. Kelly, began by running the Ute Reservation "cow camp" as early as 1872 and later branching into stock raising on their own.<sup>27</sup> Another of the early ranchers, W. B. Munson, is credited with introducing the first Hereford cattle into the area. From this beginning has developed the high grade of "Gunnison beef" for which the area is well noted. Although the cattle industry was over shadowed from 1879-1885 by the mining boom and high hopes for an iron and steel industry, it grew steadily. The growth of Gunnison was advantageous for both the cattlemen and Gunnison. The stockmen supplied the town with ample beef and a stable citizenry. Although many lived out on ranches, they were prominent men in Gunnison's growth both in local government, society and as stable business assets much too hardy to pick up and leave during the winter or a rough year. Alonzo Hartman established the first post office in 1876 and remained the postmaster for many years.

Although the flourishing prosperity of expanding Gunnison was beneficial to the rancher by providing him a market, supply station and

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<sup>27</sup>Borland, et al., op. cit., p. 45.

refuge for comparative rest and luxuries, ranching was very hard work and only the strongest remained. They experienced such hardships as the bad winters of 1879-81, loss of stock, and scarcity of hay. The women worked as well as the men; still, a few hard years showed them that not only must most of the whole family work but they must form cooperatives with the neighboring ranches in the valley. "Cattle pools" were formed to protect the stock from loss, theft and predators during the months spent on summer pasture in the high remote mountains. They also combined their efforts in harvesting the lush and abundant grass of the valley for their winter hay supply.<sup>28</sup> They prospered as improvements were made, such as the first thresher which was brought in by a rancher in 1887,<sup>29</sup> and the introduction of shipping cattle to the main markets at Denver, Kansas City, Omaha and Chicago by rail. The first shipment was made on the Rio Grande in 1885. Thus as the mining boom faded, the cattlemen kept their markets alive through expansion and both their and Gunnison's future stable. It was these same determined, courageous, and independent residents of Gunnison that stabilized and sustained the valley when silver was demonetized in 1893 and the mining influence gradually disappeared. Indeed, in 1899, thirty-four of the one hundred largest taxpayers were ranchers.<sup>30</sup>

The Gunnison County Stockgrowers Association was formed on May 10,

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<sup>28</sup>Wallace, op. cit., p. 74-77.

<sup>29</sup>Borland, et al., op. cit., p. 28.

<sup>30</sup>Wallace, op. cit., p. 77-78, 81.

1884,<sup>31</sup> and has been one of the factors contributing towards their progressive stability and continuity. Originally formed for cooperative help and protection in dealing with rustling, sheep disease, and natural calamity, it was an effective instrument then and continued in an expanding capacity. There was little rustling in the 1880's and still less ever reached a court of law. The ranchers in their fight for survival dealt with offenders harshly in order to protect their interests. There was substantial initial resentment of any sheep in the area due to the cattlemen's traditional complaint that they ruined the grass. A group known as the "Night Riders" organized to keep the offenders out of the valley. One of their night rides left a flock of 5,000 sheep shot-- occasionally the shepherd met the same fate.<sup>32</sup>

Time, however, forced the ranchers to adapt their principles as the creation of the Gunnison National Forest in May 1905 made open range rights part of the past era. The ranchers were forced to cut their herds to conform with grazing proportions and to raise the standard and quality of their beef to one of the finest in the country. In 1945 a local rancher named Dan Thornton sold two bulls at the Denver Western Stockshow for \$50,000 apiece. The ranchers were also forced to diversify and raise other stock--sheep, hogs and horses as they were often more economical. Because of the adaptability and stableness of these residents, large herds of beautiful white faced cattle are still prominent in the

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<sup>31</sup>The Gunnison Daily Review-Press, May 22, 1884, p. 1.

<sup>32</sup>Wallace, op. cit., p. 78-79.

valley and have helped to retain Gunnison as a community. Whereas once rodeos were held in the main streets between rival ranches, the annual Cattleman's Days has replaced them and the ranchers are still prominent in the area.<sup>33</sup>

As well as being a supply center for the mining, Reservation, and cattle interests, Gunnison due to its central location, was a natural depot for roads and railways. It was in this respect that Gunnison most nearly fitted Richardson's concept of it being the hub of the wheel. The surrounding mining towns and ranches needed a central location for smelting their ores or for shipping ores and goods to the east. Toll roads were the first means of transportation to come into existence and were begun as early as 1875.<sup>34</sup> Over these roads traveled the horses and wagons that brought men, goods, and business to Gunnison. The David Wood Freight Outfitter was located in Gunnison in 1881. It had a large volume, 500,000 pounds daily and kept its five hundred mules, oxen and horses in constant service hauling building materials, ore, fuel, and goods to and from the mining camps and Gunnison.<sup>35</sup> In a second realm of road transportation, the first edition of the Gunnison Review reported that the Barlow and Sanderson Stage Line had just purchased ten lots in

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<sup>33</sup>Ibid., p. 79-81.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., p. 19.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., p. 35.

Gunnison and planned to put up the depot and stable very soon.<sup>36</sup> For two years this stage line supplied passenger and mail transportation to Gunnison. From these, individuals obtained their transportation to the outlying mining camps or many stayed in Gunnison.<sup>37</sup> Thus, it was necessary for most people going to the Gunnison country to pass through Gunnison itself, boosting her business and population.

The freight and stage lines were an integral part of a western town's infancy, but they were forced to move further on into unsettled frontier as the town grew and demanded the efficiency and convenience of the railroad. The toll roads continued to be important during the building of the railroads into the area as they linked Gunnison to the furthest point of construction. The Gunnison News reported in late August of 1880, as the Denver and Rio Grande had begun earnest and rapid progression, that the toll road from Gunnison to Buena Vista was near completion thus providing the Gunnison area with the shortest route to the functioning railroad.<sup>38</sup>

It was quickly apparent to the rail companies during the summer of 1880 that the Gunnison boom was in full swing. A railroad to the central point of Gunnison and some branches to mining towns was essential and would soon be extended into the Reservation. Gunnison, lying in the central portion of the valley and a proven natural supply center was, of

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<sup>36</sup> The Gunnison Review, May 15, 1880, p. 3.

<sup>37</sup> Wallace, op. cit., p. 34.

<sup>38</sup> The Gunnison News, August 21, 1880, p. 3.

course, to be the initial goal to reach and was then to be the point from which to branch out. The race into the valley was between the Denver and Rio Grande and the South Park-Union Pacific. The latter chose a shorter route and tunneled directly through a mountain. The completion of the Alpine Tunnel, 1771 feet long and completely shored with California redwood, was a magnificent engineering accomplishment. The Denver and Rio Grande reached Gunnison first in August 9, 1881, and the South Park more than a year later on September 1, 1882.<sup>39</sup> The town was jubilant and held a great celebration, which lasted all night in the streets of Gunnison, in honor of the event. The future of the town seemed insured as plans were made for the location of the freight yards and round house.<sup>40</sup> The narrow gauge railway was essential to Gunnison's growth and the survival of the mining community. Its arrival established the importance of Gunnison's central location and its growing permanence as a solid community was recognized. The railroad served a vital function at the time, but with the mining interests fading and new methods of transportation becoming more effective, the South Park began phasing out in 1911 and the Denver and Rio Grande had closed by 1955; when the Big Mine at Crested Butte shut down. During its time, however, it was the safest, fastest, and most reliable mode of cargo or passenger transportation (the only train robbery occurred July 14, 1902) and was essential to Gunnison's initial growth and development.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>39</sup>Wallace, op. cit., p. 65-69.

<sup>40</sup>The Gunnison Review, August, 13, 1881, p. 2.

<sup>41</sup>Wallace, op. cit., p. 69.

Aside from Gunnison's surroundings and her central location there was another factor essential in the consideration of her strength and viability as a permanent community, that was her internal structure. It is imperative to note the character of Gunnison's early inhabitants and the type of community they set out to establish. It was largely in their futuristic insight that the fate of Gunnison was to lie.

In beginning to study Gunnison's growth and internal structure, one would require some idea of the size of Gunnison's population and her increase. Richardson reported that only five of the original thirty colonists were left after the first winter.<sup>42</sup> The town grew from 1876 to 1880 until various sources gave the population during the summer of the first boom year to be between one and two thousand.<sup>43</sup> Due to the transient population of prospectors it would have been difficult to have obtained an accurate estimate, thus the discrepancy. The following year, the summer of 1881, there was a significant boost in population even before the entrance of the Denver and Rio Grande simplified transportation. Reports have the population at between 2,500 and 3,500.<sup>44</sup> The highest figure recorded was 5,000 in 1883, many of whom were considered floating population. With the end of Gunnison's boom era in 1885 the population

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<sup>42</sup>The Gunnison Review, June 5, 1880, p. 1.

<sup>43</sup>Borland, et al., op. cit., p. 54 (Spring of 1880, population 2000)  
Wallace, op. cit., p. 25, (July 10, 1880, population 1,000)  
The Gunnison Democrat, August 4, 1880, p. 3, (population 882)

<sup>44</sup>George A. Root, "Gunnison in the Early 'Eighties," The Colorado Magazine, Vol. IX, November 1932, p. 205. (Population 3,500).  
The Gunnison Review, May 7, 1881, p. 2. (Population 2,500).



slowly declined to 1,200 in 1900 and 1,026 in 1910.<sup>45</sup> During the early part of the century there seemed little to attract people due to the mining failure. The solid ranching and business interests remained however, until Gunnison's location brought to it a new kind of prosperity. Today the population is 4,613 (1970 census).

These figures of population alone are not sufficient for understanding the community, rather the type of people they represent is most important. The Gunnison Review of June 14, 1880 lists Gunnison's population as 850, 95 of which were women and 75 were children, 48 of that 75 being of school age. It also credits the town with 101 members of Gunnison churches. From the lists of arriving people and local news of established residents, it appears that most business and professional men had their families with them or they soon joined them.<sup>46</sup> In addition there are numerous newspaper comments to that effect. This statement is from the Gunnison News of October 9, 1880, "Whoever saw so many children in a new town in Colorado as there is (sic) in Gunnison."<sup>47</sup> Another example is from the Gunnison Review, June 26, 1880, "It is surprising to see so many ladies in West Gunnison. Most of them came lately and felt somewhat discouraged when they did not have nice houses to live in . . . but this thing has changed."<sup>48</sup> The town quickly saw the necessity for

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<sup>45</sup>Wallace, op. cit., p. 56.

<sup>46</sup>The Gunnison Review, June 19, 1880, p. 2.

<sup>47</sup>The Gunnison News, October 9, 1880, p. 3.

<sup>48</sup>The Gunnison Review, June 28, 1880, p. 2.

schools, churches, and nice houses which their families required and they were promptly erected. Indeed, it had been intended from its very founding to be a solid, peaceful town and as Richardson stated "a desirable place for heads of families to raise their children."<sup>49</sup> Business began early to advertise dainty luxuries for the ladies' consumption and in May of 1880, Mrs. J. W. Rogers happily announced to the Gunnison Review that she was about to open her dress shop and millinery.<sup>50</sup> It was primarily due to the early presence of families and their demands that Gunnison got such a solid start as a functional community.

The population appeared to be predominately white and Protestant but according to newspaper reports there were some Italians connected with the railroad,<sup>51</sup> some Chinese laundrymen,<sup>52</sup> Jewish businessmen<sup>53</sup> and Negroes. In May of 1880 the Gunnison Review carried this statement, "Only one solitary colored man resides in West Gunnison. He works hard, keeps bachelor's hall, is intelligent and happy, and votes the Republican ticket."<sup>54</sup> There was considerable animosity expressed between Republicans and Democrats, and East and West Gunnison than in any racial issue. The only questionable factor lies in the point that of Gunnison's only two hangings one victim was an Italian and the other a Negro.<sup>55</sup> This may

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<sup>49</sup>Ibid., May 22, 1880, p. 1.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid., May 29, 1880, p. 3.

<sup>51</sup>Ibid., October 29, 1881, p. 2.

<sup>52</sup>Ibid., September 25, 1881, p. 2.

<sup>53</sup>Ibid., October 8, 1881, p. 3.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid., May 29, 1880, p. 2.

<sup>55</sup>Wallace, op. cit., p. 53. (Other sources say the man was Austrian)

have been only coincidental, however, as there did not appear to be any evidence of much racial discrimination in newspapers or texts. The minority was small and in all probability caused few incidents.

The leading citizens were well established professional and businessmen. As county seat and center of mining country there were numerous lawyers, assayers, and court officials.<sup>56</sup> No one family ran the town but several dozen of the most successful professional businessmen and ranchers. The big eastern investors and financiers such as Buck, Lewis and Moffet lived in the east and only occasionally visited for business purposes alone.<sup>57</sup>

As the population grew, the structures the residents chose to erect were of significance. Good housing was important to the people and they invested heavily in their presence in the city. The growth of the value of personal property and real estate in Gunnison is shown by these figures proudly displayed in The Gunnison Review of June 25, 1881: 1871-1877, \$26,000; 1878 - \$66,000; 1879 - \$136,000; 1880 - \$619,000; and in 1881, \$2 million.<sup>58</sup>

The area surrounding Gunnison held abundant building material. There was pine, excellent building sandstone, and fire clay nearby.<sup>59</sup> Lumber was an item of severe shortage in the spring of 1880 until the

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<sup>56</sup>The Gunnison Review, August 7, 1880, p. 3.

<sup>57</sup>Borland, et al., op. cit., p. 25-35.

<sup>58</sup>The Gunnison Review, June 25, 1881, p. 2.

<sup>59</sup>John K. Hallowell, Gunnison, Colorado Bonanza Country (Denver: Colorado Museum of Applied Geology and Mineralogy, 1883), p. 50.

toll roads could be built to freight it in. It ran as high as \$65 a thousand, but nonetheless, often could not be obtained at any price because it was simply non-existent. Lumber was termed as "high and scarce" and "one of Gunnison's most pressing needs."<sup>60</sup> Buildings went up slowly at first and many lived in tents until lumber could be obtained in sufficient quantities. Still, it was only a matter of a little time until the material came and meanwhile many bought their land and proceeded to wait. On May 22, The Gunnison Review reported that over three hundred lots had been sold in the past six weeks at \$75-125 apiece.<sup>61</sup> A year later business lots were to sell for \$1,000 to \$5,000.<sup>62</sup> By July 24, fifty new buildings were in the process of erection and the sawmill was turning out 20,000 to 25,000 feet daily. Prices were half what they had been.<sup>63</sup> Indeed, from May 15 to August 15, some two hundred buildings were erected.<sup>64</sup> Despite availability of brick and stone most people preferred the faster yet less permanent structures of lumber. In the 1880's there were from fifteen to twenty frame structures to each brick one built.<sup>65</sup> Several of the frame residences and brick business buildings are still standing in good condition and in use.

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<sup>60</sup>The Gunnison Review, May 22, 1880, p. 2. *op. cit.*, p. 20.

<sup>61</sup>Ibid., May 22, 1880, p. 2.

<sup>62</sup>Mallowney, op. cit., p. 4.

<sup>63</sup>The Gunnison News, July 24, 1880, p. 2.

<sup>64</sup>Borland, et al., op. cit., p. 23.

<sup>65</sup>George A. Root, "Geo. A. Root's Absorbing Story of Early Day Gunnison" The Gunnison News-Champion, July 14, 1938.

Initially, construction on the east and west sites varied due to differing philosophy and some rivalry. The East section was the original site with some original buildings at the beginning of the 1880 boom period. George Root, son of the Gunnison Review editor, the West section paper, recalled that in early days the feeling pervaded that those on the east were "fashioned from just a trifle better grade of clay." It did not prevail among the young however as he said social lines were "elastic."<sup>66</sup> At first there was competition for location of the railway depots with the west section getting the Denver and South Park and the east the Denver and Rio Grande and building. A June 1880 comment from the Gunnison Review stated West intended to build schools and churches which were more progressive than the saloons and gambling houses of the east side.<sup>67</sup> A few weeks later they boasted that there were no dance halls in West Gunnison and it was not likely that any would be allowed.<sup>68</sup> It did not take long before they found their way in, however. It was not long either before everyone was caught up in the enthusiasm of growing Gunnison and the prejudices and rivalries were overcome. The August 17, 1880 Gunnison Review stated, "Both Gunnison and West Gunnison will be one in the same town if building continues as rapidly as it has during the past two or three months." The gap was being rapidly closed by the two hundred buildings constructed during that time.<sup>69</sup> By June of 1881 the Gunnison

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<sup>66</sup>Root, "Gunnison in the Early Eighties," op. cit., p. 201.

<sup>67</sup>The Gunnison Review, June 26, 1880, p. 2.

<sup>68</sup>Ibid., July 3, 1880, p. 2.

Ibid., August 7, 1880, p. 3.

Review confidentially expressed the feeling that east-west discrepancies had been overcome as nearly all of the gaps had been filled and the main street was to be constructed to run north and south.<sup>70</sup> Thus, the citizens proved that they were more concerned with establishing a solid, flourishing community and had united over petty grievances to achieve that purpose.

Gunnison had a wide variety of businesses and services to support the needs of the residents and the surrounding country. By August of 1880 West Gunnison reported two doctors, a ~~select~~ school, two assayers, three attorneys, two painters, an express office and agent, two blacksmiths, five carpenters, one corral, one coal yard, three dairys, one lumber yard, one livery, a stageline, two hotels, a saloon ("neat and respectable," however), and a variety of stores including clothing, furniture, groceries and hardware.<sup>71</sup> The east side had many more and Gunnison as a whole is reported to have had 175 business establishments of a varied and permanent nature in 1880.<sup>72</sup> By 1885 Gunnison had increased to five doctors, nineteen lawyers, seven hotels, five restaurants, five stables, four brickyards, blacksmiths, meat markets, and drugstores, three breweries, a bank, an opera house, seventeen saloons, six churches, two daily and three weekly newspapers.<sup>73</sup>

Some of these business establishments and facilities are still functioning in the community and many deserve a closer examination.

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<sup>70</sup>Ibid., June 4, 1881, p. 2.

<sup>71</sup>Ibid., August 7, 1880, p. 3.

<sup>72</sup>Malloway, op. cit., p. 4.

<sup>73</sup>Wallace, op. cit., p. 60.

Churches are one of the primary evidences of a stable, well balanced community. Congregations were quickly established during the early years and buildings followed later. The first to be established was the Methodist Church in the spring of 1880. The Episcopal followed shortly after during that summer. The Baptists, Presbyterians, and Catholics formed congregations in 1881 and the Congregationalists in 1882.<sup>74</sup> Constructing buildings was time consuming and services were often held in business offices or other churches. The first church building was Methodist and the Episcopalians shared it until their own was finished. In the same manner, the Baptists shared their building for quite some time with the Presbyterians. Again the frontier spirit was displayed by Gunnison citizens helping each other.<sup>75</sup> The one hundred dollars received from the auction of the first copy of The Gunnison Review was donated as charity to Gunnison's first church which proved to be the Methodist Church.<sup>76</sup> Notices of special meetings, special gatherings, and regular Sunday services can be found in all of Gunnison's newspapers. Gunnison had to have been a stable family town to have supported and encouraged the activities and establishment of so many churches. They began with the town's inception and are still serving the Gunnison community.

Gunnison quickly recognized its substantial number of children and need for a school. In mid-June of 1880 the Gunnison Review reported

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<sup>74</sup>Ibid., p. 25

<sup>75</sup>The Gunnison Review, June 4, 1881, p. 3.

<sup>76</sup>Ibid., May 22, 1880, p. 2.

forty-eight children of school age,<sup>77</sup> and by the end of June announced that "Miss Maud Kellogg [the Judge's daughter] will open a select school in West Gunnison next Wednesday morning. She will be the first lady that ever had birch manipulation power in our city."<sup>78</sup> It was not long, however, before this was insufficient for the rapidly growing populace and eventually during the boom period three schools were erected at a cost of \$10,000 apiece. Gunnison not only rose to meet the need of her own community but as county seat was the location of the county superintendent of schools.<sup>79</sup>

The Gunnison community saw even further ahead than providing for the needs of its present citizens. As early as 1882 editorials included in the great designs for the future of Gunnison the establishment of a normal school. This dream was to become a reality when after many years of struggle the appropriation was obtained and the State Normal School of the Western Slope was built. It opened in 1911 and graduated five women in its first graduating class of 1912. In 1920 it became a four year college and later established a Master's program. The college was a great accomplishment and source of pride for the Gunnison residents--something long fought for in this forward looking community.<sup>80</sup>

Any new, expanding community needs a bank to provide captial and

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<sup>77</sup>Ibid., May 22, 1880, p. 2.

<sup>78</sup>Ibid., June 19, 1880, p. 2.

<sup>79</sup>Nelson, op. cit., p. 74.

<sup>80</sup>Wallace, op. cit., p. 83-84.



investment potential for the community interest. A bank was of even greater importance to a mining area with massive amounts of money being exchanged. In the summer of 1880 the Bank of Gunnison was organized out of Denver and established in Gunnison. It boasted a capital of \$30,000 and a surplus of \$10,000, appearing to be a solidly founded bank.<sup>81</sup> In 1881, the Miner's Exchange received a federal charter as the 1st National making it the first national bank to be chartered on the western slope of Colorado. By June 1883 the original Bank of Gunnison received her federal charter under the name of the Iron National. Finally in 1884 the Iron National bought the stock and name of the 1st National and for thirty years was Gunnison's sole bank. The red brick building on the corner of Main and Virginia was a landmark in early Gunnison and remained until 1964 when a modern building was erected on its site.<sup>82</sup> Thus, during a time of lax banking laws, Gunnison had a stable banking service for the city and area.

There was another facility that was necessary for Gunnison that was for her own betterment but not necessarily of direct advantage to the established citizenry. Gunnison, having a railroad depot and being centrally located, brought many visitors and settlers into the area. The more that could be convinced of Gunnison's prosperity and potential and therefore enticed to stay or invest the better. Gunnison business interests attempted to provide travelers with the finest accommodations. In

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<sup>81</sup>Borland, et al., op. cit., p. 25.

<sup>82</sup>Wallace, op. cit., p. 24-25.  
Borland, et al., op. cit., p. 25.

1881 there were four fine hotels--the Tabor, Mullin (formerly known as Cuein), the Gunnison and Red Lion. General Grant stayed at the Cuein when he came through on a hunting and fishing trip in 1880.<sup>83</sup>

Despite these splendid accommodations it was believed that growing Gunnison badly needed the opulence which was to take the form of the La Veta Hotel. The La Veta was a project of the St. Louis capitalist Mr. J. B. Lewis and was slated to cost \$200,000. George Willard of Ohio had actually begun the project but had got no farther than basement excavation and the foundations when, in the spring of 1881 personal financial reverses caused him to abandon the project. Work ceased until J. B. Lewis took over construction in August 1882 and completed it in the spring of 1884. During this period it was referred to as the Lewis House by newspapers and residents, and everything--furniture, carpets, linens, silver, etc.--was monogrammed L. H. Before the opening, however, the name was changed by Lewis's request to La Veta, "the vein," for both nearby La Veta Pass and the mining symbolism. Eastern newspapers called it a "peacock among a lot of mud hens,"<sup>84</sup> but the citizens believed in the future of the town as shown in the opening address given at the Grand Opening Ball. In response to the question of why such a grand hotel was erected in such an undeveloped place the master of ceremonies stated "Wherever iron and coal has been found in large quantities in a small area . . . there has been the seat of large manufactories." The La Veta was built to "accommodate

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<sup>83</sup>Wallace, op. cit., p. 24, p. 46.

<sup>84</sup>Wallace, op. cit., pp. 39-41, 46.

the class of people who will come here to engage in developing the boundless resources of the area." The structure was indeed an example of splendor amid the mud. It was the town's largest structure, being one hundred twenty-five feet square and four stories high. The basement contained a barber shop, baths and the offices of the Lewis Development Co. The main floor held a billiards room and lounge, bank, and the dining and ball rooms. Three stairways and an elevator led up to the 107 sleeping rooms above. The main stairway was of oak and brass and valued at \$6,000. The bar held Colorado's largest plate glass mirror. The massive oak furniture, the velvet and Brussels carpets were all especially made for the hotel and monogrammed. The opening ball was held May 22, 1884 and was an occasion of anticipated festivity for months as the ladies planned their dresses and flowers. Over 1,500 invitations were sent out, many to prominent people in major cities throughout the country. About 500 actually attended the gala and elegant affair which ended at dawn. The Gunnison Daily Review-Press allotted several pages to the description of the hotel and the evening's events including a page of description of the ladies dresses. All the prominent town names were in evidence.<sup>85</sup>

The La Veta opened just as the area began its decline, however, and it never really prospered. It closed for the winter, only opening on special occasions such as a New Year's Ball. In 1889 it was sold under a deed of trust and passed through a succession of ownerships. In 1912, to promote business, the manager began a policy of serving free

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<sup>85</sup> The Gunnison Daily Review-Press, May 23, 1884, p. 1-4.

meals to all guests on any day the sun did not shine in Gunnison. Until its closing, free meals were served only twenty times, a fact recorded in Ripley's "Believe It or Not." In September 21, 1943 it was sold at a sheriff's sale for \$8,350 and wrecked down to the first floor. Sadly, it is now nothing more than an ugly, squat building with a few tattered apartments in it.<sup>86</sup> It is unfortunate it could not have been restored and used as a summer tourist attraction and for its historical value but funds and interest were lacking at the time.

"Nature has favored us with one of the finest locations in the country, surrounded by the best mining camps in the state, by an inexhaustible water supply, vast quantities of [minerals], and a few months hence will bring to our ears the sound of the steam whistle from two railroads. The future of Gunnison is indeed bright."<sup>87</sup> This portion of the Gunnison Review is typical of the Gunnison newspapers promoting and displaying confidence in their community. All are active and vital newspapers in the campaign for a better Gunnison in all facets. They, of course, encouraged circulation among residents to keep them informed on the vital issues constantly arising in a rapidly growing community and in addition were significantly instrumental in soliciting eastern investors and families to come to Gunnison. They themselves circulated their newspapers filled with glowing and sincere prophecies for Gunnison's future and strongly urged residents to send papers to their friends as well. On

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<sup>86</sup>Wallace, op. cit., p. 50.

<sup>87</sup>The Gunnison Review, November 6, 1880, p. 2.

July 31, 1880, the Gunnison News reported that six hundred copies of their paper alone were sent east weekly.<sup>88</sup> In this aspect the newspapers were certainly crucial in advancing early Gunnison's possibilities, but they also played another role of equal importance. While Gunnison's newspapers firmly vocalized their belief in the city's potential and attributes they also believed in making it as fine a community as possible which called for criticism when necessary. They were unafraid of giving the community a bad name by speaking out on law and order, improvement of facilities, etc. There was much discussion and complaint over the erratic mail delivery system which was greatly improved by 1881.<sup>89</sup> There was also much comment during the first summer of the unsatisfactory health facilities and the need for a hospital which was indeed built later. Citizens and editors occasionally commented on some deplorably violent, rowdy, or illegal citizen or establishment.<sup>90</sup> Much of Gunnison needed rectifying and Gunnison's strongest supporters were the first to recognize it and attempt a solution. They were interested in a solid, well-balanced community, not a glorified one. Because of these desires the citizens were also correct in recognizing Gunnison's viability due to concerned residents as well as her location and resources. Remorse and alarm was expressed over several Eastern newspapers' sensationalism and exaggeration concerning the area. This caused many disappointments for people traveling

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<sup>88</sup>The Gunnison News, July 31, 1880, p. 2.  
<sup>88</sup>The Gunnison News, July 31, 1880, p. 2.

<sup>89</sup>The Gunnison Democrat, August 18, 1880, p. 3.

<sup>90</sup>The Gunnison News, August 28, 1880, p. 2-3.

across the continent only to find one could not really become rich by panning for gold in Gunnison's waterworks ditches.<sup>91</sup>

The newspapers began with Gunnison's boom period and followed its development all the way. Gunnison's first newspaper, The Gunnison News, began printing in April of 1880. It was started by a wealthy eastern investor named Col. W. H. F. Hall. He died only a month later and the paper was taken over by E. A. Buck, another eastern investor and the editor of New York's Spirit of the Times. Their office was located in East Gunnison.<sup>92</sup> The second newspaper's first edition was published May 15, 1880, by Frank A. Root and Henry C. Olney. The Gunnison Review, located in West Gunnison, and staunchly Republican, and the Gunnison News were rivals throughout the 1880s. In August 1882, the Free-Press, a supplement of the Gunnison Review, was consolidated with it to become the Gunnison Review-Press. During the first year it was a weekly newspaper and was subsequently expanded to a daily during the second year. The decline of 1884, however, caused it to change from a daily to tri-weekly and three years later to a weekly. As a weekly, though, it prospered and was an excellent publication. In 1891, the name was changed to the Gunnison Tribune. The Gunnison News had much the same fate. It merged for a time in 1881 with the Gunnison Democrat, a chatty humorous paper which devoted much time to poking fun at the Republicans and the Gunnison Review. This was only temporary, but, it later again combined with the People's Champion in 1904. Throughout its existence it retained its somewhat Democratic

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<sup>91</sup>Ibid., October 16, 1880, p. 2.

<sup>92</sup>Wallace, op. cit., p. 29.

leanings. Other papers sometimes made an appearance for a few months but the Gunnison Review and the Gunnison News were the principal ones.<sup>93</sup> Whatever party or sectional rivalries the papers had, they both were primarily interested in the expansion and productivity of their city.

Part of the city fathers' and leading residents' ambitions were to establish the community facilities needed by her residents. Much of this required obtaining donations and investments from the eastern capitalists as well as their own careful management of public funds. In early 1880 Dobe John, his ox, a sledge, and a barrel comprised the Gunnison waterworks. For a dollar a barrel Dobe John would haul water from the city's one well. The need was obvious and in 1883 the \$200,000 Gunnison Gas and Water Company, financed by St. Louis money, was completed. Such a large system was not needed at the time but was built to hold Gunnison's anticipated population and industrial requirements. Five hundred horsepower was acquired from the Gunnison River in 1889 and public electricity in 1893. Health and sanitary conditions as well were much improved by the waterworks.<sup>94</sup>

The capitalists also invested their time and money in other city projects. E. A. Buck, The Gunnison News publisher, planted 1,000 shade trees in "Sagebrush City" and was instrumental in the erecting of 250 miles of telephone and telegraph lines to surrounding mining towns and Denver. The lines were completed in February 1882 and cost Gunnison

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<sup>93</sup>Borland et. al., op. cit., p. 54-57.

<sup>94</sup>Wallace, op. cit., p. 36-38.

residents ten dollars for telephone installation and eighty dollars a year. There were fifty immediate subscribers but by June a third of the businesses had discarded it as too expensive. The system operated until 1885 when it was discontinued for several years before it was revived.<sup>95</sup> With the many timber buildings fire was a severe hazard. Gunnison experienced its first major fire in June 1881, destroying five business buildings valued at \$12,000 in the downtown district. None were insured. Citizens called for a fire department<sup>96</sup> and the Buck Hook and Ladder Company was organized shortly after under a donation from E. A. Buck.<sup>97</sup> Various other community projects were also completed with city and investors' money, such as the West Gunnison Park with its trees, flowers, and fishponds,<sup>98</sup> and a county hospital.<sup>99</sup>

In addition to community improvement projects, eastern investors attempted to stimulate industry in the area. In December 1882, Moffet of Joplin, Missouri built a smelter but abandoned it several years later as it was too expensive to operate. St. Louis iron tycoon, Benjamin Lewis, aspired to make Gunnison a "Second Pittsburg" and rumors of the establishment of an iron and steel foundry caused lots to skyrocket from \$150 to \$400, and Gunnison threatened Denver as one of Colorado's big cities,

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<sup>95</sup>Wallace, *op. cit.*, p. 29, 35.

<sup>96</sup>*The Gunnison Review*, June 21, 1881, n. 2.

<sup>97</sup>Borland et al., *op. cit.*, p. 27.

<sup>98</sup>*The Gunnison Review*, July 16, 1881, p. 3.

<sup>99</sup>*Ibid.*, July 23, 1881, p. 3.



but the foundry never came.<sup>100</sup>

The examination of Gunnison's internal structure provides evidence that the facilities, businesses, and investors of early Gunnison were concerned with the future of their city and quickly recognized the needs of a growing community and provided for them. Not only did they give essential and temporary assistance but, in most cases, provided facilities ample enough to meet future needs.

As a well organized community and county seat, Gunnison began early to set high standards of local government. In 1877 when Gunnison was made a separate county, county commissioners, a judge, a clerk, a recorder, a sheriff, an assessor, a coroner, a justice of the peace, and a treasurer were appointed. The first elections were held on October 2, 1877 and Gunnison was officially named the county seat.<sup>101</sup> When the city was formally organized in 1880, a municipal government was immediately established consisting of a mayor, board of trustees, a recorder, a treasurer, a town attorney, a town physician, and a marshall.<sup>102</sup> A court house was built in 1881,<sup>103</sup> and a new, larger, stronger jail begun in the same year.<sup>104</sup> Newspapers carried the reports of court cases while the county court was in session. There were murder and theft trials, of

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<sup>100</sup>Borland et al., op. cit., p. 18.

<sup>101</sup>Wallace, op. cit., p. 18.

<sup>102</sup>Mallowney, op. cit., p. 4.

<sup>103</sup>The Gunnison News, May 14, 1881, p. 3.

<sup>104</sup>The Gunnison Review, October 15, 1881, p. 3.

course, but many of a lighter vein as well. The quick wit of The Gunnison Democrat always reported such misdemeanors on a humorous note. "Thos. was sick and didn't feel well and said he drank freely to drive dull cares away. 'Yes,' saith the Judge, 'but \$12 for the privilege of driving such things away in Gunnison.'"<sup>105</sup> With the establishment of the town, and election of officials, came the task of establishing city ordinances for the betterment of a well organized and civilized community. For example, they forbade immoral behavior, dress, plays or books, imposed fines for cruelty to animals, prohibited drunk or disorderly behavior, the firing of arms in the city, racing horses or wagons on the streets or the vending of anything causing illness. All businesses were to supply a hitching rail, a barrel of water in case of fire, and a sidewalk. There were many others designed to keep the peace and order in the town.<sup>106</sup>

Although Gunnison was never a wild, brawling city by nature as it boomed and saloons outnumbered any other business, it too had a considerable share of violence. The Gunnison News reported the city's first gunfight on May 22, 1880 when "Dutch Bill" was shot and killed.<sup>107</sup> There were occasional shooting sprees in true "Hollywood style" and robberies became frequent with drunk miners as the usual victims. At one time two women accosted a Chinese laundry competitor and the ensuing mob

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<sup>105</sup>The Gunnison Democrat, September 8, 1880, p. 8.

<sup>106</sup>The Gunnison News, April 24, 1880, p. 2-3.

<sup>107</sup>Ibid., May 22, 1880, p. 3.

nearly lynched the victim in the excitement. Sheriff Yule saved the unfortunate man and what could have been a tragedy was humorous reporting for the newspapers.<sup>108</sup> There were two hangings in Gunnison: the first a lynching and the second an execution. In October of 1881 a railroad worker accused of murder was hung by a mob incited by rail men. The unfortunate man was dragged from the courthouse to a livery stable sign on Tomichi Street and hanged there although he was dead by the time he arrived. The papers labeled it "Horrible Outrage" and citizens massed for a law and order meeting.<sup>109</sup> Gunnison's only legal execution occurred in December 1881, hanging Thomas Coleman, a Negro convicted of murder.<sup>110</sup> There was little note made of it in the local newspapers save a letter to the editor of The Gunnison Review denouncing the capital punishment for Coleman's case.<sup>111</sup> The execution, it appears, was not popular among the townspeople and was the only one ever to take place in Gunnison.

By 1883 law and order was quite lax and campaigns were begun to rectify the problem. In 1884 Sheriff Shores was elected on a law and order platform. He describes the situation he helped to overcome in this way in his memoirs, "All kinds of crimes were taking place and very little was being done about them. Not only were few outlaws captured but those few who were caught usually broke jail or failed to be convicted." Most

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<sup>108</sup> The Gunnison Review, September 17, 1881, p. 3.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid., October 29, 1881, p. 2-3.

<sup>110</sup> Wallace, op. cit., p. 53.

<sup>111</sup> The Gunnison Review, December 17, 1881, p. 2.

releases were made under drunk or self defense pleas. During his period in office from 1884 to 1892, "Doc" Shores saw the judicial and police system improve under his and city officials perserverance.<sup>112</sup> Gunnison's most famous trial was that of Alferd Packer who was convicted to murdering and eating his companions when they were lost in the mountains in the winter of 1874. He was given a life sentence in his retrial in Gunnison, in 1886.<sup>113</sup>

Crimes of violence were infrequent by 1890 due to more efficient law enforcement, lower population, and the decline of the mining area. The type of crime changed notably from professional gunfights to the domestic side. For example, an enraged husband "sliced up" his wife's lover and the newspapers commended his action as the preservation of his home. A bit of the Old Wst atmosphere still pervades in Gunnison, however, since the last ~~barroom~~ shoot out occured only nine years ago.<sup>114</sup> As the center of the mining community and thoroughfare for western travel one would expect Gunnison to have a substantial crime problem. It rarely appeared to be with the local citizens but with the drunk miners and transient population. Still, crime never really got out of control in Gunnison and when it appeared to require stricter measures the citizens spoke out and saw that they were met. The permanent Gunnison community was stable and as the mining and wilder influence left so did the major

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<sup>112</sup>C. W. Shores, Memoires of a Lawman, ed. by Wilson Rockwell (Denver: Sage Books, 1962), p. 39.

<sup>113</sup>Wallace, op. cit., p. 54.

<sup>114</sup>Ibid., p. 55.

crime problem.

The types of amusements that Gunnison's residents participated in also reveal some of the character of the city. "bundant entertainment could be found at all extremes, from saloon dance halls to church "milk suppers." Each of the saloons had a gimmick to attract business. "Dillions" varied their programs from boxing to masquerade balls. The Atlantic Gardens featured free drinks and lunch at midnight. Kisses Saloon gave out prizes every half hour and Fat Jacks featured sacred music to dance to on Sundays. The Red Light Dance Hall was simply lurid and needed little else to attract its customers. At the opposite extreme the churches often sponsored suppers, socials, and choir concerts, and the schools had plays and programs. The town also had some elegant social affairs including balls sponsored by various clubs and organizations such as the Annual Fireman's Ball. People from the surrounding mining towns as well as Gunnison residents often attended. There was, of course, the La Veta opening ball and subsequent parties as well. Weddings were also a time of festivity. Alonzo Hartman's wedding reception in one of the Gunnison hotels was one of Gunnison's finest parties.<sup>115</sup> Gunnison also had two theatres,<sup>116</sup> one of which was Frank Smith's opera house, a fine two story building. George Root recalled the community band's humorous attempts at adding some culture to early Gunnison the summer of 1880. Nonetheless, all were proud of the organization.<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>115</sup>Lois Borland, "Gunnison in the Lurid '80's," The Gunnison News-Champion, August 12, 1943.

<sup>116</sup>The Gunnison Democrat, September 8, 1880, p. 2.

<sup>117</sup>George A. Root, "Gunnison in the Early Eighties," op. cit., p. 209, 211.

Gunnison had numerous clubs and organizations formed by her permanent residents. These, as well as the churches and theatres, indicated the emergence of a permanent and stable community. Among the organizations were the Knight Templars, Free Masons, Odd Fellows, Woodsmen of the World, Royal Neighbors, Equitable Fraternal Union, Order of the Eastern Star, GAR, DAR, the Women's Relief Corps, and the Chautauqua Reading circle.<sup>118</sup> There were also political organizations and events for both parties. The Gunnison Review announced the "Grand Barbecue and Republican Rally" which was to take place the following week.<sup>119</sup>

The community also had some outdoor sports as well. Notices of upcoming horse races appeared in several newspaper columns. One in July of 1880 announced a long awaited horse race between two favorites, and a purse of \$2,800 to the winner.<sup>120</sup> Ski races were held in the mountains with representatives of the surrounding mining towns competing. The course was straight downhill and contestants wore board skis from eight to fourteen feet in length and about four inches wide. Equipped with only a toe strap to secure the foot on the ski and one long, wood spike for a pole, the men raced down the slopes at speeds over sixty miles per hour. Winning could bring one a purse of a hundred dollars or more but now even the most avid ski enthusiast would cringe at the thought.<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>118</sup>Nelson, op. cit., p. 76.

<sup>119</sup>The Gunnison Review, October 9, 1880, p. 3.

<sup>120</sup>Ibid., July 3, 1880, p. 3.

Duane Vandebusche, "Tales of the Gunnison," January 26, 1972 (lecture given at Western State College: Dr. Vandebusche is a professor in the College's History Department)

Another winter sport of Gunnison residents was ice skating on a rink located near the La Veta.<sup>122</sup> A baseball team was formed and there was abundant hunting and fishing for the residents in the summer months.<sup>123</sup> Gunnison, as the county seat, held the first county fair on October 2 and 3, 1885.<sup>124</sup> The list of the community's leisure time events and sports sounds like any growing country community. As the boom faded so did the saloons, but the sports and activities which first made Gunnison a desirable community for early settlers to establish still prevailed in the town. In part, even Gunnison's amusements, her mountains and games, clubs and churches, helped to give her continuity as evidenced by their presence from her first decade of growth to the present one.

In spite of all of Gunnison's early glory and enthusiastic expectations, the boom ended and she began her decline by 1885. Newspapers throughout the declining period encouraged citizens and local government to back new industries and smelters. In June 1884, after a series of Chamber of Commerce meetings, the city offered to donate \$25,000 in money and land to the establishment of a new smelter.<sup>125</sup> In 1887 hopes were still pinned on a new mining boom. Newspapers crowed with such statements as, "The next boom will be a Gunnison one," and "the tide has turned this year."<sup>126</sup> Even the Denver Republican saw new hope for

<sup>122</sup>Root, op. cit., p. 204.

<sup>123</sup>The Gunnison Review, May 22, 1880, p. 3.

<sup>124</sup>Root, op. cit., p. 213/

<sup>125</sup>The Gunnison Review-Press, June 7, 1884, p. 3.

<sup>126</sup>Ibid., October 15, 1887, p. 6.

Gunnison as a mining community. They stated that Gunnison was "improving" and that carpenters were building again. They praised Gunnison's location and resources and expected it to boom again the following summer. That anticipated boom, however, never arrived.<sup>127</sup> Instead the surrounding mines closed by the mid-eighties due to failure to smelt ores satisfactorily on a large volume basis, difficulties in transporting materials from mining towns to major sources of industry, and a general depression.<sup>128</sup> Too much money had been exchanged and invested too fast, and the drop was inevitable. It was not a spectacular "bust," however, because of Gunnison's soundly built community and diversity of purpose. The ranches continued as a valuable and stable business in the valley and tourists and settlers still passed through to new areas of expansion. Just as the ranches adapted their stock raising methods to the changes of progress, so did the city of Gunnison. The thrift and substantial class that comprised Gunnison's stable residents during her boom era remained and the town that was formed in the wake of "Gunnison the Fabulous" consisted of the elements that comprise a permanent community.<sup>129</sup>

The mining, rail, cattle, investors, location, public facilities, and solid business and professional community contributed to Gunnison's establishment and early growth. The city was widely enough diversified so that when some of these other factors diminished, the community was

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<sup>127</sup>Ibid., October 22, 1887, p. 6.

<sup>128</sup>Wallace, op. cit., p. 59.

<sup>129</sup>Borland et al., op. cit., p. 10.



durable enough to last until other areas of business interest opened or expanded. Gunnison's true wealth lay not in her minerals but in her location and her residents. It took time to change the emphasis from a central mining and industrial location to recognition of its natural asset as a recreation area. Hunting and fishing have always been popular sports in the Gunnison area and now the highways are crowded with in and out-of-state enthusiasts during the seasons. Camping is popular throughout the West and the valley and mountains have many beautiful sites. The creation of the Taylor Reservoir has boosted recreation with boating, fishing, and camping available in the area. Tourists pass through during the summer months and although Gunnison is not a completely tourist centered town, ghost town looking and the mountain beauty draw them to this area. With the increasing popularity of winter sports, the valley draws downhill and cross-country skiers and snowmobilers during the winter months. Crested Butte has one of the better ski areas in the state. The area does not have the crowded popularity of the big resorts, but still draws enough people to support business and yet, leave it uncongested enough for the enjoyment of the residents and those who travel into the area. It is a precarious balance that is hoped will be retained. The sports and beauty have helped to retain the college and its personnel, an important business for the community which those farsighted early residents worked to obtain.

Gunnison was fortunate in having determined and futuristic residents during her early growth. They provided her with enduring business and public facilities that remain as do the viable, stable citizens that first established Gunnison. It is up to the future, however, to see

whether or not these residents can protect the quality of life in their valley from over population and pollution. Gunnison's location in accessible yet remote beauty, first brought settlers to the area and continued to retain their population, but unless care is taken the quality can easily be destroyed as much of the splendor of Colorado has been.

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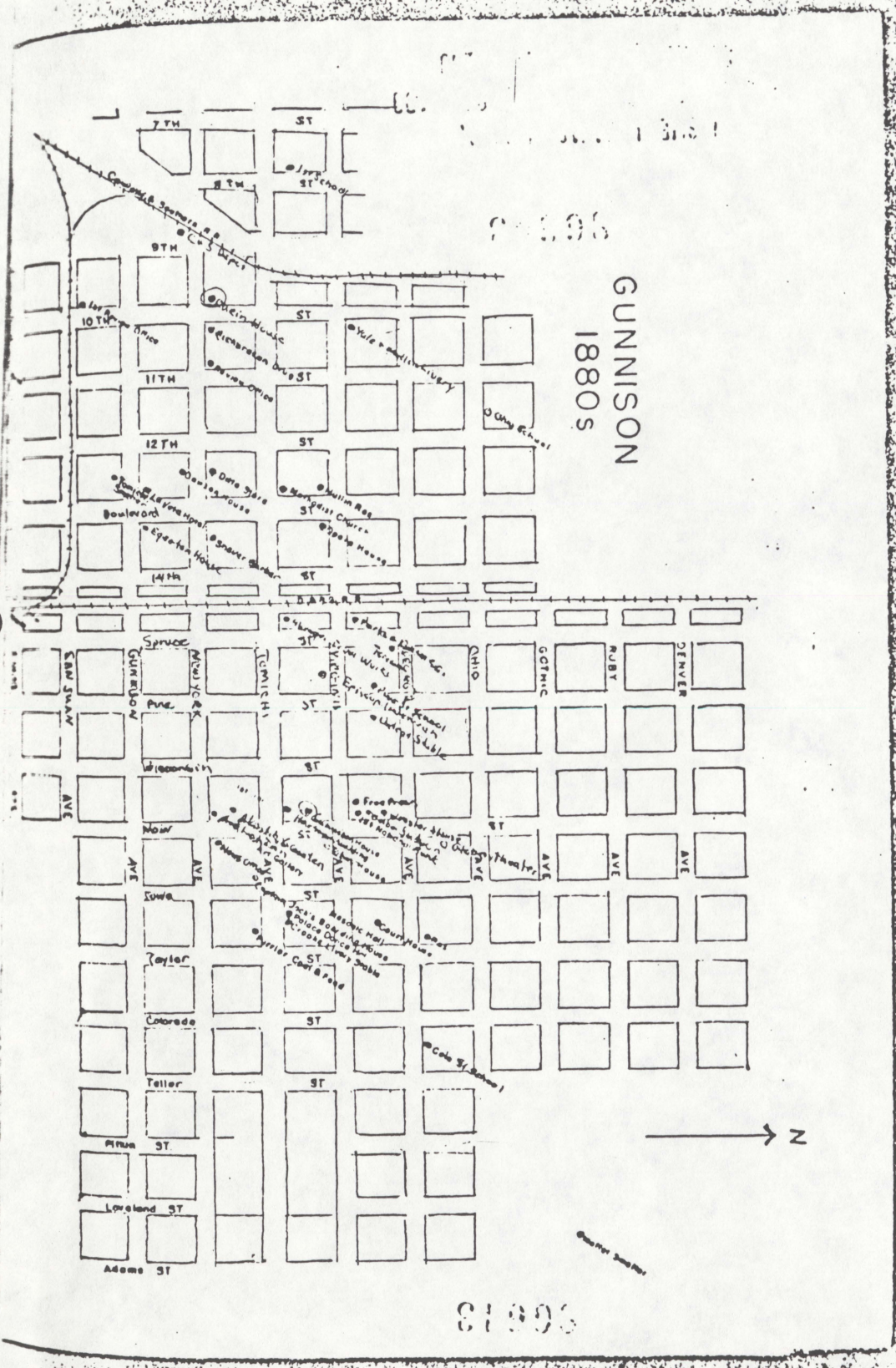
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GUNNISON  
1880s

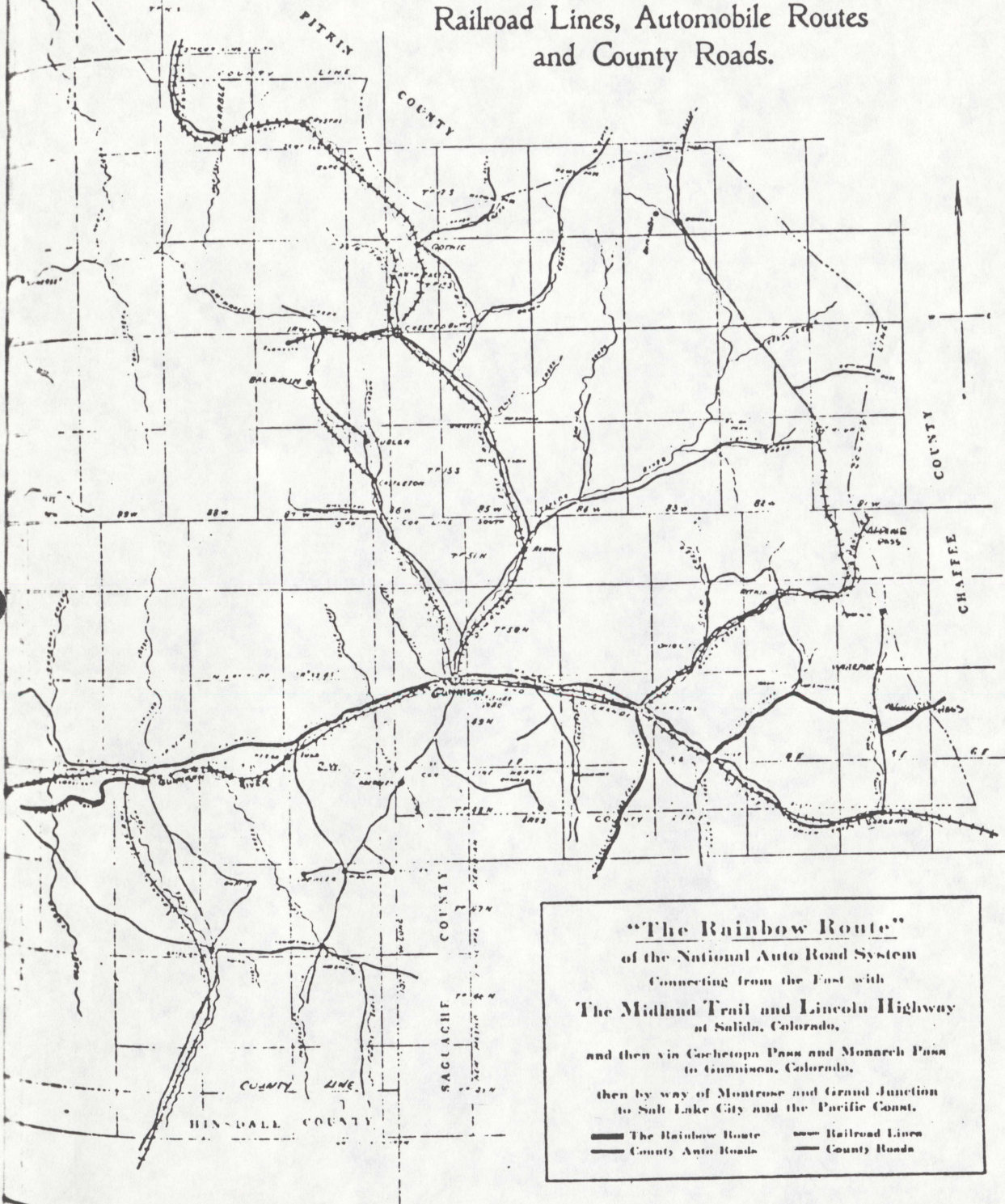


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(Source: Betty Wallace - Gunnison; A Short Illustrated History.)

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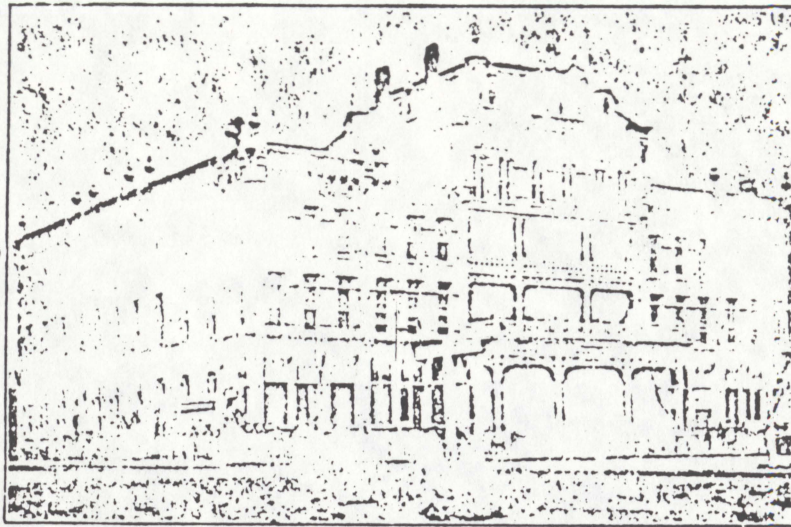
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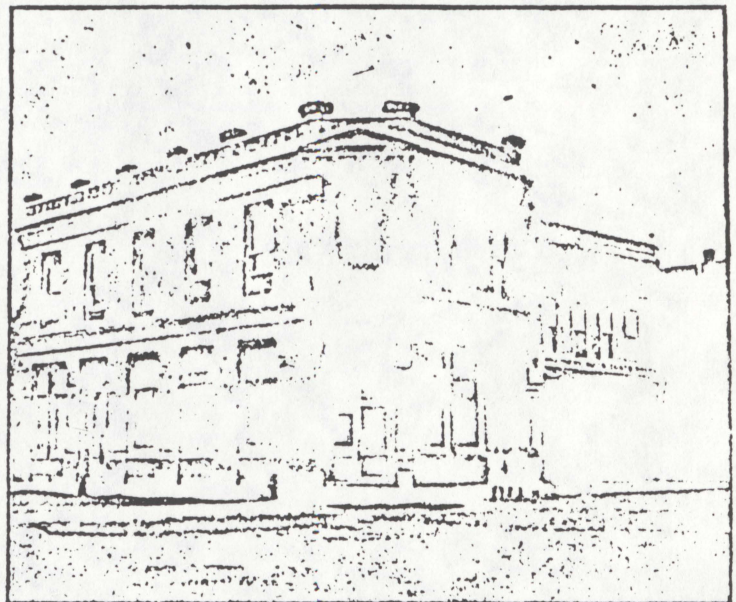
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