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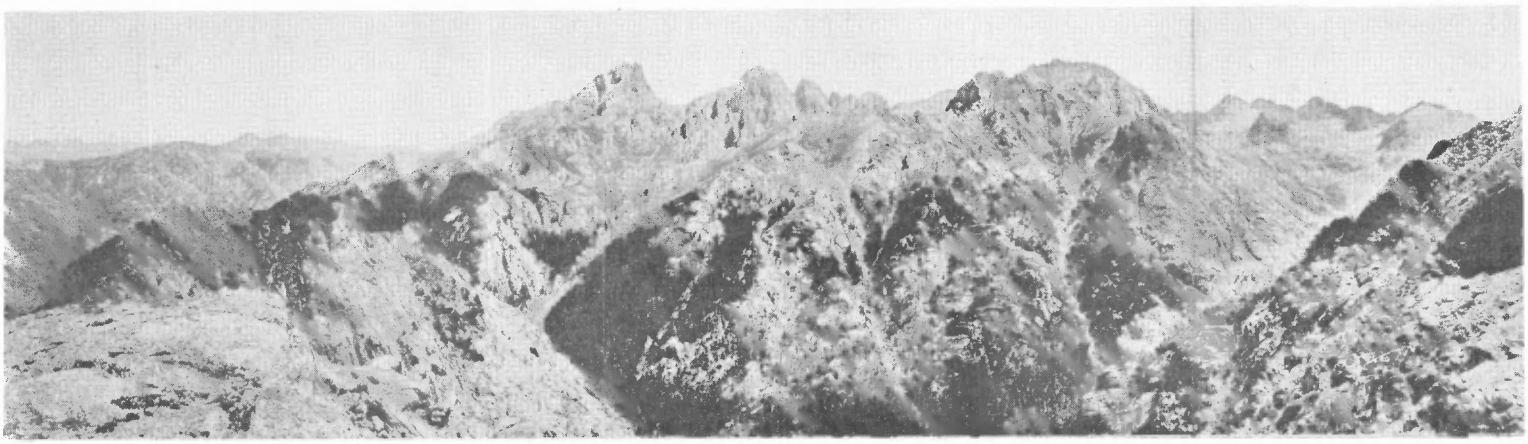
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MOUNTAINS OF PRE-CAMBRIAN ROCKS NEAR THE CENTER OF THE NEEDLE MOUNTAINS QUADRANGLE

HISTORY AND FOLKLORE OF THE SAN JUAN REGION

By
Caswell Silver
Albuquerque, New Mexico

Rugged and awe-inspiring, the San Juan Mountain region is a stage where natural forces and human dramas constantly hold sway. Here nature knows only extremes. The weather can be superbly mild and the air balmy and stimulating to unexcelled degree. Yet the snows know no season and the great winter cold lurks. The ground climbs into the sky and the air is rarefied, the slopes are steeper, the summits higher, the canyons deeper, the streams more swift. Here during wet years the earth moves and slides, and avalanches thunder. Snow chutes thousands of feet long scar the mountainsides, and tangled dead trees on opposite canyon slopes starkly suggest the blast of air as the slide hit. Here too, unbelievable human endurance has been tested with triumphant fortune or broken bodies to score the results.

Travel over such a region by the members and guests of the New Mexico Geological Society may have more meaning if prefaced by a background of historical events and legends of the region. The following quasi-historical treatment is offered as a prologue to one of the most colorful areas we, as a Society, have ever traveled. The material which follows cannot be accurately credited but will largely be found in the sources listed at the end of this article from which much of it has been taken verbatim.

BEGINNINGS OF LA PLATA COUNTY

Our trip starts in Durango, the gateway city to the upper Animas River drainage. The city serves an area where farming, ranching, logging, mining, and petroleum activity all have contributed to its growth and existence. The history of Durango, inseparable from the region we are about to traverse, is intimately tied to the history of mining in the area.

The earliest record of travel into the San Juan Mountains is that of Juan Maria Rivera, who came into La Plata Mountains in 1765 via the San Juan River to investigate rumors of gold and silver. In 1776 the Franciscan friars, Silvestre Velez de Escalante and Francisco Antanasio Dominguez, traveling from Santa Fe, made their way across the southern slopes of the San Juan Mountains. They left their memorial in the names they bestowed upon the San Juan Mountains, and upon such streams draining the mountains as the Blanco, the San Juan, the Piedra, the Pine, the Florida, and the Animas.

In the winter of 1860-61 a large party of miners led by Charles Baker came from the Rio Grande drainage over the mountains into the "park" where the town of Silverton now stands, looking for placers. The party was harassed by the Ute Undians and overtaken by heavy winter snows; many perished miserably. The survivors escaped southward down the Animas and wintered near Baker's Bridge, later making their way to Animas City. This was the first group reported to reach the site of the present city of Durango.

In 1861 Lt. Howard and other members of the Baker expedition made their way over the mountains and prospected the Dolores River. In 1866 a party from Arizona reached the Dolores River where the town of Dolores no

stands; the party explored the river to its source, coming over the Divide to Trout Lake and thence west down the San Miguel River. In 1869 two prospectors, on their way from Santa Fe to the newly discovered gold fields in Montana, prospected at Rico and located the Pioneer claim, which eventually gave that district its name. In 1870 R. C. Darling, a surveyor of the boundaries of the Ute Indian Reservation, located some claims at Rico and prospected at Telluride. During the same year Gus Begole, John Echols, Dempsey Reese, and "Pony" Whittemore came into the Pioneer district from New Mexico and discovered and located the Aztec and Yellow Jacket claims. The miners all left for the winter and none returned until 1872, when Darling led a large party into the Pioneer district from Santa Fe, erected a Mexican smelting furnace, and produced three bars of bullion. The results were not encouraging and the party returned to Santa Fe.

Meanwhile the Lake City area was being prospected, and the Ute and Ulay veins were discovered there on August 27, 1871.

INDIAN TROUBLES

These forays by prospectors were made at a time when all the land of the San Juan region belonged to the Ute Indians by the treaty of 1868, and difficulties with the Indians arose. The United States Army was sent to remove the prospectors, but the prospectors stuck to their mines. The United States, as a consequence, bought three million acres of mineral land from the Utes; and the Brunot Treaty, which voided the Indian title, was ratified by the Senate in April, 1874. This same year John Moss organized for Parrott and Company of San Francisco the California Mining district, which he had prospected under a personal treaty with Chief Ignacio of the Southern Utes the previous year. The district lies 16 miles west of Durango at the headwaters of La Plata River. La Plata County was formed in 1874, with Parrot City the county seat. In 1874 Animas City was established on the present site of Durango north of the present Main Street bridge across the Animas. In 1875 members of the Hayden expedition mapped a portion of the region. By 1876 Animas City had thirty cabins, a school, and the usual array of mining camp saloons.

In spite of the Brunot Treaty, conflict continued between the Whites and the Indians. After the Meeker massacre in northwest Colorado in 1879, a general uprising was feared. Fort Flagler, a log stockade, was built at Animas City, and fires were kept burning all night on surrounding mountains. In the fall of that year 600 soldiers under the command of General Buell were quartered there and remained until the Indian troubles subsided.

Animas City lost the majority of its inhabitants when the Denver and Rio Grande Railroad established its own town to profit from the business created by the road. An item in the Animas City *Southwest* of May 1, 1880 reads: "The Bank of San Juan has issued a circular in which it is stated that a branch office will be opened at the 'new town of Durango on the Rio Animas.' Where the new town of Durango is to be, or not to be, God and the D&R. G. Railroad only know. If they are in cahoots we ask for special dispensation." Dispensation did not arrive, and the new town of Durango was established and became the County seat in November, 1881. Thus started (Fort Worth and Dallas, take note) the municipal feud that lasted 67 years and was only settled after most of the original settlers had been laid to rest, and after water and other municipal problems forced consolidation of the two towns on October 28, 1947.

Anticipating the coming of the railroad, Fort Lewis was moved in from Pagosa Springs, where it had existed since 1872, to a new site 15 miles west of Durango. It remained an Army garrison until 1892 when it was converted to an Indian School which was operated until 1911. In 1933 the site of the old Fort was reactivated as Fort Lewis College, a branch of Colorado A&M. The college was moved to Durango in 1955.

One story told is of the Ute Chief asking the Commanding Officer of Fort Lewis to lend him some cannon. The Colonel demurred, saying the Indians might turn the field piece on the soldiers. "Nagh," denied the Chief. "Squaws chase sojers off with sticks. Want cannon kill dam cowpunchers."

The great "Rush to the San Juan" (as it became known to those who participated) came in 1874 from the east up the Rio Grande into Lake City and over the mountains into Silverton. Many of the miners, noting the need for agricultural products in the mining camps, drifted down into the Animas Valley north of Durango and commenced farming. Cattle, which were soon driven into the area from Texas and from other parts of Colorado, were turned loose to run in thevalleys where food and water were abundant, and from 1877 to 1887 the country was taken up for ranches.

In those days the cattle industry was important. Large-scale rustling plagued the ranchers. The mines in the mountains offered a ready market for stolen cattle; the

Stockton gang operating out of Bloomfield, and the Eskridge gang out of Durango, competed for control of the "trade." Skirmishes between the gangs and cowboys became open enough to endanger the lives of the citizenry, and a Durango "Committee of Safety" was organized in 1880.

DURANGO

Cowhands, Indians, prospectors, miners, gamblers, freight handlers, and railroad construction hands swelled the population in 1880 to between 2,500 and 3,000 people, and the town began to hum. In addition to the usual quantity of stores, businesses, and restaurants, there were 25 saloons and two theatres. The actors for these theatres were imported from Denver and Leadville. In the 1880's, when great wealth from the mines in the San Juans poured through Durango, this town became nationally famous as one of the toughest towns in the West. The town life was sensational to the point where both the Denver papers and the New York papers occasionally kept correspondents in town and reported each shooting episode with relish.

The town of Durango got its first industry with the moving of the former Greene smelter from Silverton by the San Juan and New York Smelting Company in 1881. In 1882 this company started the smelter now operated as a uranium-vanadium mill. In September, 1887, the name was changed to "Durango Smelting Company". From April 1, 1888, until May 1, 1895, business was conducted under the name of the San Juan Smelting and Mining Company, a corporation organized through the consolidation of the Durango Smelting Company of Durango, and the Hazelton Mountain Mining Company of Silverton, owners of the Aspen group of mines.

With the coming of the railroad the town began to expand rapidly, and in July 1882, the Silverton branch of the D. & R. G. was completed up the Animas River to Silverton. This brought into Durango the business of the Silverton area and San Juan County. Trading began with the Rico community to the west, which had been formed in 1879. In 1891 the narrow-gauge Rio Grande Southern Railroad from Telluride and Rico reached Durango, furnishing communication with mines of the western San Juan and La Plata districts.

In 1897 an electric power plant was built on the Animas River to furnish power to Silverton. Durango progressed steadily from this time on. Periods of slack mining activity were balanced by agricultural and lumbering activity. The largest continuous stand of western yellow pine ever known, together with great stands of spruce and fir, stretched along the south slopes of the San Juan Mountains; and it is estimated that more than one billion board feet was logged in the first quarter of this century, a big factor in sustaining the economy of the region.

In 1930 the lead-bullion, copper-matte smelter at Durango, which had been in almost continuous operation for 48 years (31 years under the ownership of American Smelting and Refining Company), shut down, and the town suffered noticeably. By this time, however, Durango was the center of one of the great sheep and cattle winter-summer ranges in the West. Sheep and cattle movements – enough sheep bands to aggregate 80 to 100 thousand head per stock driveway – moved each summer up the Piedra, Animas River, and other driveways into the San Juan Mountains. The town is once again growing apace, thanks to oil, gas, and uranium activities of the last eight years.

SILVERTON, SAN JUAN COUNTY

Silverton, nesting in the center of the San Juan Mountains, is a perfect piece of Americana, a relic of the booming mining era of the West. Now functioning at a subdued pace, it affords an opportunity to visitors to taste the flavor of those days.

Howardsville, four miles up the Animas, was the first town and the county seat of San Juan when organized in 1874, the year of the "great San Juan excitement". Silverton received its first year-round residents about the same time, and that year it was reported to have 30 cabins, a school, and the Westminster bar. The town's population exploded as a result of the "Rush of the San Juan" when 1,000 residents suddenly materialized. Originally called "Baker's Park", the name was changed by the words of a mine operator who remarked, "We may not have gold here, but we have silver by the ton." Interesting accounts of religious meetings in the gambling dens are given in the reminiscence of George Darley, pioneer preacher in San Juan County. A story in verse by William DeVere recreates the scene on next page.

The golden era of Silverton was from 1882 to 1908, and the town achieved most of its growth during the early part of this period, which opened with the coming of the railroad and closed with the financial panic of 1907.

Prior to 1882 the dollar value of mine production in San Juan County during any year exceeded $100,000 only once, in 1875. In 1883 it was $400,871; in 1884, $719,909; and in 1885, $1,006,500. Since then the yearly value of ore mined from the county has varied, with a few exceptions, between $1,000,000 and $4,000,000. The total aggregate value of ores produced for San Juan County,



inclusive of 1953, has been $136,840,668.

The foundations of many great fortunes were laid in Silverton during the "halcyon days", and the town was reputed to have its "silver" kings – men of large fortunes derived directly and indirectly from mining activity. Among them were Thomas Walsh, Otto Mears, William Terry, and Edward Stoiber.

The Grand Hotel (now the Grand Imperial) was constructed in 1882. Much of the town was built during the succeeding decade. Major construction declined about 1900 and virtually ended with the county court house in 1907, built at a cost of $60,000 – a fabulous sum for that day. The town reached a population peak of about 5,000 in the early 1900s. During its heyday it had an opera house, variety theatres, and on Blair Street, between 11th and 13th, two solid blocks of sporting houeses. Some of the famous bars were the Hub, once housed in the Grand Hotel, the Diamond Belle, on Blair between 12th and 13th, the Luke Dance Hall, and the National.

From the silver panic in 1893 to about 1900 the town slowed down, but by 1900 was again active until the financial panic of 1907. In 1910 the town picked up, only to decline with the closing of the Sunnyside mine in 1936. The last major mine, the Shenandoah-Dives, shut down in 1952.

OURAY

Ouray is not only unique for its name but for its physical setting. It inspired man long before the coming of the whites. This gigantic bowl in the mountains, favored by nature as few places in the world are, was the favorite summer camp ground of the Ute Indians and still lives prominently in their legends. The vast amphitheater 5,000 feet high which forms the eastern backdrop of the town and which changes color through every hour of the day from gray to pale lavender to rich gold to bright red to dark purple – has been reverently viewed by both untutored savage and sophisticated traveler. This is one of the sacred places of the Ute Indians.

The variety of rocks, the steep palisades, the mist-shrouded waterfalls, the great winter bowl of white, all make for one of the outstanding scenic sites in North America.

The first white man to enter Ouray was lured by rumors of gold in this stronghold of the Utes. During the "Rush to the San Juan" in 1874, some prospectors making their way from Engineer Mountain discovered a route through American Flats and down Bear Creek trail to Ouray. It is not known whether these were the same as the first settlers, A.W. Begole and S. Eckles, who came in 1875; but it is interesting that the same "Gus" Begole and "John" Eckles were members of the first party to enter and explore the Pioneer district in Las Platas in 1870. The town was surveyed in 1876 when various cabins were constructed of logs cut on the site, and a saw mill began operation.

The original town was called Uncompahgre, from the river. Of the various interpretations of the Indian word "Uncompahgre", men who knew the Utes said it meant "warm stream", and, unlike most mountain waters, it never froze in winter. In 1876 the town was incorporated and named "Ouray" in honor of the chief of the Utes – the great friend of the white man.

Although it is reported that the Grand View, located in 1875, was the first lode staked in the district, most older residents have the impression that the Trout and Fisherman claims at the mouth of Box Canyon were the source of the first commercial ore shipped from Ouray district.. The story extant is that two early explorers, deciding to catch some trout for a meal, stumbled on to some rich showings along the Canyon Creek side of the river and staked two claims in the name of their activity at the time of discovery.

Early development of Ouray was more closely related to the development of the great fissure veins of the Mt. Sneffels district than to the deposits immediately around town that later became important producers. The early development of such important lodes as the Revenue and the Virginius necessitated the establishment of a point of supply near Ouray. How much of the town's early development can be attributed to the veins of the Imogene

Basin that later developed into the great Camp Bird mine can only be left to conjecture. It is known that William Weston and George Barber, who originally staked the Una and Gertrude, became important factors in the development of Ouray. William Weston and his brother, Percy, together with D. C. Hartwell, were connected with the building of the Beaumont Hotel, the Beaumont Livery, the Beaumont Sampling Works, and the Beaumont addition to the city of Ouray. The Westons made their first stake of $50,000 from their sale of what many years later became the Camp Bird. These men and many others were responsible for the growth of Ouray during the 70s and 80s when the town prospered from development of mines in the Sneffels District and later the Red Mountain district.

In 1878 the Ripley brothers began publication of the *Ouray Times*; in 1880 Dave Day began publication of the *Solid Muldoon*, and continued for almost ten years. Mr. Day was an outspoken editor with a penchant for lambasting his political foes and phrasing his editorials and stories in a highly individual style especially adapted for reporting interludes of the town's more riotous livers. In 1890 he moved to Durango, where he became even more well known.

In Ouray, however, the newspapers with the longest life were the *Ouray Herald* and the *Plain Dealer*. One of the later editors of the *Herald* once said, "Any man who would look at the boundless opportunities of this western country and then locate in a mining camp is a big enough ass to do anything. If I am punished for every lie I have told about this country in that dammed paper of mine hell won't be deep enough to hold me."

Early development of Ouray owed much to such mines as the Virginius. Located in 1876, the Virginius shipped ore running (according to some settlement sheets) eight ounces of gold and 175 ounces of silver to the ton. For more than twenty years the Revenue (as the lower adit to the Virginius mine was called), which employed as many as 600 men, shipped the largest tonnage of any mine in Ouray County, with a total production of approximately 15 million dollars. Although there was much prospecting and a small amount of mining in the immediate vicinity of town, it was not until 1880 that the Calliope and Bachelor, important producers, were located just south of town. The Mineral Farm was located in the early 1880s, and the American Nettie in 1885. It was 1890 before the Gem, Pony Express, Jonathan, Genevieve, and Grizzly Bear were located. All these mines were close to town and achieved their important production during the '90s and early 1900s. Like Silverton, Ouray's main building boom came with the flush mine production of the '80s and '90s. The numerous frame and brick buildings (with the dates of construction high on their fronts) were built during this period.

In the '90s Ouray had a population of 3,000; money flowed freely, and construction was of both the plain and fancy variety. The Beaumont Hotel was designed by the same architect who went on to design the Brown Palace in Denver and the Palace Hotel in San Francisco — all three famous architectural gems of the period. The Beaumont was very elegant for its day (1886) and is an authentic period piece. The Opera House was built about 1889. Thomas Walsh donated the library (1901) which was the second story of the City Hall which burned in 1950. This was a major loss to Ouray because of its elegant woodwork and authentic European paintings.

While Ouray early adopted an aura of propriety among its many cultured residents, it had its wilder elements too. There were about the same proportionate number of saloons to population in the heyday of activity as today; thirty was the greatest number achieved (The White House Saloon had leaded cathedral glass windows). Practically every saloon had gambling in connection with it, and a few had girls, but mostly the "sporting houses" were apart on Second Street between Seventh and Eighth Avenues. There were the Temple of Music, Bon Ton, the Bird Cage, the Monte Carlo, the Clipper, the Morning Star, and the Club. The largest saloon was the Roma at 220 Main Street. It was run in conjunction with the "Gold Belt Theatre", a variety theatre across the alley in the rear. Both the "Gold Belt Theatre" and the Opera House saw many current traveling companies. Ouray was a popular break for theatrical companies of the day traveling from the east to the west coast. The Bon Ton and Temple of Music were destroyed in the great fire which swept the Ostenfelter barns about the turn of the century.

Like other mining towns Ouray has risen and fallen with mining activity, but recent years have brought tourists to balance the vagaries of lead and zinc prices.

MINING

The history of the region north of Durango is almost entirely the history of mining in the area. Its development came later than most other areas in the West. As Ransome has stated, "At a time when every gulch of the Sierra Nevada was a scene of picturesque activity, the Indians and the mountain sheep were as yet undisturbed in their possession of the San Juan."

The memory of the unfortunate Baker party of 1860-61

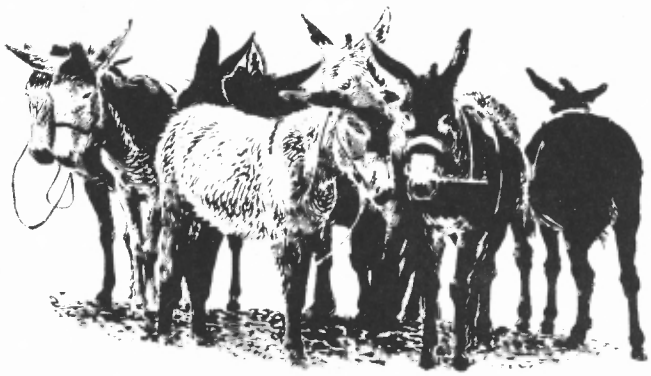
apparently discouraged prospecting in the vicinity of Baker's Park (Silverton); but in the early seventies reports of mineral wealth began to draw the more adventurous prospectors into the forbidden Indian country of the Utes. Some gold was early obtained by a party of prospectors, sent out by Governor Pile of New Mexico in 1870, who established the Little Giant on the north side of Arrastra Gulch four miles southeast of Baker's Park. This mine produced 27 tons of gold ore yielding $150.00 a ton. The discoveries in Lake City, made in 1871, had not yet been exploited, when the Army's expedition to remove miners and prospectors in 1872 delayed further development until the signing of the Brunot Treaty in 1873. The success of the Pile expedition resulted in the organization of the Little Giant Company in Chicago in 1873; and in that year the primitive arrastres were replaced by an amalgamating mill equipped with a Dodge crusher, a ball pulverizer, and five stamps powered by a 12-horsepower steam engine. That year the Little Giant produced $12,000 out of about $15,000 for the entire region. The pay streak of eight inches of gold-bearing quartz was quickly exhausted, and after the milling of a few hundred tons of ore the entire operation was abandoned. Other lodes in the region had by this time been opened and small quantities of rich ore taken out, but it was not until the following year that the "Rush" began. In August of 1874, Hotchkiss, the leader of the expedition that built a wagon road from Saguache to Lake City, discovered the rich vein now known as the Golden Fleece; and Lake City soon became the center of activity. Most of the men flocking into the new district were from the northern Colorado mining camps, but a few were from the South and some even from the Far West. It is estimated that about 2,000 men came into the district during the summer of 1874, and Endlich reported that more than this number of lodes were then staked out.

Most of the traffic into the San Juan in 1874 came from two routes – one via Del Norte up the Rio Grande; the other up the Gunnision via Saguache. Prospecting spread down the Uncompahgre into Poughkeepsie Gulch in 1874, and down Bear Creek Trail to Ouray, where the Grand View was located in 1875. In 1874 prospectors crossed from Baker's Park into Marshall Basin on the Telluride side; in 1875 locations were made on the Smuggler vein, and a ton of ore worth $2,000 was shipped to the smelter at Alamosa.

Nearly every lode which subsequently proved valuable (except the Red Mountain and Ironton deposits discovered in 1881) was prospected during the seventies. It was this period that saw mining at the Highland Mary, Aspen, Prospector, and Little Giant in the Animas District. Raymond reported gray copper ores from the Aspen group assaying from 500 to 2,300 ounces with a small quantity of native silver. Locations were made of the Alaska, Saxon, and Poughkeepsie in the Uncompahgre District; and Raymond reported an assay from this district of 10,000 ounces of silver per ton.

TRAVEL

While the seventies were spectacular and the era of the "San Juan Excitement", it was a time of prospecting. From the date of discovery to 1880 the total dollar value of production (1873-80) was not more than $500,000 for San Juan County; $250,000 (1878-80) for Ouray County. The chief lack in the country was transportation. In 1876 La Veta was the terminal of the D. & R. G., and the road into the San Juan country was far from being a "freighter's paradise". The freighters claimed "every ten feet there was a stone projecting from six to 18 inches, and frequently on the opposite side a hole from six to 18 inches deep with a stump in the middle".



From: ONE MAN'S WEST by David Lavender
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Drawings by William Arthur Smith.

The chief means of shipping to railhead from Silverton was over a trail by way of Cunningham Gulch and Stony Pass to Del Norte by pack-train; a road was not completed on this route until 1879. While some oxen were used, they were never successful, and burro trains were the mainstay of transport. "Burro-punchers" charged $60 in 1876 to move a ton of ore to railhead, and when ore-wagons and teams could finally be used in 1879, the freight was still $30 a ton. The patient, plodding, much-abused burro could seemingly go anywhere. In the winter of '79 a man brought a burro from Mineral Point, at the head of the Uncompahgre River, over Engineer Mountain to the head of Hensen Creek, on snowshoes. On Bear Creek Trail, about five miles above Ouray, one burro packed with flour fell two hundred feet. The weight of the flour turned the burro heels up, and, striking the snow thus with his pack, his life was saved.

Establishment of the Crooke & Co. smelter at Lake City provided a market for ores from the Eureka and Mineral Point Districts as well as from the Lake City District. The first ore shipped from the Eureka District was from the Mountain Queen Mine at the head of California Gulch in 1877. It amounted to 370 tons and contained 64 percent lead and 30 ounces of silver per ton. It was packed to the end of the road at Rose's Cabin at the head of Henson Creek at a cost of $3 per ton. In 1879 a road completed from Silverton up Cement Creek to the head of Poughkeepsie Gulch, where prospecting and mining were going on with great fever on the Old Lout, Alabama, Poughkeepsie, Red Roger, Saxon, Alaska. Bonanza, and other claims.

During the seventies activity was feverish and often ill-considered. Smelting plants and mills were erected by unscrupulous and dishonest promoters even before the presence of ore was ascertained. Thus in 1876, Animas Forks was a lively town of some 30 houses and two mills, and in 1883 boasted a population of 450. Built upon hopes never realized, it declined almost as rapidly as it rose, and by 1900 was in ruins and desolate. Its principal mill was put up in 1875 or 1876 to treat ore from the Red Cloud mine, but was never successful. The Eclipse smelter, erected by James Cherry at the head of Grouse Gulch as late as 1880, was also a costly failure. The Bonanza tunnel, a mile and a half west of Silverton, was driven 1,000 feet at the then extravagant cost of $300,000 to $400,000 and then abandoned. Around Mineral Point, according to Ransome (1901) probably two or three million dollars were squandered in mining operations which resulted in very few permanent improvements or actual development.

OTTO MEARS

If there were unscrupulous promoters there were also many far-sighted and honest ones. And, as every era brings forth a man to match the times, one arose in the San Juan county whose contributions were unique and timely. This man was Otto Mears, the uneducated, "underprivileged" immigrant, who ran an empty purse into a pioneer fortune and left a better country behind him. At 25 he was a veteran who had served with Kit Carson in the Indian campaign in New Mexico, and a Santa Fe storekeeper with an eye on the future of Fort Garland, in the San Luis Valley, for which he hoped to grow wheat. By the time Mears harvested his first crop the southern Colorado outpost was not in the market for his product, so the tough little Anglo-Russian cut his way over Poncha Pass to reach other customers at Leadville. This, in 1875, was the beginning of his career as a toll-road builder and eventual railroad magnate, and his preparation for his role in the San Juan country.

Mears, despite his five-five stature, his foreign accent and unimpressive appearance, was distinguished by one characteristic – it never occurred to him that he could not get any kind of job done. As a result, he founded towns, published newspapers, made treaties with the Indians, became a financial and political power in Colorado – all this in addition to his carving of roadways through the primitive Rockies.

"Mears System of Toll Roads" in the San Juans eventually totaled 358 miles in length. Some stretches became the beds for his and later companies' railroads. Mears' first major venture in the San Juans was in the early 1880s – the incredible feat of building a toll road up Uncompahgre Canyon connecting the Silverton and Lake City areas with Ouray. The portion of this road from just above Ouray to Poughkeepsie Gulch is still in existence, with practically no major change, as the Million Dollar Highway. Among its many wonders was the famous Riverside snow tunnel just below the switchbacks at the north end of Ironton Park. The slides came down in winter; and an immense tunnel, 450 feet long, large enough for a six-horse stage, was regularly dug through it each year. In some years the snow did not melt all summer.

Mears sent his first locomotive to run from Silverton to Red Mountain and Ironton. On this route his intent was to continue the rails into Ouray. Even this daring builder could not find a feasible grade for the four miles from Ironton Park down Red Mountain Creek to Ouray; and as a consequence he built the 172 miles of the Rio Grande Southern (Ridgway to Durango via Telluride, Ophir, Rico Dolores). Also his was the Silverton Northern line which linked Silverton, Eureka, and Animas Forks; and the Gladstone and Northern Railroad up Cement Creek behind Silverton was another. On the spur up to the Gold Prince at Animas Forks on a seven percent grade, one engineman testified that his locomotive could barely pull one car of coal and one "empty" up to the mine; the return was a matter of setting the brakes at the top and kneeling in prayer all the way down. Mears' projects, both toll and railroads, made it profitable to work low-grade ores and increased mining activities through the Ouray-Silverton-Telluride districts. It was for these frontier routes that he issued his famous passes, of which some 90 are known to exist today. Two are in gold filigree a dozen are of buckskin, 15 are watch fobs, 25 of silver filigree, 30-odd of solid silver, and a few are paper.



Paper passes courtesy of Henry Rathmell and Henry M. Dowd

Made of gold, silver, buckskin or paper, 90 passes are known to exist today.

A drab, whiskery, half-pint of a man, Mears founded towns, published papers, built roads and rail lines, negotiated Indian pacts.

The "Little father of Colorado Mountain routes" was honored by having Mears' Peak, on the ridge west of Mt. Sneffels, named for him. He died June 24, 1931, and his ashes were scattered over Engineer Mountain in his beloved cliff-sided San Juans.

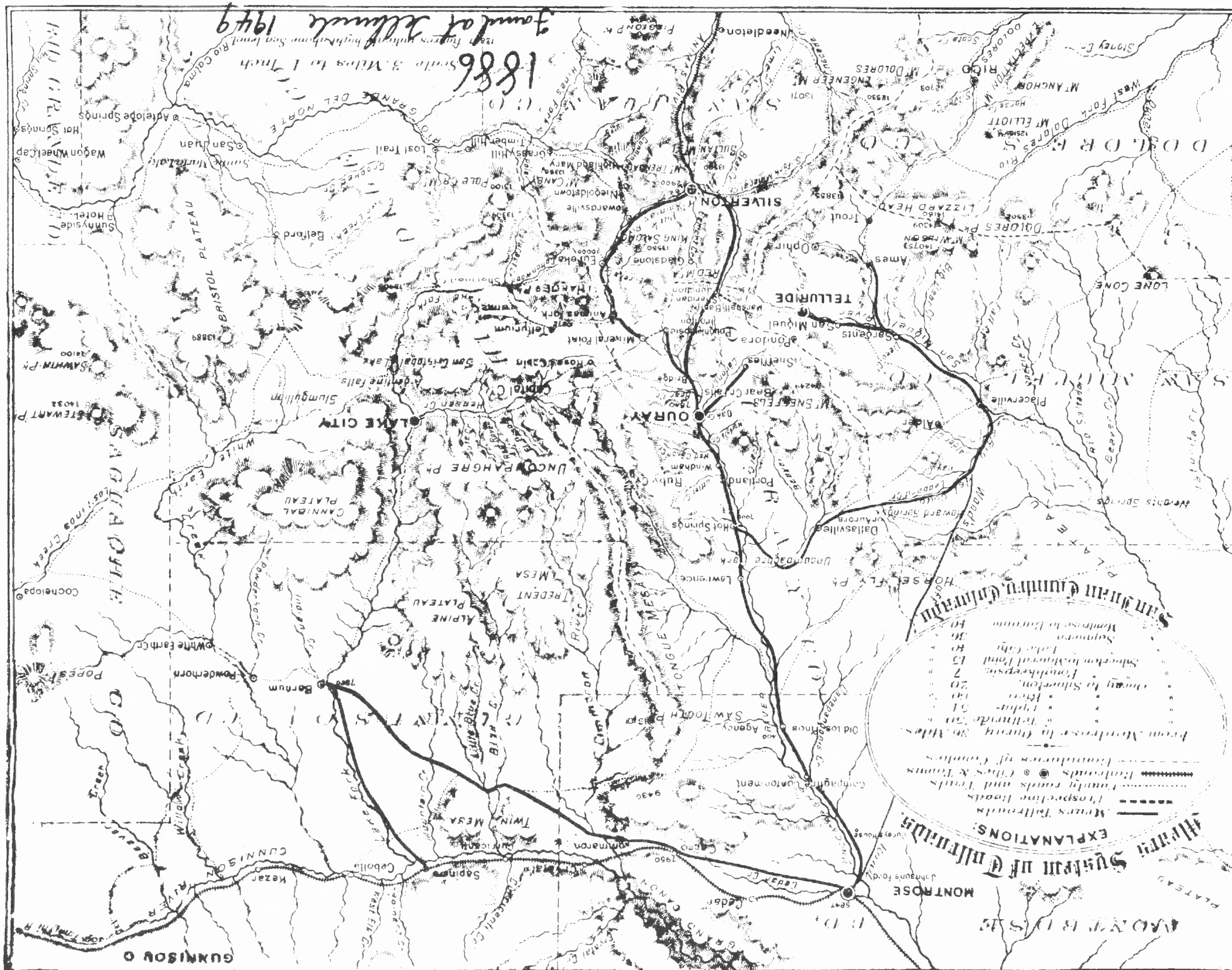
Two important events occurring in the early eighties made the ensuing decade (until the silver panic of 1893) the "silver age" of San Juan activity. The first event is described by Burchard in his report of 1883:

> On the 14th of August 1881, John Robinson, while hunting in Red Mountain Park, pickea up a boulder and, being astonished at its weight, broke it in two and found it to be solid galena. He and his three partners went to work and soon discovered the enormous ore body known as the Yankee Girl mine.

Thus was the discovery of the remarkable breccia-pipe deposits of the Red Mountain district made. In 1882 and 1883 prospectors swarmed into the new field. The Yankee Girl and the Guston shipped large quantities of high-grade silver ore for 14 years, during which period these two mines alone have probably produced about $7 million. These mines, together with the lesser known Robinson,



Silver filigree work distinguishes 1889 pass to C. F. Hoeckel, Denver stationer.



"Old 1886 map of "Otto Mears Ststem of Toll Roads"

National Belle, Genesee - Vanderbilt, Congress, Paymaster, Saratoga, Barstow, Hudson, Orphan Boy, Carbonate King, Maude S., Guadalupe, and others, formed an active mining community. Red Mountain and Ironton were formerly thriving mining towns of about 1,000 and 500 inhabitants, and activity steadily increased up to 1893 when the fall in the price of silver and the exhaustion of the phenomenally rich portions of the ore bodies caused the boom to collapse. The better properties such as the Yankee Girl and the Guston continued working until 1896 and the National Belle until 1897. A few of the mines have been worked sporadically for a few years on an occasional rich stope of ore, such as one mined from the Barstow mine in 1899-1900 which carried "gray-copper" ores sometimes assaying 2,000 ounces of silver and 25 ounces of gold per ton. The so-called "gray-copper" of the Barstow was an argentifeous lead sulfabismuthite containing almost no copper.

THE RAILROAD ARRIVES

The most important event of the early '80s, aside from the discovery of the Red Mountain district, was the coming of the railroad to Silverton in July, 1882. The reduction of shipping costs on ore from $35 and $40 per ton to $12 a ton changed the economics of mining in the entire area, and within six months 6,000 tons were shipped. Silverton was such an important mining center that there was Pullman service to Denver on a 30-hour schedule..

The Red Mountain - Ironton line was built in 1889, and by 1891 the Ridgway - Telluride - Rico - Durango line was completed. By 1899 the Gladstone - Silverton line followed up Cement Creek.

SHIFT TO GOLD AND BASE-METALS

The collapse of the price of silver in 1893 and the coming of railroad transportation brought about a change in emphasis in the San Juan mining districts. Whereas the activity of the previous decade was dependent on the mining of the rich surficial silver and lead deposits, which contributed the principal dollar values realized from ores, the next twenty-five years saw a gradual shift first to gold and later to base-metals as the main product.

Thus began the "Golden Age" of San Juan Mining activity, the period of the great gold producers of the Telluride and Ouray areas, with important gold production from the Silverton area. In the Telluride area early production in the '80s paralleled that of the Silverton area with emphasis on silver. Such mines as the Smuggler, Mendota, Cimarron, Argentine, Sheridan, and Revenue were worked, but as silver dropped in price gold was in ascendency; and the larger operations, such as the Smuggler-Union, Liberty Bell, Bessie, Tomboy, and Gold King, were heavy gold producers. Similarly, the shift in emphasis from silver to gold occurred around Ouray. In the '80s the Virginian, and other mines of the Sneffels district, and Yankee Boy, Terrible, Portland, Sidney, Monongahela, El Dorado, Allied, Snow Drift, Governor, Bessie, Barstow, Revenue, Ethan Allan, Young America, Flagstaff, and Ruby Girl were all producing at one time or another. Also operating were the Belle of Ouray and Union, on Bear Creek three miles south of Ouray; the Silver Link and Silver Point, one mile from town; and the Mineral Farm, two miles from town.

CAMP BIRD MINE - THOMAS WALSH

The shift from silver to gold is well illustrated by the story of the famous Camp Bird mine in Imogene Basin six miles southwest of Ouray. In October 1877, William Weston, proceeding from Silverton up Mineral Creek and Commodore Gulch, crossed over the divide into Imogene Basin; and he and his partner staked the Gertrude, Una, and other claims, and worked them alone for four years. Weston assayed his own ores and obtained $12 to $20 worth of gold per ton from the outcrop. At the time, however, smelters would not pay for less than one ounce of gold a ton; and it cost $35 a ton to pack the ore to the Greene smelter at Silverton and $45 a ton for treatment, so it did not pay to extract ore running less than $100 a ton. In 1881 the Weston and Barber group of claims was sold for $50,000, and a mill was erected; but the company failed, and it was fourteen years later, in September 1896, that Thomas F. Walsh, looking for siliceous ores to flux the basic ores of the Red Mountain district in his pyritic smelter at Silverton, sampled the Gertrude dump and found rich gold ore in the face of the Gertrude drift. He purchased the property in 1896 for $10,000 and began consolidating a large property by further staking and by acquisition of tax titles. After producing approximately $4 million of ore, he sold the property for $6 million.

The Camp Bird mine was actively worked from 1896 to June 30, 1916, when it was closed to await the results of a new adit, which, driven 11,000 feet by June 1918, cut the vein 450 feet below the lowest old workings. Development work on the vein from the new level failed to find sufficient ore to operate the 60-ton mill. From 1896 to 1916 this mine yielded $27, 269,768 in value of recovered gold, silver, lead, and copper; and the profit at the mines and mill exclusive of depreciation was $17,731,788, or 63 per cent.

The mine remained idle until 1926 when Joe King, John Moore, Ed Lavender, and Charles Bell, Sr., organized

King Lease, Inc. and took a lease from Camp Bird Ltd. to mine a pillar of ore known to have been left in the "hematite stope" by the old company on No. 3 or the "Boarding House" level. The mine has been a consistent and profitable producer of gold (bullion), silver, copper, lead, and zinc ever since with minor interruption. Total production now exceeds $35 million.

Many stories of the Camp Bird mine may be found in *Father Struck it Rich* by Evelyn Walsh McLean, the famous Washington hostess, who during her lifetime was the owner of the famous Hope Diamond.



Camp Bird, Ltd. Camp Mill and Portal

LOW-GRADE ORES TREATED

In one respect the story of the Gertrude and Una claims, which formed the nucleus of the famous Camp Bird, is the story of mining development in the San Juans. Although the first mine to be worked, the Little Giant, was a gold producer, for many years prospecting was restricted to a search for silver and lead ores. Only after the silver price decline and the exhaustion of the richer and more readily found lodes did gold provide the impetus for development of the region. However, it was the technologic development of the treatment of complex low-grade base-metal ores which eventually developed the great wealth of the San Juans. This growth took the same course at most of the large mines such as Camp Bird, Smuggler-Union, Tomboy, Sunnyside, and Shenandoah-Dives.

As early as 1890 attempts were made to concentrate low-grade ores. J. H. Terry of the Sunnyside mine and E. G. Stoiber of the Silver Lake began concentrating ores by milling processes, but operations involving large tonnages awaited the development of the flotation process. According to Burbank:

> Copper was only partly recovered and was also subject to appreciable loss in smelting operations. Zinc was first recovered as a marketable product at the Silver Ledge mine north of Silverton in 1904. Until comparatively recently, the complex mineralogy of the San Juan primary ores offered problems that defied common milling practice. The ultimate three-way separation into lead, copper, and zinc concentrates has been accomplished only since the beginning of 1945 on ores of the Black Bear vein milled at Red Mountain.

One of the first successful treatments of the complex zinc-lead ores was at the 1,000-ton mill of the Sunnyside mine at Eureka which operated with intermittent stops from 1916 to 1936. Since the development of large-scale milling, the operation of the mines has been related to the price of metals. Mines are periodically opened and shut down, mills constructed and abandoned, as the price of lead and zinc (now dominant in San Juan economy) fluctuates.

The following tables give perspective to the amount of production in the region. Many of the early smelter returns from the San Juan area were never run for gold; only lead and silver were paid for at the smelter.

Table showing the average annual prices of silver, lead, and copper, from 1880 to 1899.

Year.	Silver, per fine ounce.	Lead, per 100 pounds.	Copper, per pound.a	Year.	Silver, per fine ounce.	Lead, per 100 pounds.	Copper per pound.
1880	$1.145	$5.03	$0.216	1890	$1.050	$4.35	$0.1[illegible]
1881	1.138	4.81	.188	1891	.988	4.33	.12
1882	1.136	4.91	.185	1892	.874	4.07	.11
1883	1.110	4.32	.159	1893	.779	4.10	.10[illegible]
1884	1.113	3.74	.139	1894	.634	3.28	.09[illegible]
1885	1.065	3.94	.110	1895	.658	3.24	.10[illegible]
1886	.995	4.61	.110	1896	.674	2.97	.10[illegible]
1887	.978	4.50	.113	1897	.603	3.60	.11[illegible]
1888	.940	4.41	.168	1898	.588	3.75	.11[illegible]
1889	.986	3.81	.134	1899	.601	4.44	.17[illegible]

a Lake Superior ingot.

Production of gold, silver, copper, lead, and zinc in the San Juan region by counties and geologic provinces from earliest production to 1945, inclusive, in terms of recovered or recoverable metals. (Compiled from figures of the U. S. Bureau of Mines, and allocated or apportioned to geologic provinces by W. S. Burbank)

PROVINCE, COUNTY, AND PRINCIPAL DISTRICTS	ORE (Short tons) (Partial record only)[1]	GOLD		SILVER		COPPER		LEAD		ZINC		Total Value
		Ounces	Value	Ounces	Value	Pounds	Value	Pounds	Value	Pounds	Value	
Early Tertiary (Laccolithic)												
Dolores (Rico, Dunton)..	525,961	103,104	$ 2,196,108	13,804,680	$ 10,562,143	9,986,939	$ 1,642,852	104,057,085	$ 6,128,998	89,930,916	$ 7,215,691	$ 27,894,227
La Plata.....	100,920	211,506	4,692,197	2,039,893	1,303,545	288,576	46,087	726,183	38,708	.....	.....	6,080,537
Ouray (Uncompahgre)[2]..	450,000[3]	187,790	4,033,300	7,442,500	5,708,600	5,045,300	699,500	33,179,300	1,500,500	525,340	50,100	11,992,000
Total, Early Tertiary.....		502,400	$ 10,821,605	23,287,073	$ 17,574,288	15,320,815	$ 2,388,439	137,963,568	$ 7,668,196	90,456,256	$ 7,265,791	$ 45,966,764
Late Tertiary (Volcanic)												
Eastern and Central San Juan												
Archuleta.....		110	$ 2,819	552	$ 338	.....	.....	800	$ 47	2,000	$ 130	$ 3,334
Conejos (Platoro, Gilmore, Stunner).....		1,884	39,306	57,026	34,074	4,815	$ 797	3,400	149	.....	.....	74,326
Mineral (Creede).....	1,399,132	136,639	2,889,006	54,409,621	35,795,255	639,688	91,076	207,791,549	9,379,797	27,699,407	1,522,154	49,677,288
Rio Grande (Summitville, Embargo).....	249,077	253,214	6,853,869	424,270	343,971	554,797	67,393	112,747	6,321	.....	.....	7,271,554
Saguache (Bonanza)[4]..	597,778	19,207	428,689	5,610,048	3,717,060	15,728,254	2,263,553	38,882,356	2,377,273	6,012,148	532,103	9,318,678
Western San Juan (Silverton and Lake City volcanic center)												
Ouray (Sneffels, Red Mountain, Upper Uncompahgre)	2,018,110	1,693,037	36,401,286	37,169,392	28,495,053	22,401,461	3,105,207	144,332,550	6,607,107	5,298,910	539,300	74,147,953
San Juan (Eureka, Animas)	8,266,419	1,557,202	35,809,050	40,412,952	27,421,031	76,852,718	10,909,472	502,629,595	27,606,170	228,278,684	15,664,885	117,423,819
San Miguel (Telluride, Ophir)	13,177,392	3,395,081	73,362,157	51,329,809	37,255,226	20,371,466	3,208,113	253,106,390	14,310,099	27,231,182	2,261,111	130,396,706
Hinsdale (Galena, Lake Fork)	83,780	71,140	1,477,026	5,778,266	4,674,615	2,956,840	415,275	99,474,899	4,150,617	1,354,634	76,821	10,794,354
Total Silverton center....		6,716,461	$147,049,519	134,690,419	$ 97,845,925	122,582,485	$17,638,067	999,543,434	$52,673,993	262,163,410	$18,542,117	$332,762,832
Gunnison and Montrose (Cebolla, Cochetopa, etc.)[5]		.....	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....	750,000
Total Late Tertiary.....		7,127,515	$157,263,208	195,191,936	$137,736,623	139,510,039	$20,060,886	1,246,334,286	$64,437,580	295,876,965	$20,596,504	$399,858,012
Grand Totals.....		7,629,915	$168,084,813	218,479,009	$155,310,911	154,830,854	$22,449,325	1,384,297,854	$72,105,776	386,333,221	$27,862,295	$445,824,776
Percentage of State Total..		20		27.5		34.5		30.6		14.3		23.0

[1]Records of tonnage mainly from 1904-1944.

[2]Total county production divided between early and late Tertiary deposits on the basis of partial records, and hence figures are not significant to the values shown in the table.

[3]Figure includes about 120,000 tons recorded prior to 1904, but not a complete record.

[4]Figures for county include probably less than ½ of 1 per cent from districts outside of the San Juan region.

[5]Includes an unknown output from deposits of probable pre-Cambrian age.

There was often a severe penalty for zinc. Zinc was a noxious, deleterious substance difficult to handle, and when payment was finally agreed upon about the turn of the century, it was only under certain conditions of content in relation to the concentrates as a whole. Payments on gold were often not reported unless it ran an ounce or more per ton. The hidden charge of the early smelter was in the unreported gold content. To avoid penalties, a great deal of zinc went over the dump in the early days.

Production figures in the table show that the region we are traversing is one of the great mineralized areas of the West. Total production of gold, silver, copper, lead, and zinc, inclusive to 1953, amounted to $485, 305, 584. While great production involving the rich surficial deposits has been achieved, the San Juan region has produced only a fraction of the potentially available base-metals. Large unexploited deposits are known and many remain to be proved. As economic conditions change there will be continued development both for individual deposits and the region as a whole, and once again this area should become a thriving mining country.

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THE SILVERTON HOSTELRY, THE GRAND IMPERIAL HOTEL

By
Edna M. Frecker

The seat of San Juan County, the center of the once booming San Juan mining district, and now a favorite of summer tourists, location for movie making, and outfitting point for sportsman – this is Silverton, nestled in a park on the Animas River, 9,302 feet above sea level but more than 4,000 feet below the encompassing peaks. Storm Peak to the north, Galena Mountain to the east, Kendall Peak to the southeast, and Sultan Mountain to the southwest all exceed 13,000 feet in altitude; these frosty sentinels are reflected in the gold-domed courthouse, itself a reflection of former golden days. Called Baker's Park in the 1860's, for the indomitable Captain Charles Baker who was a pioneer prospector in the region, the town was rechristened Silverton (per local tradition) by a miner who said, "We may not have gold hereabouts, but we have silver by the ton."

Silver by the ton is true. Over 1,400 tons of silver have been recovered from the white-metal ores of San Juan County, as well as more than 60 tons of gold, 39,000 tons of copper, 250,000 tons of lead, and 115,000 tons of zinc. The value of the ores has exceeded 120 million dollars and has attracted thousands of prospectors and miners to the steep slopes surrounding Silverton. To accomodate the early fortune seekers, the Grand Hotel was built in 1882 by W. S. Thompson, a native of London, England. Thompson (royal perfumer to Queen Victoria) had made a fortune selling perfumes in England and Europe and invested part of these moneys in properties in the Silverton area. Convinced that Silverton would be the largest town in southwestern Colorado, Thompson spent $60,000 building a business block facing Greene Street. Originally the first floor was occupied by stores and only part of the second and third floors were rented for living quarters. On July 1, 1883, the Grand Hotel officially opened as the "finest and most elegantly furnished hotel in Colorado outside of Denver." Numerous handsome paintings and pictures adorned the walls and the plush carpets were set off by marbletop sideboards.

The hotel was owned by the Thompson family until 1921 and sometime during 1905 or 1906 was titled the Imperial Hotel or Grand Imperial Hotel. Henry Frecker acquired the hotel in 1921 and ownership passed to the writer, Mr. Frecker's daughter, after his death in 1944. In 1951, after 30 years proprietorship by the Freckers, a wealthy Dallas resident, Winfield Morten, bought the