

JOHN DANIEL CRAWFORD

in the

Great Good Old Days



By

LULITA CRAWFORD PRITCHETT

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Cover Picture — Russell Jones (left) and John Crawford,
snowshoeing near Yellow Creek

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AUTHOR'S STATEMENT

These tales were originally written for John Daniel Crawford's grandchildren. They are here presented in the belief that other people might also enjoy the adventures of a boy who grew up in northwestern Colorado some hundred years ago.

Today most writers about the Old West have to dig through library catalogs and microfilmed newspapers for scraps of information. I was fortunate to obtain my stories from personal interviews many years ago. The word *interviews* is used with reservations. I early learned that members of my pioneer family could not speak well on command. Though they were entirely willing and would try to answer my questions, they would soon lapse into embarrassed silence. Only when the spirit moved them and the time was ripe did words tumble forth faster than I was able to take them down in frantic shorthand.

The time was always ripe when kinfolks and friends gathered around a grate fire of an evening in the Crawford home. One tale sparked another, and Grandfather stayed up long past his seven o'clock bedtime. Nobody paid attention to a skinny girl in one corner scribbling in a notebook.

Eventually those notes were transcribed and typed, and now form a unique private reference library. There are many blank pages and unfinished sentences. There are questions that can never be answered. But I hope John Daniel and all the dear old-timers looking on from Eternity will take a charitable view of my efforts in their behalf, knowing that I was born a little too late to experience for myself those Great, Good Old Days!

Lulita Crawford Pritchett

FOREWARD

Two babies rode in the wagon train that left Sedalia, Missouri the morning of May 1, 1873 and headed across the prairies for Colorado Territory. One was John Daniel Crawford, three months old, with a fuzz of red hair; the other was a puppy, a little black-and-tan rat terrier, too young to do without its mother's milk. The mother dog, confused and frightened, went home before the nine wagons had barely got started. John's mother, Maggie, took pity on the whimpering puppy and whenever she nursed John, she also fed the other baby.

It was said that John was the only person who really enjoyed the jolting ride over the ruts of the Smoky Hill Trail. A rough cradle the wagon must have been! After thirty-five days the travelers reached Cherry Creek camp in Denver City. The night before they arrived, in spite of all Maggie's care, the puppy got out from under the covers and chilled to death. But the other baby successfully completed the first lap of a journey that was to take him deep into mountains where there was no road at all.

John was the younger son of James and Margaret Crawford, who founded the town of Steamboat Springs. Before the family ever saw Steamboat, they spent a winter in Beaver Brook not far from Golden, and another in Hot Sulphur Springs across the range. I doubt if John recalled learning some of his alphabet off the sacks of flour that took up a good deal of space in the crude log cabin on Grand River. Thirty hundred pounds of flour his mother baked that winter. He may have had a hazy remembrance of his first visit to Yampa Valley the summer of 1875. (See book MAGGIE BY MY SIDE.) But there was nothing hazy about his memory of hiding from the Indians the year of the Meeker Massacre. By then the family were settled in

Steamboat Springs. Never would John forget going up Soda Creek about dark and crouching on a hill not far from a forest fire raging through the spruce trees. Some modern historians, from the comfortable distance of a hundred years, have decided that the fires were started by lightning and the Utes got the blame.

Though John spent most of his life in and around Steamboat, he had opportunities to size up other places. One winter he attended Central Business College in Sedalia, Missouri. Some years later he went to Old Mexico to visit his sister, Lulie Pritchett, for a few months. He went to Mexico again in 1901 with seven other Routt County boys (Jeff and Sol Willey, Charles Phinney, Frank Sandhofer, Russell Jones, Billy Williams,* and E. Maxwell) to help develop a mine in the State of Chihuahua beyond Casas Grandes, under the management of his brother-in-law, Carr Pritchett, a mining engineer. What an adventure! In 1903, with his parents and his sisters, Mary and Lulie, and Lulie's ten-year-old daughter Margaret, he sailed for Hawaii, spending six weeks there till the steamer returned from Australia. In later years he accompanied his father and brother Logan to Florida on a fishing expedition.

But Steamboat Springs was his home. After the county seat was moved to Steamboat in 1912, he went to work as deputy county clerk under William Ellis. In 1916 the voters of Routt County elected him county clerk, and kept on electing him for fourteen terms. His staunch supporter, Charlie Leckenby, lauded him in the PILOT:

“There are few men who know their Routt County better than John Crawford. He has tramped the streets of this town when they were but Indian trails leading to the springs...His county records have won the highest praise from state examiners. Because of much extra work about election time, John does little or no personal campaigning. He attends to his duties and the people understand and vote for him anyhow. Courteous and obliging, he is on the job early and late, and is willing to put in overtime for accommodation of those having important business with the office.” (Overtime often meant getting up in the middle of the night to go down and unlock the office because some citizen needed a license.)

As John bent over a desk, he could occasionally glance out the window at the rocky country to the north, a good place for bear to hibernate. Sometimes it seemed that behind the public servant in conventional shirt and tie lurked a craggy frontiersman in buckskins, the last of the mountain men. Had he

been born a few years earlier, his name might have been in history books alongside the names of Kit Carson, Jim Bridger, and Jim Baker.

Summer evenings after work, he and his wife, Minnie, and son Jamie, often walked down the river fishing and trudged home after dark to pour the catch in Grandmother's kitchen sink and divide with her. All three would be cold, tired, and smelling of fish, but happy.

My greatest treat as a child was to go exploring with Uncle John, usually on a Sunday afternoon. He never seemed to mind how many of the family or neighbors tagged along. We did not have to go far — maybe just down to the railroad cut. “Now the Indian trail went right over these bluffs. Yonder by the river was a camp site. You want to look around every sagebrush. Ought to be an arrowhead here somewhere.” I did, and there was.

Or we crossed the bridge to the flat where the race track is today. “About here is where I remember the Old Adobe.” (He was referring to the remains of what must have been a small fort that was crumbling when the Crawfords arrived, though one wall with portholes was still standing several feet high.) Poking around in dry cottonwood leaves, he kicked up an ox shoe, rusted thin. We liked to think it dated from the days of the Old Adobe.

After automobiles came into use, several of us went camping on Morrison Creek, expecting to fish. The first carload started early to make camp. We had to tie bedding on the running board the best we could. Uncle John drove up after work. With him was a passenger — Grandmother! This was after Grandfather had died and Grandmother was in her eighties. I can still see the sparkle in her eyes and can hear her giggle. Who else but an understanding son would have refused to leave his mother in lonesome comfort at home and instead had brought her to sleep on the ground and fight mosquitoes and flies!

A lot of local history had taken place in this region. Most early-day travelers had followed the short-cut trail from Gore Range over Lynx Pass down little Morrison Creek. Somewhere near the top of the pass Grandfather had come on a bunch of Utes and had sat down and smoked a pipe with them. Perhaps on that same trip, while hollowing a space in dry spruce needles where he could sleep, he had uncovered a medium sized, wooden ammunition box filled with small round mirrors and beads, no doubt cached by some trader. Who? Why? Grand-

father had carefully put the box back. Though we really did not expect to find it, we looked.

Somewhere along the creek named for him, "Old Man Morrison," a prospector, had been rescued after a hard winter. He had been snowed in and was eating the last of his "jack."

The mail carriers' Middle Cabin had stood in a grassy cove among aspens part way down the creek. No sign of cabin now, but we knew where it had been because Elmer Brooks, who long ago had carried the winter mail for Routt County on his back, had previously pointed out the site.

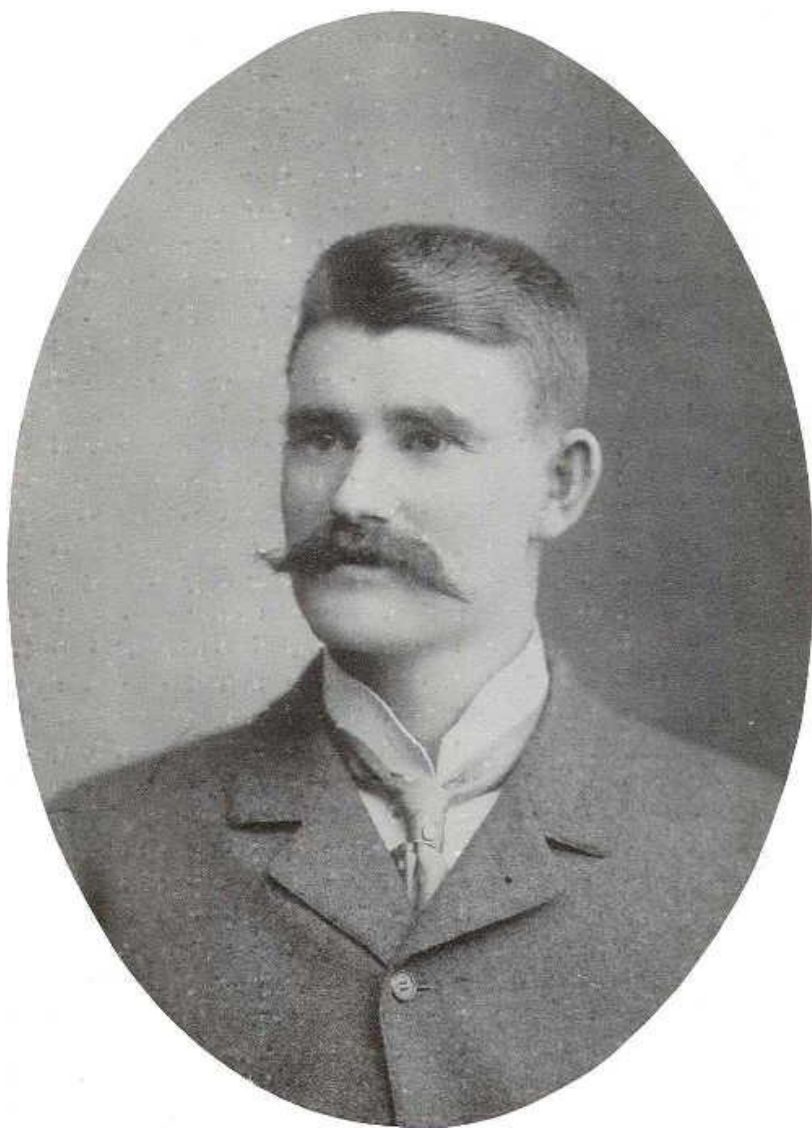
Fishing was no good because the trout were too small. The only thing we got out of Morrison Creek was a drink of ice-cold iron water from a spring that bubbled in mid-stream, and the only thing we brought home was a broken Indian metate that we dug from a bank, but we felt repaid for our trip.

Uncle John had a lively interest in lost mines. He always carried his small prospector's pick and fully expected to locate the ledge on Gore Range that was "lousy with gold," or the legendary treasure in Rabbit Ears country, or the rich strike Pony Whitmore had sought till his death in 1886. Pony had come from somewhere in New Mexico on a tip from a dying prospector, who had been in these parts and SEEN the gold and intended to return but never could.

Sometimes when people had business at the county clerk's office, they lingered to share bits of information: "...rusted gun in a cave up Elk River...initials carved on a stone in a wash near Hahns Peak...old Spanish monument in Yarmony Park..."

So much to look for! And a lifetime too short!

**There were two men by the name of Bill Williams in Yampa Valley. Both were good friends of the Crawford family. The one who lived two or three miles up the river on the west side was usually called "Billy." He was a bachelor and went with the group to Old Mexico. The other lived in town, had a wife named Mary, and several children. He was constantly with Logan and John, hunting, trapping, or prospecting. He is the one mentioned in chapters 6 and 7.*



John Daniel Crawford, young man



John D. Crawford, county clerk

Picture taken in James H. Crawford yard east of Stone House, buggy and wagon in barnyard. The dog was Tim, an Irish terrier, with sandy complexion like his master's, and plenty of sand in his character, too.



Chapter I

NO WOMENFOLKS

They were three men together — John nine, Logan thirteen, and long-legged Pa, and there were no womenfolks to cramp their style on this trip into the Colorado mountains the summer of 1882. Ma and sister Lulie had had to stay in Boulder to take care of a new baby sister named Mary Beulah. The Crawford family's real home was in Steamboat Springs, where Pa had taken up the town site, but they lived in Boulder some of the time so the children could go to school.

Pa, John, and Logan were headed for Burns Hole at the eastern end of the Flat Tops to put up wild hay. With them were Louis Garborino, a big strong Italian boy from Georgetown, and Mr. W. H. Dever, a prospector. (Dever was pronounced to rhyme with beaver.) Louis helped with camp chores and sometimes drove the team. Mr. Dever did little of anything. Bess and General, the horses, hauled a covered lumber wagon loaded with a grub box, tent, and bedrolls, a big crooked hand scythe, and a couple of pitchforks. The horses did not need a road. They could pull a wagon anywhere as long as there were no womenfolks to mind if it tipped over.

Pa had outfitted his sons with cowboy hats and copper-toed boots and had bought them a skinning knife apiece to wear in yellow leather scabbards on their belts. Skinning knives were better than little pocket knives, which were sure to get lost. The boys felt that they were ready for anything.

Five dogs rambled along: Legs, a greyhound; Hec, a short-haired, liver colored pointer; Sorghum, a big shepherd; Ponto, a shaggy yellow pup; and a new dog, a yellowish greyhound that had just been given to the Crawfords by a man they had met on their way across the range. The man had forgotten to mention the dog's name, but as soon as the travelers reached Hot Sulphur Springs, they knew for certain what to call him and knew why the former owner had been so uncommonly generous as to give him away.

A construction gang had pitched several tents near a small creek at the edge of town, and since it was about supper time, good smells came from those tents. The new hound shot into

one and came out with a chunk of bacon in his jaws. He must have stolen it from a hot kettle, for he would take a few gulps, shake his head, run on, and swallow some more. Someone in the tent let fly a stick of firewood along with a streak of cuss words, and Pa yelled at the thief, but by then the dog had gulped down the bacon and reached the livery stable.



Legs, the greyhound, and Ponto, the yellow pup

A mining boom was developing in the Grand Lake and Hot Sulphur region. This evening the barn was full of horses whose owners had their beds made down just outside and were cooking over several campfires. Legs, Hec, and Sorghum stayed politely with the wagon, but Ponto, smelling the food, ran with the new dog, who knocked over a kettle, grabbed a hunk of saltside with beans sticking to it, and galloped off, trying to down the hunk in one swallow. Ponto did not get even a sniff. All he got were some boots and hard words from the men, who saw their dinner going down the road.

“Look at that fool hound!” snorted Pa. “He’s nothing but a bummer!”

“Better pretend you don’t own him,” said Mr. Dever.

But Pa stopped and offered to pay for the saltside and beans. “Oh, that’s all right,” the cook growled. “The beans were sour anyway.”

“Bummer” became the new dog’s name.

The Crawford outfit took their time getting to Burns Hole, some forty or fifty miles away in a southwesterly direction. Up

Sunnyside Creek the dogs flushed a flock of blue grouse. One lit in a quaking aspen. Handing John the Parker shotgun, Pa told him just how to hold it and how to find the grouse in the sights. When John pulled the trigger, the gun kicked back, almost breaking his shoulder, but he got the grouse. Pa fried it with another one or two for supper.

By and by the trail wound down cedar hills into a deep, sheltered valley named for Jack Burns, a trapper. The Utes had told Pa about this place where snow was light and wild animals found easy living all year long. For several seasons Pa had wintered his small herd of cattle and thirty or forty horses there since it was only two or three days' drive from Steamboat Springs, and snow in Yampa Valley fell too deep for stock to survive unless they were fed. Even in Burns Hole a couple of years ago winter had been so severe and spring so late that Pa had lost twenty-five cattle and several horses from starvation. To be prepared for another emergency, he was going to harvest what wild hay he could.

Near Cabin Creek the campers pitched their tent and picketed the horses. Pa lifted the cradle scythe from the wagon and with long easy swings began to mow the lush grass, much of it blue-stem, which grew tall here. When the sun had dried the cut grass, he and Louis Garborino used the pitchforks to shock it. Pa made Logan and John little pitchforks out of forked willows so they could help. Mr. Dever prospected or fished or thought up jokes to play, such as putting a rope in John's blanket. John was sure the rope was a snake and leaped out of bed, yelping.

Mr. Dever even played a joke on the dogs. He discovered a big yellow jacket nest hanging on a bush like a gray paper cone. Calling the dogs around him, he sicked them on it. The dogs went where he motioned, and just as they got under the nest he threw a rock that smashed the gray cone.

Out swarmed the yellow jackets to zoom on the dogs, who ducked and ran, trying to escape a thousand hot needles. What Mr. Dever had not planned was that the dogs bolted straight for him, and the angry, buzzing cloud boiled after them. Though Mr. Dever dived under a shock of hay, he was stung several times. When he finally crawled out to bathe his lumpy face in the creek, he got no sympathy.

"Served him right!" said Logan.

One day after lunch John sprawled with the dogs in the shade instead of following Pa and Logan and Louis back to the meadow. Pitching hay was no fun when the sun was so hot. He saw a half grown cottontail run in a hole under the roots of a

tree and decided to dig it out. The dogs showed no interest in helping him. Determined to make them work, John tried burning their tails with a coal from the noon fire that had not quite been extinguished. Before he knew it, the whole camp was on fire. Grabbing the goose-down pillows Ma had made for him and Logan, he soused them in the creek and slapped them at the flames. By then, the hay crew had seen the smoke and come running and soon put out the fire. The pillows were ruined.

The next day John managed to snare the cottontail. He skinned it, smoked and dried it, and kept it to take home to Ma, even though Logan said it looked like a dried bat.

After Pa and Louis had stacked several tons, they quit haying and moved camp over to Roaring Fork in the direction of Trappers' Lake in the Flat Top mountains. John and Logan went swimming in the creek, playing around in the water all day till they were so sunburned they could hardly stand the itch. At night they had to get up against the tent pole to scratch their backs.

However, the itch was soon forgotten in the excitement of new adventures. The sawed-off Flat Tops, standing ten to twelve thousand feet high, were landmarks for miles in any direction. Pa said this was good country for mountain sheep. Louis Garborino was sure he had located a whole herd of sheep when he picketed the horses one evening. He rushed back to camp to announce, "I can hear the lambs a-bleatin' all around!" But no lambs were to be seen. The bleating sounds were traced to small, gray, furry creatures living in a rock slide and later identified as picas or conies. They could have been miniature



Near Roaring Fork of Yampa River

rabbits except that their large ears were rounded and they had no visible tails.

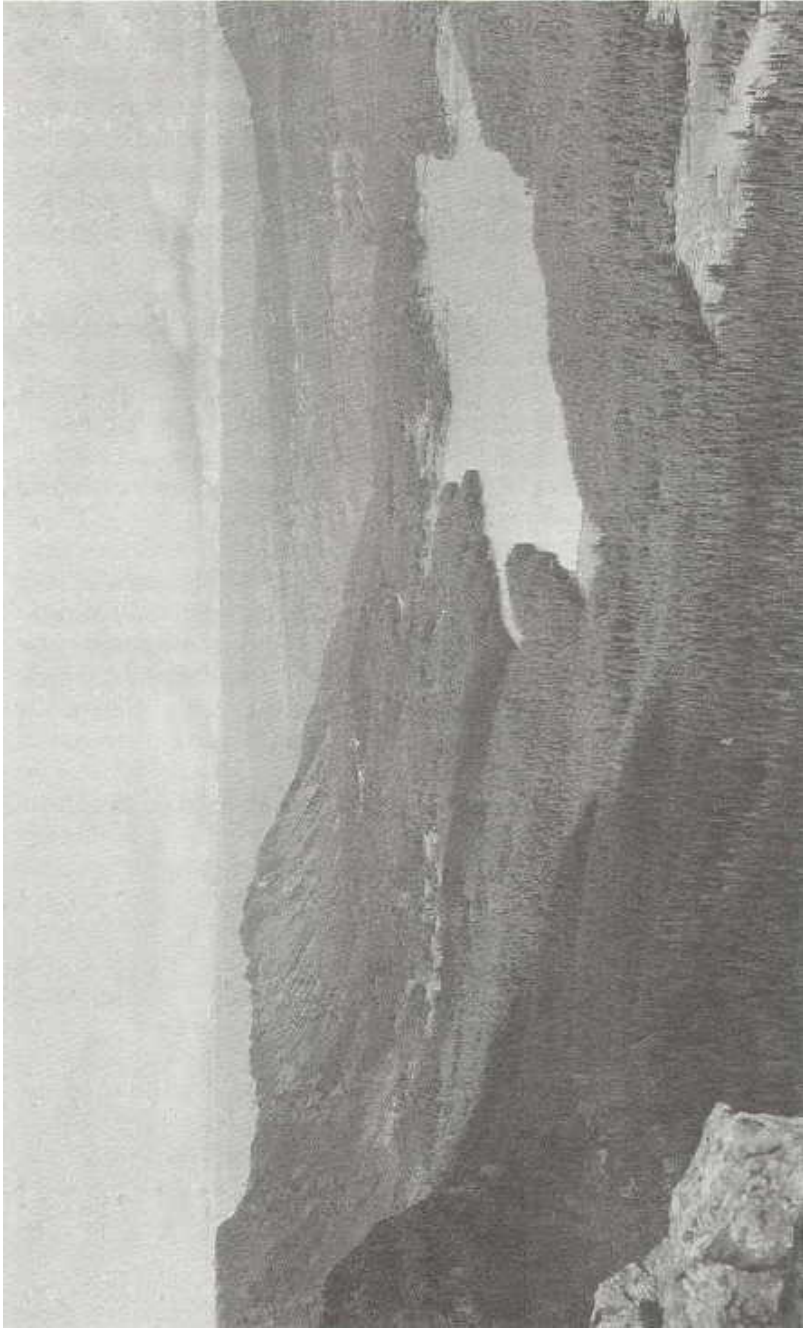
During those sunny days of late summer the Crawfords and their companions had many opportunities to observe the busy picas putting up their own hay, piling grass and other plants to dry on the rocks, then carrying bundles of it in their mouths down holes for winter use. From the same rock slides marmots scolded sharply.

Following game trails that crisscrossed scrub willows and alpine timothy, the explorers skirted lakes and waded through swamps. All this water would eventually find its way into countless streams, among them White River and Yampa River. The largest lake was Trappers' Lake in a bowl of heavy timber. It was said to be bottomless. To east and west reared tremendous rock rims, remnants of an ancient plateau, hammered and gouged by millions of years.

One morning Louis Garborino, Mr. Dever, and the dogs climbed the east rim while Pa, Logan, and John tackled the west rim. There were few ways to get up or down those giant walls. Once on the west rim, Pa and the boys found themselves in an alpine meadow carpeted with wild flowers. Spring forget-menots, fall fireweed, and all kinds of flowers were jumbled together. Pa said they all had to bloom in a hurry because it might snow day after tomorrow.

Far below stretched wilderness without end, a tangle of timber, willows, and waterways. Just ahead, in the meadow here on top of this rim, three doe deer bounded away. A monster buck, taking his ease, was too fat and comfortable to bother. A pair of eagles soared overhead, maybe looking for the ptarmigan hen the explorers almost stepped on. In mottled brown, black, and white summer plumage, she blended with the rocks. Her five downy chicks froze where they were, and the eagles did not see them.

Where the plateau broke into an area of slides and timberline spruce, Pa, in the lead, stopped abruptly. Something up ahead was clattering rocks. The boys, their ears popping with the high altitude and their hearts pounding from the climb, looked where Pa pointed. Not thirty yards away was a mother grizzly bear, turning over rocks with her great paws and finding something that her two cubs were licking up with relish. At that instant the mother grizzly must have caught scent of the intruders for she reared on her hind legs, baring sharp white teeth, and let out a roar.



**Trappers Lake and timbered basin around it as seen from
rim of Flat Tops (Photo by U.S. Forest Service)**

“Shh!” Pa hissed. “Don't move!” He gripped his gun till his knuckles showed white. Logan and John stood rooted.

Perhaps the grizzly's little eyes did not see too well, or perhaps the wind shifted and she decided there was no danger. After what seemed an eternity, she lowered herself, and she and the cubs leisurely pigeontoed into the timber. Only then did Pa and the boys dare to breathe again. They looked to see what the bears had been eating and discovered the remains of big fat millers.

One day, while Louis and Mr. Dever and the dogs roamed widely, Pa and the boys explored the great rock rampart that extended for many miles northeast from Trappers' Lake (now called the Chinese Wall). They were rewarded with a close view of sure-enough mountain sheep. They had barely got on top when they saw seven rams walking along a ledge toward them, all fine, big animals with massive curled horns. Crouched behind rocks, the explorers could watch the rams pass within ten feet, could almost count the corrugations on the horns and see the muscles flowing beneath sleek hides.

A little farther on they peered past an old pocket of snow left over from last winter and counted nineteen ewes, lambs, and yearlings lying on a ledge. Just for fun, Logan tossed a pebble that barely missed a young ram and hit a pinnacle. Away went the sheep! It was wonderful how they could leap among the rocks and not miss their footing. Not even the littlest lamb fell off the cliff.

After a week or so the campers went on to Steamboat Springs to make sure everything there was all right. They drank sparkling Iron Water, took a bath in the hot spring, and rested in the Crawford log cabin. Nights were frosty now. Pa said it was time to go. One morning they went out and shut the door behind them and hit for Boulder.

What a summer they had had, just menfolks together! What adventures they could tell to the little new baby and Lulie and Ma! Now, it seemed they could not get home to the womenfolks fast enough. Logan kept talking about apple dumplings. And John could hardly wait to see how pleased Ma would be to get the present he had for her — that nice little dried cottontail rabbit!



Chapter II

TOM SAWYER OF ROUTT COUNTY

Routt County, Colorado had its own Tom Sawyer, but in Routt County he was called John Crawford. Instead of the Mississippi River and catfish, John had Bear River with three or four trout behind every boulder and a western wilderness that Hannibal, Missouri could never provide for Tom Sawyer. What lay in the big mountains nobody knew for certain. All kinds of tracks patterned the game trails that led down from them to the mineral marsh at Steamboat Springs. At night coyotes and sometimes wolves raised an unholy chorus from Woodchuck Hill.

There was wilderness enough just outside the cabin door. The willows bordering Soda Creek, Kitten Creek, and Butcherknife Creek were real woods. Bluebells, pea vines, and gooseberry bushes tangled over beaver ditches and bear wallows. A fellow could run onto ANYTHING. Just walking to the garden up the gulch was adventure when something else had walked there a few minutes before and made tracks as big as hams with long claw marks out in front.

When John was a little lad, Lulie and Logan really tried to keep an eye on him, but sometimes they were so busy about their own affairs that they were across the hill or beyond the mesa faster than his shorter legs could follow. And so, having been born a philosopher, he made himself comfortable wherever he happened to be, under a sagebrush or willow, and took a nap. Once Lulie and Logan could not find him anywhere and were afraid he had fallen in Soda Creek, which was swift and high. At last they located him curled up back of the kitchen stove.

As he grew older and could ride a horse by himself, he could keep up better. One day all three children were larruping along horseback, with John in the rear, when his pony bucked him off. He ran howling to the cabin so Ma would know how terribly he was hurt, but he had strength enough to yell back, "Bring my hat!" Hat was a straw nubbin that had gone up to seed.

In a year or two he did not need anyone to look after him,

and Pa could trust him to take the shotgun and go hunting grouse. In the spring of the year blue grouse, that had been up in the high country all winter living on spruce needles, came down to the bare spots on the ridges. On this particular morning John, with Legs, the greyhound, had climbed Jackrabbit Hill on the snow crust and just over the top had come upon a flock of grouse running along with their tails spread. He had shot a couple and the rest had flown across to the next ridge. He was starting to follow them when he saw a mountain lion walk out of the scrub oaks not many yards away. The lion was looking over his shoulder at John. The hunter thought fleetingly about trying to shoot it. His ammunition consisted of hand loads that Pa had loaded himself, and he doubted if they would kill a lion. By then the dog had taken after the big cat on his own hook and had run him up a scraggly spruce tree.

Pa was at Suttle's sawmill seeing about some lumber. John ran to the cabin, got the rifle and a handful of cartridges and took them to him. Pa went with John to where Legs still had the lion treed though it was growling and spitting, swishing its tail, and acting as if it was going to jump out. Pa shot the cat, dragged it to the cabin, skinned it, and hung the hide on the outer wall. "Must have weighed two hundred pounds!" he said.

Settlers recognized a mountain lion as a potential predator, large enough and powerful enough to be feared. Usually, lions preyed upon deer, but the deer had not yet returned from wintering in the lower country. This lion had probably been after the grouse. Had it come upon a small boy alone — Pa petted his good dog, and praised his son.

Though John's lion had stirred up considerable excitement, Nibs, the horse, caused just about as much excitement when he got a fishhook caught in his tail. John, on his way home from fishing down the river, had stopped at the Iron Spring to get a drink. He had his willow pole in one hand. The hook he had tried to fasten in the thin willow bark came undone and flipped into the horse's tail. In trying to jerk it free, John only set the barb more solidly.

Nibs snorted and reared. The pole flew out of John's grasp. Usually stolid and unhurried, Nibs turned loose. With the fishpole bumping along behind, he plunged toward the cabin, ran around it, and jumped the running gear of a wagon that had been left near the barn. He jumped the woodpile — a feat which ordinarily he never could have accomplished, and galloped around and around the cabin, the fishpole following on his heels. He kicked, bucked, and snorted but could not rid himself of the

thing. Finally, he took off through the sagebrush, and John found him down on his back in a gully still feebly kicking. After several tries, John managed to extract the fishhook.

* * *

The Crawfords spent the winter of 1886-87 visiting in Denver and Sedalia, but when spring came they were eager to get home to Steamboat. Pa needed to be there to oversee the building of his new house, which was to be a two-story frame cottage on the hill above the old cabin. Since snow on the passes was still too deep for horse travel, the womenfolks would have to wait a while. Logan found a ride with Perry Burgess, a partner of Pa's in the town company, who had homesteaded two miles south of Steamboat. Mr. Burgess, with three other men (Ed Cody, Jim Hickey, and Johnny O'Conner), wanted to start placering at Hahns Peak and thought they could get there with a wagon by going around by Rawlins, Wyoming and Snake River.

Pa and fourteen-year-old John caught a ride to Empire and walked the rest of the way to Steamboat. Walking some hundred and thirty or forty miles in the tail end of winter, across two mountain ranges, through snow, mud, and slush, appears to have been a simple matter hardly worth mentioning in later years. The two traveled unencumbered with baggage. They carried only the clothes on their backs and a few biscuits in their pockets; and of course, Pa had his .44 Colt pistol. They were more than welcome to spend a night in any settler's cabin along the way, or they could sleep almost as comfortably with a rock at their backs and a campfire to warm by. Travel this early in the season was better than it would be later when creeks were booming.

Near the end of their journey, Fish Creek was always something to reckon with, full of big boulders, swift and treacherous, and even now beginning to rise. Since John and Pa were afoot, they had no trouble crossing it by straddling a log. A couple of miles plus three creeks farther, and they were home!

When they had rested a day or so, Pa walked up Elk River to fetch the horses Mr. Keller had wintered for him, and John found his fishpole and went to catch some trout in Soda Creek. While trying to push drift logs out of a nice hole, he lost his balance and fell in the ice cold water. He crawled out, soaked to the skin. His teeth were chattering by the time he could slosh to the kitchen and build a fire in the stove. He saw Pa's pipe on the

table. Never had John tried a pipe before, but this seemed a good time. Lacking tobacco, he put several pinches of ground coffee in the pipe bowl, lit it, and began to smoke.

Pa came in, sniffing, before his son was expecting him. John explained that he had heard a coffee smoke was good to prevent catching cold. Pa did not say anything. After John dried out, he went back down to the creek and caught those trout he had been after in the first place.

As for Logan, he and the men he was with had to leave their wagon on Snake River below Three Forks at Hinman's and walk the rest of the way, pulling a trail sled and traveling at night after the snow had crusted. At Hahns Peak Logan borrowed snowshoes (skis), struck out by himself, and was soon in Steamboat.

When roads could be traveled, Pa and Logan took a team and wagon Outside. Pa picked up Ma, Lulie, and Mary in Denver, and Logan got the other team and wagon that had been left in Georgetown all winter and loaded the wagon with provisions. It was not long till all the Crawfords were back home again, well started on another summer.

* * *

Henry Monson had lately moved his family from Napa, California to Routt County, Colorado and filed on a homestead



Pagoda over Iron (Soda) Spring

Aunt Annie Crawford seated, John with Legs, the greyhound, and little Mary Crawford standing on the bench.

in Pleasant Valley, twelve miles above Steamboat. It was a great day when Jim Monson, the oldest son, and John Crawford got acquainted. Tom Sawyer had his Huckleberry Finn, and John Crawford had Jim Monson. Jim bore no resemblance to Mark Twain's boy tramp except that he was the best friend a fellow ever had. That friendship lasted a lifetime. One year younger than John and smaller built, Jim was full of pluck and vim, and interested in the same things John was — hunting, fishing, and doing the least studying possible.

Since there were now too many scholars to fit in the original log school house near Soda Creek, classes were held in a larger, rented building up town. Jim could not attend the first term, a summer session, and John had to struggle alone with THE COMPLETE SPELLER by Alonzo Reed, subtitled by John Crawford “Everlasting Pain.” He found he could endure the book better if he annotated it liberally. For instance, under **LESSON I**, Long ā; examples were

aim

praise

He gave the words some sense by adding to them:

aim *low*

praise *God*

On the following pages, he continued the process:

lynx *in Dever's mine*

whoa *Emma*

zero *42 degrees below*

pie *you bet!*

massacre *at Mountain Meadows*

scalp *Sand Creek*

Any blank pages fore and aft were suitably filled with quotations of poetry and song:

“A cup of cold water

A cup of cold water

A cup of cold water”

The poor fellow said.

But ere I returned

His spirit had flown.

I gazed on his face

And saw he was dead.

* * *

*The sun was sinking in the west and fell with a lingering ray
Through the branches of a forest where a wounded ranger lay.
A group had gathered 'round him as comrades in the fight
And a tear rolled down each manly cheek as he bid his last
good night....*

*"She was in my dreams" — but his voice failed there,
And they took no heed to his dying prayer.
In a shallow grave just six by three
We left him there on the lone prairie.*

* * *

*Come where the lilies, the sweet fragrant lilies
Come where the lilies bloom so fair....*

* * * * *

Not quite everything about school was painful. Noontime, when the lady teacher had gone home to lunch, was a lark. The pupils who lived too far away to go home would eat their lunches as fast as they could in the shade of the schoolhouse and then someone would whang a mouth harp and they would dance, little folks and big brothers and sisters together. John had to run to the cabin by Soda Creek for lunch, but he swallowed his food whole so he could hurry back and join the fun. The teacher said dancing was wicked. When she caught them at it, she would pray over them. She would pray for an hour, it seemed.

After the lady teacher left, a man named Robinson took over, and Jim Monson came down and stayed with Crawfords for a while to attend classes. John, Jim, and Kansas Parkinson were the biggest boys in school. Even though they were almost men, their folks were determined for them to absorb all the book learning they could. Mr. Robinson was pretty rough. When he tried to whip Kansas for some misdemeanor, Kansas whipped him. Later, Mr. Robinson was going to whip Trix (Blanche) Monson, Jim's younger sister. Jim got up and said, "Trix, you stay in your seat."

Mr. Robinson turned on Jim. He shouted, "Well, I'll take you!"

John arose and proclaimed, "Well, you'll have to take two of us!"

Mr. Robinson backed down. When the school board heard all the facts, they sided with the pupils.

One day the teacher pulled a hunk of hair out of Oscar Woolery's head while trying to discipline him. To get even, the

other boys took the scent bags out of a big skunk and poked them far under the school house on each side. Mr. Robinson had the boys and John's dog trying to dig out the skunk. The boys could stand the smell, but the teacher could not and had to dismiss school for a few days. Finally, vigorous prompting from the parents enabled the boys to "find" and remove what was left of the skunk, and the smell simmered down. It never did quite go away.

Skunk smell was all around the country anyhow. John had a trap set by a log under the creek bank and got a skunk nearly every morning. He knew how to take care of it, and the town folk never suspected.

At that time Routt County paid a bounty of twenty-five cents on skunks and one dollar on coyotes. The Steamboat Springs Company paid twenty-five cents for every porcupine killed on Springs property. (John and Jim got a few that were not on Springs property.) Porcupines peeled pine trees, causing them to die. The slow, dim-witted rodents were a hazard to horses, cattle, and dogs, who got festering sores from quills in their noses or legs. Since the quills were barbed, they were almost impossible to pull out. They might go in a nose and work through an eye. Dogs sometimes learned to leave porcupines alone, but range stock persisted in investigating, and one slap from a porcupine's tail could make them look like walking pincushions.

Pa, of course, was aware that John was trapping skunks and a few other things. Ma sometimes had to make her younger son change his clothes in the root house before coming in the cabin. However, John took care that nobody in the family knew about certain other business he had.

When Jim Monson went back to Pleasant Valley to help with ranch chores, John bethought him of Harvey Woolery's sons down the valley. On an occasional moonlit night he ate fried frog legs with Wyman and Oscar at the Secret Cabin. He had helped these friends cut logs and build the tiny structure on their Uncle Milt's place just below Burgess's but south of the river. The Woolery boys would sneak out a pan or pail and go down there and cook meals at night after everyone else was asleep. It was easy for them to leave the house unnoticed. Since the upstairs gable where they slept was just roughly boarded, they could push the boards aside and climb stealthily down a ladder whenever they pleased.

All John had to do was go to bed with his clothes on and when the rest of the family were settled for the night, tiptoe out



**In the fall of 1886 Henry Monson built this home in Pleasant Valley.
On October 1 Mrs. Monson and six children moved in, and
On October 9 the seventh child, Ray, was born.**

Laura standing with horses

the opening in the cabin courtyard and, quietly joined by the dog, leg it down the trail and wade the river at the shallows.

Pa probably knew more than he let on about his son's activities. After all, he had been a boy himself, and many a night in Missouri had slipped out to meet Hute Richardson and hunt wild turkeys by moonlight.



SCHOOL OF THE BIG MOUNTAINS

On the frontier a boy went to two schools if he was lucky: one, a regular school, cramped in a house with a dozen or so other pupils of assorted ages, where he learned the names and capitals of the states and territories and the multiplication table; and the other, much more important to him, the Out-of-Doors, where he learned to survive.

On a day in midsummer Pa noticed John on the corral fence, his eyes fixed on the crags and ridges to the northeast, while the barn waited to be cleaned and the wood to be chopped. Pa leaned his elbows on the fence and took a long look himself, not only at the granite and timber of the mountains, but at his son. John had shot up in the last year till he was taller and bigger boned than Logan. At fourteen, John was almost a man. By and by Pa said, "Son, I think you'd better go and look over that country yonder. Take grub and lay out three or four nights and get up on top. We may have visitors this fall who might want to go camping up there."

John stretched another inch right then. He knew Pa was sending him to the big mountains to polish off his education. This was one school John was "r'arin'" to attend. Logan had already passed his examinations in this school several times over. Most recently he had blazed a trail to Buffalo Pass.

Next morning John rolled out before sunup. Ma was already cooking breakfast, and Pa had brought in Nibs from the pasture. John put an extra heavy blanket under the saddle. He wrapped a poke of grub and a frying pan in an old comforter and roped that behind the saddle. Then he swallowed two or three bites of breakfast, grabbed the Sharps gun, jumped on Nibs, and struck out. He knew Ma and Pa would watch him as far as they could see, but he did not look back. Gruffly, he said to Monty, the yellow dog that was leaping at the horse's head, "Come on, boy!"

Well acquainted with the lower reaches of Soda Creek, he made good time as far as the Bear Tree. This landmark was a big yellow pine which grew on a bear crossing between Soda Creek and Gunn Creek. Just below it was a nice spring used by



High Country Lakes

the bear for a bathtub. After they had wallowed in the spring, they would stand up and smear their muddy feet on the tree and mark their measure on the trunk with their muddy noses. They had worn every shred of bark off a large knot on one side. Though John had never actually seen bear at this tree, the story

was plain for the reading, and as he approached the crossing today, he thought any minute he might see a bear. Nibs thought so, too, and stopped with a snort.

“Get along, boy!”

Reluctantly, Nibs proceeded, walking as if on stilts. A mink slid away in the willows, and he tried to believe it was a bear. A grouse flushed from under him, and he almost left his skin.

“Easy, boy!”

Game trails did not always go the direction John wanted to, which was up Soda Creek to its beginning. He and Nibs traveled the side hill when they could, fought willows and alders when they could not, and now and again found themselves in a mess of marsh where Nibs had to heave mightily to pry himself loose, and both horse and rider got covered with mud.

When the creek forked, John took the branch to the north. A time or two he lay down and drank. Monty lapped water loudly. Nibs refused to drink.

On the hill under the bald pink dome of Husted Mountain John found a rusted hatchet that some trapper or prospector had lost. It came in handy that night when he made camp by a little mud hole. With it he cut tender spruce undergrowth and fixed his bed in the shelter of scrubby trees, spreading saddle blanket over the boughs and comforter on top. Though the day had dawned clear, clouds had gathered and a sprinkle of rain sputtered on the campfire. The rain was not enough to hurt, and the clouds kept the night from being so cold. John and Monty shared bacon and biscuits out of the frying pan, and Nibs, picketed just so he could not step on the bed, chomped grass.

Then, bone weary, boy and dog crawled beneath the comforter. John had his gun right there by him under the cover, and he used his saddle for a pillow — not that it made a very soft pillow, but he could be sure no porcupines would gnaw on it. He could hear sticks cracking everywhere as wild creatures moved through the night. He thought he had better keep one eye open.....

Sun in his face roused him. Cramped and frozen, he sat up. Then, remembering where he was, he let out a shout that stampeded Nibs to the end of his picket rope and set a pine squirrel to chattering. The mountains gave back his shout — those mountains he was going to climb!

That day for lunch he crammed his mouth with huckleberries high on a slope beyond the head of Soda Creek. Blue grouse, chipmunks, and ptarmigan were eating huckleberries, too. Bear sign was everywhere. John watched a nice rolypoly

black yearling below him in a meadow nosing into a yellow jacket's nest in the ground. The bear ran away batting at his nose where he must have been stung, but came back and cleaned out the larvae. Nibs was too winded to notice. Boy, dog, and horse all had to puff in this high altitude, and John's ears were stopped up. He could sometimes pop them open by yawning or working his jaws.

That day he reached the High Country, a land of broad meadows alternating with thickly timbered slopes and stony ridges. He tried to keep a fairly straight course, hoping he would soon come to the top and see out to the east, but this was hard to do when almost every hollow was filled with a pond or lake. It took a while to pick his way around the water through heavy timber. The meadows were crisscrossed with game trails and stomped up by deer, elk, bear, and mountain sheep. Buffalo had once been here as evidenced by bleached horns and old wallows. Bright colored flowers now grew in the wallows.

In a little long valley John came upon a herd of elk cows and calves. The cows took after the dog, putting their noses to the ground just the way tame cows did, but with longer legs the elk could move faster than tame cows. Monty was ducking and running as hard as he could. For a minute John thought he might have to shoot to protect himself.

Monty knew this was not a hunting expedition and stayed close to Nibs except when goaded beyond endurance by ptarmigan roosters whistling and making a great to-do on every rocky point.

Nibs had to stop often to blow. Across a rocky spur John finally saw what he believed was the top. To reach it, he nudged the horse through a sort of natural gateway between jutting rocks, and in another few grunts Nibs had taken him to the edge of a precipice.

And there it was — North Park! He could look a thousand feet down and miles across to blue-green lakes, streams, cloud shadows, and what he guessed was the Medicine Bow range. He named the spot where he stood Atlantic Point because it faced toward the Atlantic ocean. A long time he sat in the saddle filling his eyes. Mighty big country!

He was finally able to bring his attention back to immediate surroundings. Below him the cliff sheared away in a perpendicular drop of thirty or forty feet to a grassy ledge before it plunged down again. On that ledge was what he believed at first was a pile of white rocks. Then he saw that they were not rocks but bones.

He led Nibs back to a tree, tied him securely, and found a precarious way to get down to the ledge where he could better examine those bones. There were all kinds, big and little, elk skulls and horns, buffalo heads, sheep heads, ribs, hoofs..... With considerable trouble he climbed back to the top of the cliff and discovered that, to right and left, stone walls enclosed a natural corral of several acres. Those granite walls were not man made. Millions of years they had stood there, from the



**Mt. Ethel, viewed from just over North Park side
Picture taken on camping trip in later years**

very beginning when the mountains had been heaved up, and they narrowed toward the only entrance, by which John had blundered in.

Now he could understand that pile of bones. Indians had long ago discovered this place and had used it as a game trap. A few hunters on foot, or more lately on horseback, could harry buffalo or other big game through the gateway, where other Indians with spears and arrows could dispatch them at close range, or run them over the cliff to certain death. This was an easy way to secure meat and hides needed for survival. With the toe of his boot John uncovered a shattered arrowhead and a crude quartzite skinning knife. He was glad to get out of that place of bones.

That night he pitched camp in a spruce grove beside a small lake. He could see no fish in the clear water. As far as he had been able to determine, there were no fish in any of these high mountain lakes. Three elk, that had been feeding in the meadow, waded into the lake and swam across — not because they were afraid of the intruders but because they wanted to eat the yellow pond lilies that grew in a cove on the far side. John watched them chew the blooms and drink in the long stems just like macaroni.

Never before had he slept so close to the stars. The wind knifed through his comforter till he moved around where the warm draft from the fire could blow over him. Curled together, he and Monty listened to foxes barking. Nibs stood as close as he could.

Next morning the three of them tackled a high, treeless promontory where Nibs had to dig in against a wind that almost knocked him off the mountain, and Monty had his hair skinned back by the blasts. John clamped a hold on his hat to keep it from being snatched into Kingdom Come. But the wind could not blow the three of them off any more than it could blow off the willows, barely an inch high, or the big fuzzy, yellow sunflowers that clung close to the ground.

Once more John peered into North Park. He reckoned he could see the forks of the North Platte river and almost to Fort Laramie. By turning a little, he could pretty nearly look over the whole world: south along the Park Range to endless canyons and crags; west, away off yonder toward the Uintas; closer, Hahns Peak and Crystal Peak and Elk Mountain, mere nubbins in the immensity. He counted thirteen lakes. Some day he would visit all of them. When he had looked and looked, Nibs took him back down the way they had come, scrambling and



High country pond with lily pads

sliding past limber pines that had to crawl here to exist at all.

Following a game trail through the spruce trees, he soon realized that he and Nibs and Monty were not alone. The entire woods seemed to be moving. Elk were traveling a short distance on either side of him, a big herd. They were not running, just working along parallel with him.

Suddenly, in an opening ahead, a doe deer appeared. John could see the sun shining through her big, mule-like ears. She flopped those ears right at him as if daring him, so he shot a hole through one of them. Afterwards he was a little sorry he had done it, but the bullet didn't hurt her much more than a fly bite. The noise from the black powder reverberated through the woods, and the doe tore out of there, along with the elk. This was the only time on the entire trip that he shot his gun.

Three nights he stayed in the mountains, and might have stayed longer except that his grub gave out. All the while, he tried to fix in mind the lay of the land and the best trails to follow if he had to guide visitors up here.

On the evening of the fourth day he and Nibs and Monty got back home. The folks had been looking for them. Ma had kept supper. John was almost too tired to sit at the table, but he wore a grin that nearly split his blistered, freckled face. What a lot he had to tell!

Pa did not have to wait to hear his tales. Pa's answering grin said it was very plain that his son had passed his examinations in the School of the Big Mountains!



Chapter IV

HUNTER'S LUCK

The men of Yampa Valley were laying in meat for winter. Every cabin must have enough deer or elk hung on the back to freeze and last through the months of deep snow. Most of the deer had already migrated west to lower country, but elk were still in the mountains, and the hunters were making the most of the open fall weather.

Pa and Logan were among the hunters, and this year, instead of hanging their meat on the back of the log cabin that had served the family so well for over a decade, they would store it in a shed behind their newly completed frame cottage. Though surely this was a mark of progress, Steamboat Springs remained a very small, remote, frontier community, and in winter was sometimes cut off from supply points for weeks and even months at a time.

John Crawford, fourteen, and Jim Monson, thirteen, started up Soda Creek. They did not fool around the Hot Springs or Storm Mountain where most of the Steamboat folks were hunting. They were headed for better adventure. John knew where there were plenty of elk — the High Country! He had talked of nothing else since his exploratory trip alone earlier in the season. Mainly, he wanted to show Jim the range lakes and give him a look into North Park.

Both boys considered themselves experienced hunters. John had killed his first deer on Jackrabbit hill at the age of ten, and his first elk across the river just a year ago. Jim, also, had shot some game. Their camp outfit consisted of a blanket apiece, a wagon sheet they could drape over a pole for a tent, a frying pan and a poke of grub. John rode a horse called Dan, and Jim a little gray. Monty, the dog, went along.

They should have started earlier. By the time they reached the forks of the creek a little after noon, the sky had clouded over, and wind was rattling down the last dry aspen leaves. They rode on anyway as far as they could, camping at dark under a leaning rock. Hunched over a small fire, they wolfed the supper Ma had packed for them, piled in with the dog under the blankets, wagon sheet on top, and managed to be not too

uncomfortable.

During the night it rained. The rain turned to snow, and by morning the ground was covered with a skim of white. Less stout hearted hunters might have turned back. Not John and Jim. That day the sure footed mountain ponies carried them through alternate sun and snow squalls to the High Country. The snow melted almost as soon as it fell. The boys heard distant elk bugging but saw no elk in the first high meadows they crossed. Taking advantage of a spell of sunshine, John guided his friend to the top of the divide, careful to choose a route other than through the game trap. He waved an arm.

"There she is! North Park!"

Jim's eyes bugged out just the way John had known they would.



On October 7, 1886 John, age 13, killed his first elk across the river from Steamboat. His uncle, John D. Crawford, Sr., took the picture.

"Didn't I tell you?"

North Park — like a map scrawled with blue and brown and purple crayons, a mile down and miles across to the Medicine Bow range. Some day they would go there.

When they had looked a long time, they followed a rocky spur south. Heady with adventure, they pushed on where not even John had ever gone before until they were brought up short at the edge of a precipice. Only then did they realize that it

was almost night and they had better find a place to camp.

They chose a spot on a little tableland, a causeway, where the range sloped both directions, east and west, and they could throw a rock either way. There Jim cooked his first meal. Under John's tutelage, he cut bacon and potatoes and made biscuits. (Fifty years later: Question by Lulita — "Were the biscuits good?" Answer by Jim Monson — "You bet they were good!")

The boys put their bed under some stunted timber, reasoning that, as the trees were bent toward the east, the wind must blow from the west and they would be snug. When they went to bed, the stars were shining. When they awoke in the morning, five inches of snow covered the wagon sheet, and the wind was blowing a gale from the east. They tried and tried to make a fire. The wood was so hard and pitchy it was almost impossible to shave any kindling. Though they crouched under a blanket to keep their matches from going out, they never did coax a flame and finally gave up without breakfast.

What they had to do was get to the meadows and find the elk. A nice time they had trying to tie stiff, sleety ropes around their camp outfit. When they finally got the horses saddled and packed, Jim's little gray bucked down through the rocks. As Jim later told it, his horse was "sure willing that morning!"

The storm had somewhat subsided by the time they reached open park country near the first lake. Written in the snow were fox, coyote, weasel, and rabbit sign and plenty of elk tracks and droppings. The boys held their guns ready. They felt certain they would run onto the herd around the next grove of spruce. It did seem strange that everything was so quiet. The woods should have echoed to the bugling of bulls.

The hunters rode till their wet feet almost froze; then they dismounted and led their horses. Monty chewed at the balls of ice on his hair. No elk; just silent, white meadows. No marmots whistled from the rockslides. They must have gone to bed for the winter. There was not even a sandpiper to bob on the shore of any of the ponds or lakes. Those lakes were no longer sparkling blue as they had been in the summer. Rumpled by wind, they reflected the gray sky.

Doggedly, John and Jim followed a widening trail chopped with elk tracks. Slipping and sliding in half slush, half mud, their hearts pounding in the high altitude, they tried to hurry. They followed that trail till it led over a pass and dipped down toward North Park, and then they stopped. They would never catch up to those elk. The big gangling critters were gone. Since the beginning of time, their hoofs had carved this trail till it was



**Jim Monson with binoculars, and John Crawford
On top of range in later years**

cut two feet deep through the tundra. Buffalo, deer, mountain sheep — all had no doubt used it, traveling single file down to the plains and valleys just ahead of winter. Not till next season would they return the same way for a brief lush summer.

Staring down that trail, John and Jim knew it was time they, too, were getting out of the High Country.

Half frozen, disappointed, and bone tired, they pitched their last camp beside a small lake where the horses could find good grazing. On the lee side of a clump of spruce the forest floor was almost dry. A tree that had broken over furnished a tent pole for the wagon sheet. As far as camp went, this night the hunters were well fixed: good shelter, plenty of wood for a fire, and grouse for supper. Instead of leaving the high mountains, the blue grouse had moved up into them where they could live on spruce needles all winter. They were easy to shoot.

Since some wild herds always wintered on the western slopes, the boys felt they still had a chance of finding game. As they headed home, they did spot a few elk away down in a canyon, but decided not to go after them because packing the meat out would have been almost impossible.

On upper Soda Creek they sighted another small bunch of elk, which were traveling so fast the horses could not overtake

them. Neither could the boys on foot though they tied the horses and, with Monty's half-hearted help, ran themselves ragged. Snow on the ground here was about six inches deep. When at last the hunters had to give up and return to where they had hastily tied their mounts, the horses had pulled loose and were gone. The sign in the snow showed they were headed for Steamboat, dragging their reins.

If the wet snow had not balled up on the reins and weighted them down enough to slow the horses, Dan and the little gray would already have been halfway to Steamboat. As it was, the boys finally caught them, and they all got home that night.

John and Jim had no elk meat to contribute to the family larders, but nobody could say they had not tried!



Chapter V

TOO MANY BEARS

On the frontier, to be a good hunter meant to be a good provider. Pa Crawford was the best, and he taught his skills to his sons. It took a lot of providing to feed the growing number of land seekers, prospectors, and adventurers who, in the restless years of early Colorado statehood, followed the age-old trail down Bear River and found the hospitable Crawford cabin an oasis in the wilds. Nobody ever thought of paying for a meal or a night's shelter.

Some of the travelers called the main stream through the valley Bear River; others, called it Yampa River. Both names were appropriate. Yampa referred to the edible tubers which grew in profusion in the bottom lands and had been pounded into meal and eaten by the Utes. All kinds of bear were plentiful in this region. They were especially numerous around the mineral springs, coming nightly to the marshes to hunt frogs. Not only at night, but in broad daylight they asserted their prior ownership to Steamboat by strolling through or near town whenever it suited them, sometimes disrupting plans of the humans who thought they owned the place.

One September morning John climbed afoot up Woodchuck hill to get a deer. The dogs had all gone somewhere with Pa. Generally, a hunter did not have to look any farther than the Big Willow, that marked a spring about a quarter of a mile above the cabin. Today John found only tracks in the mud around the water hole and had to go clear over the ridge before he spotted a fine yearling buck in a grove of aspens below him to the west. With one shot he knocked it over and was starting down to it, picking his way through the rocks when something made him look up.

There, coming toward him along the game trail not a hundred feet away, were two monster grizzlies. Both were so heavy they rolled when they walked, and the balls of their feet turned up sideways. Fortunately, the wind was right and they did not see John. He sneaked around and got up on a rock so he would have a better chance at them if he had to defend himself. His gun was a little 38/40 Winchester — fine for deer, but too light

for the biggest, toughest critter in these mountains. John stood as still as he could and held his breath.

It flashed through his mind how a grizzly had once attacked Mr. Dever. The prospector had killed and dressed an elk, and when he went back to get it, a grizzly had covered it with sticks and dirt and was lying on top of the mound. The bear took after Mr. Dever, who threw his hat to distract the pursuer and tried to shoot him with his 45/70 Marlin gun. With one swipe the grizzly mashed the hat into the dirt and kept coming. Mr. Dever shot four times. The bear was almost on top of him. As he ran, Mr. Dever jerked his gun around and without aiming pulled the trigger for the fifth time. Luckily, the bullet hit the beast in the head and finished him. As the great bulk somersaulted down the hill, the hind feet knocked Mr. Dever over, and the claws raked his back. John had viewed the marks those claws had left.

Now, peering through a thin screen of bushes, he watched the two grizzlies amble past him. He had never seen such heads on anything in his life! He was so close he could almost count the hairs in the thick gray ruffs on their necks and could hear the long toenails click on the rocks. Since these bear were so gray, he reckoned they were old ones. Grizzlies kept together more than other bear. Probably, these had been after chokecherries that hung heavy and black on the north slopes.

When he thought they were a safe distance, he dropped down the steep hill over the rocks to the deer he had shot. With his gun right there against a tree, he dressed that deer faster than he had ever dressed one before, not taking time to trim the ragged piece off the diaphragm. Then he took the heart and liver, and beat it for home, afraid every minute the grizzlies would smell fresh blood.

He had not gone far when he saw a third bear galloping across an open slope. This one was coal black, and its coat rippled like meadow grass in the wind. John guessed it was running from the grizzlies, too.

Then, as if three bear were not enough, he spotted a fourth. It burst through the brush a couple of hundred yards yonder on the hill — a big brown bear. John did not waste any time watching the brown bear. He was too busy keeping an eye out for the grizzlies.

Not till he was inside the house and had put the deer heart and liver in a pan in the kitchen did he begin to breathe easy. He had never had such a close view of bears. Right now, home looked good to him. Tomorrow he would take a horse and bring in the venison, and he hoped those silvertips would stay in the

chokecherry patch!

* * *

Not long after that, Logan topped John's experience by running into five grizzlies one morning as he was on his way to take a bath in the hot springs at the other end of town. He had just got as far as Kitten Creek near the flat where the Sheridan Hotel would later be built, when two big male silvertips parted the willows. Logan saw them in time to duck under the bank. He waited till they moseyed on down toward the mouth of Soda Creek, then in a crouching run he continued under the bank till he thought it was safe to make a detour over the hill.

He was so intent on putting distance between himself and the two male grizzlies that he almost bumped into a mother grizzly with two cubs. Suddenly, she was right there ahead of him, a monstrous, humped shape, occupied at the moment in tearing a rotten log apart for grubs. All Logan could do was flatten himself in the brush and keep still.

A mother bear with cubs was no one to fool around with. Though grizzlies looked slow and cumbersome, they could move like lightning if provoked — witness what had happened to Mr. Dever! Logan was wondering how he was ever going to get to the bath. Mother and cubs took their time cleaning out the grubs, but after what seemed an hour, proceeded toward the river, investigating gopher holes as they went.

Logan finally did get his bath, and he made it back home, too, without further interruptions.

Let other folks call the river Yampa if they wanted to. Logan and John Crawford knew from experience that the right name was *Bear River*.



Chapter VI

HAHNS PEAK

John Crawford caught gold fever at an early age and never outgrew it. When he was about ten years old, inspired by the fancy names prospectors were giving their diggings around Hahns Peak, he went across Bear River, found a likely looking place, and named it the Timbertop Claim. He determined if he found a mine on a rainy day he would name it Maid o' the Mist.

What dreams were spawned from a few flakes of gold first discovered in the early 1860's by Joseph Hahn! In 1874, at the time John's father laid claim to the townsite of Steamboat Springs, placering was already being done twenty-five miles to the north by the Purdy Mining Company. Activity there increased greatly after James V. Farwell took over development. He brought in men and supplies, built a boarding house, saw-mill, store, and hired workers to dig a ditch with pick and shovel to bring water twenty-seven miles from Elk River for sluicing.

The story has been told and written many times. For lively details read **HISTORIC HAHNS PEAK** by Thelma V. Stevenson and **TREAD OF PIONEERS** by Charles H. Leckenby.

The Crawfords had their own personal memories of Hahns Peak. They, along with other settlers, generally benefited by



Hahns Peak

what went on there. Billy Gad, a young fellow living where Jim Sayres later had his store at Glen Eden, broke horses for Robert McIntosh, who was in charge of operations for Farwell. "Uncle" Ely Young was hired to furnish wild meat for the miners. Stone deaf, he still insisted he could hear the bullet go ka-spat when it hit an elk — "I know it were a thousand yard!" (Old timers, including James Crawford, took endless delight in telling tales on "Uncle" Ely.) Samuel Reid on Elk River sold vegetables, and the Crawfords on Bear River sold beef and butter. One week Pa Crawford took eighty pounds of butter to the Peak in two special wooden boxes, which he had made to fit a pack saddle. The butter brought fifty cents a pound.

Maybe that was the trip when little boy John went along and got his first look at Farwell's settlement, officially called International Camp, unofficially Bugtown. What most interested John at that time was the dinner bell which swung from a crooked piece of iron on a tall pole near the boarding house.

The miners and prospectors came from all walks of life. Many were well educated, and when they rode down to Steamboat to soak the aches out of their bones in the big hot spring, they brought books and papers and sometimes a nugget to a young lady named Lulie Crawford. All of which gave them a good excuse to eat a little "woman's cookin'" at the Crawford table.

Before a postal route was established from Hot Sulphur Springs to Steamboat in 1878, the Crawfords received their mail from the Union Pacific railroad via Rawlins (Wyoming), Snake River, and Hahns Peak. Even as late as 1885, in severe winter weather, letters sometimes found their way by that route since it was much more open than the road from Hot Sulphur Springs. Shipment of heavy materials was always easier through Rawlins. When the first frame bath house was built at Steamboat, the cement used to enclose the pools was hauled from there.

After Farwell quit in a few years, others took over mining operations on a smaller scale. International Camp was abandoned, and headquarters moved to Poverty Bar, later known as the town of Hahns Peak. Dyed-in-the-wool prospectors refused to be discouraged. There had to be riches somewhere in the shadow of that beautiful, symmetric, mysterious, gray peak. John, for one, had no doubt of it. Neither did Bill Leahy (pronounced la-he), who had been a ditch walker for Farwell.

But not everybody had gold fever, as Bill liked to relate. He was a tall, lank Irishman who had lost one eye in a gun fight.



Old Mine Tunnel

In later years he was janitor at the courthouse in Steamboat and enjoyed reminiscing with County Clerk John Crawford. As he talked, he would pull a lock of hair over his bad eye. He told about a man who had come to his cabin one spring day. Bill had washed out a nice pan of gold from a near-by creek, had brought it inside to better examine it, and just a minute before, had accidentally stepped on the pan, spilling the gold all over the floor. An awkward situation! Any sensible prospector knew better than to advertise what he found. Caught with the goods, Bill could only stammer, "Ain't this a p-pretty layout!" The fellow took no notice. He asked, "Seen any marten tracks?"

In the early nineties a man named Coates hired Logan Crawford to start placer development on the north side of the Peak. Logan had no trouble persuading his brother John, Jim Monson, and Russell Jones (whose parents had settled in Twenty-Mile Park) to come up and work. They were all husky young fellows eager to make their fortunes. They went early in the spring in order to take advantage of water from snow melt for sluicing operations. From Bugtown they traveled on the eastern side of the Peak twelve miles to Little Red Park and had to buck snowdrifts and rushing torrents all the way. Plenty of big, slushy bear tracks preceded them on the trail. In the edge of snowbanks wild tulips (dogtooth violets) had burst out in gold. On every barren slope blue grouse roosters strutted for modest gray hens, spreading their tails and "whoopety whoopin'."

With ten other men, the boys worked thirty days riveting pipe. A ditch had been run from King Solomon Creek, and flakes of gold washed out, but, according to one miner, "the gold was so rusty the quicksilver wouldn't touch it." However, it was in that same vicinity on a pile of rocks that Charlie Irwin picked up a chunk as big as a brickbat that was half gold!

All together, John, Jim, and Russell were in Little Red Park about three months. Mr. and Mrs. Coates were there, and an old Scotch couple named Sutherland to do the cooking for the crew. "Scotty" Sutherland and wife, just six weeks out of Scotland, were Mrs. Coates' father and mother. With them was a second daughter, who sang and played violin. The Yampa Valley boys ran out a no-good mule skinner who had followed her in. Scotty was always borrowing "a wee puckle of tobaccy" from someone. He liked Jim Monson because Jim did not run his horse "up the brae."

There could be no doubt that all the placer gold came from leads, or lodes. Many tunnels were driven in search of those leads. In 1895, when a surface outcropping of high grade silver



Logan Crawford (right) running "the Giant"

ore was found at the western base of the Peak a few miles from the original placering, the town of Columbine sprang up. Nearly ten tons of ore were quarried from the "Minnie D" mine, transported by wagons one hundred miles to Wolcott, and sent by rail to the Leadville smelters, giving a net return of six hundred dollars per ton. This ore appeared to come from a crack or seam in the formation and to have been forced up from some rich body of mineral below. Great excitement ensued. Two more town sites were quickly located — Peak City and Trilby.

John Crawford and Jim Monson were soon in the thick of things with a camp of their own between Columbine and the Master Key mine. They took Frank Tyle in as a partner, sunk a shaft thirty-five feet, timbered it, and worked till they were sore and tired and their hands were blistered. Then they went to Hinman Park to rest and eat trout. On the way they stopped at the Hahns Peak courthouse to pick up George Wither, County Clerk, who decided he also needed to rest and eat trout. Apparently, he felt he could be spared from the office. For some reason the boys were short a saddle, but George did not seem to mind riding one of the horses bareback to Hinman Park.

THIS IS THE WAY JOHN REMEMBERED THE COLUMBINE EXCITEMENT:

Campfires, tents, horses picketed everywhere...

Flapjacks and Dutch oven bread....

Prospectors with their jacks

Billy Whipple went out and got a deer. His horse came in bucking, and Billy was hollering...

People were singing and talking all night. You'd hear a lot about shale, porphyry, sylvanite, and blue lime....

"They found it today, just what they've been looking for" ... Leadville had blue lime and everyone thought silver ore would be in that. One fellow brought in a specimen of blue lime and we all went to look at it, but he wouldn't tell where he found it....

What they dug from the Good Thunder mine looked like silver but turned out to be mostly antimony.

Cap Smith built a cabin and had geraniums in cans in his window and a flower garden out in front.

Jim Donnohue was always bringing in "noggets!"

Joe Morin used to go some place up above town and pan out a good deal of gold in a red formation.

He would play poker up till a certain time; then he would quit whether he was winner or loser...

THIS IS WHAT LOGAN USED TO TELL:

"I worked in the ground sluices at the Peak for a while. Neal and George Lobb and I ran a night shift. By the light of coal oil lamps with big reflectors scattered on the banks, we 'washed down.' I ran the Giant and the boys would get the big rocks out. The Giant was the nozzle, three inch, four inch, or six inch. You could take a double-bitted axe and cut down through a four-inch stream, and the water would throw the axe. A fellow tried it and zowie! the axe sailed right by me.

"I would play the powerful jet of water along the bottom of the bank till the bank caved off. I had to be careful not to cave off too much at a time or I could not wash and pulverize it so it would run down through the sluices. The boxes were sixteen feet long with riffles in them. All the heads of the boxes would get filled with gold and 'quick' (quicksilver).

"The day shift would clean up. They would collect from the sluice boxes and also carefully examine the bed rock for thirty or forty feet on either side. Wherever there was a crevice or where somebody had stuck a shovel too deep, they would find a spoonful of gold.

"Even in summer, the nights were cold. We would wear all the clothes we could get on and wrap up in big mufflers. In the fall, we would come off the job every morning with an inch of ice all over rubber boots, slicker, and sou'wester. At midnight we would go into a little shanty, build a fire, and make coffee. Charlie Larson and his wife were running the hotel. At daylight we'd wash up at the hotel, have breakfast, and go to bed.

"In spite of the discomfort, working with nice bright gold was the prettiest kind of work anybody ever did!"

During the more than three decades that the county seat was at Hahns Peak, people coming to do business traveled bad roads and found poor accommodations on arrival. Jurors, attorneys, witnesses, and others attending district court generally had to camp out. Once when John was on jury duty, he was allowed to sleep in the corridor of the jail. The jail was a small log building with the cell block in the center, surrounded by a corridor. Several tough looking prisoners in the cell watched the newcomer through the bars. In a building across the street a dance was going on. John did not sleep very much. He was mindful that not long before, a prisoner had reached a chair leg through those bars and worked loose a nail in the floor, with which he had picked the lock and got out.

For four days John was on the jury. Judge Thomas A. Rucker from Glenwood Springs was on the bench. Once in a while the judge would dismiss court to go play poker. During one court session, the prisoner who was being tried and who had been routinely checked for weapons, had also been discovered to have in his possession a fine, large fly book containing leaders, fancy fish flies, lines, sinkers, and all kinds of fishhooks.

The judge scooted that down on the floor to John and said with a wink, "Give these exhibits to the rightful owner!"

As Logan Crawford remarked, "People did things at Hahns Peak they didn't do any place else in the world!"



**There is something down that hole – maybe a rich strike!
Logan operating windlass, John Crawford, and unidentified helper**



A BATH EVERY MORNING

Flatlanders from eastern Colorado and even adventurers from as far away as New York were beginning to discover the abundant wild game in Routt County. Each autumn more and more of them came to test their hunting prowess. Several Yampa Valley boys found themselves in the business of furnishing horses and being guides for a curious breed of person with whom they had never before rubbed shoulders. The boys did not always know what to think about these strangers from another world, and doubtless the visitors had their qualms about the barely grown kids who tried to "learn them" how to shoot.

The judgment of the visiting hunters may have been influenced by the obviously second-grade outfits their guides sometimes displayed. Though Logan had a pretty fair string of horses, John's pack animals were far from fancy. He had a big dark sorrel named Whisper, whose feet were so stove up he had trouble getting over a log, but otherwise was good and strong. He had another horse named Dollar because John had won him in a raffle. Dollar had once had the misfortune to run into a plow and cut his leg, which, when healed, was twice as big as the other leg. The size of that leg did not slow him down in the least. A third horse, Sourdough Bob, was so pigeon-toed he sometimes cut himself when he walked; otherwise, he was as good and faithful a pack horse as any in these mountains.

Visitors may also have been misled by the ancient firearms the boys generally carried. Though a gun was a frontier tool more important than an axe or saddle, seldom could a boy buy a new one. Instead, he traded with any land seeker or prospector passing through. Thus John had become the owner of an ivory handled .44 pistol, which he called Old Bony. It had been picked up on the prairies where it had lain in the sun till one side was faded white. No telling who had lost it or when. Some amateur gunsmith had tried to remodel it. A bullet shot from it would hit the mark but lacked penetration. Bill Williams had a Remington gun that shot a foot high. He never could figure how to correct that. He also owned a carbine that had been made from a rifle and was undependable. What the visitors might not

have realized was that the skill of a hunter could often more than compensate for the fault of a gun.

Logan had already had a year or two of experience before his younger brother undertook to be a mountain guide. His definition of a tenderfoot hunter was someone who talked too much and stubbed his toe at the wrong moment. The first thing John had to learn was that a can of beans would explode if he set it in the campfire to warm without first punching a hole in the top.

Being spattered with beans was nothing to the shock he got one October morning when he beheld the dude who had hired him splashing in ice-cold Elk River near camp, stark naked except for his goosebumps and the black hair on his chest. The horses were standing at the ends of their picket ropes, and the jay birds were raising a ruckus. That fellow, a New Englander, took a bath every morning no matter where he was. He seemed to have been raised that way. A bath, to John, meant soaking in the big, fine hot spring in Steamboat once or twice a week, or, in case of extreme necessity, making do in a tub on the kitchen floor.

John soon discovered that, no matter how smart a tenderfoot might appear to be, he would often lose whatever sense he had when he tried to shoot wild game. Take, for example Mr. Montgomery from Missouri. He thought he was shooting at a bear, but was actually levering the cartridges out of the chamber as fast as he could. He shouted, "I'm out of ammunition!" John told him, "There's plenty of it right around you on the ground."

Previously in the summer, John and Jim Monson had agreed to pack in a bunch of tourists and set up a camp near Luna Lake on the high range some ten or fifteen miles northeast of Steamboat Springs. These people were enjoying a long, leisurely vacation, camping, fishing, and shooting a few grouse. One of the men had brought along his wife and young child, and they were no doubt the reason for the featherbed. That featherbed caused more trouble than everything else put together.

Jim Monson, besides being a good bronc peeler, prided himself on his ability to pack anything on a horse, but that featherbed had him licked. It would crawl out from under his best diamond hitch.

His father, Henry Monson, said, "I think I can tie that thing on."

"Did you ever try tying a featherbed?"

"No, and neither did any other sane man in the mountains."

Henry, a skilled packer if ever there was one, had even managed to bring a huge square piano across Gore Range where there was no road to speak of. That was on a wagon, of course. The featherbed oozed out from under every knot and rope he could contrive. Finally, Jim did get the blamed thing to Luna Lake, but he had to stop every few feet to tie it on the horse again.

While Jim did most of the packing, John was general roustabout. He had his own horse and bedroll. Pretty soon the campers were commandeering his horse whenever they felt like it. Then, for variety, they wanted to ride Jim's little buckskin. Though Jim was generally good natured, he was a crank about letting any tenderfoot ride his horse. Still, he did not want to offend these people. He said, "I'd better get on him first." He knew from experience that if he cinched the horse a little too tight it would buck. To make sure, he hooked a spur up by its shoulder as he mounted. The buckskin came uncorked right now and plunged into the lake. After that, nobody wanted to ride such a wild mustang.

Later that fall John had real problems with a crabby business man from Denver, whom we shall call Andy. This was during the panic of 1893, and Andy was losing money every day. He had come hunting to try to settle his nerves. John took him up Elk River and made a nice camp. Accidentally, Andy let his gun go off in the tent while John was fastening the throat latch on one of the horses just outside. The bullet creased the horse's neck. It could just as well have killed John.

Not far from where John and Andy were camped was an Englishman with his own retinue. He had two servants, about twenty horses, and fifteen gallons of brandy. Whenever he went fishing, his man would take the fish off the hook. He had a big gun, a little gun, and a shotgun. John did not hang around to see what the fellow did with those guns.

Andy wanted to shoot an elk. Carefully keeping to the brush, John took him up along a ridge where a nice bunch of wapiti were feeding. Pointing out a fine bull, he said, "There he is. Get him!"

The two dogs, always along, and well trained, made a mistake this time and thought John was telling them to give chase. They broke and scared the elk. If Andy had been quick enough, he could have killed the bull anyhow, but he had buck fever so bad he could not hold the gun steady and just wounded it. That made him furious. Waving his gun like an Arab, he was going to whip John.



John Crawford, mountain guide

“Don't you dare strike me, Mr. _____,” John said, and afterwards remembered how cool he was.

Even then, he stuck with Andy. They trailed the wounded elk away up to the high country and quit only when they could no longer see in the dark. John said, “We'll camp right here and follow him in the morning.” He made the fellow sit by a big rock in his slicker all night. It got pretty cold, and rain fell. By daylight the rain had washed off all sign; so John brought Andy back to camp and eventually to Steamboat where the Denver man caught the stage for Wolcott. Unless John was much mistaken, Andy was actually glad to be going back to his financial troubles. Maybe they seemed like a picnic alongside the troubles he had had trying to get an elk!

Meanwhile, Logan was busy guiding three lawyers from New York through the Flat Tops. Two of the men obtained the trophies they wanted, but the third, named Yoemans, never could hit any game he shot at though he could beat his two friends shooting at a mark. Apparently, there was nothing wrong with his eyes. He just did not know how to use them. Once he and Logan had climbed the North Flat Top and were standing there with the whole country spread out below them. About three hundred elk were feeding over some forty acres. Logan said, “Do you see anything?”

“No, I don't see a thing.”

Patiently, Logan pointed out the elk. The hunters slid down a ravine about a quarter of a mile till they came within range of a nice yearling bull. Under Logan's instructions, Yoemans lay down with his gun across a log. "Now when he comes a little nearer, broadside, get down in your sights and take it easy. Just pull easy." Yoemans pulled and never touched a hair. Away went the yearling and all the others, but instead of crashing into the woods, they took to milling. In desperation, Yoemans shot into the herd and accomplished the impossible — missed all three hundred of them! Logan, who had expected several animals to fall, could find not even a drop of blood.

When the three lawyers left for New York, they paid their guide generously, and in addition, gave him all their gear, consisting of a 45/70 Marlin, a twelve-bore shotgun, and three hundred rounds of ammunition for each, two nice leather cases, a twelve-by-fourteen-foot tent and fly, two pairs of California double blankets, and fifty dollars' or more worth of all kinds of imported groceries and knickknacks!

John had done pretty well, too. After the last visiting hunter and tourist had gone, he tallied up his earnings and figured he had made enough to pay his way to the World's Fair in Chicago.

* * *

Before he went to the fair, he needed to attend to a few personal matters. He and Bill Williams headed for the High Country, ostensibly to do a little trapping, but mostly to stretch their eyes and settle their own nerves. It was good to be free of the responsibility of looking after a bunch of tenderfeet. It was a relief to be alone in the mountains again.

They soon discovered they were not alone.

Being unfamiliar with this part of the range, they blundered into a curious north-south canyon. Though most gullies drained the mountains crosswise, this small canyon, choked with big trees, ran parallel with the range and soon became impassable with horses. There seemed no easy way out. As night came on, rain began, turning to snow, and the wind grew wilder. The boys decided to "hole up" right where they were and wait out the storm.

Picketing the horses in an open place, they made camp on the leeward side of a bunch of spruce. For a tent they stretched a wagon sheet over a pole, anchoring it the best they could. Bill was rustling a big pile of wood from the abundance of dead quaking asps that were easy to push over, and John was trying to cook supper over a smoky fire when in rode a couple of men.

They spurred right up with sixshooters drawn.

Fortunately, John recognized one of the intruders as Old Man Perkins, who lived in Steamboat. At the same instant, the horseman recognized John. This could hardly have been called a happy reunion. Old Man Perkins, a spry, little, dried-up fellow with a high pitched voice, was not a favorite with the inhabitants of Yampa Valley. The only way he ever changed his clothes was to put on a new tie, which he would wear till it was so greasy and dirty he would have to take a nail to pry it off. He owned a feisty dog that was "half hound and half waterspaniard." All of which his neighbors could put up with. What they could not excuse was the mean way he treated his horses. He would often leave the harness on a team all night. To get even, some of the boys stuffed a pair of old overalls and miscellaneous articles down his stovepipe and smoked him out.

Under present circumstances, differences were forgotten. The second rider was Sheriff Buchanan, who had deputized Old Man Perkins to help him trail a gang of horsethieves from Burns Hole. The two had come from south of Rabbit Ears to somewhere around the head of Fish Creek where they had struck fresh tracks. Sighting smoke from the boys' camp, they thought they had caught up with the thieves.

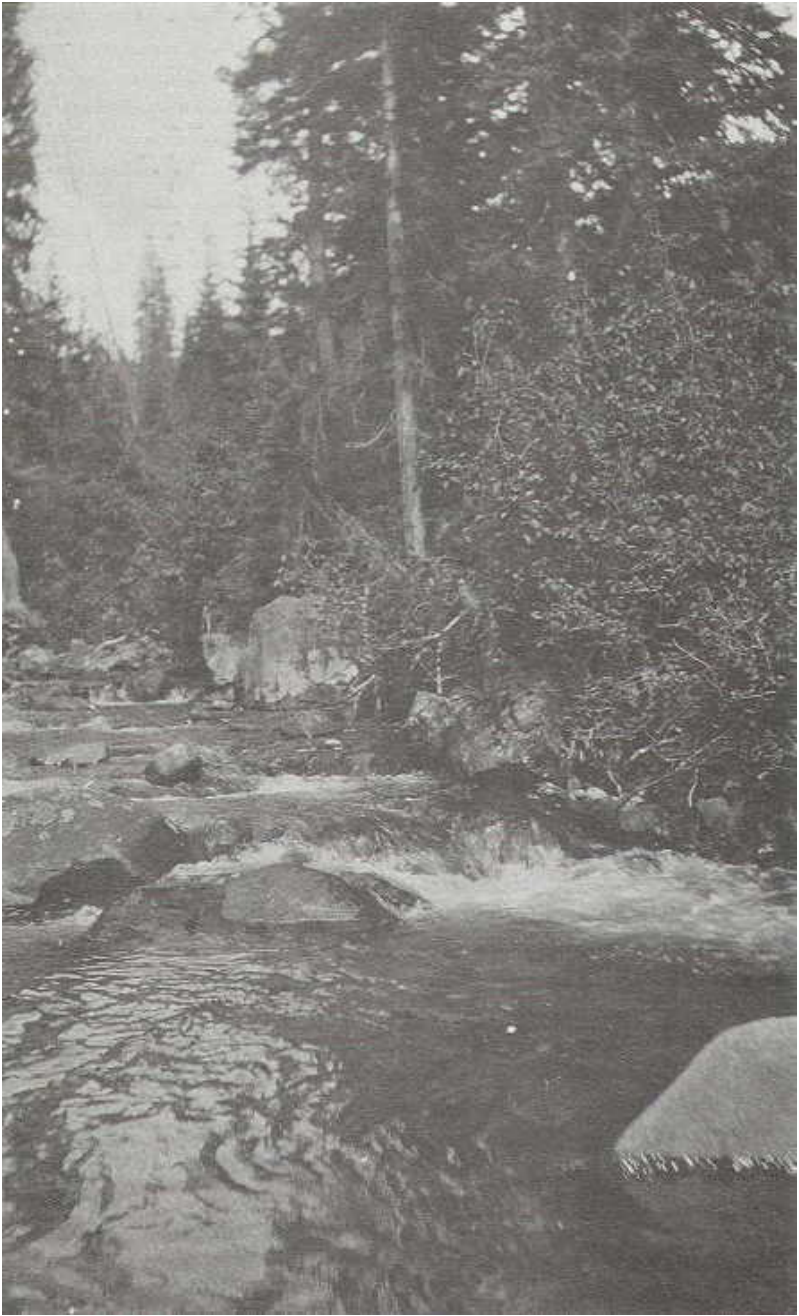
They stayed with Bill and John that night, and Bill fixed the sheriffs gun, which was so rusted the hammer would not work right. It would just walk down easy. Hunkered in the doubtful shelter of the spruce trees, the boys and their unexpected guests managed to keep a fire and melt snow in the coffee pot for water. Fitfully they slept some of the time in their makeshift tent while the wind roared around them. They named the canyon "Windy Gap."

By daylight the storm had quit after dumping two feet of snow. The sheriff and Old Man Perkins gave up looking for the horsethieves and headed home. The boys lost no time backtracking out of Windy Gap and down into country they knew.

That day, as they were working their way out of the snow and into Swamp Park, they saw smoke from what they guessed was the horsethieves' camp. Then and there, they named the nearest mountain "Horsethief Peak."

* * *

Several weeks later Logan and John were looking for stray horses of their own in the region of the present Bill May ranch on Elk River. They came upon a cabin where two men were spreading a number of hides to dry on ropes strung from the log



Elk River

outer walls to pegs in the ground. One they recognized as a professional hunter and trapper called "Bear Bill," a flat nosed, long whiskered, frontiersman, who had lost most of his teeth when a gun had exploded in his face. His real name was William E. Harvey, and he had a ranch near Pleasant Valley. (On his tombstone in the Steamboat Springs cemetery is this epitaph: *Killed 56 bears in Routt County.*)

Puttering around with him today was a stranger, a youngish man, who grabbed a rifle by the door as Logan and John rode up. This looked suspicious. The boys took care to note the brand on the horse picketed near, and when they got home notified the undersheriff in Steamboat.

The man turned out to be one of the thieves. Why he had left the others is anybody's guess. The undersheriff arrested him and recovered one of the stolen horses. The man chose to take a whipping rather than go to jail. Bear Bill had had no idea he was harboring a horsethief.

* * *

Before year's end John went to the World's Fair in Chicago and saw wonderful things but nothing that pleased him so much as the quiet, snowy meadows of Yampa Valley upon his return home.

During the past summer and fall, he had been somewhat educated in how the other half of the world lived. Now, more than ever, he was satisfied with the good life in Routt County, where almost everybody could shoot straight, and nobody was fool enough to take a bath every morning.



Chapter VIII

THE SAGA OF YELLOW CREEK

John Crawford had struck it rich at last! He had known it the minute he spied those slabs of yellow mineral on the side of a small creek that day in late September, 1897. Prospecting alone, many miles from Hahns Peak above the head of Soda Creek, he had stumbled on some kind of vein. It did not look quite like gold, but it was undoubtedly important.

He made camp and with his small hand pick scratched around, uncovering in addition to the predominant yellow stain, some greenish stuff and what he thought might be lead. In growing excitement, he staked a claim and named it The Sunset. He named the stream Yellow Creek. This stream, when joined by another small one, formed the north fork of Soda Creek.

Hurrying home, he told Pa about his find. Pa and Logan returned with him to see for themselves, and staked two more claims. The Crawfords knew little about mining or minerals, but they had learned enough at Hahns Peak to whet their interest. Word of John's discovery reached friends and relatives in Missouri, who volunteered to put up a sum of money against the Crawfords' work to see if the Sunset would be a bonanza.

The beginning of winter was certainly not the best time to open a mine at an altitude of more than ten thousand feet on the western brink of the Continental Divide, but the enthusiastic owners of the claims determined to begin work at once. They knew all about Routt County winters, so they thought, and saw no use waiting to find out what kind of treasure they had.

On October 20 John, Logan, and Bill Williams headed for Yellow Creek with a four-horse team and a loaded wagon. They followed the Buffalo Pass road almost to the top, then sidled off to the north a considerable distance where there was no road. Since Logan was an expert driver and his horses knew their business, he got the heavy wagon over rocks and logs and around marshes to the claim without tipping over. He went back to town for another load, leaving John and Bill to pitch a tent and start felling logs for a cabin.

John and Bill had no inkling of what was in store for them as they anchored the tent to a big green "quaker" tree. They

dragged their bedding inside and set about making the chips fly. Afterwards, they remembered how the sound of the axes rang in the uncanny quiet, and how that quiet was soon undermined by a distant thrumming that turned into a rumble and a roar as it came closer. The sun had long ago disappeared. Impatient to get as many trees felled as possible so that a cabin could be built and work started on digging out those riches under the ground, the boys paid little attention till a mighty blast wrenched the axe from John's hand and spun Bill around. Their education had begun.

Believing the storm would abate in a few minutes, the two dived for the tent and waited.....and waited..... Crouched in their frail shelter, they could hear the tent ropes *zingg* and thought sure the quaker to which the ropes were tied was going over. Their only comfort was that if it did fall, the direction of



**Yellow Creek country
September 1897**

the wind was such that the tree would crash away from them. Any second they expected the ropes to break and the tent be blown into the next county.

The wind brought snow, driving it with sledge-hammer blows into every crack. In no time the canvas was so weighted it could not have blown away if the tree had fallen and all the tent pins had been jerked out.

There was not a thing John and Bill could do but huddle under their blankets and fight off the tent that was now flat on top of them. The very first blasts had scattered their frying pan, tin plates, and grub that had been cached just outside. Some things the boys did not find till the snow melted the following summer. Even if they had had anything with which to cook, they could not possibly have made a fire. They did manage to scabble out a can of something which proved to be corn. Gnawing on that frozen corn, they passed the night.

They could hardly tell when the night ended and another day began. The wind did not end. It was like some giant gone berserk, trying to tear off the whole mountain top. The boys in the collapsed tent could only guess at what was going on in the din outside. As nearly as they could figure, that wind raged for three days and nights — three days and nights — before it quit as suddenly as it had started, and the prisoners were able to burrow through the shambles, unkink themselves, and stare at the carnage. They saw bruised and broken timber, dead pines piled like stove wood, and dozens of green trees uprooted in tangles. Most of the snow had been blown away.

It was three more days before Logan and a helper, John Eads, could chop a road through debris and reach the claim with another wagonload of supplies.

As soon as the rest of the crew came, a one-room cabin went up fast. There was no need to fell trees. Plenty of logs were already down. The cabin was squatty and strong with two tiers of upper and lower bunks and one single bunk. The carpenters did not bother to lay a floor. The hard packed red and yellow dirt was good enough.

On November 3 digging began on the Sunset tunnel. John kept a brief log. Here are some of the entries:

Nov. 5-11 Very snowy and windy. Didn't see the sun.

Nov. 26 Cut first mineralized dyke (copper and lead)

Dec. 1 Tunnel in 52 ft. Timbers 48 ft.

Dec. 8-17 Very snowy and windy. Didn't see the sun or stars during this time. Snow about 6 ft. on level and very

feathery.

- Dec. 20** Thermometer 2 degrees below zero
- Dec. 21** Thermometer 11 degrees below. (Later it was learned that the temperature at Steamboat had been 32 degrees below.)
- No date** All hands went to SS for Xmas — 3 hr. 40 m.
- Dec. 28** Came back to camp. Jn. Eads, Bill, Russell Jones, Clyde, and myself. *Very hard shoeing*. Time 9 h. +
- Jan. 18** Didn't work on tunnel till we can secure rubber goods as tunnel is very wet.
- Feb. 20** Snowshoed over the cabin. Bill came up from town. Took him 9½ hours to come up. Got assays from mine (good!)
- March 1** Tunnel in about 165 ft. Streak of good copper ore, ½ in. to 4 in thick.
- March 16** Snow around cabin the deepest to date. Cabin submerged; very hard storm for a week past.
- April 10** Easter. Robins, bluebird and flicker sighted. . Warm melting weather... Snow settled much.
- April 17** Very foggy and some wet sleety snow. Found some wild flowers on a rock at head of Green Ridge. Tunnel in over 200 ft.; 100# powder being used and 21½ boxes candles. Some copper signs and considerable iron. Snow on level with top of windows at cabin.
- May 18** Almost snowed in. Windows closed. Spring and tunnel chute full. Can't work regular. January *tough* storm.

The boys had laid in a good supply of wild meat, and varied their menu with blue grouse that lived in the spruces, shooting them with their pistols. John Crawford, Bill Williams, and Russell Jones worked at the claim all winter except for a visit to town now and then. On their snowshoes they could take a short cut around Husted Mountain, along Green Ridge, and down Soda Creek. Logan was at Yellow Creek part of the time. Before snow got too deep, he did all the teaming, hauling a thousand feet of slabs from Chedsey's mill on the North Park side, and hauling in windows and the stove. He sharpened tools and cooked. Jim and Doc Monson occasionally helped at the mine, as did John Love, Jim Porter, and others. An old man by the name of Wintersteen cooked for a while.



**Yellow Creek Cabin, June 1898, after the first “mild” winter
Stars and Stripes barely visible on ridgepole**

Since in winter there was no room for dogs in such cramped quarters, John Crawford had brought up a couple of kittens for company and had nailed a box on the outside by the door for them to sleep in. As the snow grew deeper, smothering the cabin, the door had to be left open most of the time to let in cool air, and the cats could come and go as they pleased. Tom made himself a nuisance by snooping into everything. John set a little No. 0 trap on his bed, rumbled the covers, and made a hollow where the cat would be sure to jump. He did. The trap, too small to hurt him, barely nipped his toes and failed to stop his prowling. He would jump to the table, then to the shelf where the food was kept. One night John spread molasses on the shelf expecting the cat to get gummed up in it. The candle was left burning so that the boys could watch what Tom would do. He paused on the table to sniff, whiskers twitching. But he fooled

his audience and did not jump to the shelf, and next day John had the job of cleaning up the sticky mess.

John had also brought his banjo to Yellow Creek. The boys could not work all the time, and reading material was scarce. Especially in long, gloomy evenings, John's vigorous renditions of all the tunes he knew helped enliven the monotony. It made little difference that most of the tunes, no matter what John named them, sounded remarkably like Old Dan Tucker.

Russell Jones had a habit of walking in his sleep. One night he got up, went outside, came back in, and did not awaken till he brushed against the banjo hanging on the wall and the strings went *pinkkk*.

On clear days the boys could hear shots as far away as Steamboat Springs when the town men were holding rifle shoots. Steamboat was about seventeen miles distant, perhaps eleven miles in a straight line. The Yellow Creek miners had their own contests. They nailed the lid of a can on a tree for a target and practiced shooting their pistols from the cabin door.

The crew would go to bed and leave the candle burning. It was set against a big block of firewood. Each night a different person was appointed to shoot out the light. If, in doing so, he was careless enough to hit the candle instead of the wick, he had to pay a penalty — get breakfast, wash dishes, or wear a necktie. (There was one tie in camp.) The bullets would be collected and run out again in the bullet ladle that had been made from a shovel by a Steamboat blacksmith.

Now and then Pa Crawford snowshoed up from town. In April he brought a copy of THE STEAMBOAT PILOT, SPECIAL SPRING EDITION, 1898. Under the section "Our Mineral Wealth," the boys were happy to read:

"On down the range from Hahns Peak and about opposite Steamboat Springs the Crawfords are driving a tunnel on an immense copper ledge. Five men have been employed all winter. Select samples run as high as 3½ ounces gold and a very heavy per cent in copper. Specimens of native copper have been obtained...."

Work continued on the mine through the summer. Travel could now be made to and from town on horseback. The horseflies and mosquitoes became so bad the horses learned to stay in the tunnel in the daytime and come out at night to graze.

As soon as the snow went off, the cats left the cabin and took to the woods, hunting on their own. Tabby was never seen again, but Tom was glimpsed occasionally. When the boys rode

to Steamboat late in the summer for a few weeks' vacation, they tried without success to find him. Later, they learned that he had appeared at Pickett's sawmill. Evidently, he had followed them down, crossed Soda Creek on a log, but could not get across Gunn Creek, and so had come to the sawmill. When Mrs. Pickett tried to lure him with food, he jumped on her savagely, clawing and scratching. He had never seen a woman unless briefly as a kitten. Mr. Pickett had to kill him.



**John Crawford and Russell Jones cut through 8 feet of snow
to the mine tunnel on June 9, 1898**

Before the second winter at Yellow Creek the boys added another room to the cabin to be used for a blacksmith shop and storage. The second winter was much more severe than the first. One storm lasted 58 days, from Christmas on. Snow on the level was 25 feet deep. To prove it, John lopped a limb off a tree at snow line, and the following summer measured to that cut.

There were 18 feet of snow on top of the cabin, and the roof had to be supported with numerous spruce stulls. The boys kept adding to the stovepipe, boxing it in with plank. They had to crib up the hole where they got their water in the creek. The “well” eventually measured 36 feet deep, and the water had to be drawn up in a bucket on a rope. Because of the blanket of snow around it, the cabin was roasting hot. The boys took off the door and windows to get air and carved a tunnel through the hard packed white stuff, that led up at an incline some 45 feet to the out-of-doors. Logan dubbed it “the beaver slide.” A pole with a shirt tied to it marked the top entrance. Sometimes the pole got knocked down.

Once, when John took sick, Logan snowshoed to town for medicine. Expert traveler that he was, he made the trip back, almost all uphill, in two hours and twenty minutes. He came to where he thought the cabin should be, but could see nothing. Finally, knocking around, he bumped into a pair of snowshoes sticking up in the snow and was able to locate the “beaver slide.”

Another time, Doc Monson and Clyde Williams had agreed to bring the mail from Steamboat on a certain day. The weather turned windy and mean, and when Doc and Clyde did not arrive by nightfall, the boys at the mine decided they had put off coming and went to bed. Meanwhile, Doc and Clyde were lost.

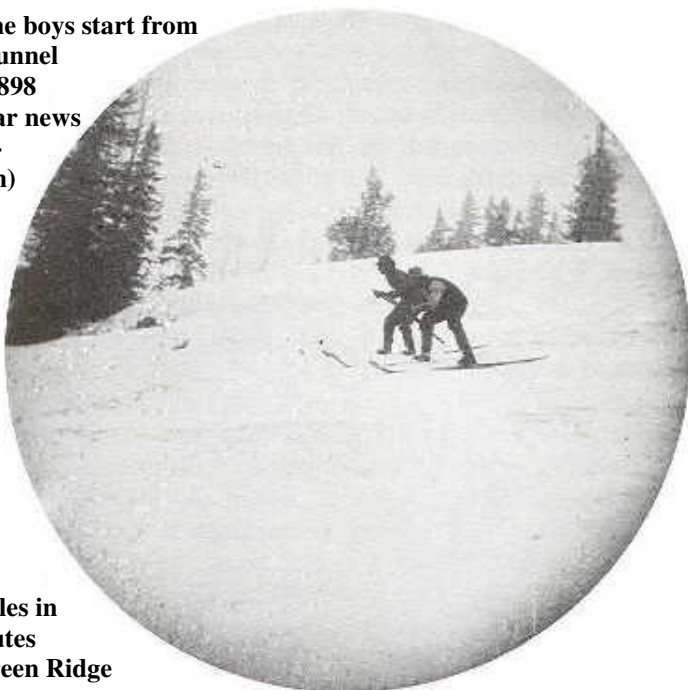
They had wandered all over the country and burned some of the mail to warm themselves. At last, they saw a streak of timber, and believing it was Husted Mountain, decided they must be three-quarters of a mile from the mine. Then Doc happened to run into the pole with the shirt on it. He and Clyde butted a hole through the snow and slid into the cabin. They were half dead, and there was ice all over their whiskers.

All the boys at Yellow Creek grew whiskers for six or seven months, partly to protect their faces from snowburn, but mostly for fun. They were a tough looking lot. John wore a heavy sweater with a rolled collar, for which he had traded a deer head. His bright red whiskers stuck out over that collar, and when he went to town, even Charlie Baer did not know him.

The snow was shifting and mean. In some places drifts piled an estimated two hundred feet deep; in other places the ground was swept bare. Late one February day John and Bill were about two miles north of the cabin hunting grouse. Before they knew it, the sun was gone, the rosy glow in the west was fading, and the air was growing colder every minute.

Bill said, “Let's hit for camp.”

**Two of the boys start from
Sunset Tunnel
June 9, 1898
To get war news
(Spanish-
American)**



**Three miles in
Ten minutes
Down Green Ridge**



Oops!

They were skimming along at a fast clip past the black trees when John struck a spot where wind had whipped the snow out in a treacherous tongue. Before he could change his direction, he had plunged over a steep bank twelve or fifteen feet and he heard his snowshoes splinter against rocks. Luckily, he was not hurt, and luckily, too, he always carried a few nails in his pockets for just such an emergency. Bill helped him pry the leather toe straps off his snowshoes and replace them on what was left of each front end. He was able to use those short shoes for three weeks till he could get others.

Spring looked mighty pretty when it began to come. In May the snow started to melt around trees and wherever loose pine needles lay on the lacy surface. The impression of snowshoe tracks stayed till the last trace of snow had soaked into the ground. The patterns melted right down with the drifts. Not till the 11th of June could the ridgepole of the cabin be seen.

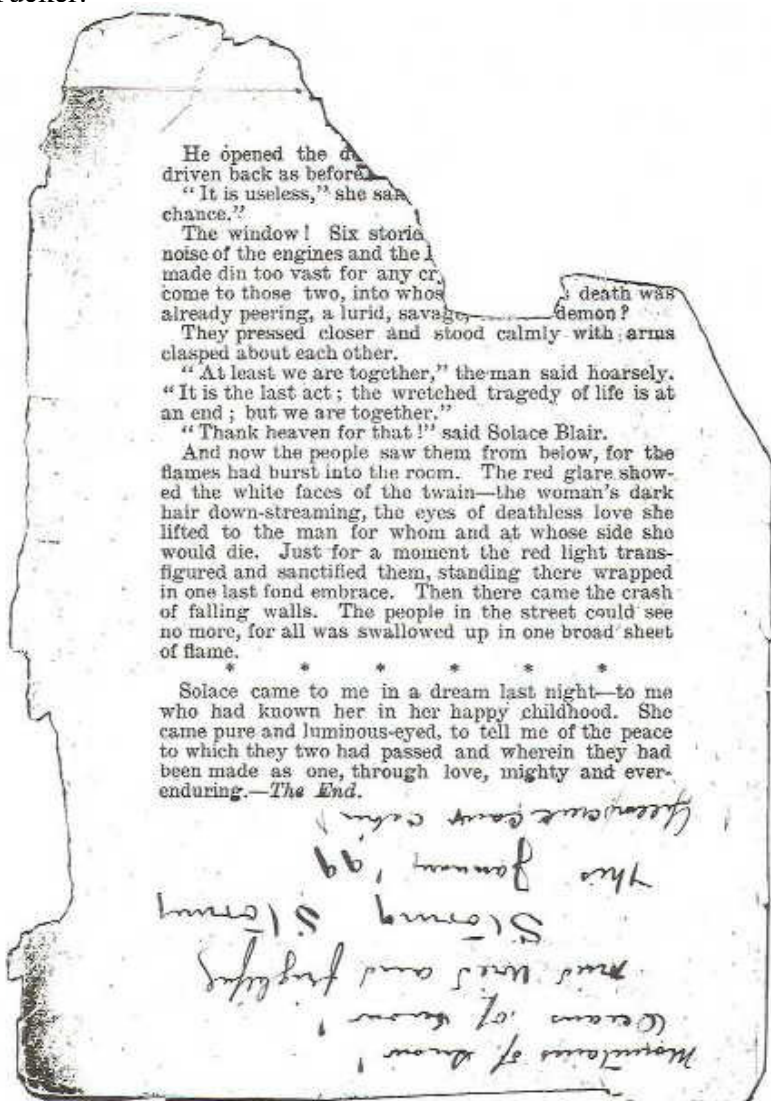
The Sunset tunnel had not proved to be a bonanza. Neither had the Black Prince tunnel, nor several others. Money gave out, and the whole project was abandoned. The cabin was deserted except when John went up to Yellow Creek to trap marten.

One season Bill Williams was his partner. On a January day, as Bill and John snowshoed along their trap lines, they stopped at a favorite spring for a drink. Long ago they had learned that it was not good to eat snow. Snow never quenched their thirst, and Bill declared that eating snow made him sick. Along in the fall they had hung a cup on a tree near the spring, moving it higher as the snow deepened. By now the cup was almost on top of the tree.

On this day the snow, which was rounded over the spring, gave way when Bill tried to get a drink, and he fell in. The hole was so deep he could not get out, and John could not pull him out. Bill's teeth began to chatter with the cold. He and John tried everything they could think of, and at last, by crossing their snowshoes to make a sort of ladder, and with the help of the snowshoe poles, they rescued Bill. His trousers froze and scraped together every time he moved. John was afraid he would freeze to death.

The boys managed to reach the cabin. John pried off Bill's heavy overshoes, fetched some snow for him to stick his feet in, and hurried to build a fire. Bill drank some old peppersauce that was standing on the table. John thought it was probably a pretty good stimulant. Anyhow, Bill survived.

That just about ended the saga of Yellow Creek. The "rich strike" was only a hole in the ground. But the Yampa Valley boys had given it their best, and they were not entirely beaten. They had proved they could survive the winter mountains at their worst. And John had had a lot of good practice on Old Dan Tucker.



The characters in the dime novel from which this page was torn may have found peace, but, according to John's notation, he and his friends at Yellow Creek cabin in January 1899 did not!



SPRING WILL COME

So much to do! A lifetime too short!

John could no longer skim the snow on his homemade skis, which gathered dust in his barn along with his car that had been drained in the fall and set up on blocks until roads could be broken in May or June. His wife, Minnie, had died, and his son, Jamie, had married and moved away.

He chafed at the long winters that kept him from trips into his beloved mountains. When business at the county clerk's office was slack, he took to pecking out "poetry" on his typewriter. Roamy Jake became his imaginary partner. Sometimes he called his car Roamy Jake. Here is a sample poem:

*Now's the time for wise prospectors
If they plan to make a strike,
To be hunting up their burros
And hitting for the pike.
For the snow is off the valleys
And the blackbird says it's time
To be thinking of the ore cached
In the Little Minnie mine.
I'm stocking up my panniers
And roundin' up my jacks;
Have rustled up my diggin' tools
And made up all my packs.
I'm apt to camp up near Red Park
'Round there some gold to seek,
And work the gulches, flats, and slopes
Of pretty old Hahns Peak.*

In memory he could travel every inch of the Hahns Peak country, or follow game trails along the range to Yellow Creek, or track a lynx behind Sand Mountain. But now those farther places did not beckon him so much as the little woodchuck trails of his boyhood in Yampa Valley.

In the summer of 1944 when candidates were being considered for fall elections, he refused to put his name on the

ballot, and because of ill health retired at the end of his fourteenth term. The STEAMBOAT PILOT reported: "He has promised that after spring opens up there will be many recordings of lode locations on the big book in the recorder's office over which he has had dominion for so many years."

As 1945 began, winter gave no sign of ever quitting, but John Daniel, weighed down with his overcoat, insisted, "Spring will come. All we have to do is wait for it."

In early March he could begin to feel the first tuggings of the changing season, and then he had to go. He died on March 21 at age 72. He was not there in Steamboat Springs to walk down to the flat by Soda Creek where the old log cabin had stood and find the first turkey peas and buttercups.

But who can say he did not find them, after all, in a spring-time to exceed his dreams?

And if, in any winter or our own, we need assurance that cold and dark will end, we can read some of the letters he was accustomed to write to Lulie on her birthday in March, and we shall not have to wait for spring. It will come to us in the words he penned. (When he was just learning to talk, he called his sister "E" and his brother "O.")

* * *

LETTER DATED MARCH 24, 1925

Dear "E":

If we remember right, the 25th of each and every March is your anniversary, at least it has been for the last sixteen. If you were here, we would take you for a spin on the crust as of old and look down along the river to see how many geese and ducks were sitting on the rocks by the Island. Then we'd look for mink tracks on the ice and watch the water ousels bobbing up and down on the rocks catching periwinkles. Then we would count the blue birds and robins and blackbirds around the cabin and in the willows on Soda Creek near the footlog... Well, since you are not here, we will have to do it in the morning without you.

Jamie and I have taken advantage of every crusty morning so far and brought in a handsled load of fine quaker poles for kindling. Last winter we got enough to last us until now. We have eight loads all told so far and will get more if we can. Jake Groesbeck is hauling every morning too, and we have big times on the crust. Sometimes the whole crowd on the hill go and we eat breakfast on the hills, fry eggs, bacon, and have coffee, etc. One morning there were 19 of us...

* * *

LETTER DATED MARCH 23, 1938

Dear Lulie:

Day after tomorrow is the day, and don't you remember in the good old days we used to go to the bare spots by the spring and hunt for turkey peas and those glossy buttercups so as to have some bouquets for your birthday. Papa would generally have killed some wild geese by that time and mother would roast one in the oven of the old No.8 Charter Oak wood stove that sat in the middle of the kitchen against the wall on the north side above the log sleepers where the skunks slept through the winter. Mother would cook the goose just right, nice and rich and brown, and make some cornbread with 'chuck grease shortening. We would gather around the table in the kitchen where we could look out the window on the south middle side while we ate, and then when someone opened the half window on the west end to throw out some dishwater and hang the pan on the peg outside on the wall, what a draught of good damp soft sulphury odor would come in from the springs! I can almost smell it now, and almost see the white mineral mud daubing between the logs, and see some willow fish poles lying up under the roof.

How the robins used to peck around those little grassy mounds the springs made at the foot of the hill west of the cabin on those wet (big flake) snowy spring days. When we would go over the crust to bare spots, how the woodchucks would tip-tip at us and run and flop their tails. We would go amongst the rocks up along the ridge, look down the bottoms, which were partly bare and partly covered with holes and ponds of water, and trace Bear River threading through the cottonwoods. We would also see anthills made of sticks, with their tops picked off by flickers who came early. We would see water running in the gulch back of the house, going down one gopher hole and out another, and the gopher tunnels made of dirt left on top of the snow, and the mouse nests as they thawed out.

How pretty and green the first thistles looked down along the river near where the Cabin Hotel is now. (Destroyed by fire in 1939.) And the big yellow dock in the swale just below the roothouse, which was in the bank by Soda Creek where we dipped up the best water in the world.

We used to hunt rocks and gather snail shells in the spring time along the hill from the cabin toward the point of Woodchuck above the pond where the butter-and-eggs and white clematis always grew. How pretty the Canterbury bells were when in bud, and the bluebells and the spring beauties freckle

faced like the little kid who always went along with his older brother or sister.

Up by the Big Willow were the dogtooth violets, strong, with several blooms on each stem. They would come up right through the middle of oak leaves, and the grouse would crop the buds off and run with their fan-tails spread and let us get right close to them before they would jump up into the scrub oaks.

Remember the big piles of quaker wood on the east side in the fall where I could cut wood while Logan was cleaning out the nice little log stable around in the cove by Soda Creek? Remember how the trail over to where Aunt Nannie and Uncle Henry lived went on top of an old beaver dam in the willows...? Remember in the summer how the yellow-eyed blackbirds would come and eat the cottage cheese mother put out for the half dozen hens we had? And how the horses, Frank and Peggy, would drink the extra milk we had? And every time we kids would pass the flour sack mother had hanging on the peg at the northeast corner of the back room on the outside, we'd give it a squeeze to get the whey out of the cheese. Gosh, it was good! Then we'd run on up the hill to chase chipmunks in the scattering service bushes.

Remember the deer and elk at the "lick" by the cave? Pa and Tom Livingston went after an elk Pa had shot, packed the meat down to the river on their backs, put it into the log dugout canoe, and turned over at the mouth of Soda Creek. We were all there to catch the rope. They lost some of the elk meat but finally rescued old "Pizenslinger," Pa's heavy Remington 45/100 rifle from the high water. How wet they got! We saved the canoe. And remember. . .

Great good old days!!

With much love, "E," for a happy birthday and many more.

Come *home* as soon as you can and go riding with me in Old Roamy (the car) and find a few arrowheads.

John



**John in later years, posed with his banjo
in his own front yard on a carpet of clover**



John about 1919, hunting rabbits on Pritchett ranch south of Steamboat. Note old-fashioned snowshoes (skis) with simple leather toe holds.

John said, "I like 9½-foot snowshoes and a 7½-foot pole. If you make your own snowshoes, red spruce is the best. Quarter-saw it, boil it and boil it, and bend it over a log. Grease the shoes with a mixture of sperm candle, balsalm pitch, and a little coal oil. Carry a sperm candle with you. You can rub it on cold, or if the snow is very sticky, you can stop, make a fire, warm the shoes to draw out the grease, then rub them with the sperm candle."



**Jim Monson in later years.
Picture courtesy his niece,
Betty Monson Card**

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I owe a debt of gratitude to three old-timers, long since departed this life, who furnished sidelights on some happenings.

JIM MONSON HAD THIS TO SAY:

“You'd be wet to the skin, tired and discouraged, but you could depend on John. If Logan starts something, he will complete it. John has more patience — a little second spurt. Log never backs down. He is faster. John isn't specially handy with a horse like Log, but when it comes to getting off a horse with a gun and firing the first shot at game, he beats anybody I have ever seen in my life. He is quicker than chain lightning. Once John and I were up in Gunn Creek country in the quaking aspens. It was as dark as pitch. That boy led us right out of there.”

CLAY MONSON, little brother to Jim, could describe in detail the altercation with teacher Robinson. Clay was hiding under his desk when Kansas Parkinson and Mr. Robinson were fighting.

ALMA WOOLERY (Mrs. Charles Baer), little sister of Oscar and Wyan Woolery, remembered with delight eating frog legs in the secret cabin after it was no longer secret. She remembered, too, the fun of dancing at noon when the lady teacher was gone.