

## FOUNDING AND EARLY HISTORY OF BRECKENRIDGE, COLORADO

In 1859 a party of adventurers came from the State of Georgia seeking gold. For some unknown reason they traveled northward and finally settled in what we now know as Georgia Gulch.

There soon rose out of nothing a city of one thousand inhabitants which they named Park City and like all booming mining camps, had their saloons, dance halls and large theater where first class plays with reliable troupes were staged.

One night during the performance of a blood curdling melodrama, the heavy villain appeared suddenly upon the stage and after the customary statement of his love and grievances seized the innocent Heroine and was about to carry her off when a broad chested miner, who had been watching the play with an earnestness that made it intensely real to him strode up to the footlights and leveling his revolver exclaimed, "no you don't, Mister, you drop that ere girl or I'll blow the top of your head off". Needless to say his orders were promptly obeyed.

Many of the Georgians became restless and later a company of one hundred crossed thru Georgia Pass to the Swan, a tributary of the Blue but the majority soon returned empty handed, hastened by reports of the murders being committed by the Utes, whom every one feared knowing their unconquerable hostility to the trespassers on their cherished domain.

Those who remained made some excellent discoveries at Gold Run, and in Galena, American and Humbug gulches, others occurred in Nigger, French, Gibson and Corkscrew, these titles being ~~supplied~~ applied to the locators. These claims and several others were quite extensively worked in 1860 and for several years afterward.

About the middle of July, 1859 some of these Georgians crossed the pass into Hamilton "diggins" in South Park, but their efforts to find gold were neither rich or extensive, the most profitable ground was about two miles above Hamilton and the camp was named Tarryall, which had its derivation from one of the party

saying "We will all tarry here". The first on the scene staked out claims and securing all the valuable ground, framed and adopted laws and began developing their claims, where-by they were richly rewarded.

News of the strike spread rapidly and hundreds rushed over the mountains to share in the rich harvest and demanded a division of the ground, but the organizers stood firm, these were the laws and must be respected, if the claimants wanted ground they must hunt for it. The trespassers moved on and made other discoveries, founded a settlement and named it "Fairplay, a living reproach to their "grab-all" neighbors.

Those who were not so fortunate returned to Georgia Gulch. The party divided and some settled on the Blue River, where they diverted the river shannel and placered for gold in the bed of the river.

Always afraid of the Indians, they built a stockade at Park City and established a fort about one mile below Breckenridge, which they named Fort Mary B for Mary Bigelow, the first woman quartered there. Later a large stamp mill was built on the sight and not so many years ago the old brick chimner was torn down and now there is nothing but a rock pile left by the destroyer of all beautiful scenery the dredge.

Still in the Spring of 1859 they began building cabins of logs a mile above the mouth of French Gulch. In the Spring of 1860, Spencer & Co. claimed under the townsite law of Congress, 320 acres of land which was surveyed and partly platted and the place was christened in honor of John C. Breckenridge, (spelled with an i in place of an e) then Vice President of the United States.

The founders earnestly desiring the location of a Post Office near the newly discovered mines together with a regularly established postal route from Denver, appealed to a Mr. B. D. Williams, a democrat and a Kentuckian by birth, representing the settlers in a lobby in Congress. For the privilege mentioned, Mr. Williams told that if they would name the twon for the Vice President their chances would ve very good in getting their desires. His prophecy was



almost immediately verified.

At a later period the orthography of the name was changed to breckenridge (en), owing to the prominent part John C. Breckinridge assumed on the Confederate side of the civil war.

The fame of the camp soon extended to all settlements and by the middle of June, 1860 the population, which were mostly males numbered about eight thousand, distributed over French Gulch, Gold Run, Galena, Iowa, Illinois, Dry, Nigger and other Diggins.

Allsupplies received by the miners had to be packed over the range from South Park by men, but later pack trains of mules and donkeys were employed. As soon as it was practicable after these camps were established, barrels of whiskey were brought in and plenty of saloons were opened.

Traders wanted to value the gold at from \$14.00 to \$16.00 per ounce, but the miners held a meeting and settled the question by refusing to take less than \$18.00 an ounce.

After the great mining epoch between 1859 and 1862 the population slowly dwindled, until only a few hundred remained. Breckenridge was the county seat, there was a Hotel, built by my Grandparents where the county records were kept and not more than a dozen dozen other cabins along what is now known as Main Street. There was a good wagon road all the way from Breckenridge to the summit of Boreas Pass.

A court sessions was held once a year and was called court week, a dance was always held for this occasion, the music being furnished by fiddlers accompanied by an organ. Every Sunday evening services were held in the hotel dining room, a printed sermon was read by some one and the old Moody & Sanky hymns sung in which every every one entered into with whole heartedness.

As I said before the Court records were kept in the Hotel Georgia Gulch or Park City wanted the County seat and an attempt was made to change it over there. My Grandmother noticed the County Clerk busily packing his records in a burlap sack and when he had been called out for a while she hid the sack and in

so doing saved the County Seat for Breckenridge.

I had the interesting experience of seeing the first records of mining, these written in 1859 and the writing was as plain as if it had been written recently. One book had a bullet hole thru it, but the history of this I was unable to get. One insertion says "a miner can have one gulch, one bar and one lode for his claim and it speaks of the men as "Gents"

It took plenty of gold to pay for provisions in those days, flour was \$42.00 a bbl. and not the white flour that we have now, but a grey mexican mixture. My Grandmother mixed up a one hundred pounds at a baking. On Saturdays the miners came in town for their mail and took back bread and pies, pair for in gold dust. Butter was \$2.50 a pound and eggs were \$2.50 a dozen, muslin was used in place of window glass and a dirt floor covered with many inches of saw dust and burlap sacks served as a floor covering and the rooms were papered with newspapers.

In 1872 a well known banking firm sold to two Americans, Arnold and Slack a quantity of diamonds and other precious stones. After looking at the first lot of rough diamonds, for which eight hundred pounds was paid, they asked to be shown some larger ones. They selected without regard to weight or quality, rough diamonds and rubies to the value of fifteen hundred pounds, for which they paid and departed. A few days another selection was made, the total amounting to nearly three thousand pounds. Samuel Barlow of New York said these men introduced themselves to him and stated they possessed of a secret of great importance, which they afterward explained to be a newly discovered diamond field in Summit County, Colorado. The fraud was soon exposed, but the enterprising head of the firm whose fertile brain had conceived and whose dexterous hands had executed one of the most daring swindles, was not the kind of a man to let concealment, like a worm in the bud, prey upon his colossal cheek. After about the middle of December he was heard from thru a card addressed to one of the San Francisco papers, date and place of writing omitted, to the Diamond Company. I see by



by the papers that Arnold and Slack were prosecuted and that eminent counsel has been employed. I have employed counsel myself, a good Newton rifle and I am likely to open my case any day. "There are several scalps I would like to string on a pole" and I dont include your expert, he is of no consequence, send him to China, where he will find his equals in the expert business. As you are going into the newspapers, I will take a fling at it myself one of these days.

I am going to the fields on my own hook in the Spring with fifty men and will hold my hand ag inst all the expertss you candsend along. If I catch any of your kid-gloved gentry aboutthere I'll blow the stuffing out of them" signed P. Arnold. To close the chapter Phil Arnold died at his home in Kentucky in February 1979 and what became of his pardner Slack no one knows.

The first newspaper, the Summit County Journal, a one page daily was first printed in 1879, later in the year the Leader was printed. 1880 was known as the boom year and it was estimated that there were eight thousand people in the County. The sound of carpenters hammers never stop ed day or night and it was a wide open, town with eighteen saloons and three dance halls adding to the gaiety of life in a mining camp.

The Railroad was built over Boreas Pass, running from Como to Keystone in 1881 and in 1883 it was completed to Leadville, a large joint celebration was held. The large mines have opened and closed, but dredging still continues, despite the fact, that the entire county was platted for lode claims and not dredging.

The corner stone of our present Court House was laid in 1909 and our splendid accredited High School was built the following year. Our Winters are not as severe as in years goneby and our Summers are unexcelled. It is a privilege to live in Breckenridge and Summit County.

Quoting from "Colorado, a Summer Trip" written by Bayard Taylar in 1867. We discovered a Hotel, or its equivalent kept by Mr & Mrs. Silverthorne (my grandparents) who welcomed us like old friends. The walls of their large cabin was covered with newspapaers and presented a variety of advertisements and local



news from New Hampshire to Salt Lake. If the colored lithographs were doubtful specimens of art, there were good indications of literature on the table. The kind Hostess promised us beds, real beds, with sheets and pillows and the good Host would have taken me to any number of lodes and gulch-washings, had I not been too sore to bend a joint. Mrs. Silverthorn, kept her promise, when the Artist and myself found ourselves stretched out in a broad feather bed, with something softer than boots under our heads, we lay awake for a long time in delicious rest, unable to sleep from the luxury of knowing what a sleep awaited us. Every jarred bone and bruised muscle claimed its own particular sensation of relief and I doubted at last whether unconsciousness was better than such wide awake fullness of rest. I shall always retain a very pleasant recollection of Breckenridge and shall henceforth associate its name with the loyal devine, not the traitor politician"

We deserved no credit for early rising at Breckenridge, for the room wherein we slept was used as a dining room and parlor and the Ladies could not set the breakfast table with four men about the room partly dressed.

Quoted from "In the Parks and Mountains of Colorado " by Samuel Bowles,  
At  
1869. "Breckenridge we got above the washings and the river was clear again. This is the center of these upper mining interests, but a village of only about thirty cabins, located ten thousand feet above sea level and scarcely habitable in winter although some of the miners do hibernate here thru the season of snow and cold. There is a Hotel here well built, with logs to be sure, with a broad buxom Matron (my grandmother) and two black eyed beauties of Daughters ( one of these was my mother) to whom after dinner we consigned to Govenor Bross, with warning against his fascinations.

Some leave home for money and some leave home for fame. Some seek skies always sunny and some depart in shame. I care not what the reason men travel east or west, or what the month or season, the home town is the best.

The home-town is the glad town, where something real abides. Its not the money mad town, that all its spirit hides. Tho Strangers scoff and flout it and even geer its name, it has a charm about it no other twon can claim. The home t town skies seem blu r than skies that stretch away, the home town friends seem truer and kinder thru the day, and whether glum or cheery, light hearted or depressed, or struggle fit or weary, I like the home town best. Let him who will go wander to distant towns to live. Of some things I am fonder than all they have to give, the gold of distant places could not repay me quite, for those familar faces that keep the home town bright.