

# GREAT SAND DUNES NATIONAL MONUMENT



## THE SAN LUIS VALLEY HISTORIAN

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# Table of Contents

GREAT SAND DUNES NATIONAL MONUMENT: An Administrative History <i>by C. Joe Carter</i> .....	3
THE TRAGIC LEGEND OF MOSCA PASS <i>by Shirley R. Carter</i> .....	15
A LEGEND OF THE SAND DUNES .....	16
CLIMATIC CHANGE IN THE SAN LUIS VALLEY <i>by John A. Mangimeli</i> .....	18
THE DISAPPEARING SHEEP OF THE SAND DUNES <i>M.D.M., Alamosa Journal, August 6, 1885</i> .....	25
SAN LUIS SAND DUNES <i>by Millie Holbrook Velhagen</i> .....	29
THE SINGING SANDS OF ALAMOSA <i>by Kim Gannon and Bert Reisfeld</i> .....	30
SONG OF THE SAND DUNES <i>by Ray Madison</i> .....	31
BOOK REVIEWS .....	32
INDEX—VOLUME XIII - 1981 <i>by Carrol Joe Carter</i> .....	35
ADVERTISING .....	44

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*Mining claim on Mosca Pass.*



*New construction - 1982.*

# **GREAT SAND DUNES NATIONAL MONUMENT: An Administrative History**

**by C. Joe Carter**

People today enjoy visiting the San Luis Valley of Colorado and the Great Sand Dunes just as other residents and visitors have for thousands of years. Indians of the Folsom culture (10-15,000 years ago) hunted and camped near the dunes and undoubtedly walked among them for pleasure. Later Indian cultures also enjoyed the area as evidenced by the campsites and artifacts left behind.

Spanish Conquistadores traveled in the San Luis Valley as early as 1599 when Juan de Zaldivar ventured north from New Mexico. Members of Juan de Oñate's group undoubtedly followed the Rio Grande into present day Colorado in the 17th century. After the Pueblo revolt of 1680 and the reconquest of New Mexico, Governor Don Diego de Vargas lead an expedition into the San Luis Valley in 1694 but his records made no special note of the Sand Dunes. In the late summer of 1779 Juan Bautista de Anza came through the San Luis Valley on an expedition against unfriendly Indians. These and other unknown explorer-soldiers named many of the mountains, creeks, rivers, and valleys during their travels.<sup>1</sup>

Early in the 19th century the first American explorer entered the San Luis Valley on January 27, 1807. Zebulon Montgomery Pike glimpsed the Sand Dunes as he descended Mosca Pass and the first written description of the dunes appeared in his JOURNAL.<sup>2</sup>

28th January, Wednesday.--Followed down the ravine and discovered after some time that there had been a road cut out, and on many trees were various hieroglyphicks painted; after marching some miles, we discovered, through the lengthy vista at a distance, another chain of mountains and nearer by at the foot of the White mountains, which we were then descending, sandy hills. We marched on the outlet of the mountains, and left the sandy desert to our right; kept down between it and the mountain ... When we encamped, I ascended one of the largest hills of sand, and with my glass could discover a large river, flowing nearly north by west, and south by east, through the plain which came of the third chain of mountains, about N. 75° W. the prairie between the two mountains bore nearly north and south. I returned to camp with the news of my discovery. The sand hills extended up and down at the foot of the White mountains, about fifteen miles, and appeared to be about five miles in width.

Their appearance was exactly that of a sea in a storm, (except as to color), not the least sign of vegetation existing thereon. Distance 15 miles.

As Pike observed, the route across Mosca pass served the Indians as an outlet to the Plains. This route generally has much less snow during the winter than those to the north and south. Pike and his men found Mosca pass the most convenient passage in 1807 and most people after them also crossed the Sangre de Cristo mountains via this route. Pike's JOURNAL provided good information about the Colorado Rockies for increased numbers of men who headed west to trap fur-bearing animals. Mountain men blazed good trails across the San Luis Valley. One route turned south around Mt. Blanca and provided a link with the route to Taos known as the Trappers Trail. These colorful characters continue to fascinate readers of western history. Among the more popular trappers who worked in the San Luis Valley during the 1820's you find the names of: James Pursley, Joseph Philbert, William Becknell, John McKnight, Thomas James, Hugh Glenn, Jacob Fowler, Nathaniel M. Pryor, Antoine Robidoux and many others.<sup>3</sup> Joseph Williams trapped in the area for many years. On August 20, 1842 he recorded impressions in his Journal.<sup>4</sup> "We are now on the waters of the Del Norte River ... This is a beautiful valley, about eighty or a hundred miles long. We remain sometime in this valley, encamped by some beautiful streams of water." Kit Carson, the most famous of all mountain men, stayed in the area and later commanded Fort Garland. Moses Carson, Aaron B. Lewis, Dick Wooten, Ceran St. Vrain, and Carlos H. Beaubien also worked here. Tom Tobin arrived in the 1830's and remained the rest of his life attaining the status of a genuine folk hero. The two Hispanic mountain men of prominence were Domingo Lamelas and Mariano Medina.<sup>5</sup>

After the fur trade declined in the early 1840's only a few people entered the San Luis Valley. One of these, Captain John Charles Fremont, arrived on his fourth western expedition in the winter of 1848, looking for a railroad route. Against good advice he attempted a crossing of the Valley and the San Juan mountains in December and met with disaster.<sup>6</sup>

In 1851 the United States Government assigned troops to help police the newly acquired territory. Settlement in the San Luis Valley was less risky with soldiers around and several permanent villages were founded in the southern river valleys. Travel increased as the military aided the maintenance of roads and trails, especially south and east of Ft. Massachusetts after its establishment in 1852. This army post soon became a popular stopping off place for travelers. Captain John W. Gunnison, seeking a railroad route, rested there for a time in 1853.<sup>7</sup> In June 1853 Gwin Harris Heap traveled in the Valley and noted that Mosca pass would probably be the best route for a wagon road into the Valley.<sup>8</sup>

### EARLY VISITOR

In 1888, Henry Kaddatz, a resident of Alamosa, first visited the Sand Dunes and became a serious observer of their movement. At the time of monument designation he recalled some of his many trips to the area and said he thought the dunes were moving closer to the mountains. Kaddatz noticed changes in the Ghost Forest in 1907. On a trip in 1915 he found portions of a human skeleton north of Spring creek. DAILY COURIER, April 1, 1932.

Toward the end of the decade a new military post replaced Ft. Massachusetts when Ft. Garland opened in 1858. It soon became the center of activity in the Valley. Prospectors from the gold fields purchased supplies there in 1859 and checked out potential areas of the Valley for later processing. Hayden's surveying teams arrived in the 1870's<sup>9</sup> and General William Jackson Palmer's Denver and Rio Grande Western Railroad crossed the Sangre de Cristos and connected the San Luis Valley with the rest of the world.<sup>10</sup> By this time William Gilpin, William Blackmore and others began speculating in land, a practice that continues to this time.<sup>11</sup>

## ROADS

In 1871, only a decade after the establishment of the Colorado Territory, Frank Hastings received a charter from the legislature to build and maintain a toll road over Mosca pass. Gates on the east and west sides of the pass assured the collection of fees. One of the early gate keepers was known only as "English Billy." He impressed travelers with his team of elk that were broken to harness.<sup>12</sup> Some business for the road came from the famous Medano ranch. The Dickey brothers consolidated numerous small holdings into a 130,000 acre operation by 1882 when they sold it to Adee and Durkee. (Hastings was a brother-in-law of Durkee.)<sup>13</sup>

The toll road charter became the property of T.B. Seely and Doug Holly after a few years. Holly's brother Charles operated the road and supervised routine maintenance and repairs. In the 1890's Will and Coley King purchased the charter and hired Linnie King as gatekeeper. Ike Denton was in charge of maintenance. Rates posted for passage by the Kings included: \$2.00 per wagon, \$1.00 for horse and rider, .50c head for cattle and sheep.<sup>14</sup> About the turn of the

### THE KING FAMILY

For almost a century the King family has been closely associated with the area of the Great Sand Dunes National Monument. The early family members migrated to Alamosa in 1885 and two years later settled on the Zapata, south of the Sand Dunes. When the national monument was created the first person hired was Glen King. Many other members of the family worked at the Monument over the past 50 years. The name of Ben King is closely associated with the years of serious development during the 1950's and 1960's. Bob King worked there for a time and Cora Denton King became a well known personality at the Visitors Center. The names of Mrs. Agnes King and Harry King are prominent among the pioneers in the San Luis Valley.

century the Kings sold the road to the State of Colorado. Traffic counts increased to 30-40 wagons a day and public pressure increased to open the popular passage as a public road. The state had more resources to keep the road in good repair which became expensive when periodic floods destroyed portions of it. Major repairs were necessitated in 1880 due to flooding. Other floods damaged the road in 1905 and it had to be closed for a time.<sup>15</sup>

Similar problems came in 1911 but the result was total destruction this time. Parly Liggie managed to pick his way down the west side into the Valley before the road was completely washed out.<sup>16</sup> With the Mosca pass route closed, travelers found the old D.&R.G. railroad route over La Veta pass an acceptable alternative. The railroad moved farther south with the installation of standard gauge track about 1890. As new roads were being designed in the 1920's the Mosca pass route remained a popular suggestion.<sup>17</sup>

The lack of a through route did not hinder the visitation at the Sand Dunes. In 1926 the Alamosa Chamber of Commerce erected markers to direct tourists.<sup>18</sup> Interest in the area as a special tourist spot increased when the U.S. Government withdrew the dunes from homesteading in 1930.<sup>19</sup>

During the spring of 1932 as locals awaited notification of national monument designation efforts to improve the road began. Alamosa county appropriated funds and the county road superintendent, Bert McKee, supervised the work. He urged people with heavy loads to seek an alternate route to facilitate the construction. Nick Ortega, general contractor from Alamosa, had all twelve of his men busy. Ortega and McKee urged people to postpone trips to the dunes for a few days and promised a much more enjoyable trip when the new road opened to regular traffic, about March 27, 1932.<sup>20</sup>

For almost twenty years the best approach to the Great Sand Dunes National Monument turned east at Mosca off state highway #17. Wilbur Foshay, Chamber of Commerce secretary, exaggerated a little to potential visitors when describing the route.<sup>21</sup> Valley people knew that they faced over 20 miles of "poor road" with "plenty of dust" and many "rough spots."<sup>22</sup> In 1959 the Colorado State Highway Department paved the road in from Mosca and designated it as Colorado State Highway #150. With this encouragement some groups urged the reconstruction of the Mosca pass road as a good alternative to the plains. A feasibility study by the State Highway Department in 1960 found the cost prohibitive; traffic problems at the Sand Dunes unacceptable; and the landscape damage objectionable. Access to the Medano pass road, maintained by the U.S. Forest Service, remained available to people with four-wheel drive vehicles.<sup>23</sup>

When tourists arrived in the Valley in the summer of 1973 they found a new route open to the Sand Dunes. The State Highway Department improved and paved the southern approach north from Highway #160. This was redesignated as the new Colorado State Highway #150 and the old road in from Mosca reverted to the jurisdiction of Alamosa county. Robert Dudley, State Highway Engineer, did much of the planning for the new road and upon his retirement the northernmost portion was designated "Dudley Drive" in his honor. The State of Colorado spent about \$350,000 on the new highway, according to engineer Don Knapp.<sup>24</sup>

## THE MONUMENT

It was a typical day in June, 1930 when the ladies of the Monte Vista Chapter V, P.E.O. sisterhood gathered for their regular meeting. Little did any of them know that the idea presented at that meeting would move with great speed and culminate in a success story that continues to benefit people and provide enjoyment today.

Mrs. Elizabeth Spencer accepted the responsibility for the program that day. She directed her prepared remarks to the issue of having the San Luis Valley Sand Dunes designated as a National Monument. In her presentation she included the suggestion that the local P.E.O. chapter assume primary responsibility for leading the monument effort.<sup>25</sup>

Her recommendation was warmly accepted by the group and the necessary motions were made and passed. Mrs. Ward Darley, President of the group, appointed Mrs. Spencer to Chairman of the Sand Dunes committee. Mrs. Jean (George) Corlett and Mrs. Myrtle C. (W.S.) Woods were also appointed to the committee. Recognizing the job as a large one the group decided to invite their fellow P.E.O. Chapters in the San Luis Valley to join in the work. Del Norte Chapter B.H. President, Mrs. Mabel Reded Carr accepted the invitation and appointed Mrs. Nina M. (Adam) Weiss as Chairman of their group to be assisted by Daisy D. Dannen and Nell B. Meyer. Alamosa Chapter A.E. President Millicent Holbrook Velhagen accepted the assignment of local committee chairman and selected Mrs. Caroline A. (W.W.) Platt, Ayne H. Shull, and Jessie B. Hamman to complete the committee. Organizational details were soon completed and this group of leaders began work to accomplish their announced goal.<sup>26</sup>

Attention focused on Washington, D.C. where the decision would finally be made. In order to show a great deal of local support for the project the P.E.O. sisterhood enlisted the aid of every possible organization and individual. Prominent citizens were urged to write to the Colorado Congressional Delegation. Photographs of the Sand Dunes helped complete the material sent to Washington. Articles from local newspapers and other sources increased the portfolio. A petition, in support of the monument designation, drawn up by Monte Vista attorney George Corlett (former Lieutenant Governor), was introduced by Senator A. Elmer Headlee (Democrat) of Monte Vista and passed by the Colorado General Assembly. Armed with great support from the people and the assurance of politicians in Colorado, Congressman William R. Eaton (Republican-First District) assisted in drafting a bill which he personally carried to Washington. Congressman Guy U. Hardy (Republican-Third District) accepted the challenge and worked diligently on the issue. His office kept the San Luis Valley committees informed of progress, advised them on their next course of action, and maintained a sincere interest in the work.<sup>27</sup>

Although it seemed like an eternity to the P.E.O. committee, it was only six months from inception that encouraging word arrived. U.S. Senator from Colorado Lawrence C. Phipps (Republican) notified the San Luis Valley group that funds had been appropriated for an official inspection of the Sand Dunes area. On February 14-15, 1931 Roger W. Toll, Superintendent of Yellowstone National Park, toured the area and visited with the people working for the

national monument designation.<sup>28</sup> The report presented by Toll to the National Park Service was not entirely favorable but that proved to be only a minor setback for the sincere and dedicated group of women.<sup>29</sup>

All the hard work by the P.E.O. chapters received its reward on March 17, 1932 when President Herbert Hoover signed the proclamation creating the Great Sand Dunes National Monument. This was the 36th national monument in the United States and the second one in the San Luis Valley. At the time of its creation the Sand Dunes competed with many other projects being pushed in Washington. Mrs. Ward Darley commented: "In view of the fact that there were ninety like projects to be considered by the National Park officials and the President of the United States, the P.E.O. Sisterhood of the Valley is proud and happy to have accomplished something of lasting benefit to the San Luis Valley, the state, and the entire nation."<sup>30</sup>

A local paper headlined the event with enthusiasm. Special credit for the work went to the P.E.O. chapters and their committees. Identical telegrams received by Millie Velhagen, Elizabeth Spencer, and others from Representative Hardy said: "I think the national park service will tell the newspapers tomorrow [March 19, 1932] that the President has signed a proclamation creating the Great Sand Dunes a national monument."<sup>31</sup>

The reporter noted that Congressman Hardy usually wrote in a very conservative manner. The "official word" spread throughout the Valley quickly. Everyone knew that President Herbert Hoover had signed the proclamation and it would be made official soon. Congressman Hardy received generous praise for his role in the monument designation. The DAILY COURIER speculated that the outcome had been obvious for some time but ... "the ultimate designation of the area as a national monument, but it was not expected that the objective would be achieved so soon. Creation of the newest national monument climaxes a long, consistent campaign by local interests and Mr. Hardy to obtain the needed action."<sup>32</sup>

Official notification of the new national monument and copies of the proclamation arrived in the Valley about a week after the official signing. Word also came that Congressman Hardy had spent a great deal of time conferring with the Director of the National Park Service, Horace M. Albright. He also worked closely with the National Park Service Senior Assistant Director, A.E. Demaray.<sup>33</sup>

As the news spread the grandeur of the new monument received favorable publicity in the local and regional press. The Colorado Chamber of Commerce President F.H. Reid praised the efforts toward monument designation and publicized the great fun a visit to the Sand Dunes offered everyone.<sup>34</sup> An editorial in the local newspaper by Robert H. Berkov entitled "SUCCESSFUL AT LAST" summarized the feelings of Valley people.<sup>35</sup>

The long-awaited creation of a national monument for the famous San Luis Valley sand dunes seems to be at hand, climaxing a long and earnest campaign by those interested in the project. Congressman Guy U. Hardy, who has pushed the matter relentlessly in

official circles; Mrs. Millicent Velhagen, and the Monte Vista and Alamosa P.E.O. chapters at the behest of Mrs. Frank C. Spencer, who have all been active in an unofficial capacity, are to be congratulated on the successful termination of their efforts.

Designation of the sand dunes as a national monument will mean much to this region. For one thing, it will mean that the territory now occupied by the dunes must remain inviolate, and that trespassers for commercial reasons will be expelled. Thus the beauty of a natural phenomenon which is unique in this nation will be preserved forever, safe from the depredations of private interests. Second, it will mean the dissemination of much publicity concerning the dunes, resulting in their becoming better known to the people of the nation, and in a larger number of visitors to this region every year. Thirdly, it means the possibility of future improvement and aid by the government, which will raise its official status and result in still greater knowledge regarding this Valley attraction.

Alamosa and the Valley region will be immeasurably benefited by creation of a national monument at the dunes. The thanks of the entire area, including both cultural and commercial interests, are due those who have labored so faithfully for the goal.

The economic benefits of the new National Monument were immediately recognized. Another editorial by Robert H. Berkov headlined "FINE PUBLICITY" urged prompt action.<sup>36</sup>

The suggestion made by an Alamosa businessman that stickers advertising the San Luis Valley sand dunes be printed and distributed to motorists visiting this region is one well worth considering. Designation of the dunes as a national monument gives further point to the proposal.

Many points of interest to the tourist have achieved national fame and recognition as a result of the windshield-sticker idea. Placing of such a sign on the car of every party visiting the Valley would be an effective and inexpensive method of giving the dunes national publicity, resulting in a more widespread knowledge of the great San Luis Valley natural wonder, and in a consequent increase in the number of visitors here each year. The proper authorities should give thought to the local man's suggestion and act upon it before the spring tourist tide arrives in full force.

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During the time the sand dunes were being touted for national monument designation, another project of similar nature was going on. A group of people were working on national monument designation for the area of Pike's stockade on the Conejos river. When the Sand Dunes Proclamation was signed, the efforts by the Pike's Stockade group diminished and were soon forgotten. The site became a State Historical Monument in 1925.<sup>37</sup>

## DEVELOPMENT OF THE SAND DUNES

When the Great Sand Dunes National Monument began operations in March, 1932 hopes for quick development were few. The great depression enveloped the country and government spending for projects like this one ranked low on the list of priorities. Some activity began, however.<sup>38</sup>

Glen King became the first employee. His job assignment included the task of gathering data about the number of people visiting the area. The work station was immediately north of the Zapata ranch where he could count the number of automobiles that turned north into the monument area.<sup>39</sup> King recorded the numbers of the licence plates and was able to estimate the number of visitors. Russell Dunn also worked as caretaker at the new monument. Administrative authority for operations came from Mesa Verde National Park. Rangers temporarily assigned to the Valley included Woodrow Peppers and Kenneth Wallace.<sup>40</sup> For several years this part-time arrangement prevailed.

As the depression lessened the long awaited development began. Late in 1938 plans were announced for roads within the monument and a picnic area with sanitation facilities and fireplaces. A custodian worked there during the tourist season.<sup>41</sup> Jesse L. Nusbaum, Superintendent of Mesa Verde National Park, presented the plans in Alamosa on December 9, 1938. The road would be improved from the monument boundary to the foot of Mosca pass. All the arrangements were to be made and construction to start on December 16, 1938. A local newspaper commented: "The work ... will mark the realization of the hopes of Alamosa leaders for years."<sup>42</sup>

Mr. Howard Reins, an engineer from Alamosa, supervised much of this early work.<sup>43</sup> He coordinated the different projects of the Works Projects Administration and the Civilian Conservation Corps.<sup>44</sup> In 1939 Superintendent Paul R. Franke, Mesa Verde National Park, announced further plans for construction of a superintendents residence and a headquarters and combined entrance station. The southwestern adobe type construction would blend in with the terrain. Work began September 18, 1940 and results were noticeable by the following spring.

### GLENN BEAN

Glen Bean was probably the best known and most popular ranger stationed at the Great Sand Dunes National Monument. Bean grew up in the San Luis Valley and worked at the Sand Dunes in 1946. He returned as Superintendent in May 1950 and remained in that post until November 1953. During the next 30 years Glen Bean served with distinction in a variety of important posts in the National Park Service, retiring in 1980. In 1976 he was named Outstanding Alumnus of Adams State College.

Howard S. Rines became the first resident ranger.<sup>45</sup> During the war years construction at the Dunes stopped and visitation lessened. Bert G. Clarke, former superintendent of the Hooper high school, assumed the responsibilities as seasonal ranger and acting custodian in May 1942. He worked there until May 1946.<sup>46</sup>

Ted Sowers was named Superintendent of the monument in 1946. Jack Williams, a Valley native, began a long and distinguished career with the National Park Service there about this time.<sup>47</sup> The Great Sand Dunes National Monument operated under Mesa Verde National Park for several years. Administrative control by the Southwest National Monument Group lasted for a brief time. The separate unit status (1946) answered to the Santa Fe district office and now operates under the direction of the Denver Region.<sup>48</sup>

As the decade of the 1960's opened, visitation at the Sand Dunes increased steadily with the new road. Facilities grew to serve the public and make their visits more comfortable. The major growth in facilities was accomplished by the "Mission 66" program. Construction of the visitors center began in the summer of 1961 and moved the Great Sand Dunes into the class of a modern facility. Monument roads were rebuilt and the Pinon Flats campground opened in 1964.<sup>49</sup> The amphitheatre opened in 1966 and provided facilities for special presentations and programs. As "Mission 66" ended the Sand Dunes had adequate housing for rangers along with a well equipped maintenance shop. Supervising much of this work was long-time Superintendent Harold Schafsma, who served from 1953 to 1968 and was reassigned to Tonto National Monument.<sup>50</sup> Jim Carrico became the fourth superintendent in 1969 and transferred to Washington, D.C. in 1975.<sup>51</sup> Dennis Huffman was named the fifth superintendent in 1975 and transferred to Colorado National Monument in 1980. Robert Reynolds became the sixth superintendent in 1980. Popular rangers who served many years at the Sand Dunes include Bruce Denton, Frank Johnson, and Berle Lewis.

Recent developments include the construction of scenic trails and new signs at important spots. The exhibits in the visitors center were renovated in 1981 under the direction of Ranger Walt Sanger. The feature attraction is a movie about the Dunes. Solar heating of the visitors center as well as solar water heaters on the ranger's residences were installed in 1981 and seem to work well.

The monuments area increased in size over the past half-century. Several parcels of land were added to consolidate the dune mass within the boundaries. Important acquisitions were the inholdings of Ron Jausma and Mr. and Mr. Howard W. Shockey.

The vision of Elizabeth Spencer and the San Luis Valley women of the P.E.O. sisterhood for the Sand Dunes worked much as they thought it would. Some of these women continued their support of the Monument for many years. Additional reasons for the Great Sand Dunes National Monument being one of the most enjoyable parks in the entire system has been the outstanding personnel of the National Park Service who have served the area for the past fifty years.

## BACKNOTES

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46. Jones, *IBID.*
47. *DAILY COURIER*, November 28, 1950.
48. *IBID.*, March 15, 1960.
49. *IBID.*, November 14, 1964.
50. *PUEBLO STAR JOURNAL*, February 23, 1969 and *EMPIRE MAGAZINE (DENVER POST)*, November 22, 1970.
51. *PUEBLO STAR JOURNAL*, June 29, 1975.
52. *VALLEY COURIER*, November 17, 1978 and June 17, 1980.



*Shockey's cabin.*

## **WHEELER NATIONAL MONUMENT**

Wheeler National Monument, near Wagon Wheel Gap, was the first area in the San Luis Valley set aside by the United States Government and placed under the jurisdiction of the National Park Service. Dr. Frank C. Spencer, Professor of History at Adams State College from 1925 to 1944, deserves much of the credit for his work. He was working as a supervisor for the U.S. Forest Service during the summer of 1907 when the multicolored rock formations, domes, spires, and wind formed columns attracted his attention. In 1908, while in Washington, D.C., he presented the idea to Gifford Pinchot at the U.S. Forest Service headquarters. Spencer and Pinchot made a personal appeal to the chief executive. The name originally suggested was Fremont National Monument. That idea was dropped when President Theodore Roosevelt signed the proclamation on December 7, 1908. The area was named in honor of H.N. Wheeler, former Chief Forester of the Colorado National Forest. Another source says the monument was named in honor of Captain George M. Wheeler, a U.S. Army surveyor who mapped the area in 1874. The area was never developed and reverted to the U.S. Forest Service on August 3, 1950. It was then redesignated as the Wheeler Geologic Area.

See Floyd Baskette, *SOUTH COLORADAN*, Adams State College, February 20, 1933; Frank C. Spencer, *COLORADO MAGAZINE*, I, (1924), pp. 97-103; Lloyd E. Parris, "The Monument America Forgot," *EMPIRE MAGAZINE - The Denver Post*, (July 28, 1968).



*Medano Creek - 1982.*



### **THE FRENCHMAN**

Ulysses Virgil Herald, "The Frenchman," personified the rugged individualism of early San Luis Valley residents. Most of his life revolved around the large herd of cattle he owned and grazed behind the Sand Dunes in Medano park. Herald's adventures and exploits included fights with bears, killing 100 mountain lions, confrontations with balky mules, and minor conflicts with people. These stories are fast becoming part of Valley folklore in their many versions. Known for his hospitality, "Ulus" communicated by writing notes after he lost his hearing. For more information see Cuvier H. Jones, "The Herald Family," *SAN LUIS VALLEY HISTORIAN*, XI/1, pp. 7-11 and George Harlan, *POSTMARKS AND PLACES*, (Crestone, 1976).

## **THE TRAGIC LEGEND OF MOSCA PASS** **by Shirley R. Carter**

The moonlight plays a shimmering glow upon the sand and the young lovers as they walk, hand in hand, across the dunes. Her long flowing peasant skirt is ruffled by the slight breezes and he with his heavy Mexican boots, leave not a trace of their night walk. Some say they walk the dunes when the moon is high and bright. Others say they hear her faint moaning and sorrowful cry on dark and dreary nights as the wind traverses the dunes.

Legends are as much a part of western history as those facts that can be documented. The tragic legend of Mosca Pass is one of these. Mosca Pass lays hidden in the Sangre de Cristo mountains behind the ever shifting sands of the Great Sand Dunes National Monument. The story is told that Pedro Garcia and Maria Martinez fell in love and were married. Their lives seemed to be one of perpetual sunshine. Pedro made a good living for her raising sheep.

One day a trader from Pueblo came to the small adobe home of Pedro and Maria to buy 10,000 of their sheep. Maria and Pedro were delighted and plans were made for Pedro to drive the sheep over Mosca Pass, as it would be the shortest route to take. Early one morning Pedro started with nine shepherders and the large flock. Maria and her servants followed to within a few miles of where the pass started. It was agreed that Maria would wait there for Pedro's return. The young lovers bid each other farewell.

When, after three days, Pedro did not return, Maria became concerned and sent a servant to see if he could see them coming back. After many hours, the servant returned, reporting that although he had gone over the entire pass, he could find no trace of the missing Pedro, the nine shepherders, or the 10,000 sheep.

Filled with anxiety and worry, Maria set out on horseback, taking her dog with her, to find her husband. She had not gone far when her dog began racing around uncontrollably. There, where the sands are still and deep, she found her beloved Pedro buried in the sand. Overcome with grief, she dismounted her horse and laid her thin willowy body on top of his and died.

The following day, after her horse had returned to the base camp, the servants went to look for her. They found her, half buried by the sand, on top of her husband's body. To this day, no trace of the nine shepherders or the 10,000 sheep has ever been found. One can only speculate about the possible wind and sand storm, or an unknown violence that took Pedro's life and the lives of the others. Only Pedro and his friends know of the tragedy that keeps he and his lovely Maria walking on the moonlit dunes, as their troubled souls look for peace and rest.

## **A LEGEND OF THE SAND DUNES\***

**Since early times a story has persisted that a young couple settled on the headwaters of the Huerfano but no one knew with certainty from whence they came. It was rumored they originated in the San Luis Valley but details of their migration were unknown. The only explanation of this, to our knowledge, that has ever been offered is given here in an abbreviated form. The story came many years ago from a very old resident of the Valley.**

Soon after the fort was established at the foot of Sierra Blanca, a poor Spanish-speaking family from near Taos settled at the mouth of a small creek near the military reservation. The father cultivated a small acreage and he and his only child, a son, tended a small flock of sheep which belonged to his miserly rich older brother. The poor people were deeply in debt to this miser who was also very oppressive.

One day a Ute chief appeared at the home of the farmer. He had with him a girl whom he wished to sell. He said he had stolen her from the Navajos but she did not appear to be an Indian. Recently there had been a white family on the Huerfano ambushed and apparently the whole family was killed but the poor farmer felt that this little girl must have been the sole survivor. She was not old enough to talk well so nothing could be learned from her. The farmer borrowed more money from the miserly brother and bought the orphan. They called her Paulita and it was not long before she was helping their son, Benito, in tending the flock.

Years flew by and the children were soon youths and the girl had grown to be a beauty. The old Chief looked on her with longing eyes and hinted that he'd take her back. The old miser also wished her as a wife and the poor parents were sure that some day he would propose that he take her and apply her purchase price on their large debt. That spring the weather had been very cold and dry and the only place in the Valley where the grass was growing was at the Sand Dunes, so the miser ordered Benito to drive the sheep to the Dunes for feed. He obeyed.

Paulita was very sorry, for the boy and girl had grown very fond of each other. Also she knew that at that time of year there were often fierce storms at the Sand Dunes and people and flocks were suffocated. Frequently she would climb the ridge back of their home to watch Benito's progress and to check on the clouds on the San Juans for one could generally tell from the clouds hanging there if a storm were brewing. The second day after Benito's departure the wily Chief appeared and inquired for Paulita. He was in an ugly mood and the parents knew he intended to take the girl. Fortunately she had gone to the hill to watch and they told the Indian she was gone and would not be back until morning.

That evening when she returned the father told her of the Indian and of his fears. Immediately she seized a bearskin coat and rushed out to the corral, took the Chief's horse, and rushed away after Benito. The next morning the brave

**\*Reprinted with permission from Luther E. Bean, LAND OF THE BLUE SKY PEOPLE, (Alamosa, 1972), pp. 95-97.**

awoke early and saw his steed gone. He soon discovered the girl had taken his horse and was very angry. He threw a blanket on an old pack animal and started as fast as he could after Paulita. He was hardly out of sight when the old miser appeared and inquired about the sheep, Benito, and Paulita. The poor parents told the whole story, including the fact that the old Indian had just left and that they believed he wanted to take Paulita. This made the old miser furious and he rushed out and threw his saddle on a big bronco—he had ridden his own mount all night and it was exhausted. He climbed on the wild horse and it immediately bucked him off. He tried again and was successful but could not get the colt to take off in the right direction. Finally he got it under way and was away on the chase after the Indian and the girl.

In the meantime the storm that had been developing on the San Juans broke in fierce fury. Still the three raced on with Paulita much in the lead, followed by the Indian who was being overtaken by the miser, for the old pack horse could not match the steady speed of the young bronco. The storm by now was surging so that the men could not see each other. Soon after they reached the edge of the Sand Dunes the bronco overtook the plodding pack animal. The Indian turned, drew his bow and arrow, and shot the miser—but as the rascal fell from his steed he pulled his pistol and fired a random shot at the brave which hit him fatally. The storm covered their bodies with the powdery sand and it was years after that the winds exposed their bones and told the story of the gory catastrophe.

Benito was crossing the Sand Dunes when the storm broke and managed to get to some cottonwoods near the edge. His pack burros laid down behind the trees and held their noses close to the ground so they would not suffocate. Benito crawled between the two animals and covered himself with a blanket. As the fury of the storm abated slightly, he thought he heard a whinny of a horse. He listened again and was sure it was one. Soon Paulita appeared on a worn mount and crawled under the blanket to await the end of the awful storm.

When the wind had ceased and the sand no longer filled the air, Benito came out of their shelter and soon discovered that the horse and two burros had survived as well as several of the sheep. Without delay they approached the mountains and journeyed over the pass to settle on the headwaters of the Huerfano. They prospered but never divulged their story to anyone and it is said that they were ancestors of some of the people who now live in the area.



# CLIMATIC CHANGE IN THE SAN LUIS VALLEY

*by John A. Mangimeli*

Throughout history the human race has been vulnerable to changes in climate. In his study of the economic effects of climatic change, M. L. Parry concludes that long-term climatic fluctuation over the last two thousand years has had a major impact on the civilizations of Europe and North America.<sup>1</sup> Even short-term changes in climate, such as drought or unseasonable cold, can have significant economic and social consequences, particularly when they occur during periods of social and political instability. In places where agriculture is marginal under "normal" climatic conditions, such as semi-arid areas or areas with long winters and short growing seasons, this vulnerability to climatic change is particularly great. Anyone who lived on the High Plains during the "Dust Bowl" years knows how climatic change can influence the economic and social history of a region.

Attempts to understand the history of the San Luis Valley must also take into account the effect of climatic fluctuation on the natural environment and on human activity of the area. The knowledge of how the climate of the San Luis Valley has changed over the past several hundred years can be applied to various historical and environmental problems of the vicinity, such as native American occupation and migration, activities of early white explorers, settlement and agricultural development, environmental change and dune movement within the Great Sand Dunes National Monument.

Despite the fact that the earliest settlements in Colorado are within the San Luis Valley, continuous meteorological records for the area extend back only a few decades. For example, the two meteorological stations nearest the Great Sand Dunes National Monument--at the Great Sand Dunes entrance station and at Blanca--have continuous monthly temperature and precipitation data dating back to 1951 and 1961, respectively. Sporadic records exist at various places in the San Luis Valley back to the 1890's.

In order to determine the nature of the climate of the San Luis Valley in the period prior to meteorological instrumentation, other evidence of climatic change must be sought. While indirect and less precise than modern meteorological measurements, such "proxy evidence" can allow for useful estimates of past climatic variables. One technique of acquiring proxy data that has been used successfully for climatic reconstruction in the western United States has been tree-ring analysis. Certain species of western conifers growing on arid sites have proven to be very sensitive to changes in precipitation and, to a lesser degree, temperature. Tree-ring chronologies developed from such species have been used to reconstruct these climatic variables over the lifetime of the tree.<sup>2</sup>

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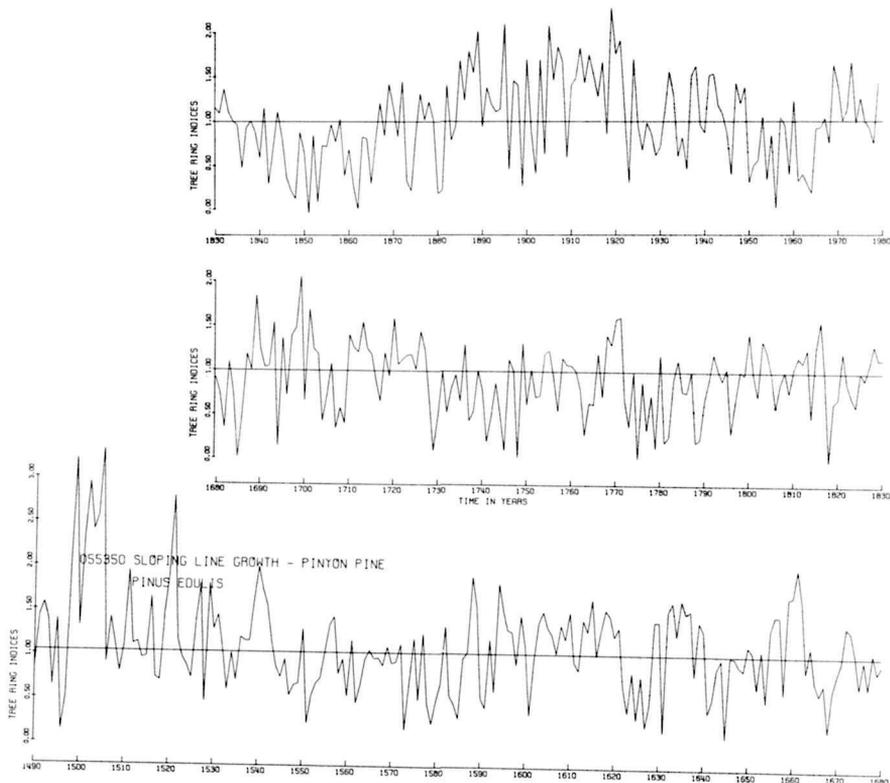
The author is a graduate student in Geography at the University of Arizona. This article is based on research he did for his masters thesis at the University of Nebraska, Lincoln. He has been a seasonal interpretive ranger with the National Park Service for the past six years and served at the Great Sand Dunes National Monument in 1980 and 1981.

Because of the aridity of the San Luis Valley, a climatologically-determined limit to tree growth occurs at the base of the mountains surrounding the Valley. Within the boundaries of the Great Sand Dunes National Monument, for example, the lower limit to tree growth in the Sangre de Cristo Mountains occurs at approximately 8200 feet, with the exception of phreatophytes growing along stream courses. This arid tree-line corresponds roughly to the eleven-inch precipitation line.

In the southeastern corner of the Monument, I selected a group of large pinon pine (*Pinus edulis*) near the tree-line. From each tree, two cores were extracted, measured and analyzed according to standard dendrochronological techniques.<sup>3</sup> A total of twenty-four cores (two each from twelve trees) averaging 391 years of age were used in this study. The ring-series displayed in the twenty-four cores showed a high degree of common variance; that is, the pattern of wide and narrow rings was very similar for all of the cores.<sup>4</sup> This high correlation among all the trees at the site indicates that some external factor--presumably climate--has affected all the trees at the site in a similar fashion over their lifetimes.

The ring-series measurements for each of the twenty-four cores were then averaged to produce a "Master chronology" for the pinon pine (Figure 1). In theory, such averaging tends to eliminate much of the "noise"--the non-

## FIGURE 1



climatically-induced growth variance--and allows for correlation with climatic data. The master chronology is interpreted as representing the average growth of an entire group of trees at a particular site and indicates the years when the growth of all the trees was significantly above or below the mean. The high-degree of ring-width variability displayed in the pinon pine master chronology is consistent with and presumably reflects the high annual rainfall variability of arid areas such as the San Luis Valley.

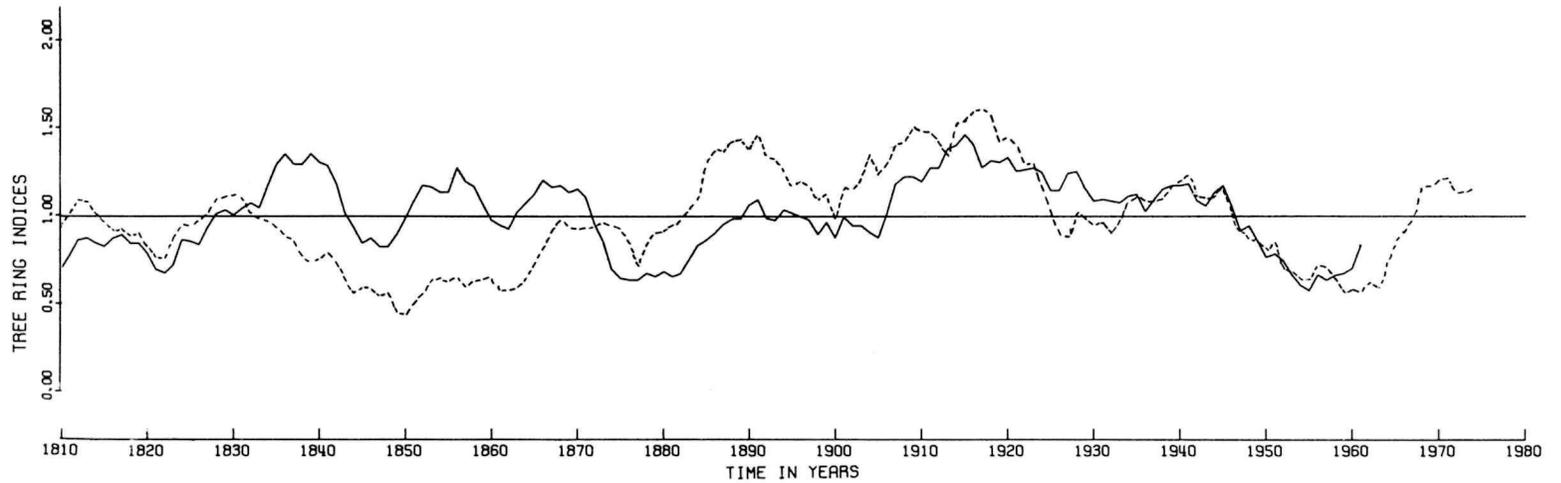
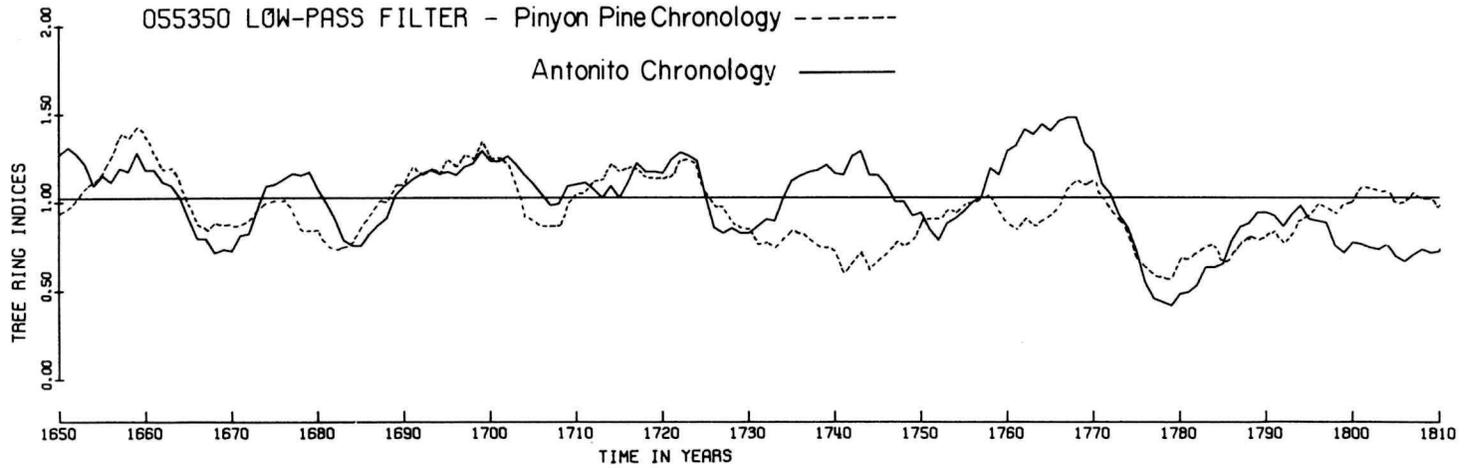
In order to determine if climate is indeed responsible for the variability of growth of the pinon pine and, if so, which particular climatic variables are the most important in influencing growth, a complex computerized technique known as principal component analysis was employed. This technique correlates the measurements of each annual growth ring in the master chronology with climatic variables for the twelve-month period prior to growing season. The climatic data used in this study were monthly mean temperatures and monthly total precipitation from 1941 to 1979 for the Rio Grande Drainage climatic division.<sup>5</sup>

Principal component analysis produces a "response function" which indicates significant statistical relationships between tree growth and individual monthly climatic variables. The response function developed in this study indicated that the growth of pinon pine at this site was directly related to precipitation and inversely related to temperature; that is, low temperatures and high precipitation over the twelve month period preceding the development of the ring (July through June) would lead to the production of a wide ring. Conversely, high temperatures and low precipitation during the course of the preceding year would lead to the development of a narrow ring.<sup>6</sup> These results are consistent with other studies of pinon pine in the western United States.

Long-term climatic reconstruction from tree-ring chronologies usually requires statistical manipulation of the chronology to eliminate "high frequency" variance (year-to-year fluctuations of growth) in favor of "low frequency" variance (periods of several years of above-average or below-average growth). In order to display these long-term changes in growth, high-frequency variance is filtered out of the master chronology by a running mean. In the case of the pinon pine chronology from Great Sand Dunes National Monument, an unweighted, nine-year running-mean was used to smooth the chronology over the 1650-1975 time-span (Figure 2). Those periods that show growth consistently above the mean (the horizontal line labeled "1.00") are interpreted as times when cool and moist climatic conditions prevailed, while below-average growth is indicative of warm, dry climate.

In order to verify the climatic reconstruction based on the filtered pinon pine chronology, the chronology was compared to three other types of climatic data from the San Luis Valley. First, sporadic instrumental records dating back nearly 100 years are available for a few parts of the Valley. Saguache has intermittent temperature and precipitation data dating back to 1891, while Manassa has continuous precipitation data from 1906 to present. The precipitation data from both stations were smoothed in the same manner as the pinon pine master chronology and each set of data was plotted and scaled according to its respective

# FIGURE 2



# FIGURE 3

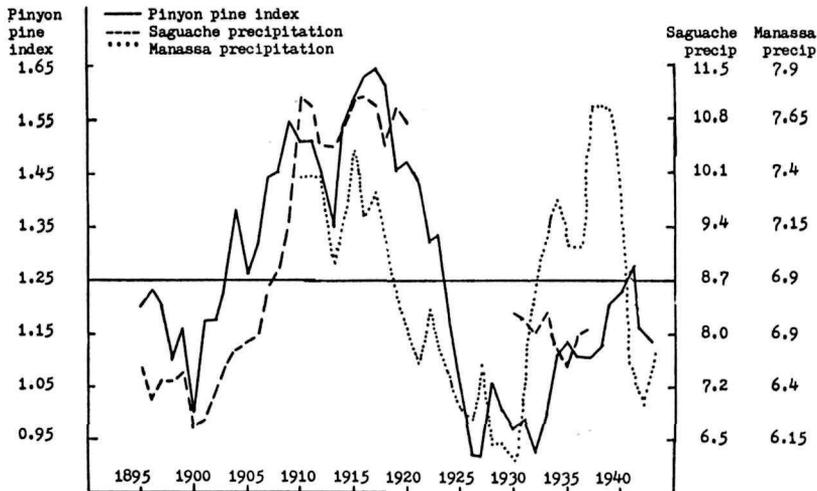


Figure 3. Pinon pine chronology, annual precipitation at Saguache (1895-1920 and 1931-1939), and annual precipitation at Manassa (1910-1943). All have been smoothed by an unweighted, nine-year running mean and the plots are scaled according to the mean and standard deviation for each set of data over the time periods involved.

mean and standard deviation over the time period involved (Figure 3). Considering the 40-mile distance of each town from the Great Sand Dunes, the correspondence between the precipitation data and tree-growth is significant and appears to indicate that the growth of pinon pine is a reasonably good indicator of local precipitation over the period involved.

Prior to meteorological records, historical, non-instrumental weather observations were recorded at Fort Garland from 1866-1880. Bradley analyses and summarizes these records and concludes that annual precipitation for this fifteen-year period was significantly higher than the modern (1940-1970) normals.<sup>7</sup> The master chronology indicates that pinon pine growth during this same fifteen-year period was also greater than growth during the 1940-1970 period. Consequently, pinon pine growth again seems to reflect precipitation fluctuations, although the short length of record from Fort Garland does not eliminate the possibility of coincidence.

Finally, the only other tree-ring chronology developed within the Rio Grande drainage basin was the Antonito chronology produced by Stokes and Harlan of the University of Arizona Laboratory of Tree-Ring Research in Tucson, Arizona.<sup>8</sup> The Antonito chronology was developed from Douglas fir (*Pseudotsuga menziesii*) growing at 9000 feet elevation in the San Juan Mountains near the Colorado-New Mexico border, about sixty miles southwest of the Great Sand Dunes. Work with Douglas fir throughout the western United States has indicated that, like pinon pine, ring-width is directly related to precipitation and inversely related to temperature; that is, cool, wet conditions enhance the growth of the trees and result in wide rings.<sup>9</sup>

Consequently, a significant degree of similarity between the Antonito and pinon pine chronologies would lend support to the hypothesis that pinon pine growth does indeed reflect long-term climatic variations. A correlation coefficient of .435 indicates that a significant direct relationship does exist between the two smoothed chronologies. A visual comparison of the plots of both chronologies (Figure 2) also shows that, for about 77% of the 1650-1961 period, the two chronologies correspond quite closely. It can therefore be concluded that during most of the 312-year period both species are responding in a similar fashion to macroclimatic forces.

There are some periods, however, where the two chronologies diverge noticeably, namely in the 1730's, 1740's, 1760's, 1830's, and 1850's. Considering the sixty-mile distance and the altitudinal and topographic differences between the pinon pine site and the Douglas fir site, these periods when the two chronologies do not correspond may be interpreted as differences in the local climate from one side of the Valley to the other. However, the possibility that these differences are a product of some non-climatic factor (disease, fire, porcupine damage, etc.) influencing all the trees at one of the sites cannot be excluded.

It is therefore concluded that, for the majority of the 1650-1961 period (when the two chronologies correspond), the general climatic conditions of the San Luis Valley can be reconstructed with some confidence. An analysis of Figure 2 indicates that recent times (1945-75) have been considerably warmer and drier than the long-term climatic average for the area. Prior to 1940, several periods experienced conditions that were much cooler and wetter than any time during the past forty years of meteorological records: the late 1650's and early 1660's, the 1690's, 1710-1725, and a very long cool-moist period from 1885-1925.

While the 1945-75 period is not representative of the long-term climate of the area in the sense that it is warmer and drier than the mean, a drought of even greater duration is indicated in 1770-1800. Other shorter and less-intense dry periods occurred in the late 1660's and early 1670's, the 1680's, 1720-35, 1815-25, the 1840's, and the 1870's. The warm-dry conditions indicated by the pinon pine chronology from 1730-1750, in the 1830's, and from 1850-80 must be interpreted with caution, as cool-moist conditions are indicated across the Valley by the Antonito chronology. As mentioned earlier, this may or may not reflect a genuine difference in climatic regimes on opposite sides of the Valley, as some unknown non-climatic factor may have been operative during these periods.

It must also be noted that climatic reconstruction as presented in this paper reflects only long-term climatic trends. It is not advisable to attempt reconstruction of climatic conditions for any individual years because of the lag effect of climatic change on tree growth and because statistical filtering of the chronologies may mask an unusually wet year during a longer period of drought or a dry year during a long period of cool-moist conditions.

In conclusion, it can be stated that the climate of the San Luis Valley is not static. Over the last three hundred and thirty years it has fluctuated significantly and such climatic fluctuation should be taken into account by students of human history and environmental change in the San Luis Valley. And if the past is any guide to the future, then we must conclude that climatic variability will continue to be a factor in the history of the San Luis Valley and that long-term economic and political decisions might well be made with such fluctuations in mind.

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## A SAN LUIS VALLEY LEGEND

# THE DISAPPEARING SHEEP OF THE SAND DUNES

From The Alamosa Journal, August 6, 1885

We had just reached the banks of that noble stream of the west, the Rio Grande river, after a long and fatiguing march of forty miles across the desert of the San Luis Valley. We had dismounted in a large grove of cottonwoods near the river and were busily engaged in relieving our three pack animals of their burdens. Our horses stood patiently waiting to be unsaddled and turned out to graze. We soon had our camp pitched and our outfit in order for the night. The horses were lariatied in reach of water, and in the midst of luxuriant bunch grass, and the burros turned out for their feed and night of rest.

My companion had opened the panniers to prepare our evening meal, and I seized upon a trout rod and lazily strolled along the banks of the river to endeavor to coax some of the speckled beauties into taking my fly. Finding a deep pool I soon landed three fine fellows. Upon my return to camp I found a fire brightly burning and a hot frying pan awaiting my catch. We soon had the fish cooking over the fire and the while watched by two hungry Bohemians until they were done to a turn. We had finished our meal and were reclining upon a pile of blankets placed upon the ground and enjoying a comfortable smoke. We were talking about our hot and disagreeable ride over the desert, forty miles of sand and sun without meeting with a drop of water to wet our parched lips or to give to our famishing animals, and of the wonderful sand dunes or hills which we passed on the eastern side of the desert and which loomed up before us thirty-five miles distant.

These sand dunes of the San Luis Valley run on the west side and parallel with the Sangre de Cristo range of mountains. The soil of some portions of this valley is composed of

### A DRY, LOOSE SAND

that a light breeze will raise in a cloud. At times there are terrible sand storms, and it is during these storms that these immense mountains of sand are formed. They are completely barren of all vegetation, and present a white, dazzling appearance to the eye. Opposite the Mosca Pass lies one end of this curious range of sand hills, and it is there that the largest one is situated. It rises to a height of over 800 feet above the level of the surrounding desert, and is surrounded by numerous smaller ones which raise all the way from twenty-five feet to several hundred feet in height.

These sand hills then extend in a continuous chain for over twenty miles, when they become broken, and the desert assumes its level state again.

That this immense body of sand had been placed there and in such form seemed wonderful, and how and when the dunes were formed was the subject of our conversation; but presently the conversation slackened until we were occupied with our own thoughts and silently admiring the beautiful sight of the Sangre de Cristo range which lay before us, with the snow-tipped Mount Blanca, the noblest and highest peak of the Rockies, as the central figure.

The sun had sunk behind the San Juan mountains in the west, and the grand and imposing picture that lay before us was gradually fading from our view. We were getting a fresh breeze from the snow-covered mountains, the evening had become cool, and I got up to place some logs on our fire, which was getting low. Scarcely had I done so when I heard light footsteps and the snapping of dry twigs. From out of a dense growth of willows toward the river

### **CAME A MAN,**

a Spaniard. He had long black curling hair, which fell from beneath a broad-brimmed sombrero, large black eyes, a narrow chin, prominent features, a set, determined mouth (which was partly hidden by a long, black moustache), a swarthy complexion, and was six feet, one or two inches in height, and weighed about 180 pounds. His age I should have placed at about forty years. In his hand he carried a repeating Winchester rifle, and in his belt, which he carried full cartridges around his waist, he had a large size Colt's revolver and a hunting knife. As he stepped into the light made by our fire he stopped and stood looking at me for a moment and then, seeing me rise, came forward and greeted me with "Buenas tardes, señor."

I welcomed him in Spanish and invited him to draw near our fire and be seated. When asked whether he understood English and spoke it he said that he did, as he had received part of his education at an English school and had spent the greater part of his life among Americans. He then introduced himself as Francis Gonzalez and said that he lived in New Mexico, where he owned a large hacienda, and that he was up in Colorado on his annual elk hunt. His camp was about twenty miles from where we were, at the foot of the San Juan range. He had been out all day long riding for antelope, and as it was then getting late and his horse was tired out he asked the privilege of remaining with us overnight. I informed him that nothing would please us more than to have him to remain as our guest, and that we would make him as comfortable as camp life would permit. After relating to us a number of his adventures in the hunt and with the Indians, and telling us that his greatest pleasure from boyhood had been in roaming through the mountains of Colorado, I told him that our curiosity had been greatly excited at the magnitude of the sand hills in the San Luis Valley.

He remained silent for a moment, gazing into the fire, but looking up suddenly he said, "Señor, if it would please you, I can relate to you how the famous sand dunes of the San Luis Valley really came into existence. There are undoubtedly many who can tell you this tale, but there is no one living who would be more apt to know the truth in regard to it than myself, for it was

## **MY GRANDFATHER**

who started the formation of the largest one in the range with part of his herd of sheep and several of his herders." I assured him that we were never too tired to listen and begged him to proceed. "It is now ten years if not more," he said, "since I last repeated what I am to tell you tonight, and, although it may seem incredible to you, it is nevertheless true. What I am to repeat to you was told to me by my father and has been told by me to my children.

It was in the year 1816 that my grandfather, El Senor Don Louis Gonzalez, returned to his home in Mexico, where he had enormous herds of cattle and sheep, from an exploring tour north.

He had penetrated into this part of Colorado and had traveled over the San Luis Valley. Feed was here in such abundance that my grandfather returned to his home completely charmed with this part of the world, and was fully determined to brave the Indians and hardships presented by nature and send a small portion of his herd of sheep, in charge of some of his Mexican herders, to this valley. He therefore selected 3,500 sheep from his herd, picked out five of his most trusty herders and sent them out upon their journey. One of these herders had accompanied my grandfather on his trip and knew where to find this garden spot of the north. They traveled many hundred leagues, and it was in the springtime that they arrived at their destination.

They immediately set to work building cabins to live in and corrals for the sheep. A month had passed away, and the sheep were thriving wonderfully, and nothing had occurred to give warning of their approaching doom. On the twenty-fifth of June, one herder, Martinez by name, proposed to go over the mountains and see what kind of country lay on the other side.

He started out during the fairest of weather and passed through the point now known as Mosca Pass. After three days spent in wandering around the eastern side of the range he started to return to his companions. He pursued his way through this pass with no foreboding of the horrible fate that had overtaken those left behind, and at last arrived at the mouth of the pass.

He looked and where he should have seen the newly erected cabins and the herd peacefully grazing, he saw only

## **AN IMMENSE MOUNTAIN OF SAND.**

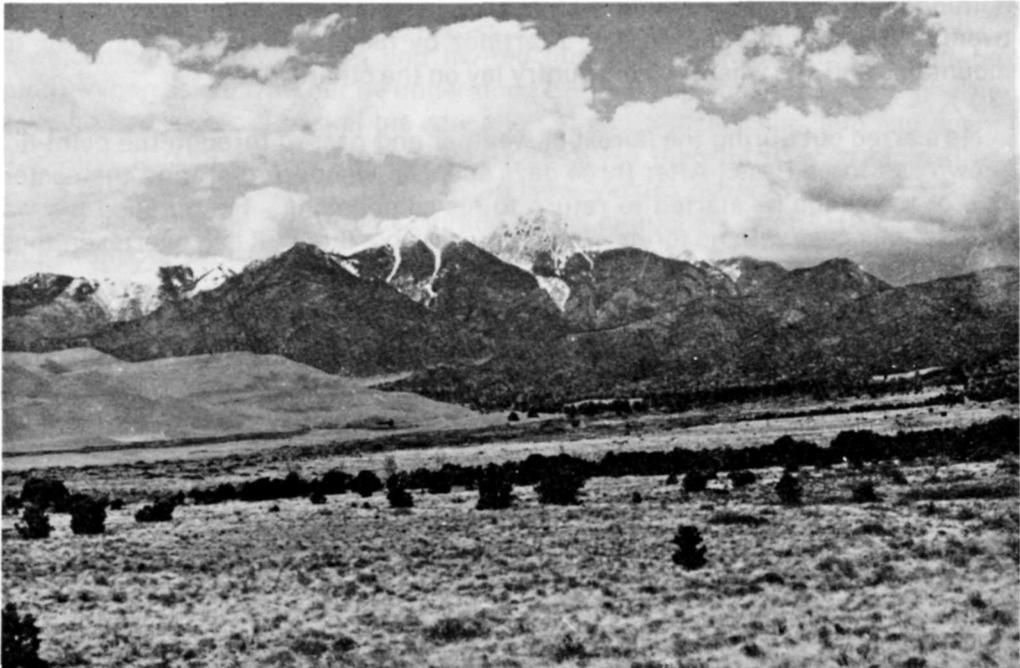
He was dumbfounded and could not believe at first but that it was some hideous nightmare or else that he had lost his way and that his companions with the sheep were off in some other direction. After going a short distance further and seeing many familiar landmarks he at last came to realize what had happened and that where now stood only a large hill of sand was where his home had been for the past month.

He started immediately to find his brother herders, but after searching for them for two days he gave them up as lost. A storm had risen during his absence and buried that 3,500 sheep, his four companions, and their houses and corrals beneath fifty feet of sand. That was the beginning of the famous sand dunes of Colorado. The herder who had escaped the fate of his companions then set out to carry the news to my grandfather, and after encountering many hardships he at last arrived at the hacienda and related to his master all that he knew. Sand storms year after year have kept piling the sand in this heap until today it stands fully 800 feet above the bones of those who perished there sixty-nine years ago.

Hill after hill was formed from that, until now there exists a chain extending many miles up the valley. Search was made for the bodies of the Mexicans who perished there, but before the laborers could succeed in getting ten feet below the surface the excavation made would completely fill with the loose sand, and the undertaking was abandoned."

After Senor Gonzalez finished his tale we all rolled ourselves up in our blankets and passed off into dreamland.

The next morning after breakfast our guest got up his horse, and after extending a very cordial invitation to make him a visit, departed for his own camp. M.D.M.



*Medano mountain in winter.*

# San Luis Sand Dunes

By Millie Holbrook Velhagen

*Lifted by every bright breeze in its straying,  
Or reeling in funnels flung high by the storm;  
Hurling their grains into air like waves spraying,  
Or slipping in soft, silent eddies that form,*

*The sands of the Great Dunes are constantly seeking  
The lost sea that left them when old Earth was new, —  
Left them a tideless shore evermore keeping  
Their tryst of the centuries, restless but true;*

*Restless to know once again the dear drifting  
Of all the strange craft that the Primitives found,  
Eager to feel the soft, vibrating shifting  
Of blue limpid water, spring-fed and rock bound.*

*Down thru the endless years sounds the low yearning, —  
That lost wailing shore that a sea left behind,  
Telling the search of the solemn sands turning,  
Turning to search again . . . never to find.*

This poem appeared in the Sunday DENVER POST, November 9, 1930, and was reprinted in the DAILY COURIER, November 12, 1930.

# The Singing Sands of Alamosa

Lyric by Kim Gannon  
Music by Bert Reisfeld

*In the heart of Colorado  
There's a canyon ev'ry lover knows  
Where the desert sand sings love songs  
Ev'ry time the west wind blows.*

**REFRAIN**

**THE SINGING SANDS OF ALAMOSA**  
*Sang tenderly the night  
That we found love was ours.*

*Deep in the sands of Alamosa  
The angels hid a song  
Amid the desert flowers.*

*But since you said goodbye  
There's no music.  
Just the ghost of a song that used to be.*

**THE SINGING SANDS OF ALAMOSA**  
*Will sing a new day  
That you come back to me.*

In the early 1940's this song was recorded by Bing Crosby and Warner Brothers used it in the movies "YOU CAN'T ESCAPE FOREVER" and "SECRET ENEMIES." It became a popular song by other singers on radio. PUEBLO CHIEFTAIN, November 4, 1942.

# Song of the Sand Dunes

By Ray Madison, Blanca, Colorado

*When the wind blows across the Valley,  
And the sand dunes begin to creep;  
The myriad grains on their surface  
Awaken from fitful sleep;  
And a murmur of exquisite music  
Fills the air, as they drift along—  
If you listen, closely, you'll hear it,  
And the words of their simple song.*

*It seems, that in by-gone ages,  
On the shores of an inland sea,  
The waves kissed these tiny sand grains,  
And they still keep that memory;  
And they question, over and over,  
The right of an unseen hand  
To change paradise to a desert,  
And an ocean's depth to land.*

*So, for ages, they've murmured in protest,  
When the wind begins to blow,  
The words of a much-loved lullaby  
The sea taught them long ago;  
And, now, when you hear their music,  
You'll listen, and understand,  
The longing and sorrow that's hidden  
In these mountains of shifting sand.*

Reprinted from the ALAMOSA JOURNAL, March 22, 1932

**GREAT SAND DUNES: THE SHAPE OF THE WIND, by Stephen A. Trimble.** (Globe, AZ: Southwest Parks and Monuments Association, 1978.) Maps, Drawings, Photographs, and Bibliography. Pp. 32. (8½ x 11 in.; 21.5 x 28 cm.) \$1.90 paperback.

There are more than two dozen books and monographs currently in print about people, history, culture, institutions, and the physical features of the San Luis Valley. All of them are good and make important contributions to the literature of the area. This monograph, however, is by far the most beautiful.

Steve Trimble has numerous friends and many acquaintances in the Valley. He now has thousands of admirers and fans who have seen and read his book and all owe him a salute for an outstanding job. Trimble writes with confidence gained from careful research. He adds that touch of understanding, appreciation, and love for the dunes that some of us erroneously assume is reserved for Valley people alone. A sample of his writing is presented here.

As you drive the length of the Valley, the ragged summits of the Crestones and of Sierra Blanca dominate your view to the east. Desert colors on the Valley floor, browns and gray-greens, change to deep greens and crisp blues at the mountain front.

You drive closer. The mysterious area must be enormous, it takes so long to seem to increase in size. Finally, you draw near--close enough to discover one more of the contrasts held within the Colorado Rockies. For here mountain peaks drop in dark, jagged contours to meet the soft lines and uninterrupted colors of sand dunes.

The geologic history of the Valley is well explained along with the patterns of development through the ages. Dune types are detailed in an easy to read manner accompanied by drawings. Plant and animal life in the Dunes is well illustrated. The photographs, 60 in color, are primarily the work of the author. Several are full page and suitable for framing. Mr. Trimble deserves a second round of praise as a photographer.

A brief sketch of exploration and settlement in the Sand Dunes area of the east-central Valley is appreciated in a book devoted primarily to natural history.

This is a beautiful little book. It is well researched, well designed, well printed, and extremely well written. Coupled with these features is an added one—it is inexpensive. Valley people should keep a supply on hand as gifts for visitors. This work, first published in 1978 and now in a third edition, is well appreciated and deserving of highest praise.

C.J.C.

**POSTMARKS AND PLACES, by George Harlan. (Crestone, 1976). Introduction, Contents, Maps, Drawings, Illustrations, Photographs, Documents, Bibliography, Index. Pp. 211. (6x9 in.; 15.5x23 cm.). \$6.90 paperback.**

Early mail routes and the post offices that served people in the northeastern part of the San Luis Valley are the focal points of this book. It is more than the title implies, however. The people who lived, worked, and died in the shadow of the Sangre de Cristo mountains are presented here with their problems and successes. Their lighter moments and funny stories are used to illustrate their great sense of humor and sophisticated outlook on life.

Nobody but George Harlan could have written this book. He knows the area as part of his life and knew many of the more recent personalities and some of the old timers. He too "carried the mail" for many years and at the same time gathered materials and formulated ideas for this work. All the old settlements and post offices are given adequate treatment but the best parts are about the men and women who operated them. Their customers and neighbors are presented against the background of major events concerning mining and ranching which had profound effects on their lives. The research is detailed and thorough as well as balanced. The writing is a good example of local history presented at its best. A couple of brief examples follow:

The name of Garrison was changed to Hooper, July 17, 1896, because of the confusion with the mail and freight with that of Gunnison, Colorado. The name Hooper was chosen in honor of Major Hooper, general passenger agent of the Denver & Rio Grande railroad. It was thought that Major Hooper might make a worthy gift to this new namesake. (66).

To many haying was a way of life. Their only occupation was that of working in the hay fields each summer. Some continued to work for the same contractor year after year. In the hay fields, horses furnished the power for the mowers, rakes, sulky and buck, and stackers. Every morning was an exciting time. (72).

Illustrations of several types add much to this work. It is an extremely valuable contribution to San Luis Valley history and greatly appreciated. In addition to its value as a source book it is also enjoyable reading. Thanks, George!

C.J.C.



*Vegetation on the dunes - 1982.*

During the summer of 1897 an eastern journalist working for FIELD & FARM Magazine traveled in the San Luis Valley. The following is his description of the trip across Mosca pass.

The day had been stormy all through the pass. When we concluded to camp near Mosca creek for the night, the cyclonic blasts were at their height. The whole group of sandhills northwest of Mosca creek were mewling. One could see the profile of them shift plainly, at the same time hearing the music at the two miles distance. It was very much like the sounds of an Aeolian harp, how low, sweet, murmuring; then shrill like the noise of a bagpipe, modulated according to the squally blasts of the storm. After an hour's continuance the winds went down with the sun, and when the dust clouds over the sand dunes had settled and allowed of a clear perception we were astonished to observe the distinct change of a profile of the great sandhills before us.

The editor of the MOSCA HERALD quipped that the writer mistook the incessant bawling of the calves, about weaning time, on the Durkee ranch a few miles east, for the sounds of music he attributed to the dunes. FIELD & STREAM, June 26, 1897 and the COLORADO PROSPECTOR, March 1896.

# INDEX — Volume XIII — 1981

by

Carrol Joe Carter, Ph.D.

This index for Volume XIII, 1981, is provided as a service to Historian readers. Kathy Lopez and Jennifer Jones provided able assistance. The same pattern of the comprehensive INDEX to Volumes I-VII and the annual articles for Volumes VIII, IX, X, XI, and XII has been retained. A comprehensive card file index has been completed and is available to historians, writers, and the general public in the San Luis Valley-Colorado Room of the Adams State College Library during regular hours.

<u>Primary Entry</u>	<u>Secondary Entry</u>	<u>Volume</u>	<u>Issue</u>	<u>Page</u>
Harstad, Teresa M.	Author	XIII/4=	17-22	

## A

Adams Alva XIII/2=5,7  
 Adams Family XIII/2= 5  
 Adams, William H. "Billy" XIII/2=3-11

### ADVERTISING

Alamosa Industrial Bank, Inc. XIII/1  
 Alamosa Inn XIII/2,4  
 Alamosa National Bank XIII/1,2,3,4  
 Big R Stores XIII/2  
 Bill Clark Truck Line, Inc.  
 XIII/1,2,3,4  
 Colorado Aggregate Co., Inc.  
 XIII/1,2,3  
 First National Bank in Alamosa  
 XIII/1,2,3,4  
 Holiday Inn XIII/1,2,3,4  
 The Home Lumber Co. XIII/1,2,3,4  
 Kentucky Fried Chicken XIII/1,2,4  
 Medicine Chest Pharmacy XIII/1,2,3,4  
 O & V Printing-Alamosa XIII/4  
 Public Service Company of Colorado  
 XIII/2,3  
 San Luis Valley Federal Savings and  
 Loan Association XIII/1,2,3,4  
 The Sir-Loin XIII/1,3

Agency XIII/4= 23  
 Agriculture XIII/4= 12  
 Alamogordo, New Mexico XIII/3= 21  
 Alamosa XIII/1= 3-12; XIII/2= 3;  
 XIII/3= 3-38  
 Alamosa Board of Trustees XIII/2= 3  
 Alamosa, City Council XIII/3= 26  
 Alamosa City Treasurer XIII/2= 3  
 Alamosa Club House XIII/3= 4  
 Alamosa Community Hospital Association  
 XIII/3= 3-38  
 Alamosa Community Hospital Chief  
 Technologist of Radiology  
 XIII/3= 31  
 Alamosa Community Hospital Dedication  
 Dinner XIII/3= 28

Alamosa Community Hospital Director  
 of Nursing XIII/3= 31  
 Alamosa Community Hospital Employees'  
 Hospitalization Agreement  
 XIII/3= 12  
 Alamosa Community Hospital Ford  
 Foundation Grant XIII/3= 22  
 "The Alamosa Community Hospital Fund  
 for Professional Education"  
 XIII/3= 33  
 Alamosa Community Hospital  
 Hill-Burton Funds XIII/3= 24,26  
 Alamosa Hospital, Uptown Board  
 XIII/3= 11  
 Alamosa Community Hospital Nursing  
 Scholarship Fund XIII/3= 33  
 Alamosa Community Hospital Summer  
 Resident Program XIII/3= 31  
 Alamosa Gray Ladies XIII/3= 28  
 Alamosa National Bank XIII/3= 23  
 Alamosa, Planning Commission  
 XIII/3= 26  
 Alamosa Realty Company XIII/3= 6  
 Alamosa, Zoning Board XIII/3= 26  
 Alaska XIII/4= 13  
 Albany Hotel XIII/1= 10  
 Alpine vegetation XIII/4= 8  
 Amato, Anthony XIII/3= 33  
 American National Bank - Alamosa  
 XIII/3= 6,12  
 Anderson, Sidney (M.D.)  
 XIII/3= 3,8,15  
 Andes XIII/4= 9  
 Andis, Ada (Mrs.) XIII/3= 14  
 Anoka, Minnesota XIII/4= 17  
 Architecture XIII/4= 17  
 Area Redevelopment Administration  
 XIII/3= 24  
 Arizona XIII/4= 12  
 Arlington, Minnesota XIII/3= 34  
 Arroyo Hondo XIII/4= 5  
 Ashley, Samuel XIII/4= 23

Aspen, Colorado XIII/3= 21  
Association of Western Hospitals  
XIII/3= ifc  
Atchison, Kansas XIII/4= 26  
Atencio, Gabe XIII/3= 36

#### ANIMALS

Beaver, XIII/4= 12  
Birds, XIII/1= 15; XIII/4= 12  
Bull, XIII/1= 15  
Cattle, XIII/4= 7  
Colts, XIII/1= 13  
Fish, XIII/4= 12  
Goats, XIII/1= 15  
Mules, XIII/1= 14  
Owls, XIII/1= 15  
Water Fowl, XIII/4= 12

Arapahoe County XIII/2= 5

#### ARTICLES

"Alamosa Community Hospital: a History  
Of Service," Gordon E. Gillson  
XII/3= 1-43  
Alamosa Homes-Architectural Essay,"  
Teresa M. Harstad, Introduction  
By Shirley R. Carter  
XIII/4= 17-22  
"The 1926 Gubernatorial Election,"  
Carrol Joe Carter, XIII/2= 3-11  
"Inaugural Address," By Governor  
William H. Adams, XIII/2= 13-17  
"Index for Volume XII-1980-S.L.V.  
Historian," By Carrol Joe Carter,  
XIII/2= 18-27  
"Parks of the Rocky Mountains,"  
William Gilpin, XIII/4= 2-16  
"Saguache County," XIII/4= 23-27  
"State Basketball Champions-1939,"  
By Earl K. Steers, Jr.,  
XIII/1= 3-12  
"Wild Horses and Other Ranch Stories  
of the San Luis Valley,"  
Ann Thompson, XIII/1= 13-15

#### AUTHORS

Adams, William H. "Billy,"  
"Inaugural Address,"  
XIII/2= 13-17  
Carter, Carrol Joe, "Index-Volume  
XI-1979," XIII/2= 3=11, 18-27  
Carter, Carrol Joe, "The 1976 Guber-  
natorial Election," XIII/2= 2-12  
Carter, Shirley R., "Introduction,"  
XIII/4= 17  
Gillson, Gordon E., "Alamosa Community  
Hospital: A History of Service,"  
XIII/3= 1-43  
Gilpin, William, "Parks of the Rocky  
Mountains," XIII/4= 2-16  
Harstad, Teresa M., "Architectural  
Essay," XIII/4= 17-22  
Steers, Earl K. Jr., "State Basketball  
Champions - 1939," XIII/1= 3-12  
Thompson, Ann, "Wild Horses and Other  
Ranch Stories of the San Luis  
Valley," XIII/1=13-15

## B

Baca county, XIII/2=7  
Baker, B. H. Inc., XIII/3=26  
Bakken, H. H., XIII/3=6  
Bank, U.S. National (Denver) XIII/3=26  
Barr, Louis D., XIII/3=10  
Basketball, XIII/1=2-12  
Basketball, A.A.U. Tournament (1939),  
XIII/1=10, 12  
Basketball, All-district team,  
XIII/1=8  
Basketball, All-San Luis Valley Team,  
XIII/1=8  
Basketball, anti-over play, XIII/1=8  
Basketball, auditorium, XIII/1=8  
Basketball, Denver Nuggets, XIII/1=12  
Basketball, division "B" playoffs,  
XIII/1=10  
Basketball, new rules, XIII/1=3  
Basketball schedule, XIII/1=4  
Basketball, state championship,  
XIII/1=3  
Basketball, tournament (dist. #5),  
XIII/1=8  
Basketball, training rules, XIII/1=4  
Bean, Luther, XIII/1=2  
Beaver Dam, Wisconsin, XIII/3=6  
Bennett, Al, XIII/1=12  
Bennet, J. M. & Co., XIII/4=26  
Bensons stores, XIII/1=12  
B\*J.'s Country Crafts, XIII/3=4  
Blair, Lance, XIII/1=3,8,10,12  
Blue Cross insurance, XIII/3=12  
Board of Trustees, XIII/3=29  
Boatright, William L, XIII/2=7  
Bolton, Vernon (M.D.), XIII/3=22  
Bonanza, XIII/4=26, 27  
Bonanza City, XIII/4=24, 26  
Bonanza Lodes, XIII/4=26  
Bonanza Mining Camp, XIII/4=25  
Bonfils, Fredrick G., XIII/2=9  
Bonito (town), XIII/4=24  
Bradshaw, Robert (M.D.), XIII/3=15  
Brekke, Arvid R., XIII/3=33  
Brenamen, Seward, XIII/1=13  
Broomfield (town), XIII/1=12  
Brott, Walter H. (Rev.), XIII/3=6, 8  
Brown, Ida, XIII/1=14  
Brown Palace Hotel, XIII/2=3  
Brummund, Calvin, XIII/3= 31, 37  
Buena Vista, XIII/1=3  
Bunch, Littleton J. (M.D.),  
XIII/3=3, 15, 20  
Bunts, Edward L, XIII/3=26  
Bunts & Kelsey, architects,  
XIII/3=22, 33  
Burt, John R., XIII/3=21  
Butler-Showalter Mortuary, XIII/3=4  
Blanca, XIII/1=10

#### BOOK REVIEWS

Armstrong, Ruth, PROMISED LAND,  
XIII/1=18 by C. Joe Carter  
Griswold, P.R., COLORADO'S LONLIEST  
RAILROAD, XIII/1=17 by C. J. Carter  
Wilson & Glover, THE CUMBRES & TOLTEC  
SCENIC RAILROAD, XIII/1=16 by Carter

## C

Calkins (Mr.), XIII/1=3  
Campaign organization, XIII/3=10  
Canadian Nurses, XIII/3=17  
Canon City, XIII/1=12; XIII/4=3  
Carbonates, XIII/4=9  
Carnero, XIII/4=4  
Carpenter, Floyd (coach), XIII/1=3,10,12  
Carringer, Franklin, XIII/2=3  
Carter, Carrol Joe, XIII/3=3  
Castle Rock, XIII/1=10  
Cattle rustlers, XIII/1=14  
Chamber of Commerce, ALAMOSA, XIII/3=15  
Cehyenne, Wyoming, XIII/3=21  
Chlorides, XIII/4=9  
Circus, XIII/1=13  
Clark, Doyle, XIII/3=15  
Clarke, Hada, XIII/3=17  
Clay, XIII/4=10  
Claytonia, XIII/4=25, 27  
Clear Creek county, XIII/2=5  
Cleere, Roy L. (M.D.), XIII/3=26  
Cleveland, Ohio, XIII/3=6  
Coal, XIII/4=25  
Cole, Everett (Mayor), XIII/3=8  
Colorado Springs, XIII/1=10; XIII/3=11, 21, 22, 26, 28  
Corlett, George M., XIII/2=3  
Cornum, Lily, XIII/3=4  
Cortez, XIII/1=3,8,10; XIII/4=13  
Cottonwood, XIII/4=27  
Crestone, XIII/3=12; XIII/4=25,27  
Croft, Mary, XIII/3=36, 37  
Crowley, XIII/1=10  
Curtis Brothers, XIII/3=4  
Center, XIII/1=3

### COLLEGES

Adams State, XIII/1=12; XIII/2=7,9;  
XIII/3=15, 17,24,28,33; XIII/4=17  
American Hospital Administrators,  
XIII/3=1fc  
Carleton, XIII/3=15  
Concordia, XIII/3=ifc, 15, 31, 34  
Moorhead State University, XIII/3=34  
Oklahoma A & M, XIII/1=2  
Trinidad State Jr., XIII/3=33

### COLORADO

Coal and Iron Co., XIII/4=25  
General Assembly, XIII/2=3  
Governor, XIII/2=3-11  
Governor Emeritus, XIII/2=9  
Hospital Association, XIII/3=ifc, 21  
Legislature, XIII/2=5  
Lieutenant Governor, XIII/2=3  
National Bank of Denver, XIII/3=22,23  
Senate, XIII/2=3  
State Board of Nursing, XIII/3=17  
State Dept. of Public Health,  
XIII/3=24, 26, 28  
State Rangers, XIII/2=15  
Territorial Legislature, XIII/4=23  
Treasury, XIII/2=16

Conejos, XIII/4=23  
Conejos county, XIII/2=3  
Conejos county commissioners, XIII/2=3  
Costilla county, XIII/4=5,23

## CREEKS

Alamosa, XIII/4=4  
Carnero, XIII/4=23, 24, 25  
Conejos, XIII/4=4  
Cottonwood, XIII/4=23, 24  
Crestone, XIII/4=23  
Ford, XIII/4=24, 27  
Kerber, XIII/4=23, 24, 26, 27  
LaGarita, XIII/4=23, 24  
Piedro, XIII/4=4  
Pintada, XIII/4=4  
Rio de la Gara, XIII/4=4  
Rio Gata, XIII/4=4  
Rito Alto, XIII/4=23  
Saguache, XIII/4=23, 24  
San Antonio, XIII/4=4  
Sangre de Cristo, XIII/4=5  
San Isabel, XIII/4=23  
San Luis, XIII/4=23,24,26  
Trinchera, XIII/4=5  
Tuttle, XIII/4=24, 27  
Yuba, XIII/4=5

## D

Danks, W. C., XIII/2=3  
Davlin, Charles A. (M.D.),  
XIII/3=4, 5, 6  
Dawson, Harry, XIII/3=28, 34, 35  
Day, R. J. (M.D.), XIII/3=11, 20  
Deertrail, XIII/1=10  
Democratic party, XIII/2=3-9  
Democratic party convention,  
XIII/2=3  
Denver, XIII/1=10, 12; XIII/2=3;  
XIII/3=15, 23; XIII/4=3, 13, 26  
Devine, Debbi (R.N.), XIII/3=37  
Diaz, R.C., XIII/3=11  
Dienst, Clara, XIII/3=6, 8  
Doctor, Amelia, XIII/3=6, 8  
Dolcini, Ann (R.N.), XIII/3=17  
Dorsey, Charles, XIII/3=11  
Dumas, Texas, XIII/1=12  
Durango, XIII/1=3  
Del Norte, XIII/1=3, 8; XIII/4=23

## DRAWINGS

Alamosa Homes, XIII/4=ofc, 17, 18,  
19, 20, 21, 22, obc  
Alamosa H.S. Auditorium-1939,  
XIII/1=6  
Basketball players, XIII/1=ofc  
Basketball plays-1939, XIII/1=9  
Adams editorial cartoons,  
XIII/2=4, 6, 8  
Mt. Blanca, XIII/1=17  
Railroad car, XIII/1=16

## E

Eavenson, Betty (R.N.), XIII/3=36, 37  
Edgewater, XIII/1=10  
Edstrom, Ann (R.N.), XIII/3=17  
Election laws, XIII/2=16  
Ellison, Wyogene, XIII/3=36  
Erickson, Eugene (M.D.), XIII/3=31  
Evans, E. F., XIII/1=10

## F

Farmer, XIII/2=16; XIII/4=24  
Farmington, N.M., XIII/1=12  
Federal Relief Board, XIII/3=8  
Fisher, Keith, XIII/3=36  
Foote, Robert R., XIII/3=36  
Forests, XIII/4=8  
Fountain, XIII/1=10  
Fourrier, D.G. (M.D.), XIII/3=32  
Freiberger building, XIII/3=4, 5  
Freiberger, Edgar Lee (M.D.), XIII/3=4  
French, Mary, XIII/3=14  
Ft. Garland (town), XIII/1=3, 10, 14;  
XIII/4=5, 23

## G

Garcia, Lucy, XIII/3=36  
Garcia, Prudencia, XIII/4=23  
Garden, XIII/1=15  
Geology, XIII/4=8  
Germer, Julia (R.N.), XIII/3=17  
Gilbert, Arthur L., XIII/3=36  
G.I. Bill of Rights, XIII/3=15  
Gillson, Gordon E., XIII/3  
Gillson, Phyllis L., XIII/3=3  
Gilmore, Mable, XIII/3=14, 17  
Gilpin, William H., XIII/2=5; XIII/4=24  
Godwin Bevers Co., XIII/3=23  
Gold, XIII/4=8, 9  
Golden, XIII/1=10; XIII/2=3  
Gomez, Bob, XIII/1=3, 8, 10  
Graf, George, XIII/3=6, 14  
Graf, Katie, XIII/3=14  
Grasses, XIII/4=7  
Gray, James S., XIII/3=36  
Gray Ladies, XIII/3=31  
Great Depression, XIII/3=8  
Great Salt Lake, XIII/4=12  
Green & White Oil Co., XIII/3=15  
Grodffrej, William G., XIII/4=23  
Groening, Mathilda Emperius, XIII/3=20  
Groening will, XIII/3=20  
Grove, Ella Leon, XIII/3=26  
Gumper, Rose, XIII/3=14  
Gunnison, XIII/1=10  
Gunnison county, XIII/4=23  
Gypsum, XIII/4=10

## H

Hage, Werth C., XIII/3=28, 36  
Hammarstrom, Erna, XIII/3=14, 17  
Hammarstrom, Fritz, XIII/3=17, 28, 36  
Harris, E.R., XIII/4=23  
Hattori, Jim "Jimmy", XIII/1=3  
Hay, XIII/1=14; XIII/4=7  
Hayes, Richard, XIII/3=37  
Health Maintenance Organization,  
XIII/3=32  
Heersink, Ruth, XIII/3=36  
Heilman, Jennie, XIII/3=3  
Heilman, Roy B., XIII/3=3, 17, 22, 28, 36  
Heimsoth, Norman (Rev.), XIII/3=21  
Hernandez, Eleanor, XIII/3=36  
Herrara, Pedro D., XIII/4=23  
Herriman, L. L., XIII/3=11

Hibler, Jack, XIII/1=12  
Hibler, Leo, XIII/1=8, 10  
Higel, Fritz, XIII/3=6  
Highway Transportation Lines,  
XIII/2=16  
Hiller, O. A., XIII/3=6, 14  
Hofman, G. C., XIII/3=6  
Holly, Bob, XIII/1=3  
Hopper, Vernon, XIII/1=3-12  
Horner family, XIII/1=14  
Horses  
Appaloosa, XIII/1=13  
Arabian, XIII/1=13  
Palomino, XIII/1=13  
Percheron, XIII/1=13  
Prince, XIII/1=14  
Stealers, XIII/1=14

## HOSPITAL

Alamosa Community, XIII/3=3-38  
Board, XIII/3=8, 10  
Cornum, XIII/3=4  
Lutheran, XIII/3=4, 6, 14  
Sisters, XIII/3=8  
St. Francis, XIII/3=22  
Hot Springs, XIII/4=12  
Houser, Esther (R.N.), XIII/3=3, 6  
Housing, XIII/4=17  
Howell, T.F., XIII/3=11  
Hudson's Bay, XIII/4=13  
Humbolt, XIII/4=9  
Hurley, James R. (M.D.), XIII/3=11, 15  
Hooper, XIII/1=3, 8

## I

Industrial relations, XIII/2=17  
Iron camp, XIII/4=24, 25, 27  
Irrigation, XIII/4=12  
Iwaarden, George Van, XIII/3=22  
Indians, Nez Perce, XIII/1=13

## J

Jane Jefferson club, XIII/2=9  
Jefferson county, XIII/2=5  
Jefferson, Thomas, XIII/1=12  
Jenks, L.S., XIII/4=23  
Johnson, Carl, XIII/3=3  
Johnson, Delmar (M.D.), XIII/3=11, 15  
Johnson, Samuel W., (judge), XIII/2=3, 5  
Jones, Bill, XIII/1=3, 8, 10, 12  
Jordon, A.J., XIII/3=28, 36  
Julesburg, XIII/1=10  
Jungck, Gus, XIII/3=6

## K

Kalli, Karin, XIII/3=31  
Kassin, Jerry, XIII/1=12  
Kelly, O.W. & Co., XIII/4=27  
Kenny, James, XIII/4=26  
Kerber, Charles [Capt.], XIII/4=23  
Kiowa county, XIII/2=7  
Ku Klux Klan, XIII/2=3, 5, 7

# L

Labouisse, David (M.D.) XIII/3= 22  
La Garita, XIII/4= 4  
La Junta, XIII/1= 10  
Lava, XIII/4= 10,11  
Law Enforcement, XIII/2= 15  
Lawrence, John, XIII/4= 23  
Leads, XIII/4= 26  
Leadville, XIII/1= 3,8; XIII/4= 24,27  
Lee, Mary Ann (Mrs.), XIII/3= 31,33,36,  
37  
Lentz, Donald (M.T.), XIII/3= 31,36,37  
Leon, Rose (Mrs.), XIII/3= 26  
Lewis, Duane, XIII/1= 12  
Libby, Montana, XIII/3= 21  
Lime, XIII/4= 11  
Limestone, XIII/4= 10  
Linn, William P., XIII/4= 26  
Loco Weed, XIII/1= 14  
Longitudinal Railway, XIII/4= 13  
Lopez, Carmel, XIII/1= 3,8,10,12  
Lopez, Claudia Bradshaw (R.N.),  
XIII/3= 33  
Lopez, Emelia, XIII/3= 36  
Lopez Plumbing Company, XIII/1= 12  
Los Alamos, XIII/4= 4  
Los Pinos, XIII/4= 23  
Loveland, XIII/4= 17  
Lowe, Luella, XIII/3= 36  
Lowry Field, XIII/3= 15  
Lutherans, XIII/3= 6,11  
Lutheran Deaconess Association  
XIII/3= 6,11,12  
Lutheran Hospital Association  
XIII/3= 3-38  
Lutheran Ladies Aid, XIII/3= 14  
Lutheran Laymen's League, XIII/3= 8  
La Jara, XIII/1= 3; XIII/3= 11

# M

Malouff, Julia (R.N.), XIII/3= 17  
Manassa, XIII/1= 3; XIII/3= 11  
Mancos, XIII/1= 8  
Maple Lake, Minnesota, XIII/3= 31  
Maroons (Alamosa High School),  
XIII/1= 8  
Mears, Otto, XIII/4= 12,23  
Medical Directors' Association of  
America, XIII/3= 12  
Medical Director of Penn Mutual Life  
Insurance Company, XIII/3= 12  
Medical Professional Corporation,  
XIII/3= 32  
Meier, Edward, XIII/3= 6  
Meteorology, XIII/4= 6  
Mexico City, XIII/4= 6  
Meyer, Eileen (R.P.T.), XIII/3= 37  
Meyer, John-Paul (Rev.), XIII/3= 21  
Meyer, William T. (Ph.D.), XIII/3= 17,  
28,33  
Middle Park, XIII/4= 3  
Miller, Jerome L., XIII/3= 3,31,33,34  
Milliken, Carl S., XIII/2= 5  
Mississippi, XIII/4= 13  
Moline, Illinois, XIII/3= 31  
Monroe, J. B., XIII/4= 26

Monter, C. F., XIII/3= 6  
Monument (town), XIII/1= 10  
Moore, John (R.N.), XIII/3= 37  
Moorhead, Minnesota, XIII/3= 31  
Morgan, Grant, XIII/1= 8,10,12  
Morley, Clarence J. (Governor)  
XIII/2= 3  
Moses, A. L., XIII/3= 10  
Motz, Marvin D., XIII/3= 36  
Mueller, Ernest, XIII/3= 6  
Mueller, Martin L. (Rev.),  
XIII/3= 6,8,14

# M

San Luis Parc (Mid 19th Century)  
XIII/4= 14-15

# MINES

Mines, XIII/4= 13  
Mines, Arkansas, XIII/4= 24,26  
Mines, Boss-Mammoth, XIII/4= 24,26  
Mines, Carnero, XIII/4= 25  
Mines, Cochetopa, XIII/4= 25  
Mines, Cornucopia, XIII/4= 24  
Mines, Empress Josephine, XIII/4= 24,  
26  
Mines, Exchequer, XIII/4= 24,26  
Mines, Ford Creek, XIII/4= 25  
Mines, Foreign, XIII/4= 9  
Mines, Governor Seymour, XIII/4= 25  
Mines, Mammoth, XIII/4= 25  
Mines, Merimac, XIII/4= 24  
Mines, Mountain Lion, XIII/4= 25  
Mines, Rawley, XIII/4= 24,26  
Mines, Revenue, XIII/4= 24,26  
Mines, Saguache County, XIII/4= 24  
Mines, Superior, XIII/4= 24,26  
Mines, Townsend, XIII/4= 26  
Mines, Tuttle Creek, XIII/4= 25  
Mines, Whale, XIII/4= 24  
Mines, Wheel of Fortune, XIII/4= 24  
Mines, Wildcat, XIII/4= 25  
Mining, XIII/2= 16  
Mining, Blake Districts, XIII/4= 24  
Mining, Carnero District, XIII/4= 24  
Mining, Cottonwood Camp District  
XIII/4= 25  
Mining, Kerber Creek District  
XIII/4= 25  
Moffat, XIII/1= 3  
Monte Vista, XIII/1= 3; XIII/3= ifc,  
6,11,14,15,33  
Mosca, XIII/1= 3; XIII/4= 12  
McCardell, Peter, XIII/4= 26  
McCarthy, Edward J. (Rev.),  
XIII/3= 8,10,11  
McClintock, Loa (Mrs.), XIII/3= 17  
McHugh, Robert L., XIII/3= 31  
McIlvenne, Gerald (R.T.), XIII/3= 31,  
37  
McIlvenne, Kathy (L.P.N.), XIII/3= 37  
McLaughlin, Genevieve E., XIII/2= 9  
MOUNTAINS  
Cochetopa Range, XIII/4= 25  
Green, XIII/1= 12  
Mount Blanca, XIII/2= 9  
Mount Ouray, XIII/4= 23  
Sangre de Christo, XIII/4= 25

Sangre de Cristos, XIII/4= 23,24,26  
San Juans, XIII/4= 4,8,12  
Sierra Blanca, XIII/4= 5  
Sierra Mimbres, XIII/4= 3  
Sierra San Juan, XIII/4= 11  
Snowy Range, XIII/4= 3

## N

Nash, Mary, XIII/3= 3  
Neidhardt, George, XIII/4= 23  
New York, XIII/4= 13  
Nichols, Sherman D. (M.D.) XIII/3= 23,  
32  
Niermann, Henry (Rev.), XIII/3= 8,14,  
15,17  
Nigro, Dominic, XIII/1= 3,8,10,12  
Noess, Lulu Deaconess, XIII/3= 8  
Noess, Lulu (Miss), XIII/3= 5,12  
Nominating Convention, XIII/2= 3  
Northfield, Minnesota, XIII/3= 15  
North Park, XIII/4= 3  
Nurse, XIII/3= 14

### NEWSPAPERS

Newspaper, XIII/2= 5  
Alamosa Daily Courier, XIII/3= 11  
Denver Post, XIII/2= 5-10  
The Fellowship Forum, XIII/2= 5  
Greeley News, XIII/2= 3  
Masonic Lounge, XIII/2= 5  
The South Coloradan, XIII/2= 9  
Steamboat Springs Pilot, XIII/2= 7  
The Valley Courier, XIII/3= 4,23,29  
Weld County News, XIII/2= 7

## O

Obsedian, XIII/4= 11  
Oklahoma, XIII/1= 2,14  
Old Age Pensioners, XIII/3= 24  
Olguin, Theresa, XIII/3= 36  
Omaha, Nebraska, XIII/3= 31  
Omertz (Mr.), XIII/4= 25  
Oriental Mining Camp, XIII/4= 24,25,27  
Orr, Charles L. (M.D.), XIII/3= 4  
Ortiz, Emma, XIII/3= 36

## P

Paden, Jack, XIII/1= 3,8,10,12  
Palmer, Wm. J. (Gen.), Stable,  
XIII/1= 13  
Paonia, XIII/1= 10  
Parade, XIII/1= 10,13  
Patterson, Thomas M. (Senator),  
XIII/2= 3  
Perea, Mary Ann, XIII/3= 36  
Petersen, Carl A., XIII/3= 6,21,28,35  
Petersen, C. N., XIII/3= 6  
Petersen, Edna, XIII/3= 21  
Petty, Claude, XIII/1= 3,8,10,12  
Pharmacy, XIII/4= 7  
Phillips, Kay R., XIII/3= 33  
Pizza Hut, XIII/3= 4  
Placers, XIII/4= 8  
Pottenger, Mark, XIII/3= 32,37  
Precious Metals, XIII/4= 8,13  
Presbyterian Church, XIII/3= 11  
Public Highways, XIII/2= 16

Public Service, XIII/1= 12  
Public Works Administration,  
XIII/3= 8  
Pueblo, Colorado, XIII/3= 20;  
XIII/4= 24  
Pumice, XIII/4= 11  
Pursley, Etta (Mrs.), XIII/3= 14  
PWA, See Public Works Administration

### PASSES

Cochetope, XIII/4= 12  
Hayden, XIII/4= 25  
Marshall, XIII/4= 25  
Mosca, XIII/4= 23  
Music, XIII/4= 25  
Poncha, XIII/4= 3,12,23  
Sangre de Cristo, XIII/4=

### PICTURES

Adams, William H. "BILLY" XIII/2= ofc,  
2,12,obc  
Alamosa Community Hospital, XIII/3=  
ofc  
Alamosa Community Hospital (2 views  
of west side) 1938-1958,  
XIII/3= 9  
Alamosa Community Hospital Delivery  
Room, XIII/3= 18  
Alamosa Community Hospital & Neigh-  
borhood (Air Photo), XIII/3= 2  
Alamosa Community Hospital Obstetrics  
Dept.-1953, XIII/3= 18  
Alamosa H.S. Basketball Team-1938  
XII/1= 5  
Alamosa H.S. Basketball Team-1939  
XIII/1= 11  
Davlin, Charles A. (M.D.), XIII/3= 5  
Edstrom, Ann (Alamosa Hospital),  
XIII/3= 16  
Freiberger Building-1981 (old hospital  
building), XIII/3= 5  
FT. Garland, XIII/1= 18  
Gillson, Gordon E., XIII/3= 41  
Groening Plaque (Alamosa Community  
Hospital), XIII/3= 19  
Hospital Volunteers-Alamosa (WHO-We  
Help Others-1957), XIII/3= 16  
Lee, Mary Ann & Betty Eavenson-1971,  
XIII/3= 27  
Lentz, Donald, XIII/3= 30  
Lutheran Hospital 715 Main Street-May  
1938, XIII/3= 7  
Medical Building, Alamosa Community  
Hospital, XIII/3= 30  
Memorial Plaques, Alamosa Community  
Hospital, XIII/3= 25  
Miller, Jerome L., XIII/3= 35  
Noess, Lulu, XIII/3= 5  
Reese, Elton A., XIII/3= 1,13  
Stevens (Young), Inez, XIII/3= 27  
Vigil, Beverly, C. Joe Carter, and  
Betty Moeny, Jim Moeny,  
XIII/1= 19

## Q

Quartz, XIII/4= 26  
Quartzite, XIII/4= 26

# R

Railway, XIII/4= 16  
Ramsay, Buddy, XIII/1= 8,10,12  
Ranch, XIII/1= 14  
Realtor, XIII/1= 15  
Red Cross, XIII/3= 31  
Reed, John B., XIII/3= 11  
Reese, Elton A., XIII/3= 3-38  
Reese, James, XIII/3= ifc  
Reese, Kathleen Ann, XIII/3= ifc  
Rehberg, Vicki, XIII/3= 36  
Reifel, Leo, XIII/3= 12,14  
Republican Party, XIII/2= 3-9  
Republican Party Convention, XIII/2=3  
Rialto Theatre, XIII/3= 4  
Riggenbach, Harry F., XIII/3= 36  
Rincon, XIII/4= 4  
Rito, XIII/4= 5  
Rockwell, Robert F., XIII/2= 7  
Rocky Mountain Emergency Physicians,  
XIII/3= 32  
Roman Catholics, XIII/3= 8  
Romero, Maria, XIII/3= 36  
Romero, Reynalda, XIII/3= 36  
Ruddell, James W. (M.D.), XIII/3= 21,  
23  
Rupert, John K. (M.D.), XIII/3= 4,11  
Russell, Nathan, XIII/4= 23  
Ruybal, Pauline, XIII/3= 36

## RAILROADS

Railroad, XIII/4= 13,27  
Denver, XIII/4= 25  
Denver & Rio Grande, XIII/4= 27  
Railroad Rates, XIII/2= 17  
Rio Grande, XIII/4= 25

Rio Grande County, XIII/4= 23

## RIVERS

Rivers, XIII/4= 13  
Arkansas, XIII/4= 3  
Chama, XIII/4= 12  
Costilla, XIII/4= 5,11  
Culebra, XIII/4= 5,11  
Del Norte, XIII/4= 5,6,11,12,16  
Rio Grande Del Norte, XIII/4= 4,23  
Saguache, XIII/4= 4  
San Luis, XIII/4= 4  
Upper Arkansas, XIII/4= 12  
Platte, XIII/4= 3  
ROADS, XIII/4= 12

# S

Sacred Heart Parish, Alamosa, XIII/3= 8  
Saguache, XIII/1= 3; XIII/4= 25,27  
Saguache County, XIII/4= 23,24,25  
Saguache Lake, XIII/4= 4  
Salazar, Frances, XIII/3= 36  
Salida, XIII/1= 8  
Salt Lake City, XIII/4= 13  
Samora, Josephine, XIII/3= 36  
San Cristoval, XIII/4= 5  
San Diego, California, XIII/1= 12  
Sandstone, XIII/4= 11  
Sanford, XIII/1= 3,8; XIII/3= 11

San Francisco, XIII/4= 13  
Sangre de Cristo Districts,  
XIII/4= 24  
San Luis, XIII/4= 5  
San Luis Lake, XIII/4= 4,11  
San Luis Parks, XIII/4= 3,6,8,12,16,  
24  
San Luis Valley Area Vocational  
School, XIII/3= 33  
San Luis Valley Medical Professional  
Clinic, XIII/3= 32  
Sargent, XIII/1= 3  
Schaefer, Lucille, XIII/3= ifc  
Scholz, Sameul B. (M.D.), XIII/3= 12  
Sedgewick, XIII/4= 27  
Seven Gables Community Center,  
XIII/2= 9  
Seward, Nebraska, XIII/3= ifc,15  
Shale, XIII/4= 10  
Sheesley's Alma, XIII/3= 4  
Shelton, Nebraska, XIII/3= ifc  
Shoup, Oliver H., XIII/2= 3,5,7  
Silver, XIII/4= 9  
Simms, Albert, XIII/3= 20  
Simon, Walter H. (architect),  
XIII/3= 10,11,17  
Sioux City, Iowa, XIII/3= 21  
Slate, XIII/4= 10  
Sloan, Mary, XIII/3= 36  
Sloan, Toke, XIII/3= 36  
Smith, Isaac, XIII/4= 24  
Soda Springs, XIII/4= 23  
Southern Roofing Company, XIII/3= 20  
South Park, XIII/4= 3,12  
Spectrum Emergency Care, Inc.,  
XIII/3= 32  
Spur Organization, XIII/3= 28  
Staker, Robert L., XIII/3= 31  
Stamp Mill, XIII/4= 25  
Stamps, Norma (A.R.T.), XIII/3= 32,  
36,37  
Steamboat Springs, XIII/2= 3  
Stevens, Inez (R.N.), XIII/3= 3,17,  
33,36,37  
St. Louis, Missouri, XIII/3= 21,32  
Stockmen, XIII/4= 24  
Stockraiser, XIII/2= 16  
St. Peter's Church, XIII/3= 6  
St. Peter's Congregation, XIII/3= 6  
Strong, E. S. (M.D.), XIII/3= 11  
Surgeon General's Office, XIII/3= 26

## SCHOOLS, (high)

Agate, XIII/1= 10  
Aurora Central, XIII/1= 12  
Carr, XIII/1= 10  
Centauris, XIII/1= 12  
Denver Mullen, XIII/1= 12  
East, XIII/1= 10  
Frederick, XIII/1= 3,10  
Haxton, XIII/1= 10  
Holyoke, XIII/1= 3  
Jefferson, XIII/1= 12  
Manual, XIII/1= 12  
Niwot, XIII/1= 12  
Perry (Okla.), XIII/1= 2  
Victor, XIII/1= 10  
Washington, George, XIII/1= 12  
West, XIII/1= 10  
Wheatridge, XIII/1= 3,12  
School Lands, XIII/2= 15

## T

Taos, XIII/4= 5  
 Taxation, XIII/2= 14  
 Terpstra, Gladys, XIII/3= 36  
 Timber, XIII/4= 27  
 Tisdale, Mike (R.P.), XIII/3= 37  
 Tobin, Tom (ranch), XIII/1= 14  
 Trinchera (ranch), XIII/3= 20  
 Trinity Congregation, XIII/3= 6  
 Trinity Lutheran Church, XIII/3= 6,8,  
 14,21  
 Turano, John (Ed.D.), XIII/3= 28  
 T. W. Mitchell and Sons, XIII/3= 11

## U

U.S. Department of Agriculture,  
 XIII/3= 24  
 United States Senate, XIII/2= 3  
 Utes, XIII/4= 23  
 Ute, Chief Ouray, XIII/4= 23

## V

Valley Wide Health Services,  
 XIII/3= 32  
 Vegetables, XIII/1= 15  
 Veins, XIII/4= 26  
 Velasquez, Rosalina (Miss),  
 XIII/3= 33  
 Veterans Training Program, XIII/3= 15  
 Vigil, Genevieve, XIII/3= 36  
 Vigil, Juan, XIII/1= 14  
 Vigil, Priscilla, XIII/3= 36  
 Vigil, Rodger, XIII/3= 36,37  
 Villa Grove, XIII/4= 26,27  
 Vista Optical, XIII/3= 32  
 Vivian, John F., XIII/2= 5  
 Vocational School, XIII/3= 33

## W

Wagner, R. Paul (M.D.), XIII/3= 33,36  
 Wall, Larry H., XIII/3= 33  
 Walsenburg, XIII/1= 10  
 Walsh, Henrietta (Mrs.), XIII/3= 14  
 Walsh, H. F., XIII/3= 11  
 Walstrom, Jane, XIII/3= 36  
 Washington, D.C., XIII/2= 5;  
 XIII/3= 24,26  
 Water Rights, XIII/2= 15  
 Watkins, Kay O. (M.D.), XIII/3= 33  
 Webster, Deja, XIII/3= 37  
 Whitney, A. W. Mr., XIII/4= 25  
 Williamson, James "Red", XIII/1= 8,10,  
 12  
 Woodard, George W., XIII/3= 36  
 Woodsen, J. B., XIII/4= 23  
 Woodward, Edith, XIII/3= 36  
 Works Progress Administration,  
 XIII/3= 8  
 World War II, XIII/3= 12  
 WPA, (See works progress administra-  
 tion)  
 Wuckert, Edward P., XIII/3= 28,35,36  
 Wuckert, Herman, XIII/3= 17  
 Wuertele, Christian, XIII/3= 6,33

## Y

Young, Betty P., XIII/3= 33,36  
 Young, George P., XIII/1= 10  
 Young, Isaiah, XIII/4= 23

## Z

Zacheis, Harry, XIII/3= 17,26  
 Zylstra, Gerban (Rev.), XIII/3= 11



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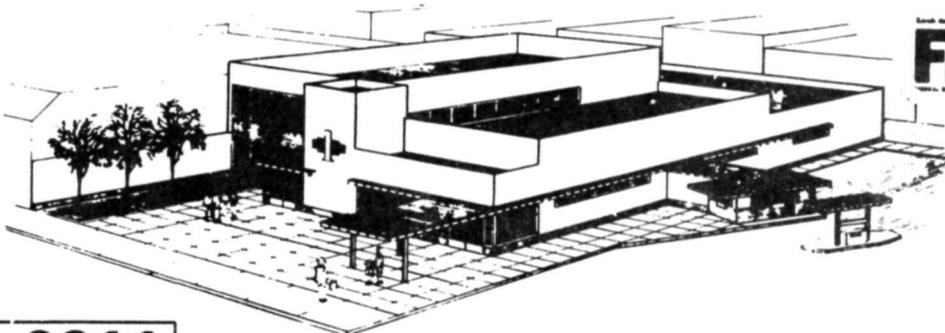


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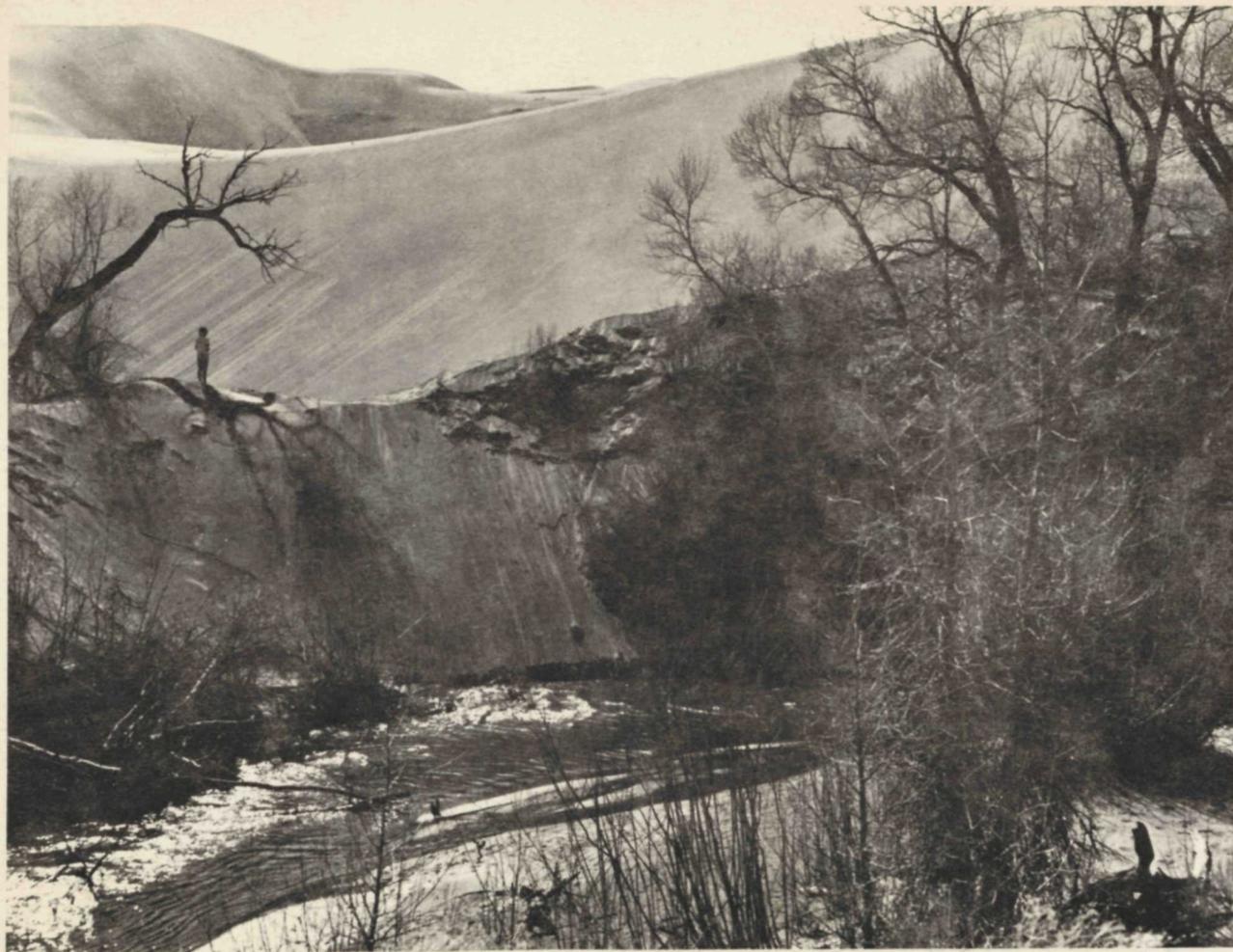
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