



WESTERN STATE COLLEGE OF COLORADO
GUNNISON, COLORADO

A BRIEF HISTORY OF SARGENTS COLORADO
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FOUNDING

Any history of Sargents is inextricable from Marshall Pass. The pass was the only logical reason for Sargents' existence, and its history was perpetuated by the pass; therefore, the background must begin with the pass's discovery.

In April 1874, the United States government and Chief Ouray of the Ute Tribe signed the Brunot Treaty. This treaty included the opening of four million acres of land including the site on which Sargents was ultimately built. A party of soldiers under Lt. William G. Marshall was sent to map the area ceded by the treaty.¹ While performing this duty, Marshall suffered from a painful toothache and was driven by pain to seek a shorter route to the dentist. He and one companion, an Indian guide, traversed Tomichi Creek to the present location of Sargents, then moved up the pass which today bears his name.²

The town's namesake, Joseph Sargent, was connected with the Los Pinos Indian Agency in 1872 and located a ranch at that point "which was merely a cow camp for the

¹Pueblo Star Journal, April 13, 1969, Sec. C p. 3.

²There is a conflict as to date and destination. The Journal lists the destination as Pueblo in 1874. Lillian Rice Brigham in Colorado Travelore gives Denver in 1873.

³"Place Names in Colorado", Colorado Magazine XIX Nov., 1942, p. 203.

agency" in 1879.³ It was classified as a ranch and post office and was established as Marshalltown on July 13, 1880. Joseph Sargent was the town's first postmaster. The local people continued to call it Sargents and the name was officially changed on January 26, 1882.⁴

The town of Sargents was never incorporated and the town plat was not applied for until 1909, and not recorded until 1917. There was another section, which is not shown on the town plat, but which was known as Knight's Addition. The addition was quite large since it had at least fifty lots.⁵ It lay on the east side of the railroad tracks.⁶

The town's location has been variously described as thirty-six miles west of Salida by stage,⁷ 259 miles west of Denver, located in Saguache County, forty-five miles north of Saguache,⁸ thirty-two miles east of Gunnison on the railroad, and twelve miles from White Pine in the Tomichi Mining District.⁹

Otto Mears first saw the need for a shorter route into

⁴Letter, General Services Administration, Washington, D. C., April 9, 1969.

⁵Public Documents, Saguache County Courthouse.

⁶Personal Interview with Frank Veo, Salida, Colorado, June 14, 1969.

⁷George A. Crofutt, Crofutt's Grip Sack Guide of Colorado V. I. (Omaha, Nebraska: Overland Publishing Co. 1881), p. 120.

⁸Colorado State Business Directory (Denver: James R. Ives & Co., 1884), p. 321.

⁹Gunnison Daily Review, January 4, 1882, p. 2, c. 2.

the Gunnison valley and built a toll road over Marshall Pass in 1879. As the mines in the area began producing, there was a need for a railroad to haul supplies and ore. A great race to be the first into the Gunnison country was begun. The Denver & Rio Grande bought the toll road from Otto Mears and had easier going than the Denver & South Park which drilled the Alpine Tunnel. The Rio Grande overcame the obstacles of high altitude and cold and topped the pass on June 21, 1881 and arrived in Sargents on July 26.¹⁰ Sargents became a meal stop and station for the helper engines which aided the trains up the pass.¹¹

It has been reported that by the time the railroad reached Marshalltown, the town had fifty business firms, mostly in tents. There were fourteen buildings in the community, eight of which were saloons. Joseph Sargents built a hotel and eating house which was destroyed by fire on New Year's Eve 1881.¹²

After the railroad was completed Sargents was listed on all the tours since it was a meal station and the nearest town to Marshall Pass.¹³ It was also the shipping center

¹⁰M. C. Poor, Denver, South Park & Pacific (Denver: Rocky Mountain Railroad Club, 1949), p. 209.

¹¹George A. Crofutt, Crofutt's Overland Tours (Chicago: Arthur H. Day & Co., Publishers, 1888), pp. 58-60.

¹²Betty Wallace, History With the Hide Off (Denver: Sage Books, 1960), p. 205.

¹³George A. Crofutt, Crofutt's Grip Sack Guide of Colorado, V. 2, (Omaha, Nebraska: Overland Publishing Co. 1885) p. 56.

for the Tonichi Mining District and was noted for having excellent hunting and fishing.¹⁴

Sargents is in Saguache County near the line separating Gunnison and Saguache Counties and the precinct was claimed by both. It was argued that the precinct should have been in Gunnison County since all the business was conducted there.¹⁵ Some of the people were assessed by both counties. It would have been much easier if Sargents had been in Gunnison County since it was a four day round trip to Saguache, but daily trips could be made to Gunnison.¹⁶

¹⁴Lillian Rice Brigham, Colorado Travelore (Denver: The Peerless Printing Co., 1938), pp. 124-25.

¹⁵White Pine Cone, August 20, 1886, p. 1 c. 4.

¹⁶Ibid., May 15, 1891, p. 1 c. 3.

BUSINESS

Sargents was important economically because it was the nearest railroad point for the mines of the Tomichi Mining District. It was the central point for supplies for the area and was the shipping point for the ore from the mines. Ore was hauled from the mines in wagons in the summer, by sled in the winter and was shipped east over the pass to Salida. Sargents was a "boom town" when the mines were at peak production.

Since Sargents was an eating stop and helper station on the Rio Grande, it housed the large railroad crew which was stationed there. Every winter, seven hundred men working for three months shoveled snow from Marshall to allow the trains to run.¹ The Rio Grande's payroll at Sargents amounted to \$3,000 a month. Two passenger trains ran daily when the mines were booming and were loaded with people entering the region.²

As previously stated, Sargents reportedly had fifty businesses including eight saloons,³ but in 1884, in its first appearance in the Colorado Business Directory, there were thirteen listings which included two restaurants, three

¹Brigham, Colorado Travelore, p. 127.

²White Pine Cone, September 28, 1883, p. 3, c.3.

³Wallace, History With the Hide Off, p. 205.

saloons, two general merchandise stores, a hotel, a barber shop and three lumber concerns. In later issues, the number of businesses listed declined, but this apparently was due to the businesses changing hands and the new owners failing to subscribe to the service.⁴

Lumbering was a major industry in Sargents and there were many mills which cut ties for the railroad, poles for telephone service and lumber for buildings. The industry contributed greatly to the prosperity of the community.⁵

Although there were ranches in the area from 1879, their first listing did not occur until 1894, which showed the added importance after the decline of ore prices. Because of the silver panic, 1893 was a crucial year for the town, with the population dropping to sixty.⁶

The first business in the community, a hotel and eating house, was run by Joseph Sargent, the town's founder.⁷ The next prominent businessman was Joseph C. Knight, who moved in from Gunnison. He opened a family grocery in 1881 and built it up to a point where he had a larger business in the Tomichi District than the Denver Wholesale Houses.⁸ He also had interests in several mines up Tomichi Creek and was active in politics. Knight was a delegate to the Saguache

⁴Colorado State Business Directory, p. 321.

⁵Crofutt, Grip Sack Guide, p. 120.

⁶Colorado State Business Directory, p. 385.

⁷Crofutt, Grip Sack Guide, p. 120.

⁸Gunnison Daily Review, November 1, 1881, p. 3, c. 2.

County Republican Convention in 1883. He was also the Postmaster of the town for two years beginning in November, 1881.¹⁰

Samuel Jay was postmaster and operated the Sargents Hotel for three years before moving to Dallas, Texas. Andrew T. Blackley also held the postmaster position later. Both men gained prominence later in Western Colorado near Delta.¹¹ James Jones, who was the agent for the railroad, was also prominent among the town's businessmen, owning mines in the valley. He worked for a branch line of the Denver and Rio Grande Railroad up the Tonichi Valley, which if it had been accomplished would undoubtedly have decreased the importance of Sargents, since it would no longer have been the shipping center for that region.¹²

Tourism was a major business for Sargents; because of its proximity to Marshall Pass it was mentioned in the tour publications of the Denver and Rio Grande. There were instances when major excursions went there. One tour with 150 persons from Boston stayed overnight in the town in 1884. To enhance this business, the townspeople set up a mineral cabinet, with samples of ore from all of the mines as a drawing attraction.¹³

Sargents was the central point for the mail delivery

⁹White Pine Cone, September 28, 1883, p. 3, c. 3.

¹⁰Letter, General Services Administration.

¹¹Progressive Men of Western Colorado, (Chicago: A. W. Bowen & Co., 1905), pp. 721-722.

¹²White Pine Cone, September 14, 1883, p. 2, c. 2.

¹³Ibid., May 23, 1884, p. 1, c. 2.

to the Tomichi mines. This was a tedious chore in the winter when the road was closed by snow. Even as late as the 1950's, mail was hauled in a covered sled or with a toboggan and a saddle horse. Sometimes it required three to four days to complete a round trip of the twenty-four miles. The White Pine mail contract was finally terminated in 1959.¹⁴ In 1968 the United States Government attempted to close the local post office, but the residents were able to successfully combat the move.¹⁵

Sargents had a twenty year boom from the middle teens to the 1930's primarily because of a revival of the lumber industry. The Trinchera Timber Company, which employed between 400-500 men, operated near the town and used it as their base of operations.¹⁶

In the late thirties the town prospered from the Highway 50 building project. Sargents felt sure of a new boom when an ore body was opened during the road construction, but it failed to develop.¹⁷

The railroad continued to be the major business in the 1930's with the Marshall Pass hill crew being stationed there. There were attempts to move the crew to Salida, but the movement never came.¹⁸ There was also some shipment of

¹⁴Personal Interview with Vi (Mrs. Archie) Templeton, Sargents, Colorado, June 15, 1969.

¹⁵Pueblo Chieftain, August 1, 1968, p. 3, c.1.

¹⁶Templeton interview.

¹⁷Gunnison News Champion, November 11, 1937, p. 1, c. 5.

¹⁸Ibid., December 2, 1937, p. 8, c. 1.

ore since the Akron Mine, located near White Pine, continued to produce the mineral and haul it to Sargents for reshipment.¹⁹

Business was not always profitable in Sargents. Many of the residents suffered large losses, some by fires that plagued the community. The first fire in town was the previously mentioned fire that destroyed Joseph Sargent's business in 1881; it did an estimated four to six thousand dollars damage.²⁰ The post office was destroyed by fire in 1885.²¹ In 1891, \$1,000 worth of property was destroyed by fire and the blaze would have been more disastrous if the residents had not formed a bucket brigade which saved the majority of the town. The heat from the blaze was so intense it blistered the windows in the depot several hundred yards away.²² On March 31, 1909, Sargents was all but destroyed by a \$15,000 fire. The conflagration started in the hotel and spread to other buildings. It consumed the hotel, a saloon, an empty store building, a general store, a pool hall, and a blacksmith shop. The depot and log cabins on the hill were all that remained standing.²³ In 1924 the school house was completely destroyed by fire.²⁴ Even as late as 1937 destructive fires were still being reported as a highway

¹⁹Templeton interview.

²⁰Gunnison Daily Review, January 3, 1882, p. 2, c. 2.

²¹Wallace, History With the Hide Off, p. 205.

²²White Pine Cone, October 30, 1891, p. 4, c. 1.

²³Gunnison News Champion, April 2, 1909, p. 2, c. 2.

²⁴Templeton interview.

maintenance garage west of town was destroyed.²⁵

The town had other minor tragedies. On one occasion in 1884, Del Clark's bartender at the Buckingham absconded with all the funds while the owner was out of town. He did not even patronize the local railroad but rather left the country via the Denver and South Park Railroad.²⁶ One prominent businessman, W. M. King, committed suicide after becoming despondent over debts. He sold too much on credit and was unable to collect to pay his own debts.²⁷

²⁵Gunnison News Champion, November 18, 1937, p. 8, c. 1.

²⁶White Pine Cone, July 18, 1884, p. 4, c. 4.

²⁷Ibid., May 10, 1889, p. 4, c. 3.

TRANSPORTATION

Even before the Denver and Rio Grande arrived on July 26, 1881, it influenced Sargents. Many people were employed in cutting ties and in the laying of track and Marshalltown was "end of track" for a period of time. It was there the train that signalled the opening of the route to Gunnison on August 8, 1881 was made up.¹

The story of Sargents is entwined with the railroad and Marshall Pass. They are indeed inseparable with any occurrence on the pass affecting the residents of the town. Since it was the supply and shipping point for the Tonichi Mining District, the railroad was a tie between that area and Sargents.²

The helper station had to maintain a railroad crew during the year and in the winter, additional crews were hired to shovel snow from the pass. It was reported that hands were hired on and retained only by the proficiency they displayed at shoveling snow.³

Snow was a major problem on Marshall Pass and the railroad built snow sheds over the tracks. There were twenty-three of the sheds on the pass at one time; one of

¹Wallace, History With the Hide Off, p. 205.

²White Pine Cone, April 24, 1885, p. 4, c. 2.

³Brigham, Colorado Travelore, p. 125.

them on the top about 1,000 feet long. Sparks from the engines caused five to be destroyed by 1889. Other sheds were destroyed in succeeding years and plans to rebuild them out of fireproof materials were discarded as the need for the overhead buildings lessened through the use of rotary snowplows. It was estimated that the absence of snow on the pass for one winter would be worth \$100,000 to the Denver and Rio Grande.⁴ There were still three snowsheds in existence when the track was removed in 1956.⁵

On several occasions, trains became snowbound on the pass. Once it took four engines five hours to make a trip across the pass. In 1884, the pass was blocked from December 17 until the day after Christmas and a train was snowbound the entire time. The crew had nothing but tallow and waste to eat. Thirty men were sent by the railroad to shovel the snow on December 24 and the crew was rescued two days later.⁶ Another train was snowbound for eight days on the pass until a snowplow could get through and get them out. There were drifts from eight to eighteen feet deep during that winter in 1887.⁷

Snowsheds would sometimes blow full of snow and the trains would get stuck when they entered them; this occurred when the open track would be relatively free of

⁴George Everett, Cavalcade of Railroads in Central Colorado (Denver: Golden Bell Press, 1966), p. 70.

⁵Veo interview.

⁶Everett, Cavalcade of Railroads. p. 70.

⁷Cy Warman, Tales of an Engineer (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1897), pp. 81-85.

snow and the going fairly easy. One such incident occurred in 1919 when a five car passenger train with five engines left Sargents bound for Salida. The train reached the long snowshed about a mile from the summit and the first two helper engines became stuck in the snow. The other three engines took the train back to Sargents and one man went on foot to the top of the pass to get help. It took twenty-four hours before a rotary plow could get the engines out and open the road. The men kept the fires in their engines going by melting snow for water. They had plenty of coal on board and kept from freezing in that way.⁸ It was hoped that the snowsheds would keep the trains from being delayed by snow,⁹ but although the sheds helped, the trains seldom ran on schedule during the winter months.¹⁰

Railroading over the Rockies was a hazardous and often thrilling experience. In 1883, it was reported that the Marshall Pass road had met with unprecedented mishaps. Storms swept away tracks, bridges burned and there were many accidents which took the lives of some trainmen. At the same time the Denver and Rio Grande was having financial difficulties. The stock hit a new low even though building was proceeding at an all time high.¹¹

⁸Everett, Cavalcade of Railroads, pp. 192-194.

⁹Gunnison Daily Review, November 8, 1881, p. 3, c. 1.

¹⁰Ibid., November 11, 1881, p. 3, c. 1.

¹¹Ibid., August 22, 1883, p. 1, c. 3.

Some of the news releases in the White Pine Cone and Gunnison Daily Review during the period from the opening of the line in 1881 until 1885 illustrate how hazardous railroading was during the early years. Some were related as follows: "Freight train crackup eight miles east of Sargents on Marshall Pass, engine and seven freight cars demolished;" passenger train ran into rear of freight train going through a snowshed, three men injured; wreck of a passenger train on Marshall Pass with about sixty passengers on board, no serious injuries; train derailed on Marshall Pass; passenger train number three wrecked three miles east of Sargents, train was composed of a baggage and an express car, three day coaches, one tourist sleeper and three pullman cars. The sleeper and pullman cars jumped the track. Out of the fifty persons in the coaches, although there were numerous injuries, only one was killed.

There were numerous other accidents in later years. In one instance, a hand car coming down the pass collided with a freight train, injuring several men. Another time, a freight train pulled onto the siding at Chester to allow a passenger train to pass and the entire train except for the engine overturned. Amazingly, no injuries occurred. In still another case, an engine exploded on the west side of Marshall Pass and a Sargents' man was killed.¹² There were also numerous runaways on the pass when the brakes on the trains failed, a rather common occurrence. A runaway overturned on one occasion and a brake man and seven hoboos who

¹²Everett, Cavalcade of Railroads, pp. 97-100.

were riding on it were killed.¹³ After one runaway overturned, the crew was cleaning up the next day when, unhurt a tramp emerged complaining because he had lost his bag.¹⁴

It is obvious that railroading on Marshall Pass was very dangerous, but the workers were not safe even when working in town. A brakeman slipped and fell between cars while attempting to couple cars in the Sargents yard and was crushed to death in 1888. The couplings were of the link and pin variety,¹⁵ which were very dangerous. Many brakemen could be determined by the missing fingers lost while trying to make car connections.¹⁶

A bunk car on the siding at Sargents occupied by a gang of Italian laborers was entirely consumed by fire in 1885. Two men were sleeping in the car at the time and barely escaped without injury, but all personal belongings were lost.¹⁷

In 1932, John Hicks, the postmaster at Sargents, walked out on the tracks in front of the only passenger train on the run, and was knocked down. Although he was not seriously injured physically, he contracted pneumonia and died in the Gunnison hospital the following day.¹⁸

The reason there were not additional fatalities on

¹³Veo interview.

¹⁴White Pine Cone, December 19, 1884, p. 2, c.4.

¹⁵Ibid., November 23, 1888, p. 1, c. 4.

¹⁶Everett, Cavalcade of Railroads, p. 83.

¹⁷White Pine Cone, October 16, 1885, p. 4, c. 2.

¹⁸Personal Interview with Mrs. Kenneth Watters, Gunnison Colorado, May 25, 1969.

the railroad in the Sargents area is that the trains only traveled ten miles per hour when descending the pass. A description of the downward trip was described in a book of tours. "Descent most fascinating, commenced after an examination of the train. First, sending an engine ahead to check the tracks. No steam is required, but brakes set so firmly that sparks from wheels send out a stream of fire."¹⁹

Spectacular events occurred in Sargents soon after the turn of the century. On July 15, 1902, the first daylight robbery on record and one of the few incurred by the Denver and Rio Grande occurred. On that day, a train was traveling down the west side of Marshall Pass when it was forced to stop by an obstruction on the tracks. Four masked men appeared and demanded to be admitted to the express car. They dynamited the safe when it could not be opened for them since no one had the combination, but were disappointed when they found no money in it. The shipment of \$20,000 had been taken off the train at Salida to be shipped over the pass the next day after the guard had had a chance to rest. Not willing to leave empty handed the train robbers ordered the passengers out of the train and robbed them. Although many were able to hide their valuables, the total loss was still placed at \$1,500. The engineer was the only one who was harmed by the robbers; he was struck over the head with a gun when he failed to react quickly enough to an order. There was some speculation that the robbers were

¹⁹Crofutt, Overland Tours, p. 59.

fearful that the engineer, Perry Ruland, might be able to identify them and that precipitated the unwarranted attack.

Posses were formed in Gunnison, Salida and Sargents, and sheriffs from all contiguous counties were alerted but the robbers were never caught. The robbery was well planned and it was believed that the men were professionals which may have been a reason the search for them was unsuccessful.

Several amusing stories came out of the robbery. It was reported that a passenger who looked from the window and saw the masked men, jumped from the train and began running up the hill and when last seen was still running. One report was that he had \$2,000 with him, but the accepted theory was that the flight was caused by fear.²⁰ Another incident reported concerned a woman passenger who, when she saw the robbers, collapsed on a man's lap. He reportedly remarked to her, "Never mind madam, if it's any comfort to you, you just sit there."²¹

A second spectacular incident concerning Sargents occurred on June 13, 1909. A train containing a car load of dynamite pulled around a curve about one and a half miles west of Sargents when someone noticed smoke and flames coming from the dynamite car. The crew quickly stopped the train and ran for shelter. Two courageous crewmen went back and cut the dynamite car loose and moved the train. They were just running to safety when the dynamite exploded. The

²⁰Everett, Cavalcade of Railroads, pp. 54-58.

²¹Gunnison New Champion, July 18, 1902, p. 1, c. 1.

concussion knocked everyone flat and showered one man with glass, but no serious injuries were incurred. However, two hoboes riding in a car loaded with flour next to the dynamite car were not so lucky; they were killed instantly.²² On that day for the only time in Sargents' history, the people in town arose at the same time. The sound of the tremendous explosion was heard in Salida, sixty-five miles away. It was amazing the eardrums of the crew were not shattered since the concussion was felt on top of Marshall Pass. Wheels from the train were found five miles away and other debris was scattered over a large area.²⁴

Another incident on the pass occurred in the 1890's. A young engineer, Al Krall, had helped a train up the west side of Marshall Pass and was going down empty. A freight train with a load of coal cars was following. Krall stopped to fix a valve so he could take water and the freight slammed into the rear and knocked the tender, in which the fireman, Marion Myers was working, off the track and down the mountain. Luckily, Myers was not injured but Krall lost his job and changed his occupation to ranching, an occupation at which he proved much more successful.²⁵

If insurance had not been available to cattle shippers in the Sargents area, great losses would have been prevalent

²²Everett, Cavalcade of Railroads, pp. 104-106.

²³Veo interview.

²⁴Everett, Cavalcade of Railroads, p. 106.

²⁵Gilbert Lathrop, Little Engines and Big Men (Caldwell, Idaho: The Caxton Printers Ltd. 1954), pp. 249-250.

since stock trains were subject to the same hazards as other trains, some of which were fatal to crewmen as well as stock. A brakeman and seventy head of cattle were killed in one wreck on the pass in 1890. On another occasion a stock train was stalled by snow on the pass and the entire load of cattle froze to death standing in the cars before the train could be rescued.²⁷

As with most mountain railroads, there is a legend connected with the Marshall Pass road. Nelson Edwards, an old engineer was given the Marshall Pass run soon after it opened in 1881. One night, already apprehensive since he had been warned of a loose rail and an unsafe bridge, Edwards began his trip. Just after he passed the first line of snowsheds, he heard a whistle from behind him and at the same time, the gong in his cab rang, signaling him to stop. After he had stopped, Edwards was informed by his conductor that he had not given him any signal and that he had better "open it up" because there was a wild train behind them. Edwards poured it on, but the other train continued to gain. Finally, a lantern signalled him to stop and he took a chance and stopped. The other train seemed to leap upon his train but then rolled off the tracks and down into a canyon. When he finished his run at Green River the next morning, Edwards found a warning written in frost on his cab. "If you ever run here again you'll be wrecked." No sign was ever found of the train but Edwards never ran over Marshall Pass again.

²⁶White Pine Cone, August 29, 1890, p. 2, c. 1.

²⁷ Veo interview.

It was not determined if this was the reason but Edwards finished his railroad career on the Union Pacific.²⁸

The railroads, although thrilling and much more colorful, were only part of the transportation system into and out of Sargents. Most of the supplies and people who embarked at Sargents were not interested in it. They were just passing through to get to the mines up the valley. After leaving the trains they had to take the stage up the valley.

There were two stage lines in operation in the Sargents area, which attests to the traffic to the Tomichi Mining District in the early 1880's. This discounts all of the wagons and sleds which hauled the ore from the mines to the railroad.²⁹

The White Pine road was well traveled, but was only open to wagons during the summer months. In winter, all travel was in sleds or on foot, and the road was kept open to that kind of travel through the effort of "snow haulers."³⁰ In the spring the road became a morass of mud and melting snow but people continued to travel on it.³¹ In 1885, the first wheeled vehicle of the year arrived in White Pine on April 24. It was quite a treat to the residents and heralded the coming of daily communication with the other communities.³²

²⁸Amanda Ellis, Legends and Tales of the Rockies (Colorado Springs, Colo.: Denton Printing Co., 1965), pp. 41-42.

²⁹White Pine Cone, April 20, 1883, p. 2, c. 2.

³⁰Muriel Sibell Wolle, Stampede to Timberline (Boulder, Colo.: The University of Colorado, 1949), p. 173.

³¹Wallace, History With the Hide Off, p. 216.

³²White Pine Cone, April 24, 1885, p. 4, c. 2.

There were occasions when things would occur to break the monotony of the stage runs. In 1889 a harrowing experience occurred for the occupants of the stage. As the stage, with Ingold Peterson driving, was making its run to Sargents with three men and Miss Lily Dinkins of Sargents on board, an ominous appearing man appeared at the side of the road. Peterson whipped the horses and they "sprang forward in the face of a broadside well delivered." Peterson and Carr were badly hurt but the horses delivered the stage to White Pine. A drummer on board had acted suspiciously and disappeared shortly after the stage arrived in White Pine and many believed he was a partner of the gunman.³³ A crowd gathered at White Pine after the incident, but quickly dispersed because of the "smelity" of the driver. (He was drunk).³⁴

It can be seen that the transportation of the area was hazardous and unsure, but the records show there was never a lack of customers who were willing to endure the hardships to get to their destinations. The dances continued. The Archie Templetons played at many of the dances and they made money for a henry soon in this way. There were many occasions when the dances lasted until day-break. The participants then went to someone's home for breakfast. Money for the musicians was gathered by "passing the hat." Mrs. Templeton reports that this was sometimes

¹White Pine Cone, June 25, 1885, July 10, 1885, p. 4.

²White Pine Cone, 1888, January 4, 1889, p. 1, c. 3.

³³White Pine Cone, February 15, 1889, p. 3, c. 3.

³⁴Wolle, Stampede to Timberline, p. 174.

SOCIAL

The social activities of the Sargents community were limited but well attended. Mentions are made of sledding and tobogganing and trips to Waunita Hot Springs, but the favorite social gathering was the dance.

Sargents had a dancing club which sponsored dances every two weeks. These were attended by people from as far away as Parlin and Tomichi. There are even occasional references to Gunnison people attending. It was reported that the Sargents boys were very polite. These dances were usually held in the railroad eating house in the early days, although occasionally they would be held at one of the hotels.¹ On special holidays, such as Christmas and New Year's, balls were held.²

In later days, during the 1920's and '30's, the dances continued. The Archie Templetons played at many of them, in fact they made money for a honeymoon in this way. There were many occasions when the dances lasted until day-break. The participants then went to someone's home for breakfast. Money for the musicians was gathered by "passing the hat". Mrs. Templeton reports that this was sometimes

¹White Pine Cone, June 26, 1885, July 10, 1885, p. 4, c. 2.

²Ibid., December 28, 1888, January 4, 1889, p. 4, c. 3.

quite profitable.³ Frank Veo, related that the dances would start at eight o'clock p.m. and "last as long as the liquor held out", sometimes into the middle of the day. There was a common agreement that people would not get drunk, however. The dances during this period were held in the schoolhouse.

Many of the Sargents residents attended the dances at White Pine. Mike Smith, a resident of Tomichi, who survived the disastrous snowslide which obliterated the town, was usually the musician. He would play anytime and anyplace and was one of the most popular men in the area.⁴ White Pine appeared to have more social activity than Sargents in the early years and their functions were well attended by the Sargents residents.

There is no record of any church in the community or any indication that there was any spiritual guidance until after the turn of the century. In 1908, the community was served by the Gunnison Episcopal Church; this continued for two years.⁵ In the later years, there were numerous missionary and regular services in the school building. Some denominations which served the area were Baptist, Church of Christ and Presbyterian.⁶

³Personal interview with Vi (Mrs. Archie) Templeton, Sargents, Colorado, June 15, 1969.

⁴Personal interview with Frank Veo, Salida, Colorado, June 15, 1969.

⁵Allen DuPont Brech, The Episcopal Church in Colorado 1860-1963 (Denver: Big Mountain Press, 1963), p. 182.

⁶Personal interview with Vi (Mrs. Archie) Templeton, Sargents, Colorado, June 15, 1969.

The first school was held in a cabin north of the railroad tracks near the coal chute in 1881.⁷ In 1883, the school was taught by the town barber, J. H. Hill. Gunnison County allotted eighty dollars to the Sargents School to partially pay the expenses of the teacher. Before that time the parents assumed the financial burden for the school.⁸ In 1885, the school was taught by J. W. Law, a businessman, whose wife was also postmaster in 1886. After 1890, it appears that all of the teachers were women.

In 1924, the schoolhouse burned down and was replaced by a brick structure which is still standing. In 1936, the school was still a two teacher school for all twelve grades.⁹ In the 1920's the salary was sixty-five dollars a month, which was considered very good pay for a teacher.¹⁰

In the 1880's, baseball replaced skating as a pastime and Sargents formed a team which competed against teams from the surrounding communities, apparently not always too successfully from some of the scores which were reported.¹¹ The national pastime was renewed in the 1920's. Monty Montgomery, a "pool hall" owner was manager of the team. Montgomery was also a merchant for "moonshine" and would

⁷1936 Sargents School Yearbook, p. 1.

⁸White Pine Cone, April 20, 1883, p. 2, c. 2.

⁹1936 Sargents School Yearbook, p. 3.

¹⁰Veo interview.

¹¹White Pine Cone, April 4, 1884, p. 3, c. 1.

furnish the liquor for the party which followed every game. The liquor was free if his team won the game. The team especially enjoyed playing in Crested Butte because they could get a better grade of liquor there and enjoyed the fights which occurred after each game. As can be seen, prohibition did not dry up the community. There were at least two other manufacturers of illegal liquor in the Sargents community.

Big card games also went on in Sargents. The railroad men were big gamblers and there were many salesmen on the trains who were not adverse to a game of cards. On one occasion, a brakeman lost \$1,300 in one night.¹²

The social life of the town increased substantially when train loads of excursionists arrived in the community. There were parties and dances held for them. The Sargents residents were able to have great fun at the jealousy displayed by Gunnison, when the Raymond Excursionists preferred to stay in the town along Marshall Creek. According to the White Pine Cone Gunnison was too far from Sargents "to ever make anything of a place" and when the excursionists reached Sargents they had "seen all there was worth seeing".¹³

It is doubtful if many of the local residents did much traveling for relaxation and enjoyment if one trip is any indication of the inconveniences encountered in traveling in 1883. A reporter for the White Pine Cone hired a buggy

¹²Veo interview.

¹³White Pine Cone, May 23, 1884, p. 2, c. 3.

from White Pine to Sargents on Friday evening, ate a leisurely supper and played checkers until time for retiring. The train was scheduled to depart at eight a.m. He arrived at the station early, only to be informed that the train was three hours late and would probably leave about noon. Some freight trains came in and reported the passenger train was stuck in a snow drift west of Gunnison and would be in about four o'clock, some eight hours late. Although the accommodations at the depot were fairly comfortable, it was not a pleasant place to spend eight hours waiting for a train.¹⁴

There was some intrigue in the social life of Sargents. A Mrs. Jones eloped with one of the Denver and Rio Grande engineers; the plot unfolded much like a drama. Mr. Jones was invited into the saloon for a drink and while thus occupied, the lady went to the depot and caught the train for Gunnison, where the duties of the engineer took him every other night.¹⁵ The following week it was reported that the first report was probably exaggerated because, "Mrs. Jones shot into town a few days ago and everything is lovely." They could "see no reason why people should make great talk about a lady who wishes to make a visiting or business trip anywhere".¹⁶

On another occasion, John Triano was arrested in Sargents, charged with threatening the life of Miss Mary King.

¹⁴White Pine Cone, January 13, 1884, p. 1, c. 2.

¹⁵Ibid., May 28, 1886, p. 4, c. 4.

¹⁶Ibid., June 4, 1886, p. 4, c. 1.

He wanted to get married and proposed to coerce some lady into accepting his hand and heart. It was not determined if he ever accomplished this goal.¹⁷

There were attempts to organize the mine workers of the Sargents area. W. M. Wardjohn, a union organizer, was accosted while on the train in Sargents and severely beaten. Five men were involved in the act, but all escaped by jumping into a buggy and driving toward Doyleville. They were never apprehended and Mr. Wardjohn finally recovered after a prolonged confinement in a Denver hospital.¹⁸

In 1938, a train was chartered at Gunnison to take skiers up Marshall Pass. About 1,000 took part in this venture, including about eighty from Sargents. A similar venture with about the same number left Salida on the same day. The venture was designed to build an interest in skiing since there was a move on to build the Pioneer facilities north of Gunnison. The promoters, Rial Lake, Wesley McDermott, and Chuck Sweitzer, wanted to publicize the route as the best for the all-weather highway into the valley. It was one of the three routes under consideration at that time.

After going to the top, the skiers skied down to Tank Seven where the train met them. One young lady was missing, having fallen in the deep snow and taken four hours to crawl back to the top. She was brought back to Gunnison

¹⁷White Pine Cone, July 5, 1889, p. 4, c. 2.

¹⁸Gunnison News Champion, May 6, 1904, p. 1, c. 1.

in a helper engine which had been at the top. She was uninjured, but quite upset and very dirty from riding in the engine. The venture was not a financial success since the promoters had to use fifty dollars of their own money to pay the railroad fee. The route also was not chosen for the highway; Monarch Pass was chosen instead.¹⁹

The Sargents area advertised itself as the gateway to the sportsman's playground, where magnificent scenery, good fishing and hospitality was a general practice.²⁰ It was not unusual in the thirties to catch fish weighing from two to three pounds, and since there were no bag limits at that time, the fishermen could sometimes catch more native and rainbow trout than they cared to pack. Sargents, at that time made tourism and sportsman activities the major theme of the town.²¹

¹⁹Personal Interview with Rial Lake, Gunnison, Colorado, September 20, 1968. Substantiated-Gunnison News Champion, February 17, 1938, p. 6, c. 3.

²⁰Gunnison News Champion, July 14, 1938, p. 14.

²¹Veo interview.

PRESENT

In Sargents today there is little indication that it was once a thriving town. The only reminders are some of the ram-shackle buildings which give evidence to a by-gone era.

All that is left of the railroad is a rundown depot and some maintenance buildings and a water tank which is now falling apart. It is possible to see where the old railroad bed ran through town but farther west even this has disappeared as the ranchers have plowed it under to plant crops.

The old right-of-way up Marshall Pass is now a tourist road and was used for the natural gas line over the Continental Divide. Upon driving up the pass there is little to remind anyone that it was once the lifeline of the valley; that men struggled valiantly to build and maintain the railroad over it even at the cost of many lives.

There are some buildings and a water tank at Tank Seven, which are actually a reminder of fairly recent times, since it was maintained as a water stop until the closing of the road in 1956. The other communities, such as Buxton, Chester and Shawano, which were along the pass have all but disappeared, and cannot be distinguished when driving along the road. There are still remains of some of the snowsheds near the top of the pass and foundations,

piles of debris, cellars, and garbage dumps at the summit which reveal the signs of a past civilization. Other than that, only a few ties and the cinders along the road give any evidence of the once active railroad which was the primary transportation system into the Gunnison area and which made Sargents an important, thriving community.

The town claims thirteen year round residents now. Most of them live along the highway and not in Sargents as it was indicated on the town plat.¹ In the summer, the population increases greatly as the summer residents come to enjoy the beautiful scenery and fish in the mountain streams or perhaps just to enjoy the solitude of the quiet mountain community. There are many inquiries about cabin and homesites and perhaps a new boom will come because of people just trying to get away from it all.²

Sargents has managed to maintain its post office and there are cabins and a combination restaurant, general store and gas station located there. In the winter, the tow truck is kept quite busy on Monarch Pass and the Highway Department has a crew stationed there to help keep the highway open. This constitutes about all of the business of Sargents at the present time.

The town is still listed in touring publications, but only as a landmark for finding the mining camps which

¹ Personal interview with Vince LaCapra, Sargents, Colorado, June 15, 1969.

² Milton LeMoyné, "Sargents Sees Quiet Boon", The Pueblo Chieftain, July 27, 1969, Sec. C, p. 1.

existed in bygone days and have a romantic air about them.³

It can be hoped however, that a renewed interest might be taken in some of these other communities so their heritage and importance in the building of the West will not be lost.

Sargents flourished briefly during the mining boom from 1880 to 1893. After the Silver Panic in 1893, it became primarily a Denver and Rio Grande railroad town and a ranching community. It was never very large, attaining a maximum population of 250; after the removal of the railroad in 1956, the population dwindled to thirteen permanent residents.

Sargents' future, if any, rests primarily with ranching and perhaps summer tourism and the sale of summer homesites.. The region surrounding Sargents includes beautiful mountain scenery and excellent hunting and fishing. Additional glamour as a resort community would come from the easy accessibility of the many old ghost towns in the surrounding area.

It is improbable that any rebirth of mining in the Sargents area would greatly affect the community since it no longer is a railroad shipping center.

Therefore, Sargents seems destined to follow the example of many other once promising mining and transportation towns. Its glory days have passed and the future looks dim.

³Robert L. Brown, Jeep Trails to Colorado Ghost Towns (Caldwell, Idaho: Caxton Printers Ltd., 1963), pp. 152-53 and 230.

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