

Frank Adams

In our quest for a timely topic this week, we encountered that well-beloved and kindly remembered old gentleman, H. F. (Frank) Adams, resident of Middle Park since 1879, our oldest living pioneer.



So we asked Mr. Adams, among other things, about his early Thanksgiving feasts in Middle Park, and his mind, alert despite his 85 years, rolled back the curtain of a half century and more and brought forth memories rich with names and dates and facts as if they were of yesterday.

Unlike most of our pioneers who came in over Rollins Pass, Mr. Adams, accompanied by E. H. Kauffman, packed in over the Ute Trail from Estes Park (whence he had gone in 1878 from his birthplace in Eparta, Illinois, a few short miles from our own hometown) to Grand Lake, young prospectors lured by the dream of “gold in them thar’ hills.”

Their own destination was not Grand Lake, however, but a spot 18 miles up the North Fork; the mining camp that later became the flourishing town of Lulu and that is now just another legendary ghost town. There were scarcely a dozen men there that first summer, and our would-be miners, after occasional trips back to Estes for more grub, finally went back to Kauffman’s ranch on the South St. Vrain for the winter.

1879 was the year of the Meeker Massacre, and Utes in North Park, sullenly defiant, tried to drive out the settlers up there by setting fire to the forests; this fire spread clear over the range to the vicinity of the Lake, eating up valuable timber as it went.

But the next spring (1880) Adams and Kauffman were back again, and with them Ben Dunche, an old trapper and prospector long familiar with Middle Park country, Frank Wendenberg, and Jack Henry. These men spent their first Thanksgiving and winter in Middle Park in a little cabin at Lulu. There was no special celebration, Mr. Adams recalled, and certainly no feast, for they had only traditional miners’ fare: flour, bacon, sugar, coffee, tea, dried fruits, beans, potatoes, and Eagle Brand milk, tho of course game and fish were plentiful.

Thanksgiving 1881, however, Mr. Adams remembered with the fond pride of a hospitable host, for he and Ben Dunche entertained a number of the prospectors in their cabin, George Golden and a Mr. Churchill among them. There was not a woman in camp, so Dunche was elected cook. In search of a special treat, he journeyed down to Hot Sulphur Springs and purchased three elk which had been shot and hauled in from Beaver Creek. Did we say purchased? Well, he paid 1 cent a pound for them, if you can call that a purchase.

That winter and the following summer (1882) Mr. Adams spent at Lulu, but in the fall he left to try his luck down on the Sango de Cristo range at Placer, just over Le Veda Pass. His group of three men and a Kansas trio discovered they had claims on the same vein. (Here we pricked up

our ears, anticipating a little blood and thunder action, but we were disappointed). The men very sensibly pooled their resources to sink just one hole and see if they could really find good ore. Mr. Adams later injured his hand and returned to Lulu about the 6th of July, 1883, just two days after the Grand Lake massacre, and never knew how the vein panned out.

By this time there was a growing community both at Lulu and the Lake. Judge Pettingell had come in 1881, Mrs. Tom Johnston (sister of Mrs. Pettingell) was at the lake, and Jake Young's grandmother was running one hotel there and the Schaffer House was another. Also in 1881 John Smart and a Mr. Bailey started a newspaper, The Grand Lake Prospector, for wherever man may go, the Press seems sure to follow. (Apologies to Mary and her lamb).

Strange as it may seem, Mr. Adams did not journey down to Hot Sulphur Springs until about 1886; and in 1887 or 88, Mr. Godsmark moved there from Grand Lake and started another newspaper in the old courthouse building; it was christened the "Grand County Messenger."

1892 found Mr. Adams married (Lillian Gracye Adams) and his prospecting days almost at an end. A last fling at Cripple Creek in 1897, again with his old friend and partner Kauffman, and he returned in '98 to Sulphur and set up a grocery store, his dream of finding gold never realized. There his two children grew up: Helen (the late Mrs. Emery Brown) and Robert (now in Omaha, Neb.)

At that time Sulphur boasted two hotels, the Kinney House and the Middle Park Hotel (run by one of the McQuearys), the Chattfield and McQueary livery barn, and several eating places in private dwellings.

In 1908, this miner-merchant entered on a new role – politics! And served as county judge 1908-12, clerk of the court under Judges DeFrance and McCall, and county treasurer from 1918-22.

Then his ranch on the Troublesome (which he had bought in 1910 when he sold his grocery store to Mr. and Mrs. Morgan) superseded all other interests and he devoted his efforts exclusively to ranching.

Such is the varied, picturesque life of our oldest pioneer resident: prospector, merchant, politician, rancher. And when we asked him which he had enjoyed the most, his warm brown eyes glowed and after a moment's musing, he said softly. "Mining was exciting; the grocery business paid the most money; politics was fun (until the Republicans got in!); but I was most contented on the ranch. Yes ranch life was the best."

And we, city-bred and reared, silently agreed with him.

By Mrs. M. W. Baumgarten

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