

July 7, 1866

....Colorado City has neither billard saloon, restaurant, coffee-house nor theatre, and is, therefore, clearly not a mining town. It is as quiet and quiescent as an interior Kentucky village. The excitement of 1859 brought it into being, and in the first year of its existence it had one hundred and thirty houses, and three hundred inhabitants. Its population now is one hundred souls, all told. In winter it numbers somewhat more, as many of the miners then come down from the mountains. The nearest mines are seventy miles distant. Of them all the Red Mountain district is said to be the richest, although the deepest shafts sunk are only twelve feet.

Colorado City is seventy miles distant from Denver, and forty-five from Pueblo. Fully thirty miles of the latter distance are covered on both sides of the road with excellent farms -- I mean the fields, not the improvements, which are wretched. Wheat, corn, oats, all grow well, the smaller grains best. I saw one field of fine wheat, of three hundred and eighty acres. No fences, and all the cultivation by irrigation, in which the Americans, for want of familiarity with the system of acequias, or ditches, make a mistake the Mexicans have long since learned to avoid. They dig them too deep and at too great an inclination, thus creating a current that washes out or deepens the ditch, and they use more water than is necessary -- an eminently American trait, for, from housekeeping up to national finances, from the thick parings of potatoes and turnips up to the fat slices off treasury ribs, we waste and destroy more than would support the people and government of any European kingdom.

Most of the people who have settled these farms were disappointed "Peakers" -- either those who had thrown down the shovel to take up the plough, or those who, with exausted means, found a long mountain journey still before them after they had reached the Peak.

Touching irrigation, I have a story to tell, exemplifying the high esteem in which it is held in these parts.

Some twelve miles below Colorado I stopped at a ranch to get a drink of milk. Perhaps I was attracted by a group of children playing with a pet antelope -- a little, delicate thing but a few weeks old, with large, soft, liquid, black eyes, and tame as a kitten. Man of the house absent in the field. Mother put on her husband's hat, and started for the milk-house as soon as my request was made. Gave us plenty of rich, cool milk, for which she positively refused a cent of compensation. She told me they were from Crawford County, Pennsylvania. "Like it here just middlin'. It's so lonesome; no women about; all men folks."

"But, Madam," said I, "you appear to have a great many neighbors here, with all these fine farms about you."

"My sakes, yes! There are thirty-two men farmin' here, and not one of them married -- a set of good-for-nothing old

bachelors! I just tell 'em they ought all to be took up and settled down on a dry creek!"

Now, if you consider for a moment the value and blessing of a running stream in a country whose existence depends upon irrigation, you will have some slight idea of the deep anathema conveyed by the imprecation of "dry creek." Being a wretched bachelor myself, I left suddenly, covered with shame and confusion.

To do Colorado City full justice, I will add that it has five stores and a post office. The stores are, of course, supported by the miners and the farmers. Within twelve miles of the village two thousand more acres are put into cultivation this season than last, and they now raise more grain than their neighborhood can use. Every available quarter-section is taken up. Wheat and corn last year brought thirteen cents per pound. This year they will bring from six to eight cents.

James F. Meline, Two Thousand Miles on Horseback... (New York: Hurd and Houghton, 1868), pp. 88-90.