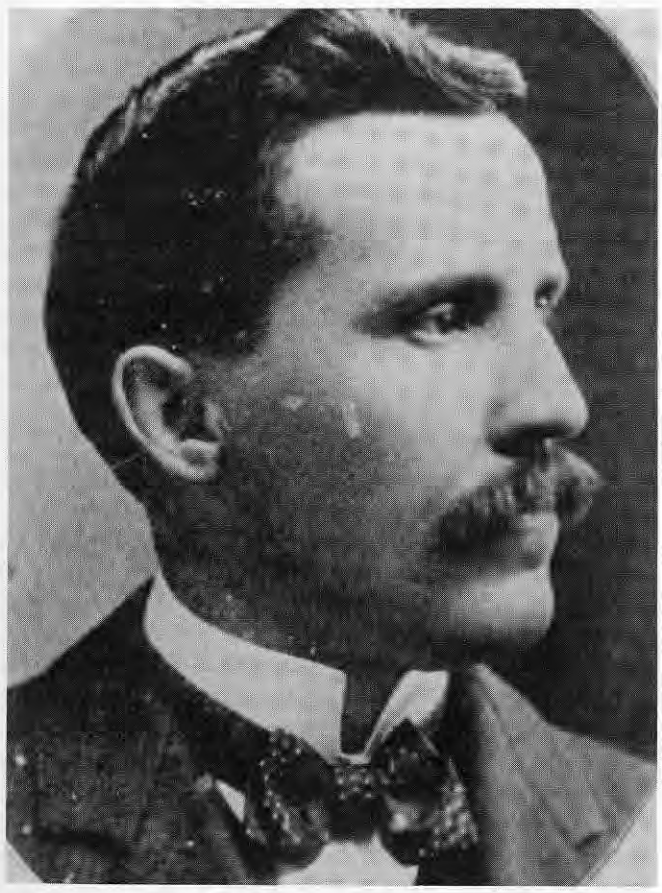
THE INDUSTRIAL AGE 1870-1879

January 19, 1870

Sheriff James Ward and the Coroner for Jefferson County, Mr. Moore, responded up Golden Gate Canyon to the mouth of the old Gregory Road, and found the dead man hanging from a small but stout tree. A slender manilla rope was doubled around the man's throat, a slip knot added for the pressure. Because of the size of the tree, the man's feet rested on the ground, his knees bent, and his body contorted in a crumpled posture. His hand's were untied and hung limp in well laundered and well dressed sleeves. Only the birds, which had pecked out the dead man's eyes, led the Sheriff to believe the man had been dead for some time.

The corpse was cut down and carried back to Golden City where Mr. Moore performed the autopsy in the mortuary on Washington Avenue. Once the man's clothes were removed, Mr. Moore discovered that the throat had been cut and the skull was shattered on one side. Mr. Moore also noted that such wounds would have caused a great amount of bleeding, but upon close examination, no blood was found on the dead man's clothes. Sheriff Ward felt very uneasy about this particular crime. He searched the Canyon for evidence, seeking the area for witnesses to the crime, but all to no avail.

On Saturday, the 21st, the nameless corpse was placed in a County owned pine box and buried.



Sheriff William L. Smith

May 18, 1870

Albert Neuman was two miles up Clear Creek Canyon, surveying a route for the Denver and Georgetown Railroad, when his mule got loose and headed up a gulch to the south of the river. The gulch turned into a fairly sharp ravine, known locally as Brown's Ravine, and just below the steep rise of Chimney Gulch, Albert Neuman discovered a man hanging from a short but stout tree. He recovered his stray mule, returned to Golden City and found Sheriff Ward.

Sheriff Ward, this time with the Coroner and Justice of the Peace Boutwell, climbed up Chimney Gulch, and looking down upon the ribbon of water known as Clear Creek, found the dead man. The corpse, now decomposed to a skeleton, was lying on its back, attached to a nearby tree by a doubled manilla rope. Sheriff Ward gathered up the bones, including the skull which still had the rope caught in the bone, and with his associates, returned to Golden City.

Doctor Joseph Anderson was called to examine the remains, while Sheriff Ward began to search for the man's identity. Doctor Anderson was shown the manilla rope removed from around the neck of a murder victim discovered last January. A comparison was made. Both sets of rope had an identical slip knot, and both were of the same stock, width and material.

July 16, 1871

Just west of Golden City, in a pretty valley leading up into the foothills, travelers and residents of Golden picniced and camped. A camper today spotted the skeletal remains of a human hand protruding from a mound of rocks in the canyon, which was naturally brought to the immediate attention of the County Sheriff.

Later this afternoon, Sheriff Ward had uncovered a skeleton covered in tattered clothes and a government overcoat. A bullet hole was found in the back of the dead person's head. Several unsolved slayings were brought to the attention of the people of Jefferson County, and due to this recent find, the valley would forever be called Dead Man's Gulch. None of the slayings would ever be solved.

March 1, 1872

The Jefferson County Board of Commissioners and the Probate Court moved to new offices on Ford Street from the space rented from W.A.H. Loveland. Soon thereafter, Sheriff Ward was advised that the contract for the leasing of Jail space in Loveland's building had expired, and the contract would not be re-negotiated. Ward moved his office next door to the old Transcript newspaper building and set up a contract with the town of Golden City to use their Jail for a fee of $30.00 a month. Undersheriff Clarence P. Hoyt would serve as the sole guard for the Golden City Jail. In 1871 Hoyt was elected Marshall of Golden City, and today joined the Sheriff's Office to serve as Undersheriff for the next six years. Hoyt's Jail experience would in 1883 cause him to be appointed Warden of the Colorado State Penetentiary.

August 12, 1874

It was decided today by the Board of County Commissioners to hold a special election in September in regards to asking the people for $20,000.00 worth of bonds to run for 20 years for the purpose of building a new Jail. The new Sheriff of Jefferson County, William Smith, circulated the petition. Jefferson County had approximately two more months of space availability in the Golden City Jail before being forced to find alternate lodging in another County's Jail.

William L. Smith was born in Clinton County, Kentucky on November 13, 1840. When he was ten years old his family moved to Wapello County, Iowa where Smith lived for twenty-four years. In 1864 William Smith arrived in Jefferson County and began a lime business. In 1874 he took over the office of Sheriff and named John W. Belcher as his Undersheriff.

August 26, 1874

Grasshoppers had come to Jefferson County this summer and had decimated the crops, causing serious financial losses to the area farmers. Now a petition was being circulated throughout the County asking for money to build a new Jail: money that could be used to restore agricultural losses. Most people in the County would find it very difficult this year to even pay their taxes, let alone finance a $20,000.00 Jail. Someone suggested to the Board of County Commissioners that a $10,000.00 Jail may be easier to accept. Today, the Board of County Commissioners promised to secure the lowest bid available for a new Jail.

October 1, 1874

The City of Golden was advised by the Jefferson County Board of Commissioners that the Sheriff would no longer house any prisoners in their town Jail. So far this yaer, the County had paid Golden City $228.25 for the feeding of the prisoners, and $661.56 in salaries to hire Deputy Sheriffs to watch the prisoners. The Board felt, at least for now, that the County could do financially better at the new Arapahoe County Jail. Arapahoe County, who had constructed their new Jail on 11th Street in Denver City, advised Jefferson County that if the new Denver City Jail was full, then Arapahoe County Deputies would transport Jefferson County prisoners to the Douglas County Jail in Castle Rock. This appeared to be an excellent arrangement and the Board of County Commissioners could not refuse.

Arapahoe County Jail in 1874

April 11, 1877

Today the Board of County Commissioners decided to build a new Jail and Courthouse for Jefferson County. Labor costs and materials were now at an all time low and the County finances were in good condition. The Commissioners selected a site fronting Washington Avenue between 5th and 6th Streets, (now 15th and 16th Streets) with a frontage of 600 feet and 140 feet in depth.

June 23, 1877

The cornerstone was dedicated today for the new Jefferson County Courthouse and Jail. Rober Millikin of Golden received the bid for the building at a cost of $30,000.00

February 15, 1878

Sheriff John Belcher escorted the visitors throughout the new Courthouse and Jail. Robert Millikin turned over the keys to the new building today to the County Commissioners for a total price tag of $31,900.00. The building was practically three stories in height, including the basement, nearly all of which is above ground. The walls of the basement are of white sandstone, with windows to match the tiers above, and with a floor throughout the hallways and jail rooms of cement, laid off in alternate squares of brown and black. Occupying the northwest corner of the basement is the Sheriff's office, and leading from it to the rear is a private room. Across the side hall from the Sheriff's office, and occupying the northeast corner of the basement is a suite of four rooms, with closets, pantry, etcetra, designed as a residence for the Undersheriff and family. On the south side of the main hall, in the southwest front is the jail itself. It is secured by two heavily barred doors leading from the hall, and by heavily grated windows on the west and south sides inside the room, with a passage around the whole containing eight iron cells, 8'x8' square, with strong iron barred doors secured by heavy combination spring locks.

The first floor of the new Courthouse contains the offices of the County Clerk and the County Commissioners. To the rear of the first floor is found the offices of the County Assessor, Treasurer, and the Superintendent of Schools. The remaining space on this floor is taken by the County Court and Judges' chambers.

Jefferson County Courthouse, Jail, and Sheriff's Office, 1878.

The second floor houses the largest of all spaces designed to hold the District Court room. Two rooms are set aside for lawyer and client conversations, with the remaining five rooms designed for jury rooms, a judge's private office, and storage. A narrow flight of stairs leads from this floor to the roof, and from the judge's chambers large window type doors open out onto a balcony over the front porch of the Courthouse.

April 5, 1878 Friday 1100 Hours

Joseph Boyd, the Undersheriff, customarily allowed the prisoners in the new Jail to exercise about this time by walking to and fro in the hallway between the cells. The hallway is flanked by windows to the outside, barred by ½" iron bars. While the prisoners, eleven in all, were pacing the corridor, four of them pried loose one of the ½" by two foot long bars from the door of a fire proof vault which was located in one corner of the Jail room. With this improvised crow bar they broke off three of the upright iron bars of one of the windows, which were bent up, leaving an open space of ten inches from which to escape. Undersheriff Boyd had left to go downtown Golden on some business, and was not present at his post when the four prisoners squeezed through the opening in the bars.

A little girl who lived nearby the Jail saw the prisoners crawling through the opening, and ran to find the Undersheriff's wife, who was visiting her mother. When Mrs. Boyd sounded the alarm, the prisoners were seen in plain view directly in front of the steps to the Courthouse, walking at a lively pace for the mountains to the west.

County Clerk Al Townsend (who would be elected Sheriff in 1881) ran down Washington Avenue and found the Undersheriff on 14th Street. Fortunately, past Sheriff William L. Smith was on his horse a block from the Jail, and gave pursuit when Undersheriff Boyd signaled him with a whistle. Three of the escapees fled into a ravine just west of Washington Avenue and William Smith rode his horse down upon them. The three fugitives ran through the ravine as Smith followed closely behind. Sheriff Belcher, who was at the time of escape mounting his horse at a stable near the Courthouse, rode to the Jail and procured some rifles.

Deputy Sheriff Carlos Lake (who would be elected Sheriff in 1897) caught up with William Smith in the ravine and both men, unarmed, chased the three prisoners to the south. One of the prisoners, William Norton, finally collapsed in the ravine from exhaustion and William Smith held him until Sheriff Belcher arrived, allowing Deputy Lake to continue the chase after the remaining two fugitives. Belcher gave Smith a Henry rifle and the past Sheriff gave up his captured prisoner. In a few moments, Smith caught up with Carlos Lake and the other two escapees at the mouth of Dead Man's Gulch. Smith pointed the Henry rifle and informed the fleeing fugitives of the consequences of their continued flight, whereupon, the two men stopped in their tracks and quickly gave up.

The fourth fugitive, R.E. Sloan, wanted for blowing up a house in Platte Canyon was caught by Al Townsend as the escapee ran down Washington Avenue, and was returned to Jail.

Sheriff Belcher separated his four fugitives in the hallway to their cells, before locking them up fastened leg irons on them. The new Jail was only forty-nine days old when today's events marked the first escape.

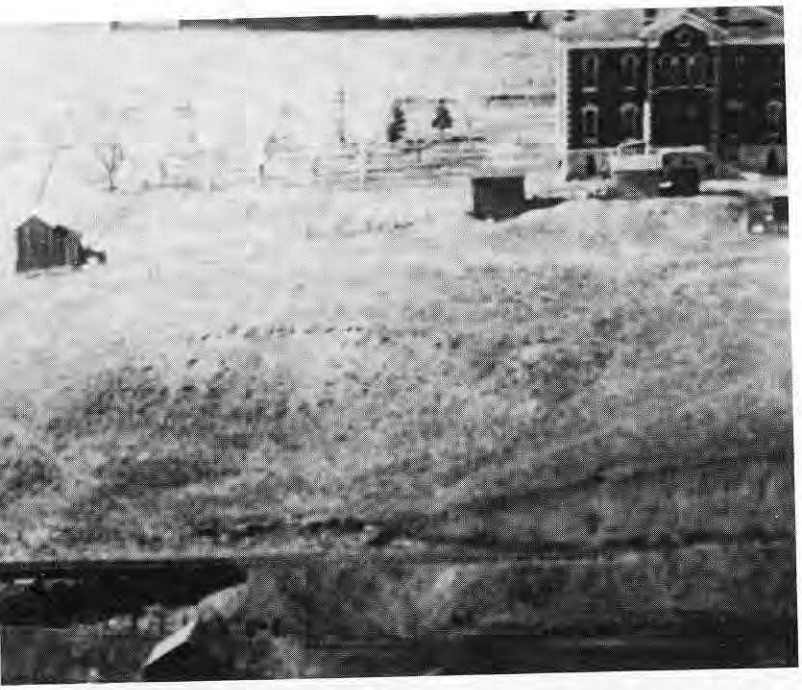
September 10, 1879

Samuel Woodruff and J. Seminole showed their business cards to Rueben Hayward of Bergen Park and asked for a ride to Denver aboard Hayward's wagon. It appeared harmless enough. Mrs. Hayward heard her husband advise the two men that he would take them as far as the valley of Mount Vernon, just south of Golden, and both men readily agreed.

Just at nightfall, William Martin of the Cold Springs Ranch (near Camp George West) saw a wagon pull up and a man asked him where the road to Denver was located. It was growing dark and Martin could not recognize the men in the wagon. A third man was not aboard.

October 7, 1879

Robert Jackson went to the culvert at Apex Junction (now known as East Tincup Village on Highway 40) to find out why the water was overflowing onto the roadway. To his horror he found a body, wrapped in oil cloth stuffed into the culvert, causing the water to back flow. Sheriff John Belcher identified the body as the missing man from Bergen Park, Reuben Hayward. Hayward's skull was badly crushed. An immediate investigation revealed the names of the two men who asked for a wagon ridge to Mount Vernon last September, and Sheriff Belcher issued arrest warrants for J. Seminole and Samuel Woodruff for the murder of the Bergen Park rancher.



Railroad trestle below the 1878 Courthouse where Seminole and Woodruff were lynched.

December 26, 1879 Thursday

J. Seminole and Samuel Woodruff were found last week in Big Grove, Iowa by Investigators from the Rocky Mountain Detective Association. Deputy Sheriff Hawley from Jefferson County served the warrants in Iowa and quickly transported the two back to Jefferson County aboard the first west bound train. At 8:15 PM today, Sheriff Belcher, Deputy Hawley, and Detective Hoyt arrived in Golden aboard the train. Deputy Sheriff Carlos Lake met the Sheriff and his prisoners at the depot. The prisoners were placed inside a carriage and driven to the Courthouse, where they were received by Undersheriff Boyd and locked away in separate cells for the night. At 10:30 PM Judge Jameson of the District Court ordered the Sheriff to bring Seminole and Woodruff to his court room for arraignment. Throngs of citizens had already gathered in the spacious courtroom and were beginning to show their anger toward the two suspected murderers. Judge Jameson, after hearing a short brief of the case by the County Attorney, Joseph Mann, ordered the pair locked up until a trial could be held in 1880.

December 28, 1879 Saturday Night

A few minutes before midnight a party of horsemen, numbering close to thirty-five, rode quietly along Washington Avenue, and suddenly split off into groups and picketted the roadways leading to the Courthouse. Then several wagons, loaded with quiet people creaked up in front of the Courthouse, and the horses were tied to the tiers in front of the Jail.

Deputy Edgar Cox was on duty in the back room of the basement of the courthouse when the door slammed open and a man placed a pistol up alongside his head and told him to stay quiet. Suddenly several other men began to pound on the iron bars with sledge hammers. The sound of the sledge hammers against the ½" bars awoke the Undersheriff, Joe Boyd, who was asleep in one of the rooms in the rear of the building. He got up, dressed, and proceeded down the corridor to the jail cells and was met with the intruders pounding open the door to the cells.

Boyd physically pushed his way through the crowd of excited men and women and reached the top of the stairs where he could look down upon the crowd. He called for quiet. Pistols were cocked and someone told him to get down. Boyd did as instructed and was led away down the hallway back into his quarters.

In a few minutes, the outer door was hammered through, and the crowd had access to the inner cells. The cell holding Samuel Woodruff was bashed open and the man was dragged out into the hallway. By this time another cell lock was broken open and the Indian, Seminole, was dragged out of his cell the same way and tied up. Seminole burst into tears. He pleaded with his captors. He called for the Undersheriff. Boyd was unable to help him.

Seminole and Woodruff were quickly ushered out the door, and the crowd guided them to the back of the courthouse, down a steep ravine to a railroad trestle owned by the Golden and South Platte Railroad. The captives stood beneath a high part in the trestle, three hundred yards from the courthouse, while men climbed to the top to secure some ropes. Samuel Woodruff requested that the vigilantes not hang him by pulling him up from the ground, but to allow him to jump from the trestle bridge. The request was granted.

The fatal noose was secured around Woodruff's neck and he was led up the embankment to the top of the trestle. Once on top the other end of the rope was tied securely to the bridge itself. As he stepped forward, on the verge of jumping, three men stepped forward and gave him a push which sent him over the edge. The rope snapped with a sharp thud.

Before Woodruff finished swinging, Seminole was led to the top of the trestle bridge and was fastened to the bridge in the same fashion as his partner. Seminole knelt down and asked for forgiveness for himself and for those about to execute him.

After closing his prayer, Seminole rose to his feet and, like Woodruff, was helped over the side. The crowd was uneasy. Most of them wanted to move away from the bridge. Someone yelled for everyone to stay thirty minutes to make sure the two men hanging from the bridge were actually dead. The time passed, the people remained, and then someone said good night and they all left.

Sheriff Belcher, himself a prisoner in his own house, did not know what was happening at the courthouse. Men with blackened faces held him at bay with pistols, until someone outside yelled "Hayward is avenged!" and the men excused themselves from the Sheriff's residence and disappeared into the night.

The bodies of Seminole and Woodruff were cut down later this morning by the Sheriff and taken to a vacant storeroom on Ford Street. At day break the coroner would close the case since none of the vigilantes could be indentified.