THE AGE OF ENLIGHTENMENT 1880-1889

January 1, 1880

Sheriff Jonas M. "Mott" Johnson took over the office of Sheriff from John Belcher, and named a Mr. Baker as his Undersheriff. Mott Johnson is the son of James M. Johnson who was the Sheriff of Jefferson County in 1863. Jonas came to Jefferson County in 1859 with his father, but in 1863, at the age of seventeen returned to Illinois to go to college. Mott joined an Illinois Infantry Regiment during the Civil War, and when his enlistment expired in 1865 he moved back to Colorado Territory to begin a cattle business with his father. In 1878 Mott was appointed as deputy to the County Clerk, Al Townsend, and served for a short time as County Assessor. Last October, Johnson soundly defeated his two opponents for the office of Sheriff, John Belcher and John Higgins.

June 6, 1881

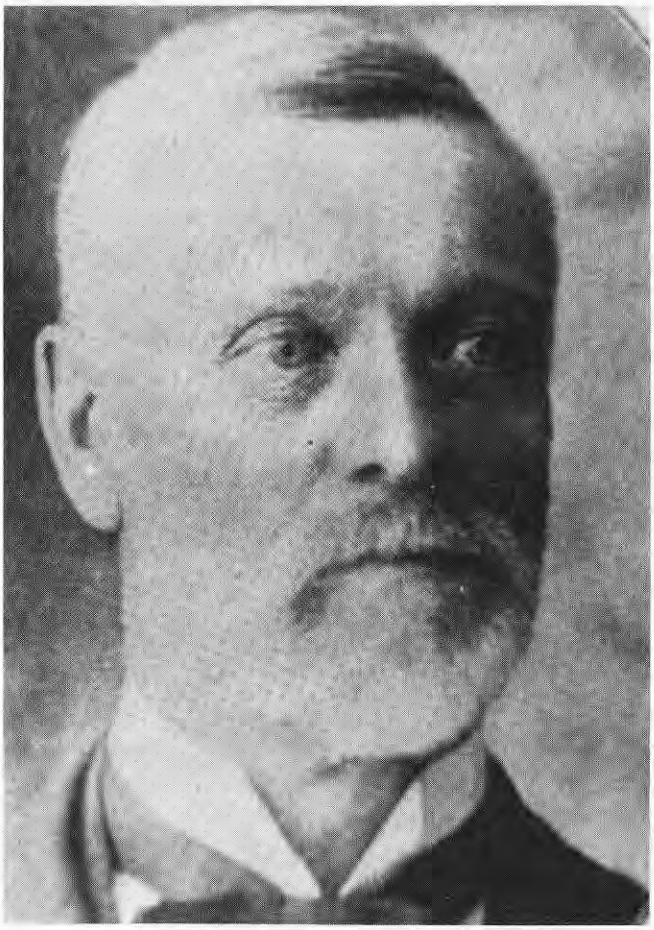
Chives Horsee decided to seek psychological revenge on his wife by performing a simulated dive off the bridge into Clear Creek. He stepped up onto the railing, looked around, noticed several astonished witnesses, and leaped to the water below. With his arms flailing and legs pumping he struck the swift and deep river with a loud smack. The witnesses peered over the railing and saw that Chives was not attempting to swim, instead, the current carried away an unconscious body and before anyone could seek help, Chives was dead, and his body was never recovered.

July 17, 1881 Sunday

A large crowd had gathered to enjoy the picnic in Morrison, sponsored by the Irish Land League. Not unlike other picnics, the people were enjoying copious amounts of spirituous liquors. James Driscoll, an employee of the Morrison Stone Quarries, drank a little too much, and around six in the evening, wandered down to Martin and Murtle's Saloon in Morrison. George Murtle was tending bar, and immediately began to scold Jim for the loud and boisterous mood he was in. Suddenly, a heated argument ensued and the bar crowd sat in awe as two men beat on one another on the floor of the saloon. Murtle knocked Driscoll away and proceeded to kick the intoxicated man in the bowels until the bar owner was pulled away by the bar crowd. The writhing and screaming Driscoll was carried to a nearby boarding house where he was made as comfortable as possible. Two days later James Driscoll would die. George Murtle left town.

August 24, 1881

John Berki and Peter Spink leased farm property from the Gregory Ranch on Bear Creek some twelve miles from Golden. They were involved in a vinegar, cider, and yeast business in Denver and raised their produce here on the banks of the small creek. Both men had agreed, even though Berki relented under pressure, to harvest a patch of cucumbers on alternate weeks.



Sheriff Al Towsend

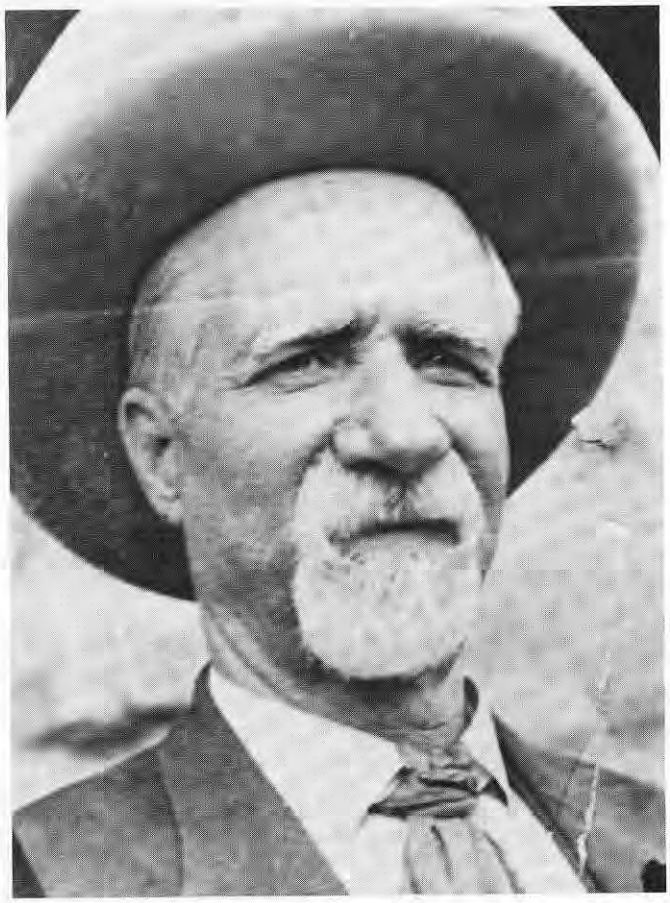
Since Berki planted the cucumbers himself, he felt that the harvesting of the vegetable should be his right, and should be done all at once. This argument has been going on now for weeks, but today Spink went to Denver to seek legal advice. When he returned, Berki did not like the outcome. Spink told Berki that he was here, now, to recover what cucumbers were rightfully his.

Both men were armed. They stood twenty yards apart in the middle of the cucumber patch. Defiant, neither man is going to move. Berki raised his gun as if to fire, but naturally Spink thought otherwise and fired his gun first. Berki was jerked around when the bullet hit him in the arm. Dazed, the wounded man turned back around, lifted his rifle to his shoulder in an attempt to return fire. Spink fired again. The bullet hit Berki square in the chest. Falling to his knees, Berki tore his shirt away. Exposing the bleeding wound he screamed, "Enough! You have killed me!"

Spink fled to Denver, but was later captured by the Denver Police. Berki recovered but the cucumber patch was never harvested.

June 14, 1882

The winter of 1881 was very wet. The Spring of 1882 was very hot. The flood waters began to roar out of the foothills filling the Platte, Bear Creek, and Clear Creek over their banks. The Golden City Jail was located just off of Washington Avenue on the south shore of Clear Creek. Today there were four prisoners inside the one room white clapboard building, and the river was rising. The City constable decided to seek help when the water from the river rose above the belt lines of the prisoners inside the jail. Sheriff Johnson was summoned and the two men thought it wise to allow the prisoners to leave the dangerous confines of the ruined city jail. However, they waited. Just long enough so the water was near chest high and the four prisoners were beginning to fear for their lives. Then they were released under the condition that they never return to the State of Colorado. All four immediately agreed to this reasonable offer and left the area in a hurry.



Sheriff John Nicholls

September 27, 1882 Tuesday

Fourteen prisoners are housed today in the Jefferson County Jail. Seven of the them are from this County, the remaining seven are here from Larimer County. One of the latter, Tiger Jim, is a young, boyish looking individual, with scars all over his body from the knife fights he has been involved in, and he holds a deep dislike for the Sheriff of Jefferson County. Last Fall, Tiger Jim had shot a man in Fort Collins and was arrested by the Larimer County Sheriff. Tiger Jim was brough to Jefferson County since Larimer County had no jail and the desperado needed to be held pending the November term of the Larimer County District Court. During his stay in this jail, Tiger Jim has been the ringleader of all the attempts to escape. Today, just after lunch, Tiger Jim decided that one way to take leave of this jail is to feign insanity. Sheriff Johnson has always been alert to Tiger Jim's tricks, and knew by the sound of murmuring and mumbling coming from the cell block that his favorite inmate was up to something. At the appointed time, Tiger Jim threw himself on the floor of his cell and went into a series of violent fits. After a short time, Sheriff Johnson grew tired of these charades and put Tiger Jim in restrictive chains.

As time passed, one of Tiger Jim's friends succeeded in breaking the shackles that bound him. Tiger Jim slipped into the hallway during an unmonitored recreation period and sought a hiding place from which to escape, but after he overpowered the Undersheriff. The Undersheriff did not return today to lock everyone down in their cells; instead Sheriff Johnson arrived in time to spoil Tiger Jim's plans once again.

Tiger Jim ran down the short hallway and ripped the stove door off its hinges and threatened Sheriff Johnson. The Sheriff lost his patience. He pulled his gun out and sternly advised the prisoner, "If you don't drop that then I will send you forthwith directly to Hell!" Tiger Jim quickly gave in. Sheriff Johnson took the liberty this time to chain Tiger Jim with several sets of chains and fasten him securely with bolts to the wall of the darkest cell.

April 22, 1885

At 6:00 PM last night, Deputy Sheriff George Cooper was on horseback in a blinding snowstorm serving civil process for the District Court. The storm had fallen with such intensity that he was forced to follow the railroad tracks back to Golden for fear of losing his way. Just east of Golden he came upon a man lying along the tracks. Cooper dismounted and turned the body over and heard a grown pass through the bluish lips of the semi-conscious man. Cooper tugged the man away from the tracks a few yards to keep him from being run over by the nine o'clock freight. He was obviously drunk, thought Cooper. The cold night air and falling snow will surely revive him. Cooper mounted his horse and headed for town.

This morning James McKenna found the body of a man lying in snow just east of Golden. As the train came by McKenna asked the conductor to seek help. Sheriff John Nichols responded a short time later with the Coroner. The unidentified man had certainly died from exposure. Throughout Golden the citizens demanded from Sheriff Nicholls an explanation regarding the neglect of duty of one of his deputies. How can a sensible man leave a poor, semi-conscious man lying all night in a blinding snow storm? Especially if the sensible man is supposed to be a law man? Well, replied Deputy Cooper to his boss, I thought he was drunk? Everyone supposed, "a poor excuse was better than no excuse."

John Nicholls had taken over the office of Sheriff in January of 1884. He was born in Wales in 1842, being the second oldest

child of a family of twenty nine children. In 1863 he immigrated to the United States and went to work as a shaft sinker in Pennsylvania. In 1873 he came to Colorado Territory and settled in Golden City on April 7th. He went into business for himself by joining up with John Hoagland (elected Sheriff of Jefferson County in 1887) to develop the local coal industry. In 1874 Nicholls was elected as night watchman for Golden City and in 1875 he was appointed as City Marshall for Golden City. In 1877 Sheriff William L. Smith appointed John Nicholls as one of his deputies and he served in that position until 1881. In 1882 John Nicholls was elected to the Jefferson County Board of Commissioners and just before his two year term had expired Nicholls put his name on the ballot for County Sheriff. On November 6, 1883 John Nicholls defeated past Sheriff Jonas M. Johnson for the office of Sheriff running on the Republican ticket.

Sheriff John Hoagland in suit with bow tie

November 8, 1887

Today the business partner of Sheriff John Nicholls, John A. Hoagland, ran for the office of Sheriff in the general election. John Nicholls had recently placed his name on the Golden ballot for city mayor, and was to win and serve in that position for two years. Hoagland was born in Bullitt County, Kentucky in 1852. Until he was nineteen years of age, John Hoagland worked in saw mill and later a cement factory when his father died. In 1873 John was the sole support for his family of four brothers and sisters and mother. In 1874 John grew ill and the Kentucky climate was deemed ill advised for his recovery, therefore, he moved his family to Golden City, Colorado Territory in June of that year. In Golden City, John Hoagland began to prosper in the coal business, and even started a shoe business with past Sheriff John Belcher in 1879. In 1878 he was elected Alderman of Golden, elected Treasurer of Golden in 1879, and re-elected Golden Treasurer in 1880. Today he was

Golden in 1890's

elected Sheriff of Jefferson County destined to serve two terms totalling four consecutive years.

Mr. Clark, a rancher in Deer Creek Canyon, has a seventeen year old daughter. He also had a ranch hand; a nineteen year old man by the name of Hollinger who is madly in love with the boss' daughter. Last week Hollinger presented Miss Clark with an engagement ring, which has been agreed upon as the wrong move to make. Yesterday morning, Mr. Clark sternly advised the two lovers that their "marriage" would never take place, which, of course, upset poor Hollinger to a point that he told his Miss Clark that he was about to commit suicide. Hollinger retired to the bunkhouse and locked himself inside. Mr. Clark watched the building all day Saturday and into the night.

Early this morning, Mr. Clark sneaked out to the bunkhouse without Hollister seeing him, and with great dexterity, nailed down the roof and the door so Hollister could not get out and kill himself. The young man was beside himself with fury when he discovered he could not leave the bunkhouse and yelled obsecnities through the wooden walls at Mr. Calrk and his wife who was lending her husband moral support.

Hollinger saw the two parents of his loved one approach the bunkhouse and suddenly his reasonableness and sanity dissolved into madness and he pulled out his revolver, stuck it through a crack in the wall, and pulled the trigger. Mrs. Clark screeched, clutched her arm and fell to the ground. Mr. Clark, who was also armed fired several return shots through the wall of the bunkhouse while he dragged his wife out of the barn yard.

At a place of safety, Mr. Clark had one of his ranch hands find the Sheriff, and then he settled down with his wounded wife to wait.

An hour later Sheriff John Hoagland began to negotiate with Hollinger, asking him to surrender. An hour later, Sheriff Hoagland took Hollinger to jail. The romance of Hollinger and Miss Clark was postponed until the next term of the District Court.