

## Climbing the Colorado Rockies in 1874

Prominent among the many illustrious personalities of Winsted's past is Clark Strong. He was a member of the family that owned the Strong Manufacturing Co. located where SCASCO's headquarters is now located. He was an educator by profession, and was a Civil War veteran. He vacationed in the west during the summer of 1874, where, on July 29, he wrote a letter to his minister, back in Winsted. I find this a quite interesting letter, as it was written two years before Colorado achieved statehood, when there were boom times in the mining of silver and gold. The first settlement by Americans was in 1858, after the discovery of gold near Pikes Peak. Sixteen years later, when Mr. Strong paid his visit, he makes the observation that if easterners had a desire to see the pristine wonders of the backbone of the continent, they had better hurry up, as changes were taking place at a rapid rate. The locale of this letter is near Grays Peak, located about 50 miles or so west of Denver and about 10 miles southeast of the Eisenhower Tunnel on I-70, and directly on the Continental Divide.

"On a pleasant, cool sunny morning last week three ponies were standing saddled and bridled at the door of our 'cloth house' (tent) while we were finishing our griddle cakes and hash. This done and we were mounted, galloping away in the direction of Georgetown and Grays Peak. Mrs. Strong was on a black pony, our young friend Wallace White, who lives with us, was on his buckskin pony and I was on a milk white steed from the livery.

These animals were sound and true and well trained to climbing steeps such as were now before them.

This being the rainy season here, we had no dust. On we went, winding our way up Clear Creek Canyon, every half mile giving us new scenery; but only a variation of cliffs and mountains, towering from 1,000 to 2,000 feet above us on either hand, and tiny streams babbling down the mountain side. On these mt. sides we occasionally see spots – sometimes lower, but often halfway up to the summit. These in the distance resemble woodchuck's holes, but on a near approach prove to be mines out of which are daily taken ore. The outside appearance of a mine is very meager compared with the values that are handed up from below. Many of these holes have produced nothing, having been sunk only to a moderate depth by men without means, and finding none of the precious metals, abandon them. In many instances these abandoned mines, which are quite numerous, are monuments of sore disappointment and money lost

These mts. are very rocky and sparsely covered with pines of moderate growth whose trunks seldom excel 12 inches in diameter. Sometimes the rocks are so compact that no trees can grow among them.

After going about 4 miles from Idaho Springs, the road following closely to Clear Creek, the canyon spreads out from 200 to 300 feet to as many rods [330 to 495 feet], continuing thus for one half mile. On a wide board we saw in large painted letters 'Townsville Ranch', and this aided us to discern beyond a few small patches of crops embracing wheat, potatoes and grass. This amount of farming land in Clear Creek Canyon is, for 30 miles around, a rare sight.

This being the rainy season, we were watching the clouds, and as they were threatening, we hurried on. While thick clouds were dashing against mt. tops, we were afraid they would dash against us in the canyon below.

At 12:30 we were at the Bactere House. Fourteen miles of horseback riding was a good appetizer for dinner. Our introduction to the dining room led us to believe that this hotel would do credit to any town in the country. There was no lack of style with very luxuriant tables and attentive waiters. The people we met there, many of them tourists, were as genteel in appearance as we see in any part of the country and showed cordiality to strangers, which we could not fail to notice. They charge \$6.00 per day for transient guests, and \$15.00 per week for regular boarders. They pay their cook \$100.00 per month and their table girls \$35.00.

Most of the talk was confined to mountain travel, scenery and mining. Parties of tourists are seen after dinner, starting out for a trip of 9 miles to the Snowy Range, or 15 miles to Grays Peak, or 8 miles to Chicago Lakes, or two and a half miles to Green Lakes and to other resorts of less importance.

The winding road, following up a stream, dashing down over its rocky bed, leads up an ascent of 1800 feet through a lovely pine forest to the Green Lakes. These lakes cover only 3 or 4 acres and are noted for their clear water, 50 feet in depth. At the bottom are rocks covered with a green moss, or coppery sediment, which gives the green appearance to the water, and the name to the lakes.

The mountainous shores are densely covered with beautiful fir trees such as ornament many a dooryard in more cultivated parts of the land. Within a few yards of one of these green sheets of water is a neat one-story cottage just built and not yet occupied, which is to be the dwelling place of Mr. Cashman, the owner of this attractive resort. He has added much to the plan by making an artificial lake for trout, yet one would hardly see that the naturalness of anything had been disturbed.

These lakes have very recently been stocked with trout – the proprietor aims to furnish these delicate fish for market and many of the people think his project will yield as much profit as some of the best silver mines in that vicinity.

Turning our backs upon the lakes, we go but a few rods before the opening forest discloses in the distance peak upon peak; snow clad, pine clad and rock-bound.

Georgetown is situated on South Clear Creek near the Snowy Range, at an altitude of 8,412 feet. The village covers about one square mile. On three sides – east, west and south, the mountains rise abruptly from 1500 to 2000 feet. Deep gorges isolate the south from the east and west walls; beautiful streams of pure water thread many of the streets. The future growth of the village can extend only to the north as the buildings already lie snugly at the base of the mountains in the other three sides. It is the center of the chief silver region and has a population of 3500. It has two newspapers, one weekly and one monthly; the latter devoted to mining interests, two banks, five hotels, four churches and about 50 lawyers. There are so many mines in litigation as to make the business of law quite out of proportion to other things. There are good public schools.

The chief industry here and in the surrounding country is mining. There are several mines here yielding each a net silver product worth not less than \$250,000 annually. The present monthly shipments of ore average \$80,000. Most of the ores are shipped to Swansea England for reduction and separation.”

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