

REMINISCENCES
of

GEORGE W. GRIFFIN of Canon City, Colorado

as related 2-15-1931

George W. Griffin was born in Van Wert County, Ohio, on January 2nd, 1847. His father, Benjamin Griffin, joined the gold rush to California in 1849 and remained in California something over a year. When George was ten years of age, the family moved from Ohio to Kansas where they lived for three years.

In the year 1860, the Griffin family came across the plains with ox teams along with Anson Rudd and family. This party had heard of the rich gold placer mines that had been discovered the year before in Colorado. The trip across the plains was rather uneventful. They saw thousands of Indians but they were all peaceful, or at least were so at that time. No live buffalo were seen, although many dead ones that had been shot by hunters were scattered over the plains. The first destination of the party was Denver and there they stopped for two days getting information as to which of the many placer diggings was the best. Denver was only a village at this time but full of people who could tell of the wonderful strikes being made in the different camps. California Gulch was chosen because here, so they were told by the most enthusiastic supporters of that camp, gold could be found lying right on top of the ground. The trip from Denver to California Gulch required almost a week. They stopped at Fairplay and it was there that Anson Rudd talked with a stranger who told him all about Canon City. Rudd went to Mr. Griffin, Sr. and told what he had heard about Canon City and remarked that he believed Canon was just the kind of a place they were hunting. Mr. Griffin answered that they had started west to try mining and that he was going on to California Gulch, which he did. The Griffin family arrived at California Gulch July 14, 1860. Gold had been discovered here late in the Fall of 1859, but with the snows of winter on the ground, no work could be done until the following early summer.

Mr. Griffin secured title to Claim #2, which was the second claim above the discovery claim. This claim had been worked over a little before the Griffins secured it and although it proved to be not nearly as good as some claims above and below them, they made good money from their placer mining operations on this claim. Often times when they made a clean up and washed off the bed rock of a small patch of ground, the larger pieces of gold would not wash down into the sluice, so they would go over this rock and pick up these pieces of gold just like chickens picking up grain off of a floor. Only the lower four or five feet of material above bed rock paid to wash for gold. The dirt above this pay streak would be caved in and run through the sluices as that was the only way they could get rid of it. The six to twelve inches right next to the bed rock was the richest streak. Two partners by the names of Reynolds and Wells owned Claim #6 above discovery claim and this proved to be a very rich claim. One day George Griffin and his father visited this claim. Wells asked Mr. Griffin to try panning a pan of the sand next to bed rock. Mr. Griffin remarked that it looked like it might be half gold. He shoveled in perhaps four quarts of sand,

half a pan, and on washing recovered a pint cup full of gold. Wells and Reynolds were taking out gold at the rate of about \$2000 per day, using a Georgia Rocker which was a hollowlog about twelve feet long. They spent their money as fast as they got it and the next year, Wells came to Canon and enlisted in the Union Army in order to get clothing for the winter.

When winter came on in 1860, the Griffin family came to Canon City as it was possible to placer mine during the winter months. Mrs. Griffin had known Mrs. Rudd in Kansas and they were great friends of each other. The Rudds were living in what is now the Penitentiary Park. Mr. Rudd was running a blacksmith shop at about Third or Fourth Street. The Griffin family set up their tent alongside the Rudd house. The two ladies wanted to have homes close to each other, so Rudd and Griffin each purchased two lots on River Street, Rudd owning where the new Municipal Building now stands and Griffin owning the two lots directly east. The Griffin home was built first and then the Rudd home, and this is the building in the rear of the Municipal Building. George Griffin hauled the logs for both homes. Later the log house of the Griffins was moved to Griffin Avenue, South Canon, and is now a part of the barn on the Griffin homestead.

At this time there was a sort of a bridge over the river at about First Street but it washed out in the high water of 1861. A foot bridge was put across the river and it was used in the winter but when the summer rains started, it would be taken down and stored until fall. Teams had to cross the river by fording. There were two fords, one at First Street, and the other back of the Municipal Building. When the waters were up in the summer, the people did not try to cross the river except in a boat on a cable, a sort of ferry. Mr. Griffin never remembers seeing the river as low as it was last week, the week of February 8th, 1931.

The Griffins lived in North Canon until 1864, when they moved to where George Griffin now lives at 629 Griffin Avenue, South Canon. Benjamin and Joanna Griffin, parents of George W. Griffin, had homesteaded the land south of the river where the Diamond Fire Brick plant is now located, and all the land lying between Fourth Street and Ninth Street and extending south to the South Canon ditch. They received their first title to this land, the Receivers' Receipt, on December 2nd, 1865, and later a deed from the Government. A considerable portion of this land has never passed out of the ownership of the family.

George W. Griffin secured a "Squatter's Right" to the ranch at the head of Oak Creek Canon in 1870, where he lived with his wife, Ellen N. Griffin, for many years and it was here that all but one of his six children were born. In about 1896, the family moved back to the old home on Griffin Avenue where Mr. & Mrs. Griffin still live.

George Griffin and his father followed mining for five summers, all in the neighborhood of California Gulch, which later became Leadville after the lode mines were discovered. While the men worked in California Gulch, the family lived in Fairplay. The trips back and forth were made

er Weston Pass. There was a toll gate on this road about 13 miles northwest of Buffalo Springs. On one of these trips over Weston Pass, George Griffin and his father were driving a team of oxen and were alone. They made camp at night and just as they were hitching up the next morning, they looked up the road and saw that it was full of Indians on horseback. They at first thought it was a band of friendly Utes, but they soon saw their mistake. They were Sioux Indians who usually stayed and lived on the plains and were known as the "Plains Indians". The Indians were in war paint and war dress. The old chief was riding in front of the band with his young daughter, as they learned later. The two Griffins could do nothing but wait for developments. The old chief came riding his horse in a walk right up to them. George Griffin states that while he himself was pretty nervous, he could not help but notice how intently the old chief kept his eyes fixed on his father, never taking his eyes from him. His followers, four or five hundred, were following in double file down the road. When the old chief got within a few feet of Benjamin Griffin, he jumped off his horse, ran to Mr. Griffin, threw his arms around his neck and kept yelling "Me know you, me know you". It developed that Benjamin Griffin had befriended this chief, Old Friday, or his people by some little act while on his way to California in 1849. Benjamin Griffin wore his hair in a peculiar fashion, long and in rolls back of his ears, and George Griffin thinks this is the reason the old chief recognized him so easily, even when at such a distance and after so many years.

The Indians asked the Griffins where the Utes were but they were unable to tell them, would not have done so even though they had known. The Utes were always friendly to the whites, while the tribes from the Plains were not always so. That afternoon these same Indians overtook the two Griffins and were very happy. They had surprised a camp of the Utes in the neighborhood of Granite and had taken more scalps than they had lost, consequently had great cause for rejoicing. The daughter of "Old Friday" was carrying a scalp of a squaw. The scalp was on a forked stick on which it was being carried for exhibition purposes.

While living in Fairplay and California Gulch, the Griffins became acquainted with "Father Dyer", who was well known and well liked by everyone in that section. He was a Methodist preacher and one winter carried the mail from Fairplay to California Gulch on snow shoes. He received the name then or later of "The Snow Shoe Preacher". Father Dyer spent many nights in the Griffin home.

The Ute Indians made their winter camp for many years west of Soda Point in Canon City, where the Kenly Gardens are located and to the west and north. The Utes were well behaved and aside from always wanting something to eat were always welcome. Now and then they did a little petty stealing but nothing very serious was ever held against them.

Mr. Griffin does not claim to know the exact history of the graves on the Grape Creek road known as the "Ute Burying Ground". He knows the story as told to him by Tom Tobin, an old scout who was in Canon every winter from 1860 to about 1868. Tobin was of French and Spanish descent, a rather short man about 5 feet 8 inches in height and was a very noted scout.

Tobin's story was to the effect that the Ute Indians had gone down into New Mexico and southern Colorado where they had committed depredations and then had started back to this section. This was in 1848.