

HISTORY OF DENVER

With Outlines of the Earlier History of the
Rocky Mountain Country

EDITED FOR THE DENVER TIMES

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With Many Illustrations

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and which she floated from "El Dorado Hotel." She is now far advanced in years, but the other women at Cherry creek in 1858 are dead.

Early in February—about the 7th—William McGaa, Charles Nichols, L. W. Smith, Josiah T. Hinman and an associate named Morrow received from the Kansas Territorial Legislature a "charter" to run five years, to operate a ferry across the South Platte river at the mouth of Cherry creek; Nichols having procured the "charter" upon his return to eastern Kansas. The reader will recall that for the "benefit" of John S. Smith and McGaa the ferry privilege had been recorded and reserved to them by the Auraria Town Company when that organization was effected. John Smith gave it no further attention, and it appears that these "charter"-holders did not exercise their privilege; for Thomas Warren, a Kentuckian, at that time began operating the ferry from the foot of Eleventh street which, in anticipation of such a public con-



William Denver McGaa.
(From a recent photograph.)

venience, had originally been named Ferry street. The new enterprise was a "rope ferry" contrived by stretching a heavy rope across the stream and making it securely fast at both ends to convenient trees. From the ends of a flat-boat other ropes reached to the thwart-stream one and were attached to pulleys running along on the cable. By lengthening one and shortening the other of these connecting ropes, the boat would be set at such an angle that the current impacting upon its sides, would send it across the stream. So, operating expenses were light and profits heavy. The ordinary charge for ferrying a wagon and team was one dollar, though Richardson, who was here in June, 1859, says his party paid two dollars and fifty cents. The ferry did a great business after the Clear creek gold discoveries, was far more profitable than the average mining, and called for

little of the hard labor required in the mountains, gulches and bars.

Another important "first event" came to pass in this period of Denver's development; one which afforded proof of enterprise and substantial progress, and which, because of its occurrence on the east side of Cherry creek instead of the west, was hailed as a most favorable and significant omen by the partisans of "Denver City." It was the birth of a son to Mr. and Mrs. William McGaa—the first birth at the mouth of Cherry creek aside from what may have previously happened in strictly Indian society. Hitherto published mention of this interesting event accords to it the date of March 3, 1839; but the descendants of this pioneer mother, including the principal figure in the domestic drama, say in letters to the editor of this work, that the date was March 8th.

At that time William McGaa was living in a shack or wigwam on the southeast corner of Fourteenth and Lawrence streets, where the old Methodist Episcopal church building now stands.

The mother was not an Arapahoe, as has so frequently been stated in published accounts, but a half-breed Sioux. She was a daughter of a white frontiersman named John Adams and a full-blood Ogallala Sioux mother, who later became, after the frontier fashion, the wife of Alphonse La Roque, a French trader, and is still living in South Dakota, aged eighty-eight years. They were at Cherry creek in the autumn of 1858.

Mrs. McGaa, a few years after William's death, married Joseph Brown, a Denver pioneer of 1838 and a shareholder in the Auraria Town Company. Brown is still living, at Pine Ridge Indian Agency, South Dakota. Mrs. McGaa-Brown died by drowning in the Cache-a-la-Poudre river at Laporte, Larimer county, in 1877, and is buried there. This information came from her sons, William Denver McGaa, and George R. Brown, the latter of the Rosebud Sioux Agency, South Dakota.

William Denver McGaa, Denver's first born, worked as a cow-boy in Colorado and Wyoming from the time he was old enough to ride until he was twenty-one. He then entered the government service at Pine Ridge Agency as Indian census-taker, herdsman, scout, guide, and interpreter, serving in those capacities about twelve years. In 1892 he was appointed Assistant Farmer at Pine Ridge, and taught the Sioux how to farm, and rear and care for cattle. In 1894 he became Indian Trader at Pine Ridge. He is now a prosperous stock-raiser in Pennington county, South Dakota, and has a most creditable record at Pine Ridge Agency and among the Sioux Indians. In one of his letters to us he said:

"I am now in the cattle business and have over one thousand head of cattle; and quite a herd of fine, well-bred horses. Am married and have six children; the oldest, a boy, is named after myself,

First Ferry, 1859

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