

## THOMAS JEFFERSON HAMPSON

Thomas Jefferson Hampson was a miner in the Garfield area of Chaffee County, Colorado during the 1880s and what follows are excerpts taken from some of the newspaper columns he sent from Garfield to the Editor of the *Salida Mail* of Salida, Colorado, from 1885-1889

Hampson, also known as T. J. or Jeff or Cap, was born in Cincinnati, Ohio in 1842. After serving four years in the Union Army during the Civil War, he went to Pensacola, Florida, where he became Captain of a tugboat, towing timber and ships in and around Pensacola and Mobile Bays. Later he moved to Texas, then back to Florida and back to Texas again before coming to Colorado in 1881 upon hearing of the rich silver strikes. For the next ten years he owned or worked mines up the Middle fork of the South Arkansas River and lived either at Garfield or Camp Summit, a group of cabins at the head of Middle fork where some of the miners lived. At different times he was a member of the School Board and Town Council of Garfield and also served a term as Mayor.

Remember, these are just excerpts taken from some of his columns. He signed his columns "Ajax".

**JANUARY 1885:** About 15 men are at work in Camp Summit this winter. One of the owners of the Mason mine, Cleon French, a few days since came near losing his life by being carried about 900 feet in a snowslide. He was so disabled that he cannot do any more work till spring. All parties have left camp except those who have made full provisions for the winter and the only communication with the outside world is by the use of snow shoes. However, the general routine was altered yesterday by Henry Whitehead and two other men leaving the camp for Quartz Creek to put up a plat on a claim for which Whitehead has applied for a patent. The day was very fine and the boys crossed the range, returning to camp in

safety at about 4 p.m. If some Eastern tourist had been just above camp and seen the boys coming down from Chalk Pass, they would have thought that snow shoes were quite as rapid a means of travel as a lightning express train between New York and Chicago. Today it is storming and such a trip would be impossible.

**JUNE 1885:** The long contest between Old Sol and the snow will result in a victory in favor of the former as the snow has shown the white feather and seems inclined to run, and our beautiful snow banks will soon be mingling with the Father of Waters, winding its way to the sea, and as far as we, the residents of the mountains are concerned, we would rejoice if our banks of snow would go to sea and stay there.

The nightly meeting of all the noted liars of the district that usually meet at Cummins' store on Saturday nights is still kept up but on a somewhat limited scale as a great many of the regular and enthusiastic members are at work in the hills. They have one single-handed liar who can lie a fifteen inch hole in hard rock in ten minutes corrected time.

A great many people would naturally suppose that garden vegetables could not be grown in this altitude, but could they see the many gardens that are putting out their green leaves of flourishing life, they would conclude that this was a way up place for garden truck.

The creek is rising very fast. It carried off one of Mrs. Maher's washtubs last Saturday. If any of you folks see a strange tub floating down the stream, just put it on the first up-steamer marked COD. The rainy season has set in for the summer.

**DECEMBER 1885:** At this writing a storm is raging in the mountains and the thermometer hovers close to zero. Sleds will probably be in demand now.

**Dr. McClure has had a train of thirty-three jacks brought in from Pitkin to use in packing ore from the Mason mine.**

**SEPTEMBER 1886: Berry picking and making jam and jelly seem to be the order of the day among our good housewives. Raspberries and currants were never so abundant as they are this season.**

Once more the merry rattle of the ore wagons as they pass through our streets make glad the hearts of all who are interested in mining matters. The ore now being shipped is from the Gulch mine. Hopkirk and Zilhaver are packing down the ore, having twenty jacks in their train. From Camp Summit the ore is hauled by wagon to Garfield. This camp is infested with a lot of old superannuated grannies and croakers that cackle and gossip about anything and everybody. Talk about women gossiping, may the good Lord deliver us. I never knew a gossiping man that couldn't out-gossip and out-lie more old women that you could pile up on a quarter section of land. These male gossipers belong to a class that are envious to a frightful degree.

Our county road from Garfield to Camp Summit is in a wretched condition and needs work badly and the drivers of the ore wagons use a hydraulic jack at Garfield to pull the kinks out of their backs after each trip. The so-called toll road between here and Maysville is blockaded by a landslide about a mile above Maysville and is impassable for teams. Now it does seem strange that any company such as the Monarch Toll Company can hold and control a road that they will not keep in repair themselves or allow anyone else to do so.

The Gulch Mining Co. are rushing things. Lumber for their 100 ft. building is now in camp and being packed up the mountain.

**OCTOBER 1886: A rock slide occurred near the Iron King mine and led the residents of Middle Fork to believe that a**

**Charleston earthquake was perambulating around the neighborhood. Moore and LeFever, whose cabin was in close proximity to the slide, said their prayers for the first time since the war.**

**A. H. Townsend came down to rusticate for a few days in Garfield accompanied by his old enemy rheumatism which seems to be trying to make connection between his heels and back of his neck.**

**NOVEMBER 1886: School will commence next week. Owing to the fact that the school fund is bankrupt the teacher will be paid by private subscriptions. We would be glad to know what has become of the school money due this district.**

**J. H. Zilhaver, L. J. Zilhaver and J. W. Whittington of Camp Summit returned home after a months hunt on Rifle Creek, twenty miles below Glenwood. They killed one bear and 21 deer. They had ten jacks with them and packed eight deer home. That is the kind of a hunt to go on. Garfield and Middle Fork will be supplied for the winter.**

**DECEMBER 1886: A carload of coal was taken up to Camp Summit last week and is now being packed up to the Gulch mine. A carload of provisions destined for the same point is en route and will go up to the mine this week, including 14 dressed beeves and a dozen muttons. We have no school yet. The matter of getting a teacher was left to the female portion of the community and they made a mess of the whole business as a matter of course.**

**A snowslide came down the mountain last week near the Spratley tunnel. Nobody tried to stop it.**

**APRIL 1887: A message was sent over the telephone from Garfield to the Mason mine for Cap Hampson who was at the Spratley tunnel; Charles Brooks and Judge Wells undertook the perilous feat of traveling over the immense snowbeds that**

intervened between the Mason and Spratley mines to deliver the message. Now as the snow beds are standing on edge covered with a hard and slippery crust, anyone can understand the difficult nature of the undertaking; but nothing daunted, Wells and Brooks made the attempt and were successful, although Brooks made one false step and had a close call, and had he got started down the mountain he would not have stopped until he had gone two stations the other side of eternity.

The municipal election will come off April 14 when a Mayor, Clerk and six Trustees will be elected. Our city dads last year put saloon licenses up to \$500 which would indicate that we will have to fall back on the jug system, and a number of our citizens who at the present time take astronomical observations through the bottom of a jug convince us that, saloon or no saloon, they will still enjoy spirits at comfort.

The regular spring crop of bonanza kings is coming to the surface, smiling and as confident as ever, and we sincerely hope all their expectations may be realized, but we don't think that the expectation of future wealth should swell their heads to such an extent that a washtub would be too small to fit their craniums.

The Toll road between Monarch and Maysville is getting to be an eyesore to everyone who is unfortunate to have to travel over it. It is no more a wagon road than the top of the Continental Divide and is an everlasting disgrace to the County.

Snow has all gone up Middle Fork except in spots, provided you call quarter sections spots.

**JANUARY 1888:** Two of our miners had been working on the Big Chief property last week and wishing to move down to another claim, they loaded all their household goods, tools, grub and blacksmith outfit onto a ten foot sled and started to descend the mountain, which by the way is very steep, about 45

degrees. There was a hard crust on the snow and you can imagine what time a sled with 800 pounds on it would make down such an incline. Everything being ready, the sled was pushed to the edge of the dump, Bill ahead, and Cap behind doing the pushing act. Bill gathered up the rope and with a do or die sort of a look told Cap to start the sled and he would hold her; but Bill lied about holding her, for when that sled started it meant business and started to go through without change of cars, it went like a shot out of a cannon, lifting Bill up in the air, and Cap turned a back somersault coming down on his head. The sled concluded to indulge in a little gymnastic exercise itself, and turned over with the rapidity of lightning, filling the air with drills, hammers, and canned goods that rained down for ten minutes. The damage was: Bill, a broken head and Cap had his clothes badly disarranged. As for the load, well, they will find it when the snow goes off next summer.

**FEBRUARY 1888:** Garfield has been for the past two weeks full to overflowing with stray curs from Monarch who make the night hideous with their yells and everybody is dog on mad about it. A shot gun was brought to bear on the disturbers of our peace yesterday and now several wicked barkers lay on the beach of the South Arkansas.

**MARCH 1888:** The annual farce of an election for the supposed purpose of electing city officers to serve during the coming year will take place on April 2<sup>nd</sup>. The time is opportune when we, the citizens of Garfield, should enter our solemn and united protest against the yearly slaughter of our city officials on the altar of duty. We are all aware of the fact that day after day and night after night did our faithful counselors, who only had the good of our city at heart, bring their giant intellect to bear upon the great and momentous questions that appertained only to the good of their fellow

citizens. How prompt they were to hold their regular meetings. How many days of unspeakable anguish; how many sleepless nights were lost by our noble heroes in trying to unravel the knotty questions of city government. Nothing seems to worry the poor, soul-tried members of the City Council more than the question of water works and the office of street commissioner. Among the members of our city government was a man whose reputation as a civil engineer will go thundering down the ages at a break-neck pace; you would stand aghast at the mere mention of the daring leap into the unknown depths of civil engineering and science by this wonderful man of modern engineering. To him was given the contract of laying water mains to supply the thirsty residents of Garfield with clear, sparkling water that comes rippling down our mountain side in all its virgin purity. He was assisted by a talented engineer whose suggestions were invaluable. Under their supervision, the water mains were constructed. The only objections we saw about the mains, they were not labeled so that an outsider could tell what they were to be used for. In size they were about large enough to carry the tears that might gather on the cheek of a man who was weeping over the loss of his mother-in-law. Two sections were carried off by one of our miners to be used as pipe stems in a corn-cob pipe. The result of this unexampled piece of engineering work was that all our people were forced to carry water from the river all winter. Our streets are in beautiful condition. Tin cans and rubbish of every description are scattered in reckless profusion. A pedestrian will often step on a tin can and sit down with more force than grace to view the mountain scenery. If the next City Council don't prove an improvement on the late lamented, we will let out a howl that will be heard across the range.

**APRIL 1888:** Please send by first train a Gattling gun and a coat of mail. I want a coat of mail that will fit a fellow about my size and have it bullet proof. Your valuable paper is in

**danger of losing its correspondent. I am taken to task for every letter I write to the Mail. I am accused of being personal and egotistical. All day Sunday I am forced to remain a close prisoner in the house and have to slip off early Monday morning and flee to the mountain fastness to escape the wrath of an outraged community. Visions of shot guns, hot water and broom sticks, dance before my eyes and lend wings to my flying feet. Such treatment from the dear people has a tendency to disarrange my whole system and keeps me continually bilious. It would seem that in the matter of trying to please everybody I am a decided failure. Should I remark in one of my communications that a certain beautiful and accomplished lady of this district contemplates going back east to visit wealthy relatives, all the dear creatures, old and young, would smack their lips and say: "The old darling, I know he meant me." Now, on the other hand, if I should note the fact that I saw an ugly woman with a wart on her nose going up the street, the result is the same. Everybody, with one accord, would jump to their feet and say: "Now I know that long-legged, slab-sided villain intended that for me." The masculine portion of our community are even worse than the opposite sex. If I criticize the actions of people in general and no one in particular whose transactions linger on the border line of the crooked and are prone to get into other people's truck patch, every man in the country gets right up on his ear in an instant and swears by all the Saints in the calendar that the shafts were directed at him and then they get on the warpath and want to go gunning for the author of the scurrilous article.**

**Regarding the election: Both parties indulged in that reprehensible practice of calling each other ugly names. The pet name one side had for the other was anti-deluvian old mossbacks and that Rip Van Winkle was a progressive individual when compared with the late city dads. The other side reciprocated by saying that the black and tan ticket was composed of all the drunken bummers and vags in the county**



and would have a dozen saloons running in Garfield before another year. The election passed off orderly and there was not a drink of whiskey taken during the day, yet some people call the ticket a wet ticket. It may be a wet ticket, but it was an everlasting dry election.

**MAY 1888:** The City charter and the keys to the calaboose came to light recently having been lost to the public gaze for five years. Our jail has been without a tenant for five years which fact goes to prove that we are a great law abiding community. The Council met last Saturday and transacted the usual routine of business. They found that the city was in debt to the tune of one dollar and twelve cents.

Annual school election results: T. J. Hampson, president, E. Gimlet, Secretary, Dr. F. McClure, Treasurer.

**JUNE 1888:** There are more idle men in the Monarch district than was ever known before. Every day we see the rural pilgrims passing up or down the road with a pack of blankets on their backs.

Our public school is getting along splendid. The School Directors have been notified by some meddlesome party, name unknown – that they object to the teacher playing baseball with her scholars. Now we have a list of names as long as the moral law, of people who became rich by attending to their own business. If certain people have run away with the idea that the present school board do not understand their business and can prove it, the present school board will step down and out and let the wise Solomons try their hand. They are like people who kick at a shadow.

Prospectors are now busy packing up their supplies and the days that try the souls of the patient burro have come – and big pack and little jack are the order of the day.

Broken heads seem to be an epidemic just now – at least a dozen miners have been injured during the past ten days by

having rocks drop on their heads. You can never determine the exact weight of a rock until it lets all holts go and finds a stopping place on the top of your head. T. P. Swift met with quite a serious accident in the Black Tiger mine last week. He hit a rock with a hammer, and the rock retaliated by hitting him back, cutting an ugly gash in his head. It knocked him a double somersault over a wheelbarrow. William Marshall was injured the same way on the same day and hour. Marshall now claims that it was a striking coincidence. Miners skulls are awfully hard, but rocks seem to have the edge on them.

**JULY 1888:** We are of the opinion that Providence has got the water business all wrong. We see by the papers that the crops of the valley are suffering from the want of rain and the prospects for trouble and litigation among the ranchmen are very favorable. Now up here in the mountains where we have no earthly use for rain, it comes down butt end first every day, much to the discomfort of everyone and especially to those whose business compels them to be outdoors. We wish we could swap ends with the ranchmen and let them have the rain and give us the sunshine.

The "cute" baseball club of Garfield went up to Monarch last week and wiped the earth with the Monarch club.

Politics are waxing warm up here and every Saturday night the Gimlet tabernacle is crowded with Republicans and free traders discussing the relative merits of their respective parties. How any miner or anyone in the least manner connected with mining interests can vote for the party that are doing all in their power to kill mining is incomprehensible, especially those who are interested in lead properties. Any miner that will not vote the Republican ticket this fall should be covered with free trade sugar and let the flies sting him to death.

**SEPTEMBER 1888:** Measles have become quite an epidemic in this place during the past two weeks. About ten persons have been down with them, both children and adults. It is supposed that Mrs. Ditmer's sister, Mrs. Smith, who came down from Denver recently, brought them down with her.

The new water works were completed last week and are a great improvement. Water is now brought down the entire distance from the spring in a covered box. This will prevent any such overflow as we had last spring.

**NOVEMBER 1888:** The average weather prophet is just about as unreliable in his predictions as Prof. Wiggins, whose great storms usually resulted in a dead calm. Our summer crop of weather prophets, with the assurance of a cold-blooded liar of the Eli Perkins order, informed us that by November 10, we would be buried under 6 feet of snow. They now try to crawlfish out of their predictions by saying that they had no reference to the mountainous district but referred to the great and glorious snow storm that swept over the country November 6 and buried Mr. Cleveland and his party so deep that they won't be resurrected for the next 25 years.

**ALL FOR NOW.**

**Donna Nevens**