

TOWN of McPHEE
McPHEE ROAD
MONTEZUMA COUNTY
COLORADO

HABS No. CO-36

HABS
COLO,
42-MCPHE,
1-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
NATIONAL ARCHITECTURAL and ENGINEERING RECORD
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20243

HABS
COLO,
42-MCPHE,
1-

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

"Town of McPhee, Colorado: A New Mexico Lumber Company Town" HABS No. CO-36

Location: Montezuma County, Colorado

Date of Construction: 1924-1948

Present Owner: Department of the Interior
Bureau of Reclamation
Upper Colorado Region
P.O. Box 11568
Salt Lake City, Utah 84501

Significance: The company town of McPhee, Colorado, owned and operated by the New Mexico Lumber Company, lasted from 1924-1948, serving as an important economic and cultural town of the Dolores River Valley. During the industrial town's peak of operations in 1927, it was Colorado's largest and most productive mill town, producing more than half the State's annual lumber. The town featured a lumber mill, housing for approximately 1,500 employees and the last logging railroad in Southwestern Colorado.

Historian: Lisa Mausolf, August, 1981

The whirl of machinery, the shouts of workers and other sounds associated with a prosperous lumber town no longer resound from an area five miles northwest of Dolores, Colorado. Yet from 1924 until 1948 this area was occupied by the company town of McPhee, at one time Colorado's largest and most important lumber mill town. At its peak in 1927, McPhee produced more than one half of the state's 60 million board foot production of lumber. A company town of 150 acres featuring a mill and subsidiary buildings provided housing for a community numbering as many as 1,500 people. Sixty miles of logging railroad, the last in the area, stretched its tentacles outward from this center connecting logging camps as far as 26 miles away.

The story of McPhee, however, represents only one phase in the evolution of Western lumbering. As other lumber towns before it, McPhee gained sustenance from the death of other lumber areas. Like other towns, McPhee also possessed a limited future. It was a town based on planned obsolescence, utilitarian architecture and a simplistic grid street pattern. Though intended to last only 18 years, McPhee persevered for 24 years before finally being destroyed by fire. The company town has, however, survived much longer in the minds of those who lived there.

Interest in the timber reserves of the Montezuma forest and vicinity began long before McPhee was established. As early as 1874 the first mill was established in the area.¹ Lumbering in the Montezuma area as well as throughout Colorado accelerated quickly. By 1885 it was vertically integrated, with all steps of production owned by the same individual or family. At the turn of the century Dolores could claim two of the country's largest lumberyards.² Between 1874 and 1918

seventy-two sawmills harvested 254,477 board feet in the Montezuma National Forest.³

The development of mining, the construction of townsites and the growth of railroads at the end of the 19th century resulted in unrestricted cutting of timberlands. Partially in response to these shortsighted actions, the Forest Service was created in 1905 to control timber cutting and aid in reforestation.⁴ In 1905 President Theodore Roosevelt created the Gunnison, San Juan, Cochetopa, Uncompaghre and Montezuma Reserves, totalling some 3.6 million acres. The Montezuma Forest Reserve would prove central to the McPhee operations.⁵

The town of McPhee represented the culmination of the endeavors of three lumber geniuses, each seeking to capitalize on these newly created reserves. McPhee's history reads like a roster of many of the area's most important lumbermen. The lumber firm of McPhee and McGinnity, one of the oldest in Colorado traces its origins to Charles McPhee's Denver carpenter shop established in 1869. McPhee, a Canadian lumberjack from Prince Edward Island, migrated westward in 1872 to become one of the pioneer lumbermen of Colorado and New Mexico. The firm expanded rapidly into building construction, followed by a shortlived partnership called McPhee and Keating. In 1879 John McGinnity, a bookkeeper in the McPhee office became a general partner.⁶

The origins of the town of McPhee began in 1892, when a subsidiary, the New Mexico Lumber Company was formed by McPhee, McGinnity and E. M. Biggs. Biggs was part of an equally well known lumber family from New Mexico. In 1900 Biggs began buying cutting rights to timber in the area north of Dolores while employed by New Mexico Lumber Company. His interest was more personal than company-related. In 1907 the struggle

for power over the timber peaked as McPhee learned of Bigg's activities and purchased the Denver lumber firm with which Biggs was negotiating for capital to establish mill operations. This incident resulted in the erosion of Bigg's authority in company operations. Although Biggs remained affiliated with the company until 1917, McPhee and McGinnity took charge of the Dolores region.⁸

The creation of the town of McPhee began with E. M. Bigg's acquiring holdings north and west of Dolores in 1900. McPhee and McGinnity subsequently filed on alternate sections of land, thus denying access to logging competitors by isolating sections. By 1913 the New Mexico Lumber Company obtained cutting rights in Dolores.⁹ The company completed their holdings in 1924 with a government sale of 400 million board feet of yellow pine within 55 square miles, located in the Montezuma National Forest, seven miles north of Dolores.¹⁰ The timber was overmature and needed to be cut immediately to salvage as much as possible. Unfortunately, McPhee and company did not realize that much of the timber reserves was overmature and of poor quality. Yet as timber at El Vado, New Mexico had recently been exhausted, plans were made for a new center of company operations and a new mill town.

The town of McPhee was only part of the company's expansive lumber monopoly. During its peak in 1927 McPhee and McGinnity had five lumberyards in Denver, five in San Luis Valley and five on Moffat Road with 25 branches in Colorado, Nebraska and Wyoming.¹¹ Its subsidiaries included the New Mexico Lumber Company, Sterling Lumber and Investment, and McPhee and McGinnity of Utah. The former had operations in Edith, El Vado and Chama, New Mexico and Chromo, Colorado. The equipment used at the varying locations was used again and again and moved on to the

next lumber town as timber gave out. Lumbering until this time had always been decentralized in the area and as William McPhee, grandson of Charles McPhee recently noted, "it probably always should be." Yet the owners of New Mexico Lumber Company conceived of a town based on a new and daring idea, one which would consolidate all the company's scattered holdings into one base, a town to be situated north of Dolores, Colorado.¹²

Decisions concerning the location of a mill town can be traced to the years prior to the creation of McPhee. In 1905 Biggs retained Arthur Ridgway of the Engineering Department of the Denver and Rio Grande Railroad to survey the Dolores area for timber potential. Ridgway suggested that a mill town be built either at the town of Dolores, or four miles downstream at the mouth of House Creek. He favored Dolores as it would eliminate the need for another train to transport lumber from the mill to the Rio Grande Southern Railroad.¹³ Those involved, however, rejected the idea of locating at Dolores because of local opposition. This deal failed and the town was eventually situated on the 800 acre site of the old Charlie Johnson homestead, down the river from Dolores. The site's 14 room adobe house, stables and racetrack were obliterated. All roads still in use were the original ones, dating back to the Johnsons; requiring no new roads to be added.¹⁴ In 1924 a gang of surveyors accompanied by W. W. Norseman surveyed the ground upon which the sawmill and railroad would be located.¹⁵

In planning the town of McPhee, those involved were faced with two alternatives; they could construct a small plant that would survive

indefinitely if forest reserves proved sufficient and mill production moderate, or they could build a town based on high production and short term existence.¹⁶ The New Mexico Lumber Company chose the latter scheme of planned obsolescence and rapid production. The inexpensive simple company housing and apparent lack of a professional town plan reflect this economical scheme.

The phenomenon of the company town is in many ways particularly suited to the American West where industries have had to locate in relatively isolated yet mineral rich areas. In order to attract and maintain a labor force industrial towns became essential.¹⁷ In early years employees in the West, especially mountainous mining camps, constructed their own crude shelters or lived in what was available, abandoned box cars and the like. Employers soon learned, however, that housing even of the most primitive style, helped to stabilize the labor force. By the turn of the century most employers either provided housing, capital for building or furnished the land on which homes could be constructed. Although initially catering to bachelors, employers discovered company housing for married couples promoted a more responsible and stable labor force.

Before construction of McPhee started, "the details of the plan had been worked out with all the minuteness of a blueprint."¹⁸ A company engineer in all likelihood designed the grid layout of the 150 acre town in 1924 consisting of the mill, homes of employees, lumberyards and subsidiary buildings. Surveyors, engineers, carpenters and grading crews all employed by the company were transferred to build the town and survey and grade the railroad routes. A document concerning the water

system of 1927 yields the names of two engineers of the New Mexico Lumber Company who could have contributed to the McPhee plan; Warren Cryder Rhoads and S. S. Houston.¹⁹

The town site was originally known as Ventura. It was also temporarily called Escalante. McPhee was situated on the alleged spot where in 1776 Father Escalante stopped for several weeks beside a stream he call the Dolores River. The town was given its final name after an influential visit to the site by William McPhee in 1924.

One cannot help but marvel that a mere company engineer probably designed the town of McPhee, once the largest community in Montezuma county. A main street served as a median dividing the homes from the sawmill buildings, commissary and boarding houses. Wooden sidewalks lined the side featuring the Anglo houses. No attempt was made to offset the monotony of row after row of identical employee housing. Only the railroad tracks and the section of town housing the hispanic workers interrupted the grid imposed on the land. The Mexican-American section was relegated to the outskirts of town, beyond the sawmill buildings in a crescent formation, responding to the curve of the river. The railroad effectively separated the Mexican-American section from the rest of the town.

The variety of housing in the town reflects the social hierarchy usually associated with company towns. The two largest homes belonged to the company doctor and manager. Built by the company, Dr. Speck's property contained a frame house, board-and-batten garage, two connecting sheds and a shed of frame construction. The house was one and one half stories, on a concrete foundation with a

full basement. The exterior was of shiplap construction, capped by a gable roof with projecting eaves and exposed rafters. The superintendent's house, the more elaborate of the two, was apparently designed for Thomas Orr in 1925 by a Denver architect.²⁰ The grounds included the main house, garage, dugout, barn, frame pump house and an outbuilding of concrete blocks. The two story frame house with full basement had a wood clapboard exterior. The roof was a single gable, with exposed rafters, featuring eaves supported by boxed corner brackets. The south wing had a frame rail deck on its roof. The wood frame garage was covered with shiplap siding. The pump house was also notable for its horizontal wood siding and decorative trim.²¹

The majority of the Anglo employee houses contained five rooms. A few seemed to have been slightly wider judging from historic aerial photographs. Some twenty houses were transported from the declining lumber town of El Vado, the rest were constructed on the site.²² Eleven additional homes were completed in 1925 and two rows of 3 room houses were built later.²³ The houses were simple rectangles capped by a broad gable, with front and rear porches and painted siding. In many cases the rear porch was screened for an additional sleeping area. Rent was \$10 a month and was deducted automatically from wages. Electricity was provided by the company as was running water. Sewers were connected to the superintendent's, doctor's and some of the larger homes. The rest of the town had outdoor privies.²⁴ Many bachelors resided in a rooming house, and received their meals from a nearby cookhouse.²⁵ The old Johnson house, a two story frame house was moved directly across the McPhee road and used as an overflow boarding house for mill hands and visitors.²⁵

A separate area 3/4 mile away from the Anglo community was reserved for the Mexican-American employees. This so called "Mexican town," "Chihauaha" or "Chili town" consisted of two rows of small houses of unfinished lumber, spaced at 15 feet intervals. A road ran along the south end, with paths between the house rows. The rows formed a crescent along the river bank. The houses in the hispanic section were "shot gun houses" consisting of three rooms all in a row, with doors in alignment. Some two room houses, with two doors leading to the exterior also existed. Electricity was provided to only a few of these homes while none received refrigeration or running water. Instead, kerosene lights, ice boxes, woodboxes, and outdoor faucets sufficed. Wood was available free from the company for firewood and an ice house was located near the mill pond. The houses had no foundation, wooden floors, newspapers stuffed inside the walls acted as insulation. Rent averaged about \$2 a month. In one case 13 people lived in one of these small three-room houses.²⁷

McPhee's impressive mill operations began in 1924 when R. E. Pryor moved his small sawmill onto McPhee and McGinnity timber lands and began to extract lumber and bridge timbers for the mill, sawmill and ties.²⁸ About this time crews from El Vado arrived to aid in construction. A combination of five ton chain driven trucks and eight wheel log wagons drawn by eight horses transported the heavy equipment from El Vado. The mill took an additional year and a half to complete and contained a band saw and circular saw. The mill covered a city block and featured a three-story main building with corrugated iron siding.²⁹ The three acre mill pond, used as a reserve when inclement weather prevented logging, was capable of holding one million feet of logs. There was no roundhouse, rather, the trains backed up to the mill pond. Inclined

platforms carried the lumber from the sawmill to some 4 to 6 rooms of stone that housed the dry kilns. The stone sawmill powerhouse contained two 500 horsepower steam engines and nine boilers provided the steam for machinery. In the sawmill house, all waste was converted into wood chips which were used to stoke the boilers. The plant also included a planning mill, machine shop and adjacent box factory where lumber was precut for boxes. The mill was shut down in the winter when logging became difficult. Crews then worked part-time, but the boiler operated continuously.³⁰

The McPhee mill has been credited by western historian Leroy Hafen for "revolutionizing the lumber mill business" of Colorado³¹ At its height in the mid 1920's, the sawmill was cutting 150,000 board feet/day with the dry kiln processing 80,000 board feet/day.³² In 1925, McPhee produced 27,445,360 board feet of lumber, 61% of the production of the entire state.³³ In the early 1940's after a fire destroyed the mill, smaller sawmills were built at strategic points in the logging area: at Lost Canon, Barlow Creek, Glades and Plateau. Wood was brought to the planner to be surfaced and milled. The same capacity was produced but savings occurred from not having to haul waste material to the central plant.³⁴

Lumber from McPhee was utilized for a variety of purposes and reached many destinations. Most of the wood produced at McPhee was rough-cut, finished later at the McPhee and McGinnity plant in Denver, located at Blake and 23rd Street.³⁵ The lower grades of lumber were made into railroad ties, to satisfy contract with the Denver and Rio Grande Western Railroad.⁶ This contract enabled the lumber company to

survive the Great Depression.³⁷ Lower grade woods were also precut for boxes, and shipped to fruit and vegetable producers and the Sherwin ~~Williams~~ Paint Company. Superior lumber grades were used for building construction and were also shipped to sash and door factories along the Missouri River.³⁸ The mill also received numerous Federal government contracts, including one for lumber to build local Civilian Conservation Corps Camps in 1933 and another to manufacture army locker trunk trays during world War II.³⁹

The McPhees pioneered logging railroads. Their decision to use the logging railroad in this area was a response to the type of lumber which they sought. Unlike species like cottonwoods which thrive in riverbottoms and can be cut, dumped into a river and floated, the tall Ponderosa pines require dry and well drained soil, normally found on mesas away from river bottoms. Land transportation either utilizing horses or logging railroads was, therefore, the only alternative.⁴⁰

The McPhee railroad was the last narrow gauge logging railroad in southwestern Colorado. The railroad officially came to the Dolores River Valley in 1891, in the form of the Rio Grande Southern. Due to McPhee's relative isolation, the New Mexico Lumber Company decided to link the mill town with the main line railroad as well as construct track to reach into the timberlands. The participation of a main line railroad in the operation of logging lines was unprecedented in the United States.⁴¹ Railroad construction began in 1924, using an incomplete survey commissioned for the Dolores, Paradox and Grand Junction Railroad in 1913.⁴² In 1924, a line was built westward five miles from Dolores, terminating at McPhee. Many logging lines of the region, like the

Colorado and Southwestern, as the McPhee's line was named, were formally incorporated rather than operating under the lumber company name.⁴³

As logging operations moved deeper into the timber, railroad spur lines followed. At its peak the company amassed sixty miles of railroad.⁴⁴ The New Mexico Lumber Company had five logging locomotives, one geared and four rod.⁴⁵ The rod locomotives were mostly obsolete, obtained second-hand from the Denver and Rio Grande Railroad with one from Rio Grande and Southwestern Railroad at El Vado. The Montezuma Lumber Company, which took over in 1936, decreased the trackage substantially and reduced the locomotives to two. Most of the 45 flat cars came from nearby declining operations. Second hand track was imported from Salida and Pagosa Springs. In the 1930's, the Montezuma Lumber Company purchased an 1880 duckbill coach (#311) from the Denver and Rio Grande Western Railroad to transport employees and their families to Dolores behind the regular lumber train. On Saturday nights the train transported the townspeople to Dolores for dances, movies and drinking in the gas-illuminated car with faded red plush seats.⁴⁶

The end of narrow gauge logging in southwest Colorado came in 1932 when the expense of hauling logs and lumber by rail gave way to hauling by trucks. The five miles of track between McPhee and Dolores remained, however, and continued to service McPhee residents. The scrapping of the last of this segment occurred in 1948.⁴⁷ Finally in 1950, after an intense struggle and a brief period of receivership in the 1940's the Denver and Rio Grande Southern Railroad abandoned operations in the area.⁴⁸

The logging operations at McPhee have been criticized for their continued dependence on the railroad and failure to mechanize production. Logging in Colorado, as exemplified by McPhee was marked

by the absence of mechanical loading devices used on the Pacific Coast. It represented instead a marked dedication to horse power.⁴⁹ Four horse teams, with either big wheeled rigs or eight wheeled wagons were used to haul the trees to the loading station. Instead of steam donkey engines, Colorado loggers used crosshauling, by which a team of horses dragged trees up a ramp onto log cars. Seven to ten flat cars made up a train with two locomotives used to haul from forest to mill. A third locomotive hauled the loaded cars to the unloading skids at the mill pond. It is interesting to note that most of the hay and grain for the 200-250 heavy draft horses had to be shipped in as no local ~~50-organized~~ by the sales agency could regularly meet the demand.⁵⁰

Social communities, separate from that of the company town of McPhee, sprang up as new logging camps were established. (See Appendix A for a list of company logging camps.) The sites of the camps moved every few years as logging operations ventured deeper to secure timber. The earliest, Horse Camp, was little more than a construction camp, though it did have a school. Beaver Camp in 1925 represented a more permanent encampment, with a store and post office. From then on, a small commissary was always moved along with the camp. Lawrence Sullenberger did most of the construction work and establishing of camps for the New Mexico Lumber Company.⁵¹ Small board cabins were built on skids, easily hitched to four or six horses for transportation to new sites. Tent colonies were often constructed at the camps. Entire families often moved to the hills so the head of family could earn a living. Characteristically the camp housed several hundred loggers and their families. No rent was charged in the log camps. During the winter people from the logging camps resided in McPhee.

Yet to understand company towns one must view them as much more than mere housing. Community functions were usually vested in the company. As the 1920 Bureau of Labor Statistics Bulletin focusing on company towns stated:

"where an employer goes into a new district to organize and establish a new plant he must practically build his whole community; he assumes the responsibility for the creation of a new center of social life. And not until he has established the community and demonstrated the likelihood of its permanence do secondary interests establish themselves and social control and self direction by the members of the community take shape."⁵²

In the absence of self government it was revealing to note how employees viewed the company, especially their perception of owners. Such views were understandably mixed yet in the case of McPhee, employees seem to have had a certain affection for the original owner, Mr. McPhee and a general distaste for those who followed. Paternalism was the key word; he served as a sort of fatherly figure. One observer recently noted that after Mr. McPhee passed away and the company reorganized, "the new management prevented things from running smoothly, as this new company exploited its employees as much as possible, giving them inadequate and unsanitary quarters in which to live, paying them in token money only good at the company store whose prices were exorbitant and otherwise treating them like animals rather than like human beings."⁵³ The comment, however, rings of nostalgia for the town which he described is no different than that which existed when Mr. McPhee lived. In any case, a clear affection for the original owner is apparent. Other complaints often referred to the new owners as dictators.⁵⁴

Providing a school, like many of the McPhee community functions, was a task which fell to the New Mexico Lumber Company. It was not until years later that the county accepted the McPhee school into their

jurisdiction. Originally classes were held in one of the four room houses, eventually transferring to the rooming house. A seven room schoolhouse was constructed on the west side of town in October, 1924 with company material and the men donating their labor. At its peak, 500 students attended the school in split sessions. After completing the tenth grade in McPhee, the students were transported to Dolores by the red carpeted train to complete their high school education. After the Great Depression, McPhee was forced to discontinue paying the tuition.⁵⁵

The commissary at McPhee was more than one of the largest company stores in southwestern Colorado; it functioned as a community center. The McPhee store functioned as a department of the New Mexico Lumber Company as opposed to other company towns where the commissary was owned by a subsidiary or leased by an outside party. Direct or indirect pressure exerted by the company on employees to shop there seems to have been a minimum.

The McPhee store, occupied half of the second largest building in town (besides the mill), the company office and the post office sharing the other half. A Butcher shop was located in a small extension next to the commissary and a gas station stood in front. Also inside the large frame building was a "picture show" and pool room. The commissary featured a high ceiling with a balcony and offered a variety of products including dry goods, hardware, meats and produce. What was not available at the store could be ordered from Montgomery Ward. The commissary was open to McPhee residents, logging camps, the CCC Camp as well as Dolores Valley residents and it accepted both cash and company scrip. Employees were charged cost plus 10% on all merchandise except dress shoes. At least one employee argued however that this was not true, "you were lucky if you got 40% above anyone else's price."⁵⁶

McPhee employees received 40% of their wages in company issued scrip for use at the commissary, and 60% in cash. The scrip was estimated to equal living expenses per month plus rent. The coin-shaped tin scrip was accepted by many Dolores merchants.⁵⁷ Later, coupons which could not be redeemed in Dolores came into use. The employees received coupon books in five, ten and twenty denominations; the price of the books was deducted from the employee's check.⁵⁸ During difficult times employees were allowed to borrow on their next summer's wages, and were issued credit for use in the company store. Many were thus obliged to patronize the store and unfortunately a few, no doubt, became indebted to it.⁵⁹

Area ranchers also patronized the large store, trading eggs, butter and produce at the store for scrip. Often this trade consumed a large percent of their cash flow. The scrip money allowed many area farmers to survive through financial unstable periods and shop for necessities at the commissary, especially merchandise which they could not trade for anywhere else.⁶⁰

In terms of fuel, power and public utilities McPhee was virtually self-sufficient. The company generated all of its own fuel. Two miles from Dolores-Disappointment Highway along the road to Beaver Camp, a vein of light lignite coal was developed. Twenty tons a day were mined, all of which was consumed by company operations. The coal was loaded directly from the mine into tenders of logging engines, the rest hauled for company use.⁶¹ All mill waste material and sawdust were put through two machines called hogs where it was made into chips. These chips were conveyed to boilers with surplus stored in a fuel house.

Beginning in 1925, parts of McPhee received electricity making use of generators powered by steam from the mill boilers.⁶² Lights were

extinguished each night at ten o'clock when the generator went down. The system was comparatively advanced. Many of the surrounding districts remained without electricity for some ten to fifteen more years.⁶³ Only select homes in the Mexican-American section received power.⁶⁴ McPhee is typical of many southwestern company towns where generally the better classes of homes received utilities.

A water pump was installed in 1927 to provide water for domestic and manufacturing purposes. The headgate was located on the west side of the Dolores River, two miles above McPhee. The pipe was drilled six feet into a sandbar, intending the sand to act as a filter.⁶⁵ The water was pumped to two large storage tanks in town.⁶⁶

The New Mexico Lumber Company furnished a number of important social services, including a doctor and dispensary for the employees. Married employees paid two dollars a month for the medical privilege, single employees one dollar a month. Although accidents frequently occurred at the plant, one had to miss work more than ten days before collecting compensation. Mill breakdowns lasting longer than fifteen minutes had to be made up at night on workers' time. The men at the mill apparently received no vacation.⁶⁷ The McPhee police force consisted of one deputy traiped by the county and employed by the company. There was no organized fire department in the town, in case of fire everyone pitched in with the help of the Dolores fire department. Amenities sponsored by the company included a company picnic, baseball team, tennis court and basketball court. There were apparently a few telephones in town and a good number of cars.

Religious worship in McPhee was influenced by the company. Because McPhee and McGinnity were both Roman Catholic, as were a large number of

Hispanic workers, this denomination received special attention and support from the company. In the early years a train was sent into the town by the company to take Catholic employees into Dolores for mass.⁶⁸ Work began on a Catholic Church in 1928, to be located near the school, on a hill to the west overlooking the town. A cemetery was planned and constructed on adjacent land serving all employees of the New Mexico Lumber Company. Company carpenters were released from other work to build the church with lumber also donated by the company. Two dollars a month was withheld from the wages of all Mexican-American employees for the building. Apparently this met some dispute from non-Catholic hispanic workers.⁶⁹ These funds were combined with a \$2500 donation by McPhee and a \$100 donation from the Catholic Extension Society.⁷⁰ The church was dedicated in June, 1929 and merited a half holiday for services, work resuming at one o'clock so visitors could see the plant in operation.⁷¹ It is indicative of the company's power over community affairs, the company refused the Archbishop's request that the land on which the church stood to be deeded to the diocese.

The church, measuring 30' x 84' was labelled the "largest and finest edifice of the kind in Montezuma County."⁷³ The wood frame building featured a single center bell tower extension and side wing. The roof was a single medium gable with projecting eaves and exposed rafters. The nave windows were multipaned and double hung. The interior was constructed of vertical planks to a point four feet above the floor and the horizontal planking extended to the ceiling. The planks were three inches wide with decorative grooves. A semicircular loft extended over the rear; two broad platforms atop each other formed the chancel. On Sundays the church hosted one service for all

belonged to the AFL Union of Carpenters and Joiners. The incident was sparked by the replacement of a retiring millwright by a man with reportedly little experience.⁸¹ After the millworkers struck, management shut down the mill, demanding the loggers stop working. The non-union loggers subsequently put enough pressure on the mill workers to force them out of the union. A clearcut victory for management over the labor force resulted; the union having lasted only slightly more than a year. Significantly, the strike was in no way caused by complaints concerning wages, hours or working conditions. Many employers viewed the company town as an effective type of insurance and insulation against strikes.⁸²

Despite all attempts to create a cohesive community at McPhee, the town remained a loose union of transients on their way to new lumber operations. Much of the local news in the Dolores Star related the immigration in and out of town. Many came to McPhee from neighboring lumber mills, numerous Mexican-Americans from Lumberton, Chama, Alamosa and El Vado. A group of Blacks was hired from McNary, Arizona remaining until World War II. Farmers from Oklahoma came westward pitching tent colonies. Swedes and Finns were also present, common in the logging camps. A large number of local small ranchers and farmers also sought work in the off season. There were few Indians. One of Colorado's longest lived Civilian Conservation Corp camps also located at Beaver Camp 20 miles north of Dolores between 1933 and 1945 adding yet another group of transients to the community. The CCC men sometimes shopped at the commissary and attended local dances.

worshipers, conducted in a combination of Latin, English and Spanish.⁷⁴
The church was moved to Dove Creek in 1949 where it received a stucco covering.

Other religious groups played lesser roles in the McPhee community. Many of the Mexican-Americans who migrated from El Vado brought with them a strong belief in the Penitente order. Frowned on by the Roman Catholic Church, the Penitents believed in penance such as flagellation for sins. Private services were held in households, the believers keeping a rather low profile. A Baptist minister and reverend of the Salvation Army preached at the school at times; Latter Day Saints and Seventh Day Adventists were also active in the early years.⁷⁵

Anti-papist sentiments permeated McPhee and McGinnity operations. The period around 1925 marked a peak in Ku Klux Klan activity in Colorado as well as in Montezuma County. The power of the Klan and their prejudices against Black, Catholic and Jewish persons during this period has been generally underestimated. The year 1924 marked a wave of bigotry witnessing the election of all KKK candidates in Denver. The Klan's influence reached McPhee in the form of a boycott on McPhee and McGinnity and their subsidiaries. The Dolores Star hailed the alleged efforts of the Klan to root out bootleggers, gamblers and the like and went so far as to declare in 1925 that today the best Americans are Klansmen.⁸⁰

The relative impotence of unions in McPhee reflects another aspect of the company's domination. In 1939 the first strike in the history of Montezuma County occurred in McPhee as 300 workers refused to go to work resulting in a two day shutdown of mill operations. The millworkers, following the lead of Mexican-Americans from Albuquerque, largely

During the Great Depression the plant was shut down for almost three years resulting in the exodus of nearly one-third of the workers. The lumber industry was among the hardest hit and many workers remained with no where else to go. The commissary closed, but those who chose to stay did not have to pay rent.⁸³ Some reportedly were employed on the Dolores sewer system.⁸⁴ Others left around 1940 with empty houses becoming the site for many dances.

While attempting to foster community spirit, the company continued to encourage the tacit segregation of Mexican-Americans and Anglos. It is estimated that 75% of the community was Spanish surnamed.⁸⁵ Hispanics were present in the area well before McPhee, working as shepherds and with the railroad and cattle industry. Yet it is not until the 1920's that Hispanic names appear on land patents.⁸⁶ One local resident commented that Pre-McPhee Mexicans were an "outstanding group of citizens, but many of the McPhee Mexicans (those imported from other lumber camps) were a different breed and they didn't always get along with whites or other Mexicans."⁸⁷

Little social interaction occurred between the two groups. Each ethnic group resided in distinct sections and maintained their own social center. The Anglos congregated in the schoolhouse while the Mexicans had a lodge near the river where dances were held and Spanish culture encouraged. One observer noted "when Anglos and Mexican-Americans mixed in social activities it usually resulted in open hostilities. Friendships never endured after children graduated. "Visiting was generally restricted to your own section of town though polite words were always exchanged if former friends should meet in the street."⁸⁸

The 1940's witnessed the slow and gradual demise of the McPhee operations. (see Appendix B, Chain of Ownership, Chronology). Several successive fires eroded its stability, yet each time rebuilding and rebirth occurred. In 1944, the Montezuma Lumber Company was sold and future lumbering seemed doomed as the new owners talked of using the McPhee site for an oil refinery.⁸⁹ Yet a new mill plant was installed and the town revived as a lumber center. The new owners supposedly built a fireproof building to house the mill. The mill was constructed of pipe stems from oil fields and with concrete, a tin roof and a floor of four by fours.⁹⁰

Even the fire proof construction could not delay the inevitable disassembling of McPhee begun in 1944. Most homes were sold to nearby ranchers and relocated. Houses averaged \$100-\$125! It averaged three days to move an Anglo house, two to jack it and one to move it. By 1945 only 25 families remained on ranches or in Dolores.

By 1945, the timber reserves were depleted to the point where operations were unprofitable and the main mill was dismantled, with a smaller mill sufficing.⁹² World War II further drained away many employees. Those who remained were faced with broken, hard to replace machinery.⁹³

In January, 1948 a devastating, yet in many ways merciful, fire destroyed the sawmill at McPhee. The second in a decade, the fire destroyed all mill machinery and damaged four railroad cars. Rather than rebuild the mill, a planer and dry kiln were set up. That same year, Bert Bidwell, a former Cortez resident took over the operation of the mill to clean up the remaining timber.⁹⁴ A. J. Rust reportedly operated the McPhee mill in its last days.⁹⁵ Salvagable machinery was

sold to firms operating in Mexico. Even after 1950 there were still several sawmills in the area which accounted for a large percentage of the state timber.⁹⁷ Lumbering continued sporadically in the area until 1976.⁹⁸

In 1948 Fred and Margaret Shepherd bought the barren 480 acres of land which once housed the town, including the commissary and several small buildings. Just as Charlie Johnson who originally homesteaded the land, the new owners planned to breed race horses. They lived in what was once the superintendent's house until the Bureau of Reclamation purchased the land for the McPhee Reservoir project.

A number of the McPhee structures remain in the surrounding area today reflecting various degrees of alteration. Most homes are now located in Cortez and Dolores as well as Lebanon, Dove Creek and Lewis Arriola. (See Appendix C: McPhee Buildings). J. E. Barret of Cortez reportedly bought and moved many of the houses.⁹⁹ J. D. Harris of Price, Utah was also responsible for moving an additional 110 homes.¹⁰⁰

The superintendent's house as well as Dr. Speck's house have been moved to Summitt Ridge where they are now owned by Evelyn Royce. Dr. Speck's office was moved to Cortez where it served as his office until he retired and then his son's office until 1968 when he moved to Denver.¹⁰¹

Although the company town of McPhee lasted but a short 24 years its tenure is typical of the short life span of most Western lumbering operations. McPhee's demise can hardly be credited solely to the exhaustion of timber lands in the area. Eventual bankruptcy was the result of a number of causes, not the least of which was the company's technological conservatism caught in the crux of an increasingly

modern world. McPhee and McGinnity Company was hampered by their determination to stick with railroading, even into the age of cheap motor travel eroding the economic viability of the railroad. Changes in railroad rates in the early 1930's completed the process, wiping out the advantages the railroad once enjoyed in shipping and closing out much of McPhee's market.

The initial parent company also owes its failure to reasons quite removed from those which ended the town of McPhee. McPhee and McGinnity filed bankruptcy in 1930 as an immediate result of the panic 1929 which severely shook building and lumber industries. A hard winter in 1929 further worsened matters. The company had also overinvested in government and private timber purchases which proved too sparse for profits. Likewise, the effect of a Klan boycott of mill products should not be underestimated as a contributing factor. Yet McPhee and McGinnity's operations, as well as those which followed them were all impeded by the quality of the lumber, which did not prove as good as initially assumed. Much of the timber was overmature by grading standards and was knocked down in grade to utility construction level, resulting in losses and debts for the company.¹⁰²

In short, the fate of the town of McPhee could have been predicted looking no further than 1930. The damage done to the company at this point proved irreparable for later owners. Fires, accidents, a war-time shortage of labor were only the latest in a succession of problems plaguing McPhee. Although later owners converted to trucks, increasing the number of mills in the forests, they could not alter the inevitable and anticipated eventual demise of the remarkable McPhee Company

FOOTNOTES

¹ "History of the Region of the Montezuma National Forest and Vicinity," 1923 Unpublished Manuscript, Dolores Archaeological Program (D.A.P. files,) Cortez, Colorado.

² One of these was A. A. Rust Sawmill producing 50,000 ft/day. See Harry Pyle, Dolores: The Gateway to Montezuma Valley. (1906) Bulletin #4, in clippings file, Western History Department, Denver Public Library.

³ "History of the Region of the Montezuma National Forest and Vicinity." D.A.P. files unpublished manuscript, undated.

⁴ Historical Encyclopedia of Colorado, Thomas S. Chamblin, ed. (Denver, Colorado Historical Association, 1975. p. 295.)

⁵ Paul O'Rourke, Frontier In Transition: A History of Southwestern Colorado, (Denver: Colorado State Office, Bureau of Land Management, 1980), pp. 126-27.

⁶ William Vickers, History of the City of Denver, Arapahoe County and Colorado. (Chicago: O. L. Baskin & Company, 1880)

⁷ Gordon Chappell, Logging Along the Denver and Rio Grande, (Golden, Colorado: Colorado Railroad Museum, 1971), p. 41.

⁸ Bigg's son was general manager of McPhee in the 1940's. See O'Rourke, Frontier in Transition, p. 129.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ "McPhee has one of the Middle West's Biggest Sawmills." See Rocky Mountain News, 18 April 1927, p. 9.

¹² William McPhee to John Bloom, 13 March 1981, (D.A.P. files).

¹³ Chappell, Logging Along the Denver & Rio Grande, p. 141.

¹⁴ John Porter Bloom, "Historic Studies" (D.A.B. Files), p. 123.

¹⁵ Dolores Star, 13 August 1926.

¹⁶ Dolores Star, 13 August 1926.

¹⁷ Chappell, Logging Along the Denver & Rio Grande, p. 186. Chappell cites the following company towns: Arloa, Azotea, Brazos, Edith, El Vado, Glencoe, Luberton, McPhee, Pagosa Junction, S. Pagosa, Willow Creek.

- 18 Dolores Star, 13 August 1926.
- 19 Plat Book #4, p. 52. Montezuma County Clerk Office, Cortez, Colorado.
- 20 "Letter to Editor" by Robert Orr, Cortez Sentinel, 23 June 1980.
- 21 Unpublished material, (D.A.P. files)
- 22 Chappell, Logging Along the Denver & Rio Grande, p. 154.
- 23 Interview with Art Hamilton, Dolores, Colorado, 28 July 1981.
- 24 Interview with Adrian White, by Linda Dishman, Lebanon, Colorado, 15 July 1981.
- 25 Dolores Star, 11 April 1924.
- 26 Robert Orr, son of first superintendent, McPhee, Colorado, to Deb Duranceau, 24 July 1979, (D.A.P. files).
- 27 Interview with Lobato by Michael Sampson, Cortez, Colorado, 26 July 1979.
- 28 Chappell, Logging Along the Denver & Rio Grande p. 146.
- 29 Montezuma Valley Journal, 26 February 1959.
- 30 Interview with Art and Bill Hamilton, Dolores, Colorado, 28 July 1981.
- 31 James H. Baker and Leroy R. Hafen, History of Colorado, 4 Vols. (Denver, Colorado Tinderman Co., 1927) 2:746.
- 32 Montezuma Valley Journal, 26 February 1949.
- 33 Dolores Renze, "A Brief Study of Lumber Industry in Colorado 1858-1948," (A University of Denver course paper, 1949.)
- 34 Dolores Star, 24 July 1942.
- 35 Rocky Mountain News, 8 August 1927, p. 14.
- 36 Sylvia McClellan, Timber: The Story of McPhee, (Dolores, Colorado: Dolores Star, 1970) P. 18.
- 37 Chappell, Logging Along the Denver & Rio Grande, p. 163.
- 38 Ibid, p. 155
- 39 Dolores Renze, "A Brief Study of Lumber Industry in Colorado, 1858-1948."
- 40 William McPhee to John Bloom, 13 March 1981, (D.A.P. files.)

⁴¹ Chappell, Logging Along the Denver & Rio Grande, p. 6.

⁴² Mallory Hope Ferrell, Silver San Juan (Boulder, Colorado: Pruett Publishing Co., 1973), 394.

⁴³ Chappell, Logging Along the Denver & Rio Grande, p. 6.

⁴⁴ Josie Crum, The Rio Grande Southern Story (Durango: Colorado Railroadians, 1947).

⁴⁵ Kramer Adams, Logging Railroads of the West, (Seattle: Superior Publishing Co., 1961).

⁴⁶ Ferrell, Silver San Juan, p. 395.

⁴⁷ Chappell, Logging Along the Denver & Rio Grande, p. 57.

⁴⁸ See Robert Ormes, Railroads and the Rockies (Denver, Colorado: Sage Books, 1963), p. 335. Remnants of the McPhee railroad are still visible today. According to Robert Ormes, "The present highway downriver from Dolores follows the line of this railroad on most part where it climbs to the sage brush mesa. The railroad grade becomes visible to anyone climbing the rest of the way up the mesa from the road's highest point."

⁴⁹ Chappell, Logging Along the Denver & Rio Grande, p. 6.

⁵⁰ Dolores Star, 13 August 1926.

⁵¹ Dolores Star, , 4 October 1928.

⁵² U. S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Housing by Employers in the United States, Federal Survey of Company Houses in 1920, by Leifer Magnuson, Washington D. C.: Government Printing Office 1920

⁵³ Rev. Reginald James, "St. Rita's Church: Mancos and Missions," 10 May 1945, (D.A.P. records.)

⁵⁴ Interview with Chris Gomez, Cortez Public Library, Local History Seminar, 1974.

⁵⁵ Interview John and Maurice Ritter, Mancos, Colorado, 8 September 1980.

⁵⁶ Interview with Chris Gomez.

⁵⁷ Tom Martin in Dolores has some of the McPhee tin money in \$1.00, \$.50, \$.25, \$.10 denominations. He said that \$.01 pieces were not made as the scrip cost more than a penny. Interview with Tom Martin, Dolores, Colorado, 17 August 1981.

58 Interview with Charley Artz by Newel Periman, 1979, (D.A.P. files.)

59 McClellan, Timber: the Story of McPhee, p. 33. The State of Colorado was notable among states for passing a law which forbade the use of a "truck system" in the payment of wages. According to this law an employee could not be required to waive payment of his wages in hard currency and take the whole or any part in merchandise. See, "Legislation Relating to Payment of Wages in Scrip," Monthly Labor Review, (July 1936): 75.

60 Interview with Ina & Jim Cline, Dunton, Colorado, 22 July 1981.

61 Dolores Star, 13 August 1926.

62 Dolores Star, 5 December 1924.

63 McClelland Timber: The Story of McPhee, p. 10.

64 Interview with Chris Brubaker, Cortez, Colorado, 13 July 1981.

65 Plat Book #4, p.52.

66 Interview with Artz Periman, 1979, (D.A.P. files.)

67 Interview with Art & Bill Hamilton, July 1981 (D.A.P. files.)

68 Interview with Gomez.

69 Ibid.

70 Brunner, "History of Catholic Church."

71 Dolores Star, 7 June 1929.

72 "Unpublished material," D.A.P. files.

73 Dolores Star, 7 June 1929.

74 Interview with Lucero, 1981.

75 Dolores Star, 1924-28.

76 Catholic Register, 16 September 1926.

77 Catholic Register, 25 June 1923.

78 Catholic Register, 30 July 1925.

- 79 Chappell, Logging Along the Denver & Rio Grande, p. 162.
- 80 Dolores Star, 22 May 1925.
- 81 McClellan, Timber: The Story of McPhee, p. 25.
- 82 Dolores Star, 14 July 1939.
- 83 Interview with Lucero, July 1981.
- 84 Cortez Journal Herald, 7 August 1930.
- 85 Adrian White, "Unpublished Notes," (D.A.P. files.)
- 86 Bloom, p. 117
- 87 Interview with Ritter, 1980.
- 88 Cynthia Kenoyer "Old Timers Still Remember McPhee as the Largest Town in Montezuma-Dolores Area," 3 April 1980, (D.A.P. files.)
- 89 Dolores Star, 3 March 1944.
- 90 Interview with Artz, 1979.
- 91 Reverend Bruner, "History of Catholic Church."
- 92 Montezuma Valley Journal, p. 26 February 1959.
- 93 Rev. Bruner, "History of Catholic Church".
- 94 Montezuma Valley Journal, 26 February 1959.
- 95 Ormes, Railroads & the Rockies, p. 335.
- 96 Dolores Star, 3 March 1934.
- 97 Historical Encyclopedia of Colorado, p. 286.
- 98 Steven G. Baker and Duane A. Smith, Dolores Archaeological Program Historic Studies - 1978 Research Design, Inventory & Evaluation, (Salt Lake City: Bureau of Reclamation, 1979), p. 286.
- 99 Dolores Star, 3 March 1944.
- 100 Interview with John Turner by Michael Sampson, 16 October 1979, (D.A.P. files.)
- 101 McClellan, p. 115.
- 102 Interview with Gomez.

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William McPhee to John Bloom, 1981, Bureau of Reclamation, Dolores
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APPENDIX A: LOGGING CAMPS

1924 Horse Camp, 9 miles above Dolores on road to Norwood, construction camp

1925 Beaver Creek, 9 miles north, 25 miles north of Dolores

1927 Langston's Camp, 2.5 miles north

1927 Long Draw, 2.5 miles north, 20 miles north Dolores

1928 Calf Creek, 6 miles west, 26 miles from McPhee

1929 Timber Spur, above Rico, spruce timber

1929 Others moved to Salters Canon, 19 miles north of McPhee

1933 Dry Canon

1940 Lost Canon, Glades

(1940's-smaller mills at Lost Canon, Timber Spur, Barlow Creek, Glades, Plateau)

APPENDIX B: CHAIN OF OWNERSHIP

- 1924 New Mexico Lumber Company, subsidiary of McPhee and McGinnity
- 1927 John Zalaha purchased private interest of William McPhee, became general manager
- 1929 Zalaha purchases remaining New Mexico Lumber stock from McPhee and McGinnity
- 1929 Zalaha and Associates default on payments after stock market crash, company reverts back to McPhee and McGinnity
- 1930 McPhee and McGinnity bankrupt, plant closed
- 1931 Receivership by Interantional Trust Company, New Mexico Lumber insolvent, mill equipment and property for sale
- 1934 Plant reopens, expected to stay open for 3 months
- 1934 New firm New Mexico Lumber and Manufacturing Company reopens plant in August
- 1934 September, fire destroys dry kiln
- 1935 New Mexico Lumber and Manufacturing fails after fire
- 1935 Montezuma Lumber Company formed by Thomas Orr and Associates of Biggs-Kurtz, Grand Junction, Colorado
- 1940 Mill and entire complex destroyed by fire, dry kiln and planer saved
- 1942 Machine shop fire
- 1943 Sawmill at Glades burned
- 1944 Operations sold to partnership headed by Lewis Mack of Moab, Utah Mill not rebuilt, smaller one set up to keep planing, finish contracts. Removal of machinery begun
- 1948 January 19, plant totally destroyed

APPENDIX C: MCPHEE BUILDINGS

Cortez

Superintendent's House, Dr. Speck's house-Summitt Ridge

301 S. Ash St.

603 S. Ash St.

611 S. Ash St.

25-29 Elm St.

W. First St. (Next to Mountain Bell)

247 S. Linden St.

Dolores

3 houses on 17th Street

Dove Creek

Church and rectory

Lebanon

Unidentified residences

Lewis Arriola

School house remnants (Wayne Dennison)

Unidentified residences