

[Early Days in Albuquerque]

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EARLY DAYS IN ALBUQUERQUE

In 1886 Franz and Charles Huning opened a store in Old Albuquerque, with a general stock of everything from drugs to furniture and clothing. Difficulties entailed in hauling the goods west from Kansas City and St. Louis made for limited stocks of merchandise, especially furniture which is bulky and more easily broken en-transit. Some indication of the furniture shortage is found in the remarks of Mrs. Pauline Meyer, who arrived in Old Town in 1875.

Speaking of the event Mrs. Meyer said: "We came by train from San Francisco to Pueblo, colorado, then the rest of the way by covered wagon. Coming down from Pueblo to Albuquerque we were most fearful of Indian attack. No fires were built and we had to make out best we could for several days until we got out of the danger zone and into New Mexico. [?????]

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“There were very few white women in the little village that was the Albuquerque of 1875. There were only the flat-roofed adobe—we called them ‘mud’—houses, for no other types of house were built here at that time.

“Mr. Franz Huning found a house for us. It was part of a 2 larger house—we’d call it an ‘unfurnished apartment’ now. But I was well pleased because it had a board floor. Few houses had wooden floors, and to me a mud house was bad enough—witho’ut mud-floors, too.

“Just to show the difference in travel as it is now, I remember we once drove to Bernalillo—17 miles—with a fast team and buggy. It took us four hours and now they make it in fifteen minutes in tho’sse fast cars. But anyway, the lady I called on that day was so surprised to see visitors from such a long ways off, she dropped a layer cake on the floor. She was just taking the cake from the oven as I came up to the door. Seeing me and knowing I had come ‘all the way’ from Albuquerque—well, it was such a surprise she dropped the cake from sheer excitement.”

Mr. and Mrs. Meyer later moved from Old Town to a ranch south of town. It was there that the autho’r of Ben Hur, Lew Wallace paid them a visit. Governor Wallace (Territorial Governor at that time) was on he way to visit different Indian Peublos in connection with government affairs.

“I remember it all very well,” Mrs. Meyer recalled. “My husband had just returned from a hunting trip when a government wagon with four handsom mules drew up in front of the house. It was Governor Wallace’s outfit. It was a chilly October day and as the sun went down it grew chilly enough for a fire. I was amused by the Governor’s behavior which exemplified our idea of southern gallantry. First I obtained the necessary kindling and other necessities for the fire. These I placed in position, ready for lighting. All this time Governor 3 had been watching me as I went about the task. Then, just as I started to strike a match to light the blaze, Lew Wallace took the match from my fingers.

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“Allow me,” said he with a slight bow. “No lady has yet lit a fire while I was in the room.” And with that he struck the match and set it to the paper beneath the kindling. He made quite a ceremony of the match-striking.

“After Lew Wallace had gone I reminded my husband of his ‘gallant’ act.

“Huh—” my husband scoffed jokingly. “If he was so gallant as all that, why in thunder didn't he carry in an armload of kindling for you! He sat there and let you do all the work, then he ups and strikes the match with a big-to-do, just as if he'd done something wonderful”.

“Of course I couldn't help but agree with my husband, tho'ugh of course I never let him know it.” (verbatim)

Sheep [?] Wool industry:

Albuquerque and [?] county have always held a ranking position in sheep raising. The surrounding mesas offer excellent forage, and until recent years when fences begun to cut up the pasturage, this region was a great wool center. Sheep growing had become a [?] enterprise by 1870. Wool was carted to Albuquerque from miles around. Huge sacks of wool piled high in lumbering wagons and drawn by oxen moved slowly over roads that were little more than trails. The ox-team freight trains we at times more than a half mile 4 in length. Albuquerque drew from a very extensive territory, from districts that are now known as Catron, [?], McKinley and Sandoval counties.

J. L. [?], Mariano [?], [??], Solomon [?], Frank Hubbel, and others numbered their sheep in tho'usands. And millions of pounds of wool came into Albuquerque for storage and shipment.

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Many were the tricks employed by dishonest wool-sellers. Rocks were often put into the wool sacks to increase the weight. In time it was discovered by the simple expedient of sorting the wool and feeling for hard lumps. But the sharp practise was continued with improved technique. Fine sand was used, dispersing it thro'ugh the wool to conceal it, but adding weight to the sack's contents.

In 1896 the late [??] Grant, James Wilkinson and Louis McRae established the first wool-scouring plant in the city. This plant scoured on an average more than five million pounds of wool each year. The scouring plant continued until 1912, when new metho'ds of wool-combing made it impracticable to scour at a profit. Wool can be shipped "in the grease" (unscoured, because of modern shipping facilities and speed in handling the raw product.

Other old timers in the wool business include [?] Brothers, whose firm later moved to Boston where it still exists. Rosenwald brothers, the picturesque Jack Crawford, and many others of equal renown. In its hey-day, the wool business brought much money and many big dealers to the city.

Former Flood Menace: Until recently portions of the city were 5 menaced by floods with each spring rise of the Rio Grande. Melting snow in the Colorado mountains together with spring rains cause the river to reach flood stage. High water formerly flooded all the low-lying areas in the river bottoms near the city. In early days the Rio Grande had a habit of choosing a new course almost at will. Breaking thro'ugh its banks upstream; the river often chose a new path southward, sometimes passing thro'ugh the center of the town.

In [?] 1874 such a flood occurred, and a new channel was out thro'ugh Albuquerque, supposedly about where third street is now. At another time the river—or a part of it—flowed along where the railroad tracks are now laid.

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Eastward, cloudbursts and heavy rains in the mountains often sent floods pouring down into the lower levels, bringing enormous amounts of silt and earth from higher [?] points . So that while the Rio Grande invariably carried away much top-soil, the mountain floods generally replaced it with rich loam from the mountain areas. The citizens were not surprised when, in 1885, a survey showed that the streets were some 3 inches higher than when first laid out a few years before. The mountain floods were as beneficent as the Rio's were destructive, the former more than offsetting the latter.

In later years corrective measures were taken to deepen and straighten the Rio Grande to force it to cut its own channel and cease making trouble each spring when on rampage. Storm sewers diversion canals and other means removed all danger from both the river and the freshets which come rushing down from the Sandias with each heavy rain in the highlands.