

PIONEER WAS TOUGH, BUT SAW HUMOR IN HIMSELF

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THE GAZETTE

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BY DAVE HUGHES

YOUR HUB CONTRIBUTOR

With an eye for practical protection against the marauding Plains Indians, 1862 El Paso County pioneer Sylvester Buzzard built a home into the high bank of an intermittent stream out on the plains east of Colorado City. He designed it in such a way that Indians could only approach it from one direction — not from above or behind. This was told to me by Buzzard's 87-year-old granddaughter, Louise Solberg, who still lives on Buzzard's family's land, right off Curtis Road near Falcon. Curtis road was named for Sylvester's son in law. Sylvester Buzzard was as tough and resourceful a Colorado Territorial pioneer as any of the more well known Colorado City pioneers: Bott, Beach, Howbert. His is a story of a rugged pioneer who ranched, farmed and worked from Colorado City, the Eastern Colorado plains, South Park, to Utah and Montana. He endured adventures that could have cost him his life. He was, by testimony delivered in 1923 to the El Paso County Pioneer Association, a restless man. He moved from his home in West

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Virginia, to Ohio, then to Illinois where he cast his first vote for Lincoln — then Iowa, then Missouri. Finally, with some friends and three teams of oxen, at 24 years of age, he set out across the plains for the Rockies as part of the Pikes Peak or Bust gold rush. He never struck it rich, but he stayed to try to make a go of it on the frontier. His recitation of all the challenges his party faced — where he was, as he says, a cook and roustabout — is as detailed as any I have read. He writes about crossing the plains in a covered wagon, teams breaking down, drinking alkali water (which required they stuff strips of bacon down their animal's throats) shoeing them after their hooves wore down and they couldn't walk, encountering the first Indians, and generating heat by burning buffalo chips. And an hilarious accounting of his first encounter with swarms of mosquitoes where he tried everything from bacon grease to gum camphor — nothing working. Finally he crossed the broad Platte River, by holding onto the tail of a cow, while the critter swam across. What is unusual about the reflections Sylvester wrote down in his own handwriting — with surprisingly vivid prose typed out later by others — was his often humorous self criticism even while he was trying to "make it" under incredibly hard conditions. - His memories manuscript has lain in the archives of the Pioneer's Museum for the last 75 years, known largely only to his family and one or two diligent researchers, until one of his great grand— daughters, Linda, contacted me last year at our Historical Society. I then went out onto the open plains of Eastern Colorado and interviewed (by videotape) Sylvester's 87-year-old granddaughter. Then I got a copy of his entire Memories manuscript from the Pioneer's Museum Louise Solberq Sylvester Buzzard who lets us use it, crediting them. After passing through Denver in 1862 (which he considered "seedy looking" with every other building a saloon) he quickly was disillusioned looking for gold around South Park. He worked with shovels with placer sand until his hands blistered, he got a toothache, neuralgia, and rheumatism. He never found a "paying wage." So he reverted to cooking in the only hotel in the town of Lincoln, which has completely disappeared. At night he played cards with the miners who all were "batching it" in log cabins with dirt roofs, cooking in their replace with skillets turning apjacks, and lining up in the morning to get, from the town butcher, one slice of beefsteak and suet impaled on a stick which they would carry back for breakfast. He met legendary Father Dyer, the itinerant snow- shoe preacher who would drop by, create a "church" with boards and chairs, and sit down with the gambling, drinking miners. At the end of a round he'd say, "Now boys, when this game is out, let's all go to church." Which they almost always did! He hurried to get out of the mountains before the snows came, and teamed up with Milner Brothers, struggled with the cows and oxen coming down Ute pass, trying the famed Soda Springs while he was very thirsty, which so bloated him he never tried again. His goal was the Randall and Sweet lands Ranch near Bachelor Flats southeast of today's Colorado Springs where he would help them farm. He passed through Colorado City (the first time) getting a canteen full of local whiskey rather than a meal. Which, while he was trying to drive the cows across Monument Creek, made him so drunk he had such a hangover he was sick for days. He had his first hunting I adventure with Mose Simpson, who was a good hunter. He tried to bring back antelope. His amateurish efforts trying to bring down one with his long barreled "muzzle-loading-squirrel- ri?e" showed just what a greenhorn he was. When he nally got one he dined on antelope liver that night. , You can go into our old Colorado City History Center and see in one display the same type of ri?e Buzzard describes, right down to the round shot, muzzle loader and wooden ramrod, exactly the kind of ri?e Buzzard describes. And you can see a hand-hewn oxen yoke which was actually used on a wagon heading for Colorado.

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Buzzard was in and out of Colorado City many times. He wonderfully describes dances in the early El Paso House (only hotel in town) when the married women came and all lay their "babies" on a mattress in an adjoining room, and all rushed to check on them when one squalled, holding candles to see whose baby was crying. He finally married at 46 and numerous descendents still live out on the plains he pioneered, and finally home- steaded.

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