

**History of San Juan County**  
**Chapter LVI-LVII, 1914-1917**  
By Albert R. Lyman, 1918

**CHAPTER LVI**

Sometime in 1914 a young Mexican sheep herder named Juan Chacon left Montezuma ca[n]yon to return to his home in New Mexico. He carried with him his wages, amounting to something over a hundred dollars, and he had two or three ponies, a riding saddle, packoutfit, etc. Poke's boy became familiar with the amount of these possessions through a game of cards, and was later seen following the young Mexican's trail.

When Chacon failed to arrive in due time at his home, a search was instituted, and his body was found on the Ute Reservation where he had been shot three times in the back and buried in a dry wash.

A complaint was filed, charging Poke's boy with murder, and a warrant was issued for his arrest. But that warrant seemed to be a white elephant on the hands of every man who received it, and the arrest was delayed from time to time until some unscrupulous white man told the Utes all about the business, allowing Poke and his friends to get well on their guard, and to be carried by their fevered imagination to a dangerous attitude of resistance. Still there was ample time and opportunity to accomplish the arrest with little danger if it had been done without that formality of delay and red tape which always breeds trouble.

Sometime in January of early February, 1915, Marshal Aquilla Nebeker came to San Juan with the view of serving the warrant. The enterprising traitor or traitors just mentioned, among the whites, made the Utes familiar with the Marshal's autho[r]ity and his mission, rendering the situation extremely awkward. To throw the red men off the scent, the Marshal went to Grayson, and from there directed the movements of a posse from Colorado.

It should be explained here that since the Utes never lost an appetite once aroused for revenge, it was thought unwise to make up a posse from the San Juan cattle men who had to ride the range where they were continually at the mercy of these same Utes. The posse was therefore collected from Cortez and Dolores, and was led by a man named Jingles.

Through an awkward misunderstanding, these men from Colorado, instead of going direct from Cortez to Bluff and taking the Indians by surprise, turned northward on the evening of February 20th to confer with Nebeker in Grayson. They returned that night in the face of a blizzard, reaching Bluff before dawn, but their trip up and down White Mesa had heralded their presence in the country and worked agai[n]st the perfect success of their undertaking.

What happened in the cold gray light of that February morning is told in different ways, and it is quite possible some will disagree with this version. It seems that the posse, chilled and numb, surrounded the Ute camp, and with the coming of morning, called for the surrender of Poke's boy, but the red men sent up a blood curdling yell and sprang for their guns.

Shooting became general on both sides, and the Utes made for the rocks. Chicken Jack and a squaw fell mortally wounded in the camp. The Utes cut off a number of the posse who waited with their horses in the mouth of the canyon, compelling the white men to climb the cliff to Cottonwood Bench, but their animals awaited there for many hours without food or drink before they were rescued.

From the rocks the red men poured forth a rather deadly fire, and Joseph Aikin of Dolores was struck in the head, causing instant death. It is affirmed by one who lay near at the time peeping over the hill, that this shot was fired by Poke himself.

Another shot, said to have been fired by Posy, struck Jose Cordova, one of Jingle['s] men, traversing his body from left to right just back of the heart. Cordova lay a long time in a critical condition, but finally recovered his perfect health.

Posey's gun seemed to be of a longer range than anything the white were using, a[nd] he mocked at their artillery, setting himself up as their target, and looking bac[k] between his knees in disdain at their bullets dropping in the sand safely behind him. But a Deputy-Marshall had just succeeded in getting a big gun, with which he threw up a dust squarely between the daring little Posey's feet, and Posey moved himself, target and all down a ravine in a hurry.

On to the cliff just north of Bluff, Posey's second son and another Ute found their way, occupying a position which commanded the country all around. The cut the 'phone line, leaving the rest of the world to imagine all sorts of things, an[d] certain people availed themselves of the opportunity.

The report of the fight had already reached Grayson and Monticello, and a formidable posse was quickly mustered in each place to string off over the frozen road like two detachments of cavalry. Report of these forces struck terror to the Ute band, and their only concern in getting away, was to cover their retreat as effec[tu]ally as possible.

Sometime in the early morning or early forenoon, Poke's son-in-law, Havane, and two other Utes were taken prisoners, handcuffed and removed to the amusement hall for safe keeping. When Havane attempted to leap from the window of this hall, he was shot through the bowels and died several days later. The propriety and necessity of this killing is called into question, and this account makes no attempt to justify it. Havane, for all that he appeared once in this record as a

coward, showed nothing but splendid grit while he suffered and died from that wound.

Bluff became much like a military camp, with every family boarding and bedding as many men as possible. Poke and his brother-in-law, Posey, their sons and a few kinsmen fled to the vicinity of Douglas Mesa, and the problem of following them was being worked out when word came from General Hugh L. Scott of the U. S. Army, for all proceedings against Indians in San Juan to stop, awaiting his arrival[.]

Marshal Nebeker's critics should bear in mind that he was thus deprived of redeeming a rather enviable situation. The Ute agent from Navajo Springs, who had ample time to handle the situation if he were inclined or able to do so, came to Bluff ordering Utah's Marshal to turn the whole business over to him, but Nebeker maintained his supremacy, and perhaps would have given this story quite a differe[nt] ending if the higher authority mentioned had not interferred.

While matters hung on an ugly question mark around Bluff, with armed guards on every hill, Charley Ute came to Grayson hunting his squaw and his children. In tearful apprehension he went inquiring from house to house, expressing fear that they had been killed. He showed no desire to fight, he knew the settlers were friends, and he did not question their words of kindness and assurance. And righ[t] here one of those settlers cannot refrain from saying that in spite of Poke and Posey, such men as Charley Ute will always find warm friends among the old settle[rs] of San Juan.

On receipt of General Scott's orders all plans to capture the Utes were laid on the shelf until the general himself arrived. From Bluff he went unarmed with one or two companions and a pack outfit to the Barton Range, and invited the Indians to sit a friendly conference. They hesitated at first, but later they were persuaded to sit around his fire and talk the thing over. He guaranteed them a fair trail on condition of their surrender, pointing out the folly and danger of defying the Government. They agreed to his proposition and rode back with him to Bluff.

Poke and his boy, known and notorious as Everet Hatch of Tsenegat, and Posey and his elder son went with the General and others to Salt Lake City. It deserves to be explained here that Posey's elder son took no criminal part in the fight, that he was and still is a fine young fellow. This, however, cannot be said for the younger son, who at that time was almost as snaky as his father, and still bids fair to rival him in genuine devilment.

During that trip from Bluff to Salt Lake City, the respect those four Indians showed for General Scott, and their implicit confidence in his perfect integrity, suggest[s] glorious possibilities which space forbids us to consider here. That wild men from their defiant place of security among the rocks should lay down their arms and follow this man as little boys follow their father, must place the

General beyond all question among that rare class of human beings who tame savagery and soften the hearts of violent men.

The part Scott took, and his intentions in this Indian affair, are deserving of sincere praise; but the fact that after all, Poke and Posey were turned loose again in San Juan without having been made to realize the gravity of their mistake in defying the law and authority of the land was not relished by the people, and has proved to be anything but good for the country.

Poke's boy, whose names were Tsenegat and Everet Hatch, was smeared in huge letters over the front page of many daily journals at the time, was removed to Denver to answer in a Federal Court of murdering Juan Chacon. While he awaited that trial, he was pampered and petted and photographed, he became more famous every day and is reported to have received three propositions of marriage from white women. He was visited and comforted and assured by a perfect swarm of crack-brained Indian-rights people, who left the poor ignorant fellow to infer that crim[e] would win favor and fame among the white populace.

The writer of this account was a witness at that trial, and he was thunderstruck at the way the daily papers failed to report the damaging evidence which that trial brought out, always catering to the popular howl for acquittal, and trying in every way to make the Ute appear innocent. Small notice indeed was taken of Mrs. Chacon, the sorrowing little widow, who waited there with her fatherless child to testify in the case. Every witness for the prosecution was persona-non-grata so far as the popular crowd at the court room was concerned, and they never hesitated to tell him so when they met him in the lobby, on the elevator or on the street.

It is not at all surprising that the jury, turned loose every night among that hotbed of Indian-rights cranks should become saturated and corrupted with the demand for unconditional acquittal, and render a verdict to please the cry.

Poke's boy came back to San Juan believing, from his contact with a Federal Court, that the best thing for a Ute to do to relieve the monotony of his lonesome life is to be charged with murder and take a great excursion among the white where suc[h] a charge will bring him fame and popularity, to ride on their cars, eat at their hotels and be the darling idol of their women.

This latest Indian affair, like its predecessors in San Juan served to perpetuate in the Indian minds, the belief that law does not apply to white men and red men alike, that white men cannot or dare not punish a San Juan Ute for a crime, even though white men do imprison and execute each other according to law.

If Poke and his gang live long enough, they will meet their waterloo, and though the people who know them best will rejoice that they are out of the way, the fact will remain that they could have been, and possibly would have been better men

if they had not been trained so long to believe they have a peculiar immunity from law. When they do meet the limit of someones endurance and have to pay the big price, the whole case of their misfortune should be charged up to the foolish whit[e] men and women who have been so determined all these years to foster in the Ute min[d] a wicked and dangerous falsehood.

## CHAPTER LVII

What else enters into this concluding chapter will perhaps have but small charm for present-day San Juanites, since it must deal with things which they have not yet had time to forget. Lack of interest of important dates and details which shoul[d] have appeared in this account. It is not impossible that in fifteen or twenty years some one will be trying to ascertain these facts of today, now common knowledge to everyone but written by no one, and soon to be lost in the oblivion of a forgotten past.

The call of the new San Juan, referred to in a former chapter, found ready respons[e] like the glad voice of spring in every chapter. Monticello became a city, enforcing an improved order of things to comport with its new dignity. A neat meeting house of brick, and later a Bishop's office building, were completed on the public square, and the surrounding ground was plotted and graded for trees, shrubbery and flowers. Modern dwellings replaced many of the original log homes, and new business houses were opened to handle the increased volume of trade. Population increased in the town and on the farms for miles all around.

The ditch-water which Monticello had been drinking since 1885, was condemned for all culinary use. To get something better a dozen plans were suggested, some of them tried and all of them abandoned. One of two women, fearing the dream would fail of realization completely, took the matter in their own hands and began formulating real plans. Men talk of woman's helplessness, and refer to her as "the weaker vessel," but when one of these weaker vessels gets her head set for something as good as pure water, she is far more potent than the great masculine boast of all creation. Mrs. Evelyn Adams was prominent among these women who demanded decent water to drink, and in answer to their insistent demands, an army of men tore up the streets of Monticello, and opened a long trench to a mountain spring west of town. The pipes were laid, the water system completed, and water testing a hundred percent pure was on tap in over a hundred homes.

The new voice called for an electric plant to supply light and power, and gradually loads of poles for that purpose came stringing down from the mountain, found their way to ready holes in the street, and the wires were stretched, the system completed, the power turned on, and Monticello, like a brilliant constellation, could be seen in the night from many miles away.

This county-seat is a thriving center supporting three stores, a number of restaurants, hotels and rooming houses, two barber shops, a spacious garage, three law offices, a newspaper, a number of blacksmith shops, and is anticipating the establishment of a bank. It is joined on the east and north by an extensive farming section which is rapidly filling with settlers from the eastern states.

Monticello's first Bishop, Frederic I. Jones, was succeeded in 1910 by George A. Adams. Bishop Adams was succeeded in 1912 by Joseph Henry Wood and in June 1917, the present Bishop, George J. Jarvis was installed.

It may be well to relate here that Francis A. Hammond was succeeded as President of San Juan Stake in 1901 by Platte D. Lyman, who was succeeded the following year by Walter C. Lyman. In 1909, Lemuel H. Redd, Jr., was sustained as Presiden[t] which position he still occupies.

The call of the new San Juan aroused the settlers on White Mesa assuring them the ditch water was poison, that they would all die with typhoid fever if they continued to drink it. In their first eager efforts to answer the call, they imported a well drilling outfit and pierced the stratas eleven hundred feet without finding the artesian flow which they expected. As that depth their driller lost his tools and also the fishing outfit with which he tried to recover them. The well caved in deep in the earth, bringing the movement to a standstill.

The fight for good water rested until Wayne H. Redd headed a move for a reservoir and a town system. Under his directions and with the financial backing of the White Mesa Canal Company, the undertaking was completed, furnishing good water for houses, corrals and lawns.

Following close on the heels of this achievement, and under the same management, an electric plant was installed, furnishing light and power. White Mesa's settlement could be seen in the evening twenty miles away.

Grayson also became a city, with Walter C. Lyman its first Mayor. All vagrant cows and horses were ordered off the streets, the curfew rang every evening, and sanitary conditions were made to observe a more lofty standard.

In order to receive the nucleus of a public library, Grayson traded its name for the name of Blanding, receiving as a bonus a shipment of books. Some of the people complained the misfit of the new name made corns on their pride, but the library grew steadily and has a promising outcome.

The arrival of school children in overwhelming numbers, as referred to before, resulted in the building of what seemed to be a tremendously big school house, but two or three years found it entirely too small, and after getting along for a while with temporary buildings, another shcool house, equal to the first in

capacity, is in process of construction. A huge church building, costing many thousand dollars is also being erected.

The new San Juan demanded a high school, and the majority of eligible students being in Blanding, the school was located at that place, and has been conducted there the last four years with something over forty pupils.

Blanding has a thriving bank, a grist mill, two stores, a garage, a number of workshops, and a population amounting to something less than nine hundred. It has superior peach and apple orchards, and produces grapes and berries successfully.

Blanding and its wide fields rest on the ruins of another population, whose hous[es] and reservoirs and still plain to be seen. Dishes, axes, mill-stones and other relics of these ancient dwellers prove they lived a long time where the present people are building.

Another important change of the new era was the purchase made near Monticello, of the Cunningham Ranch at the foot of LaSal Mountains; and of the Indian Creek Ranches north of Elk Mountain.

Near Cunningham ranch a company of thrifty settlers have made homes and have already erected a very creditable church building and been given a regular Ward organization with W. D. Hammond as Bishop. This new place, known as LaSal, has not been mentioned in these pages before, but it will no doubt come in for much attention in that second volume of San Juan History which is to be prepared in 1938.

Another matter not to be omitted from this concluding chapter, is the loyal response San Juan has made to Uncle Sam's call for men and money to defend the liberties of mankind. Blanding leads the contribution to the army with about forty-three men, and there is not a yellow streak nor a slacker district in the entire county. Its Council of Defense is as firm for democracy as the old Blue Mountain itself.

Nor may we in this last survey forget to speak of Bluff. Her people are still leaving, but the place is not abandoned. The object of the mission has not yet been fully realized, and Bishop Kumen Jones still holds to the place with all the invincible determination characteristic of that first company who danced on the bare rock on the banks of the Colorado, and subsisted on parched corn and hope. It would be a pleasure to record the happy outcome of the place, but that must yet be acted out for the second volume.

It is to be regretted this history is not more complete, San Juan is richly deserving of a better effort. Each chapter of this account was struck off hurriedl[y] in so many minutes, and rushed in so many minutes, and rushed off to the waiting

press before the ink had time to dry. The wonder is not that it is crude, but that it is not even more crude.

These last words are written with a feeling of sadness as for a departing friend, whose company has been a pleasant feature of the past year.

San Juan will go on, its affairs will be greater and more far-reaching than ever they have been in the past, and gradually its fertile land will promote it to a more prominent place in the world's mighty drama. But as these changes come, gradually and naturally as they will, and as our beloved County enters into the glory of its mature development, will someone be lovingly thoughtful to record conditions and changes incident to its progress, that those men and women of years to come may not lack for a knowledge of the splendid "land which the Lord their God shall give them?"

"This history, written in haste from limited notes in 1918, is not what I would write now, with more information on the subject."

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