

*“Mr. and Mrs. Buzbee who had the horse-stage from South Platte to Nighthawk, were dear old souls. And, ah, I used to have the front because I was the littlest; I’d get to sit next to Mr. Buzbee with my dad in the front seat and Mr. Buzbee gave me the tail-end of the reins as he was driving. Of course I thought I was driving the horses, you know, that was fun! But he was so good.”*

After our recent guest speaker’s presentation (*When All Else Fails, Try the Local Newspaper*, Roger Dudley, December 2018) I decided to take another look at Historic Colorado Newspapers. I thought I had gleaned everything possible about my Buzbee families, who lived in Clear Creek and Jefferson Counties. In those old newspapers I had found some wonderful “snippets” about my pioneers visiting each other in Morrison and Golden, dances, songs sung at my great-grandmother’s funeral, wedding celebrations, and school reports. I even found an advertisement for the “Hamilton & Buzbee Stage Company” featuring their fancy, expensive Concord Stagecoach (the Cadillac of those times.)

Three generations of Buzbees had lived and worked in the small towns along the Platte River, including Deckers, South Platte and Nighthawk, which my years of research had confirmed. Wait, I thought! Those mountain towns are in Douglas County, right? Why had I never thought of searching there?

I remembered reading Opal Kendall-Longino’s story, whose family lived along the South Platte and quickly returned to *Ancestors Life and Times*. (PIONEERS ALONG THE BRANCH of the SOUTH PLATTE RIVER in COLORADO.) She mentions her family, the Kendalls, but nothing about my Buzbees or related families. I soon found myself deep in the Douglas County Archives (online, late at night, of course!) and scared my poor husband half to death when I shouted out in surprise! I had found an amazing, first-person account—an oral history recording with an eighty-seven year old woman who had personally known my 2x-great-grandparents when she was a child.

In 1992, Johanna Harden (Douglas Public Library District, Technical Services) had interviewed Mrs. Dorothy Macdonald Roerig. After a delightful quote regarding her ride on the Buzbee Stage, she continued with another story about George’s death in the infamous snowstorm of 1913. But our family stories and even the clippings from the Denver Post don’t quite match Mrs. Roerig’s. George Buzbee was 76 years old, he carried the mail in the small, mountain towns of Douglas County, and got caught in the blizzard. We read that he had released his team of horses who found their way home and he took shelter in a shallow cave along the Platte River. When he was found a few days later by family members and others who searched on skis, they believed he had slipped on the icy rocks, hit his head, and subsequently died of exposure and hypothermia. However, Mrs. Roerig’s account differs:

*“But he came to a tragic end, ah, he was coming back from Deckers or West Creek in Deckers back to South Platte where they had their home and—was a terrific blizzard and a sharp corner which is quite near the river there he—ah—the team ran off the road and they tipped into the river and of course he was soaked to the skin. And in this blizzard he was trying to get home but about three quarters of a mile upriver from the town of Nighthawk, ah, was what we called Campbell’s Flat. They used to run cattle in those days. The ranchers could run cattle, and they had an open cattle shed, and ah, he managed to get that far and he thought he couldn’t make it any more and, ah, he left the stage some place and he had the two horses and he went in there. If he could of only got a half to three quarters of a mile further he could had gotten to where Keith Kendall and his mother were living. But the next morning they found him frozen to death. And that’s the tragic end to Mr. Buzbee.”*

Mrs. Buzbee moved away after her husband’s death. Shortly after, just like in Opal’s version, a wife-beating, very mean outlaw shot the proprietors of the South Platte Hotel and then set fire to it. He escaped on horseback, and was chased clear down to Cañon City by a sheriff’s posse where he was cornered, caught and killed. Whew!

I’m uncertain how often such a wonderful discovery happens to genealogists? We routinely uncover names, dates, and locations, we file our records and we ruminate on our family trees all the time. However, not only have I received the gift of a personal glimpse into my ancestor’s actions and personality - because of historic newspaper accounts I am also fairly certain I’ve found evidence that Opal’s and my families knew each other. How special is that?

Perhaps I will never know the actual story of George Buzbee’s death. But now, 106 years and five generations later, I can picture and savor my very own “dear old souls” and a stage driver who handed the tails of the reins to a little girl ... who, for eighty years ... remembered being so happy while riding on “Mr. Buzbee’s stagecoach.”