

JOHN LAWRENCE

John Lawrence, the largest sheep-raiser in Saguache county, and who is one of the men who had that county cut off from Costilla, and was prominent in the establishment of its government and its early not inappropriately be called the father of the county – was born at St. Louis, Missouri, on November 15, 1835, and is the son of Henry and Mary (Young) Lawrence, natives of Ireland who emigrated to it at St. Louis in the early days, remaining there the rest of their lives and dying during the childhood of their son. The father was a school teacher and his services in that capacity were advanced in methic. The son was thrown on his own resources at the age of eight with but little education which he obtained by short and irregular attendance at the public schools, and going to Iowa, worked on farms in th 1859. He then came to Colorado and located at Denver for a short time, having made the trying and dangerous journey over the plains driving six yoke of oxen, and consuming sixty days between Leav Denver. The party met many Indians on the way, but found them all peaceful and more disposed to help than to hurt the travelers. At Denver Mr. Lawrence took his pack on his back and started on foot Central City on a prospecting tour. There were but few people living at the place when he got there, and soon afterward he enlisted under Captain Golden to go in search of and punish the Indians who Elliott. Failing to find the Indians in nine days, the company determined to give up the chase. On the return they became somewhat scattered and Mr. Lawrence, being almost alone, went three days wi most of the tramp going and returning wild game was plentiful. After this expedition he went into Russel gulch and worked in the mines as a laborer, accepting the engagement for a short time to get a This accomplished, he moved to the ranch of Mr. Rowley to attend the stock for the proprietor, and soon afterward bought the ranch and stock and took Dudley Fletcher in as a partner in the venture. Th until the fall of 1859, then fearing heavy snows for the winter, they sold the cattle and Mr. Lawrence returned to Denver, where the receipts from the sale were divided, and passed the winter freighting Central City. The winter was severe and the hardships of this business were many and difficult to bear. He was obliged to camp out every night and he often suffered severely from the cold. In the near between the two cities, which he sold for horses, wagons and some cash after improving it to some extent. With the outfit thus purchased he went to Omaha and got a load of freight which he brought to profit. The excitement over the discovery of gold at Baker's Diggings (where Silverton, Colorado, now is) impelled him to go there, but he first formed a company which he took to the place as passeng day, 1860, at Fort Garland in the San Luis valley. Here he sold one team of horses to get more money and moved on to Conejos, reaching that place in January, 1861. Snow had fallen to such an extent th obliged to winter there and get on to the diggings in the spring. They reached the site of the present town of Silverton, where the diggings were located on April 4th, and the men went to prospecting w guard at the camp. They were unsuccessful in their undertaking, and it was then agreed that all who wished might leave the place, and Mr. Lawrence returned to Denver in June. With a new stock of prc Ballsinger, John Wright and a Mr. Cunan went to a new camp a few days old in Georgia gulch called Buffalo Flats. There he started a store and bought some mines which proved of no value, and on Janu Denver, making the return trip on pack horses. His next jaunt was to Conejos in company with Nathan Russel and E.R. Harris, and he remained there until 1867. He and Mr. Russell were partners, and sc Conejos he was appointed county and government assistant assessor, serving two years as county assessor and five years as government assistant assessor. On March 7, 1867, he moved to Saguache, v only three or four men, but it was the seat of a new county of the same name which he had been largely instrumental in having cut off from Costilla county and organized, it having been agreed that if he a large number of men would move into the new division and help to settle it. These men arrived on June 18th and at once organized a meeting and appointed the necessary county officers, he being ag instructed to make the assessments according to his own judgment, which all agreed to abide by. He filled the office for five successive terms, although a Democrat and all the commissioners were Rep before moving up there he had gone up and located a ranch three miles west of the proposed county seat, which is now the finest ranch in the county. In the fall of 1867 he was elected to the territorial l majority received by the next highest man on the ticket. Since then he has served the county which he founded one term as assessor, two as county judge, one as county commissioner and three as inte legislature, an office he also filled while living at Conejos. In 1898 he was elected again to the legislature. In 1896 he entered into partnership with John H. Williams to carry on a hardware store and it is county, with an extensive general stock carefully selected and kept up-to-date so as to meet all the requirements of its large and growing trade. He also served as postmaster of Saguache three years in On his ranch, which he conducted twenty-two years, from 1867 to 1889, he gave his attention principally to raising sheep and became the most extensive sheep-raiser in the county. He has made consic but he put it all back on the place in improvements. He is a charter member of Olive Branch Lodge, No. 32, Ancient Free and Accepted Masons, at Saguache, which was organized in 1876, and also a me 806, Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks. Politically he is a zealous and loyal Democrat and has always taken an active part in the campaigns, voting at every election since he came into the state. B oldest continuous white settler in the San Luis valley, and one of the most influential citizens. He was married in 1895 to Miss Julia Ana, a native of New Mexico, who died on November 3, 1901. When the Indians were numerous within its bounds, but they seldom gave the settlers any trouble. In 1890 a treaty was made with them and Mr. Lawrence served as interpreter in making it. (Source: Progressive Publ 1905. Transcribed by Kim Mohler)