



*Rock Wood was the backdrop for this picture taken around 1900. Sitting left to right, John Burgman, Nettie Burgman, unknown, Sarah Duckett, unknown, the two boys standing are Harry Burgman and Fred Burgman. Photo from the Duckett family photo collection.*

## Rock Wood Lumber Camp

By Kathy Jordan

Rock Wood was a 19<sup>th</sup> century Pinion Mesa lumber camp and social center which got its unusual name from a petrified wood log used as a bench in front of its small local church.

It was situated between the Innes & Hobbs sawmill, the first such Pinion Mesa establishment, and the P.A. Rice sawmill. They were the two largest of several sawmills which dotted Pinion Mesa in the 1880s and 1890s.

Rock Wood was more than a lumber camp in its prime. It was the place where on Saturday nights John Burgman played for dances on a slab fiddle that had been made by a friend from pine cut on Pinion Mesa. The floor would be cleared of all furniture, including the stove, and folks would dance all night. According to a joke which made the rounds, sometimes the guests danced so hard some thought they would knock the floor to pieces.

It was the place where a group would take a wagon onto the mountain, fill it with snow, bring it back to the village and use the snow instead of ice to hand-churn ice cream. While some danced, others churned, everyone taking

his turn. The reward in the end – every individual got to savor the flavor with one small spoonful.

It was the place where one year two Rock Wood residents, Mrs. Burgman and Mrs. Duckett, won a prize for a 300-pound cheese when they exhibited it at the Mesa County Fair.

It was the place where, on July 4, 1885, residents celebrated with fresh fruit that had been ordered from Salt Lake City. Fresh lemonade was served - in very small glasses.

Rockwood had a mail drop, and during elections the voting precinct was at the Innes & Hobbs sawmill.

In the 1890s the Indian pasture, located about the distance of two city blocks from Rock Wood, was home to several Indian boys and girls who lived at the Teller Indian Institute in Grand Junction and worked on Pinion Mesa in the summer. Some nights the Indians would build large bonfires, and according to reports at the time “scream and yell, scaring the dickens out of the Rock Wood residents.”

There were two routes to Pinion Mesa. The most direct route would be to take either the Innes Ferry or the Gordon Ferry to cross the Grand (now Colorado) River at Main Street and then travel the Gordon Toll Road. By the other route, which was 12 to 15 miles longer, travelers had to go first to Whitewater, then cross the Gunnison River on a ferry owned by P.A. Rice and take the Old Mill Road to the top of Pinion Mesa.

The earliest saws were powered by steam engines, so any leftover scrap wood was used to fuel the fire for the boiler. Later saws were powered by Model-T engines. The trees that were milled were yellow pine and red spruce, some of which were four to five feet in diameter. Few trees that large remain on Pinion Mesa today.

Gentle work cattle, which were shod, were used instead of oxen for snaking logs to the mill and for moving the buildings from one location to another to set up a new site.

T.B. Duckett, J.C. Burgman and a Mr. Capps purchased the Innes sawmill in 1892. Alexander Seegmiller, bought the Rice sawmill in 1900. Seegmiller, Thomas Todd, who was the mayor of Grand Junction, and several partners,

started the Mesa Lumber Co., then located at South Seventh and Pitkin Avenue. The lumber company has been gone for many years.

All that is left of Rock Wood today is the petrified wood log once used as a bench, where many years ago Nettie Burgman sat and read these lyrics of a song her father, John, had written:

Round my rocky mountain homestead waved the pine trees

In the distance looms the mountain white with snow

Often times my thoughts revert to times of childhood

Where in the springtime we always go

But missing from the hill side

Without its humming sound so incomplete

I long to see the sawmill in the distance

As it stood there years ago, amid snow and sleet

Oh the moon light from tonight along East Creek

From the hills there comes the breath of mountain sage

Through the pine trees the campfires are gleaming

On the banks of East Creek far away