



Issue no. 5

Fountain Valley Historical Society Newsletter

Member of the Pikes Peak History Coalition

Fountain Valley History

A Lesson from the Past

By FVHS Member Stephen Torbit



R.B. Toothman - Christmas 1917

I come from a long line of storytellers. I grew up in Fountain and was curried and molded by family history, including stories of the old west, when my family helped settle Colorado and other western locales. Sitting with my paternal grandmother Daisy and her father, I eagerly listened to exciting and sometimes tragic events that befell them or people they knew. Family history as told by my elders lived in my imagination as I grew. I loved reading history from books, but it was not as vivid as family oral history. The stories made my ancestors and the areas they settled come alive for me.

The following narrative was born out of conversations with my children in March 2020 during the Covid 19 pandemic. They had previously heard the story of the tragic death of my Great Uncle R.B. Toothman during the Spanish Flu epidemic of 1918. With Covid 19 and the associated uncertainties, it was time to repeat the story to them and I had additional insights to share.

Although I was familiar with the impact of the Spanish Flu on my family in 1918, I had recently discovered a letter that really brought it home to me. After my mother's death in 2015 I was going through a treasure trove of family papers, photos and other memorabilia trying to organize and document our history in the Fountain Valley. I came across a letter from my Great-Uncle R.B. Toothman to his parents who lived in Fountain. This letter provided important perspective for me about the flu and the world of 1918. This letter made RB come alive for me. In his own hand, he gave me a window into Colorado in 1918 and helped me build out this narrative.

But first some background.

My Great-Grandfather Louis A. Toothman came to Fountain in the 1890s and was a key figure in the town's development. He served as the first town marshal during these rough and rowdy times. Louis was married and had four children: Coral, Daisy, R.B. and Clarissa. By 1918, Coral had finished her education and married a cowboy named Pearl Miller, Daisy was still in high school, RB was struggling with whether to continue with his schooling or to assist the nation at war and Clarrisa was in 3rd Grade. My future grandfather, Charlie Torbit and Coral's husband Pearl Miller were both fighting in World War I. (Con't pg 2)

**Fountain Valley Historical
Society and Museum**

114 N. Main Street, Fountain, CO

Open Saturdays 10 am - 3 pm, or by
appointment

www.fountainvalleyhistory.org

FVHistoricalSociety@gmail.com

719-382-7379/ 719-244-4747

Date: Dec 2025



Lessons From The Past (Con't)

R.B. (named after his grandfather Ratliffe Boone Toothman) had graduated from the 8th grade and was determined to join the Army. He was sent packing after the recruiters discovered his age (14) and he returned to Fountain. There were few adult men around because of the war and RB convinced the railroad that he was an adult and so became the Station Master for the railroad in Fountain. He had been trained in Morse Code and this served him well at the railroad. After a time, the railroad discovered his age and promptly fired him. The schools were closed and RB looked around to find work; he was hired by Western Union in Denver as a telegraph operator. Although he was only 16 at this time, RB moved to Denver and began his career with Western Union. The Spanish Flu was prevalent then and, Daisy, and Coral, at home in Fountain, were infected and extremely sick. RB wrote the letter in November 1918 when he was in Denver and I rediscovered it nearly a century later.

It was RB's last communication home to his parents. Shortly after writing this letter, RB contracted the Spanish Flu. He was sick for about a week and the doctors thought he would survive the flu because he did not seem to be severely ill. However, he suddenly got worse and died in Denver at the age of 16.

His last letter home illustrates life in Denver amid the flu pandemic and at Western Union in 1918. I have not corrected any spelling, grammatical or syntax errors.

1722 Larimer St.
Nov. 4. 1918

Folks at Home:

Well I am finally writing to you.

We got us a new, new room, steam heat, gas & electric lights go with it all for \$1.75 per week. The girls couldn't find an apartment anyplace all full up.

The band has been playing & going thru the Sts. All day, principlly for Phipps & Tynan. The post is doing it. I seen Bob the other day while I was loafing around.

Have they started school there yet? This town is sure on the bum up here, dead as the dickens.

If we wanted to cash in up here all we would have to do is to close the windows & doors & turn gas on - Easy isn't it.

I may be down Thanksgiving & I may not. I can't tell yet. I am sure I can get off tho if I want to, we don't work every other Sunday. I didn't have to work last nite at all.

Of about 300 hundred people in the Western U. there has been no case of "flu", pretty good I think.

A young fellow has to be careful tho because they all flirt - pretty near all of them & he sure will spend his money unless he has to make a little do like for me lately.

I can hear the band now playing army pieces all bugle calls - sure pretty too.

I normally sleep until about 3 o'clock but I didn't today because I slept all last night. We get paid every week here.

Rec'd safety razor O.K.

I am going to stay here all winter unless something happens.

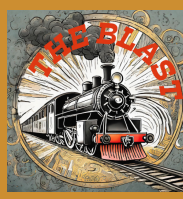
Tell Daisy to keep practice - practice steady all the time. I wish I had of practiced more now so I could be a little better.

Well, no more news.

As Ever
RB

Con't Page 3

Copy of the original letter



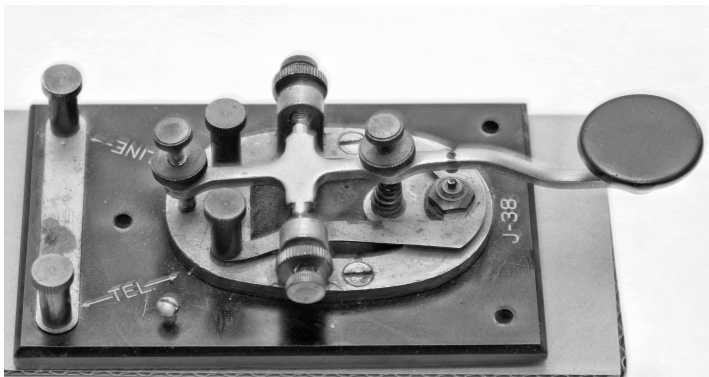
Lessons Continued

The Armistice officially ended World War I on November 11, 1918. There was a big street celebration in Denver and RB attended the Armistice Celebration. He likely contracted the Spanish Flu at the celebration. RB died in the Denver hospital on November 16th, 1918. His parents had tried to go to Denver to see him, but they did not make it. RB's sister Coral had to retrieve his body and accompany him on the train back to Fountain. She had to possess a special permit to transport his body home. There were no vehicles available to retrieve his body at the Fountain Depot and so his parents drove a horse-drawn wagon team to the Fountain Depot to pick up his body. RB was buried in Fountain and his parents were later buried next to him in the Toothman family plot.

Daisy and Clarissa survived their battle with the flu, but Daisy's high school graduation was delayed one year, she graduated in 1919. Although the flu was very prevalent in the Army during the war, neither my Grandfather Charlie nor my Great-Uncle Pearl ever were infected and returned home after the Armistice. RB was the only son of Louis Toothman and the Toothman name died out with him. Louis lived a long life and I was able to sit with him and listen to stories of Fountain and the west from the early days. I can vividly remember the pain in my great-grandfather's voice when in his 90s he recalled RB's death and how his name would soon die out. Louis died in 1963.

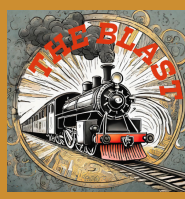
These stories helped my nuclear family deal with the restrictions of Covid 19 because we knew most of our ancestors survived, but we also were able to compare the restrictions and distractions of 1918 and compare them to our experiences in 2020. We all felt more fortunate to have the options available to us in 2020, although we did spend time playing cards and doing puzzles, just as the family had done in 1918. In March 2020, at the height of the pandemic, I drove into downtown Denver to find the location of RB's apartment. Denver was like a ghost town and I remembered RB's words from 1918 about Denver, "dead as the dickens". The building is gone and has been replaced with a modern high-rise, but it was important to go to the site. This episode was a new example for me of how family history relayed in the oral tradition can be powerful and meaningful. Oral traditions provide more than just facts, they provide context, perspectives and a personal connection.

I was once again thankful that I came from a family of storytellers.



Telegraph Key





Fountain Valley Pioneer

By FVHS Member Kay Hulen

I would like to introduce you to my paternal grandmother. Her name was Tina E. Morris Rutledge. She was born December 19th 1900 in Evergreen, Colorado. She was born prematurely and there are family stories of the family keeping her warm on the oven door. Stoves in 1900 were either coal or wood burning and her survival wasn't guaranteed. She proved to be tough. Her stature remained small and most everyone called her Tiny. She was 4'10" tall. She married Raymond V. Rutledge in 1919 and they worked together most of their marriage around our area ranches. They worked as a team. Ray foreman ranches and Tiny was the ranch cook. Some of my fondest memories were of her warm homemade bread fresh out of the oven and the ease with which she could put together a holiday feast.

Ray and Tiny moved into the town of Fountain in 1950 following an accident. Ray suffered a fracture of his back on a bucking horse. Ray owned a pool hall on main st. in Fountain for a number of years. He also drove a school bus for District 8 and was a Volunteer Fire Chief.

In 1976 tiny was chosen to represent the bicentennial of our nation and the Colorado centennial in the Fountain Labor Day celebration. Her dress and sash are on display in the Fountain Valley Historical Society Museum at 411 Main st in Fountain. Tiny embodied the toughness and energy of the Colorado Frontier.

Tiny Rutledge

TAPS

By FVHS Member Mary Koepp

Taps is a bugle call sounded at the close of a military day or during patriotic memorial services. The official version is played by a single bugle with only five notes. Other pitches are created with the lips directing the stream of air. Taps has an interesting history which is relevant to our Civil War Memorial dedication.

Before field telephones or other modern means of combat communication, bugle calls were used to command troops. During the Civil War, officers were required to be "perfectly acquainted with the bugle signals as military regulations stipulated they must be able to sound them if necessary with the bugle, by whistling, or by singing." The calls were considered vital for command and troop movement, for everything from waking up and mess call to battlefield commands such as "fixed bayonets" charge, cease fire and "retreat".

Taps, the signal for "lights out" at the end of a military day, was a variation of an earlier bugle call called "Tattoo," which was played to tell local saloon operators to turn off the taps and send the drinking soldiers to their barracks to extinguish fires and go to bed. "Tattoo" came from the French meaning "turn off the drums" or "extinguish the lights".

It was arranged, in its present form, by Union Army Brigadier General Daniel Butterfield, a Medal of Honor recipient, during a lull in Civil War battle in July 1862. He found the original tune difficult to play.

Captain John C. Tidball started the custom of playing "Taps" at military funerals. He wished to bury a young corporal with military honors, but, was refused permission to fire rifle volleys over the grave as the unit occupied an advanced position concealed in the woods. Tidball felt that playing taps was a fitting end to the burial service.

Within months, "Taps" was commonly used by both the Union and the Confederate forces during field burials for the fallen. It was officially recognized by the United States Army in 1874. Taps became a standard component to U.S. military funerals in 1891 and is now designated as the "National Song of Remembrance" (designated by Congress in 2013) and is played at military funerals, memorial services, and at dusk on military installations to signal the end of the day.

During the playing of Taps, the honor guard detail salutes, and individuals in uniform are also expected to salute. Civilians can place their hand over their heart. A custom authorized by a 2008 defense act, allows uniformed and non-uniformed veterans to salute during flag ceremonies.

"Taps" is a bugle call—a signal, not a song. As such, there are no "official" associated lyrics. Lyrics in common use are:

Day is done, gone the sun,
From the lake, from the hills, from the sky;
All is well, safely rest, God is nigh.



Colorado History

The Writing of the Colorado Constitution

By FVHS Member Tamara Estes

The Historical Society will be sharing stories and educational materials throughout the year highlighting the rich heritage of our region and commemorating the 150th anniversary of Colorado's statehood.

Colorado Territory was established in 1861, encompassing land carved from the territories of Kansas, Nebraska, Utah, and New Mexico. From its earliest days, settlers envisioned statehood as a means of securing political autonomy and greater economic stability. The discovery of gold in 1858 and subsequent population growth gave momentum to that dream.

An early attempt at statehood came in 1865, when territorial leaders drafted a constitution and submitted it to voters. Although the measure passed locally, President Andrew Johnson vetoed the enabling act, largely due to national political tensions during Reconstruction. For a decade, Colorado remained in territorial limbo.

By the early 1870s, however, booming mining towns, expanding railroads, and an increasing population renewed the push for statehood. In March 1875, Congress passed the Colorado Enabling Act, allowing residents to draft a constitution as the final step toward admission to the Union.

The Colorado Constitutional Convention convened in Denver on December 20, 1875, bringing together 39 delegates elected from the territory's districts. These men represented a cross-section of the frontier elite: lawyers, miners, farmers, and businessmen. They were divided politically among Republicans and Democrats, but united by a shared belief in self-governance. Representing the Thirteenth District (El Paso County) were J. C. Wilson and Robert Douglass. J. C. Wilson would serve as the president of the convention.

The convention concluded its work and drafted the final version on March 14, 1876, producing a constitution notable for its length with more than 100 articles and sections. On July 1, 1876, Colorado voters ratified the document by a margin of roughly 15,443 to 4,052.

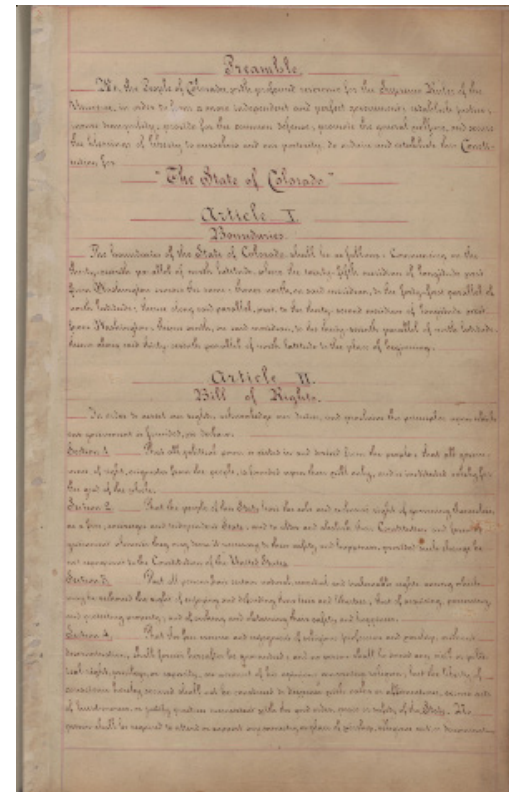
Following ratification, the U.. S. Congress and President Ulysses S. Grant swiftly approved Colorado's admission to the Union. On August 1, 1876, the "Centennial State" officially joined as the 38th member of the United States, exactly one hundred years after the Declaration of Independence..

Some interesting facts from the State Constitution:

- The original Colorado Constitution was written in three languages: English, Spanish and German. The Constitution provided that all laws would be published in the three languages until 1900.
- The permanent State Capital location would be determined by a vote of the people in at the first general election after 1880. That election occurred on November 8, 1881, the following results Denver - 30,248, Pueblo - 6047, Colorado Springs - 4790, Canon City - 2788, Salida - 695, Others - 929.

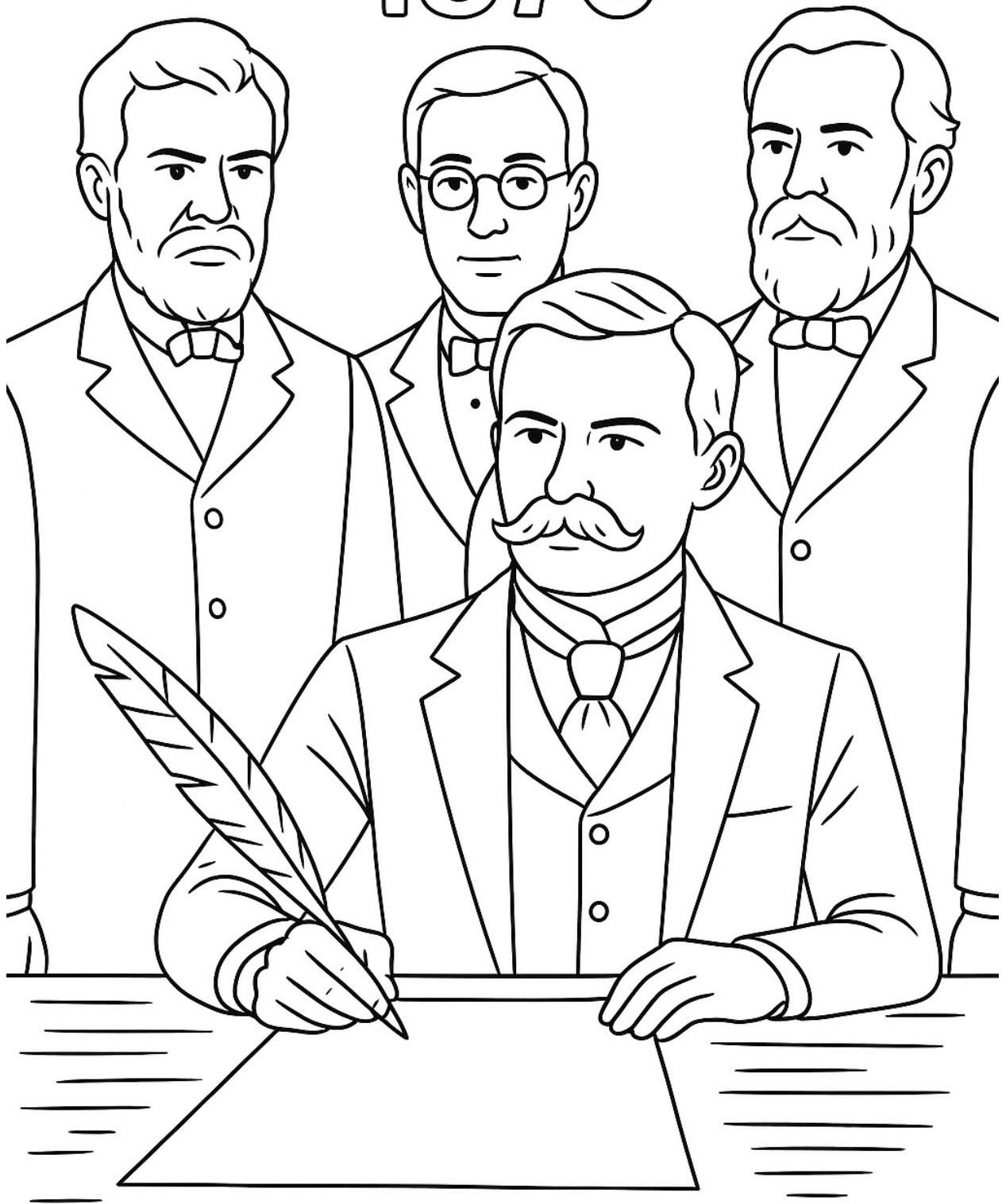
To date the original State Constitution has been amended over 152 times.

<https://archives.colorado.gov/collections/authenticated-constitution>
https://archives.colorado.gov/sites/archives/files/documents/PROCEEDINGS%20OF%20THE%20CONSTITUTIONAL%20CONVENTION-tagged_0.pdf





1876



"This picture shows Casimiro Barela and his fellow delegates working together to write the Colorado Constitution in 1876. Barela was especially important because he helped make sure the first state constitution was written in three languages: English, Spanish, and German. To learn about Barela click [**HERE**](#)