

## “Santa Fe Drive,” Denver

By Simpson T. Sopris\*

One who has lived in Denver as long as the writer reads of so many things concerning the early days of Denver and this region that simply never happened or are greatly exaggerated, that it seems useless to endeavor to give the facts. However, I am going to write down the truth about the street on the westerly side of the city, formerly known as “Jason Street.”

By petition of residents and property owners along the street, the city council changed the name to “Santa Fe Drive.” There

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\* Mr. Sopris came to Colorado with his father, Captain Richard Sopris, in the spring of 1860, and has watched the growth of the state from the beginning. He has written for the State Historical Society a number of historical sketches which are original source material.—Ed.

never before was a road leading out of Denver that was known by that name. There was little travel in the early days between Denver and Santa Fe, New Mexico, and no direct road connected the two towns. The only wagon road running southward entered Denver by way of Ferry Street, in later years changed to Eleventh. Ferry Street was the first street, going from East Denver westward, that ran through West Denver from Larimer Street to the southern limits of the townsite, without running into Cherry Creek. Hence, to get to the road leading to the south you had to go over to Ferry. The only bridge across Cherry Creek for some time was on Larimer, and travelers from the south, if they wished to get into West Denver or over to East Denver had to follow Ferry Street. The two streets between Ferry Street and Cherry Creek, "Front" and "Cherry," ended at the bank of the creek before getting as far south as the point where Stout Street now crosses the creek.

The road to and from the south connected with Ferry Street not far from the present intersection of Eleventh and West Colfax. On the original map of Auraria, Ferry extended several blocks beyond the present West Colfax, but the "built up" part of the street did not go beyond the line of the "Congressional Grant" (West Colfax), and from the occupied end of the street the road southward veered to the right, and followed a course closely parallel to the present Kalamath Street. But the road never dropped into the Platte River bottoms; it kept on high ground till it reached far enough to the southeast to avoid the gullies, or hollows, caused by water draining into the Platte from the higher ground; then, following the bend in the river, it turned to the south and ran midway between the present Broadway and the river.

It seems impossible for later comers to comprehend the fact that the early roads or trails made by the pioneers of 1858, 1859 and 1860, and even in later years, followed the line of least resistance; in other words, avoided the hills and hollows as much as possible, and that it was several years after the settlement of the country before there was any grading done on public highways.

For a road from Santa Fe or anywhere to the south to have followed the alleged "Santa Fe Drive" it would have had to cross scores of gullies, ravines, arroyos to get down into the river bottom and out of it, and when it got within about two blocks of present West Colfax it would have ended in the very sandy bed of Cherry Creek. For, be it known to the "pioneer" of 1858, more or less, the *bed* of Cherry Creek, not the *stream*, extended

far "inland" at that point, and a goodly part of the block of ground now covered by the county jail and criminal court-house, as well as the fire engine house, was for years after Denver was put on the map, a part of Cherry Creek's sandy bed. And that is true of all of the space occupied by the present city market, as far down as about Curtis Street.

In 1861-1862, during the absence in the war of Captain Richard Sopris, his family lived in a house that stood on a line with Ferry Street, and a quarter mile or so southeast of the settled part of that street, and had there been a road along or near the line of "Santa Fe Drive," it would have run within a few rods of our house. The only road anywhere in sight was the one running from Ferry Street, south, three or four city blocks to the west. A path led from the front gate of our place directly down to the traveled part of Ferry Street and to get over to the east side of town we went down to Larimer Street to the nearest bridge over the creek.