

A Brief Account of the Life of Sam McCune
and George W. Horrace

Late in 1851 Samuel Levi McCune, age 19, left Athens County, Ohio with a group of men bound for the California gold fields. The group made its way to New York City where they took a steamship for California.

The ship lost its power and drifted at sea for weeks before making a landfall on the island of Jamaica. After obtaining a partial refund of their passage money the men walked across the island, took a ship to Panama, crossed the isthmus and sailed to San Francisco, arriving in April, 1852.

Sam made enough money around the gold fields to go into business. He used his profits to stake prospectors and to invest in a gold venture referred to as the "river-project".

After the river-project failed Sam went to Panama to search for gold. In Panama he was arrested and sentenced to death for illegal mining. He escaped shortly before his hour of execution. His guard was found dead.

Sam got back to San Francisco and may have returned to the gold camps. An 1856 directory shows him as a miner at Shaw's Flat in Tuolumne County. It is not certain whether this was before or after the Panama adventure. If the story told by his son, John Horrace, that he killed a claim jumper in California and fled in fear of his life is true, he must have returned to the gold fields after returning from Panama.

Late in 1857 Sam enlisted in the United States Army in San Francisco and was sent to the Oregon country. In the spring of 1858 Sam deserted the Army. In 1858 the eastern Oregon and Washington Territories were in the midst of a gold rush. I suspect that Sam again went prospecting.

Whether Sam went prospecting or not is not really important, because some time after he departed from the Army he was taken captive by Indians and lived with them for several years.

In 1863 he escaped from the Indians and made his way to Fort Hall, an old fur trading post in southeastern Idaho Territory. It is likely that it was then that he first identified himself as George Washington Horrace.

From Fort Hall Sam (or George) went to Utah from where he wrote home in 1864 saying that he was working as a school teacher and Indian interpreter.

In Utah Sam, using the name George W. Horrace (and who hereinafter will be referred to chiefly as George Horrace), met and eloped with Rachel Caldwell. Rachel was the daughter of a dedicated Mormon living in Fountain Green, a community south of Salt Lake City. Rachel and George lived in or near

Fountain Green for three or four years and then, reportedly because of their disfavor among the Mormons of the area, they moved with their two children to Wyoming where George worked as a miner and their third child was born. By 1871 the Horraces had moved to Bear Lake County, Idaho Territory where all the rest of their twelve children were born.

In the Nupher (now called Pegram) area of Bear Lake County George had a store, taught school and established a successful ranching operation. In 1889 Sam McCune wrote home for the first time in twenty-five years. He told of his marriage to Rachel, of the ten children they had at the time and perhaps proudly of his prosperity. He did not tell of his name change.

The drought years of 1887 and 1889 and the terrible blizzard of 1890 nearly wiped out the ranch's herd. In 1892, having lost most of his assets, George took his young son John with him and went to western Idaho. George and his son did some gold sluicing on the Snake River and George homesteaded a few miles west of Caldwell. By 1896 George was well enough established to bring Rachel and the children still at home to join him on the new homestead.

George was sixty-four when he reunited his family. They lived together and farmed the homestead until his death in 1902. George never told any of them, except perhaps his son and traveling companion, John K. Horraces, of his name change or any of his adventures between the California gold camps and Utah.

When the family learned George's true identity from letters they found after he died, one of his daughters wrote to the McCunes in Athens, Ohio. The McCunes responded, but there was little continuation of the correspondence. The next generation of Horraces had no knowledge of the Athens McCunes, the spelling of their name or the state in which they lived.

The McCune decedents, which includes the McVays, were unable to establish any contact with their Idaho relatives and were left with only a vague knowledge of the story of Sam McCune and a belief in the existence of some Horraces cousins in Idaho.