

Fig. 1. Horace Austin Warner Tabor (1830-1899), c. 1883. He was at one time not only the richest man in the American West but also a New England stonecutter, Kansas Free-Stater and farmer, Rocky Mountain gold prospector, storekeeper, silver-mining magnate, Leadville mayor, banker, theater owner, civic developer and philanthropist, Denver postmaster, Colorado Lieutenant Governor, and U.S. Senator.

SWORDS OF THE TABOR LIGHT CAVALRY OF LEADVILLE, COLORADO

by Jack Bethune

Among the authentic legends of the American West is the story of Leadville, Colorado, the silver-mining boomtown high in the Rockies, once home to one of the richest and most colorful men of his time, Horace Austin Warner Tabor (Fig. 1). His fame as Colorado's strike-it-rich mining multimillionaire, civic philanthropist, political figure, and scandal-plagued tycoon has survived to the present day. Less widely known is his private peacekeeping force, superbly uniformed and equipped by Tabor himself, and charged with maintaining Leadville's safety and security during its riotous silver-mining years, the mounted troop known as the Tabor Light Cavalry.

It was the rare survival and discovery of one of its cavalry officers' sabers (Figs. 9A-E), coupled with Horace Tabor's own dress sword (Figs. 12A-C) carefully preserved in a Denver historical museum, that enlarges our understanding of the swords carried by this cavalry troop during Leadville's 1880s heyday. Their etched blades and custom features recall Leadville's meteoric rise as once the nation's richest source of silver, when fortunes were created almost overnight for lucky prospectors and mine owners, and Leadville's mining wealth forever changed Colorado's civic landscape and state history. On a personal level, they remind us of Horace Tabor's pivotal role and widespread fame during Leadville's boom years, his legacy as Colorado's foremost mining industrialist and philanthropist, and his epic downfall in the collapsing silver market and devastating bankruptcy that followed.

The "Silver King" who was to put Leadville on the nation's map and who founded the Tabor Light Cavalry was born in Holland, Orleans County, Vermont, on November 26, 1830. Christened Horace Austin Warner Tabor, he allowed acquaintances to call him by his initials, or "HAW" Tabor. Young Tabor worked as a New England stonecutter for eight 8 years, but in 1855 he joined a group of Free-Soil emigrants heading to Kansas Territory. In 1857, he returned to Maine and was married to Augusta Pierce (Fig. 2), a daughter of his former employer. The Tabors moved to Kansas and, through thrift and hard work, managed to make a meager living as farmers. Augusta was industrious, practical, and prudent, adept at managing family finances and getting the couple through



Fig. 2. Augusta Louise Pierce Tabor (1833-1895), c. 1880. Courtesy, ColoradoVirtualLibrary.org.

tough times.

Nationwide excitement over the famous California Gold Rush of 1849 had long since faded, but nearly a decade later, in 1858, a second gold rush erupted in the American west. The discovery that year of small amounts of gold about 85 miles from Pike's Peak in the southern Rocky Mountains created a sensation, luring hordes of eager prospectors ("Fifty-niners") out west to what was still Kansas Territory. Going nowhere as farmers, the Tabors with their infant son followed the rush westward in 1859. Horace prospected a series of small mining claims in the mountains near Denver, between Idaho Springs and Oro City. Money was scarce that first year, so Augusta sold pies and took in boarders to meet expenses during the long winters. After 2 years of thrift and hard work, the Tabors had saved enough money by 1861 to open a general store and post office. In the next few years, the Tabors relocated their store several times, finally settling near Oro City, not far from present-day Leadville.

In their search for gold, Colorado's early prospectors were hampered using traditional placer-mining techniques,



Fig. 3. Photo postcard of Augusta and Horace Tabor's house in Leadville, now a museum open to visitors.

which employed moving water to wash away waste material and reveal the heavier precious metal. In particular, they resented the “brown sand” that constantly clogged their sluice boxes and had to be cleared by hand. In 1875, two curious prospectors, one a metallurgist, assayed the dark “waste” material and discovered that it held large amounts of silver, far more than any gold content. Despite the attempt at imposed secrecy, word of their discovery leaked out and, by 1876, the rush to stake out mining claims and conduct hard-rock silver mining became a stampede. It had been difficult for Horace to make his prospecting efforts worthwhile, so the Tabors continued their store and postal services, forming partnerships with some miners, and grubstaking food and supplies to penniless prospectors in exchange for a third of their finds.

It was the lucky result of one such partnership that dramatically changed the Tabors' fortunes for the better. In 1878, two unlikely prospectors whom Tabor had grubstaked discovered an area rich with silver ore at the peak of Fryer Hill, a site in present-day Leadville later named the Little Pittsburgh Mine. Tabor bought out one partner, acquired several additional promising mining properties, rounded up a number of eager business partners, and incorporated their new mining company in New York, shortly after which Tabor sold his interest in the whole enterprise for more than a million dollars.¹ After 19 years of hardscrabble existence in the rugged elevations of Colorado, Tabor at last had struck it rich.



Fig. 4 Photo postcard of the Tabor Opera House in Leadville, built by Tabor in 1879. Though in some disrepair, it can still be seen by visitors.

With his sudden wealth, Tabor began buying up more mining shares and properties, some as far away as New Mexico, Arizona, Idaho, and Mexico. Among his many acquisitions in the Leadville area was the Matchless Mine (Fig. 17), which became his all-time richest lode of silver and an inseparable part of the Tabor saga to the end. To give this rapidly growing mining camp high in the mountains a name, the prospectors and miners decided to call it Leadville, in recognition of the dark-brown lead carbonate (cerussite) that made up much of the silver ore.

By 1879, Tabor's lucky string of mining successes and other investments had made him a millionaire several times over. As a natural consequence of his good fortunes, Tabor began making major improvements in his lifestyle and social activities. He and Augusta moved into a new home in Leadville (Fig. 3). Then, in defiance of Augusta's prudent counsel, Tabor began spending lavishly on jewelry, personal fineries, and roaring parties at Leadville saloons and gambling houses. His constant crowd of friends could always count on Tabor to pick up the check, since he grandly treated everyone as a friend. Putting his newfound wealth to higher purposes, Tabor magnanimously funded major civic improvements in Leadville, such as the new Leadville Opera House (Fig. 4); the Tabor Fire Insurance Company; the Leadville Illuminating Gas Company; the Leadville Telephone Company; a newspaper named the *Leadville Daily Herald*; the Smelter's Sup-

ply Company; and the Bank of Leadville, of which Tabor became a principal and bank officer.

With his immense income opening up new horizons, in 1879 Horace and Augusta moved to Denver, where Tabor once again assumed the role of bold entrepreneur, civic philanthropist, and financial powerhouse. Colorado had only recently become a new state, joining the Union in 1876, but Denver as its capital was still very much a small town. That would quickly change, however, thanks to Tabor and the silver-mining riches that began pouring in from Leadville. Repeating his previous interest in civic development, Tabor financially backed important Denver improvements such as the Tabor Block, an up-to-date 5-story commercial center of retail shops and offices (Fig. 5). In addition, he built Denver's splendid new Tabor Grand Opera House, which cost \$850,000 (Fig. 6). He also became an officer and major stockholder in the First National Bank of Denver, and donated land to the U.S. government for a new Denver Post Office.

Ever bolder in wielding his vast wealth, Tabor plunged into riskier and more diversified investments, many in distant locations such as Chicago, St. Louis, Texas, Yucatan, and Honduras. He poured millions into railroads,

timber, livestock, ranching, commodities, and real estate. Tabor's voracious appetite for investment opportunities, fueled by a torrent of mining and other income, propelled him to spend virtually without care, and often without due diligence. He became a target for con men and investment sharks peddling worthless mines in foreign countries, railroads that didn't exist except on paper, and other business scams for which Tabor paid huge sums and later regretted. By the early 1880s, however, none of that seemed to matter. Tabor was indisputably the richest man in the American West and, some predicted, soon would be in the whole country.

Tabor had long harbored political ambitions and, while living in Kansas, had served on the Topeka town council. His political activities greatly expanded in Leadville, where he served as the town's first mayor from 1878 to 1879. A staunch Republican and important local party official, Tabor concurrently was elected Lieutenant Governor of Colorado, serving from 1878 to 1884. He also ran three times for the governorship of Colorado, but was unsuccessful. In 1883, however, Tabor briefly managed to become a U.S. Senator, serving out the unexpired month-long term of a Colorado Senator who had joined President Chester A. Arthur's cabinet.



Fig. 5. Card stereograph of the Tabor Block in Denver. Built by Tabor in 1880, and demolished in 1972, it was the Capital City's first modern five-story commercial complex of offices and retail shops that also boasted of an elevator.



Fig. 6. Photo postcard of the Tabor Grand Opera House in Denver, built by Tabor and opened in 1881. To its right is the Post Office and Customs House erected in 1885 on land donated by Tabor. Both buildings were demolished in 1964 to make room for the new Denver Branch of the Federal Reserve Bank of Kansas City.

It was during his reign as Colorado's famed Silver Baron and Lieutenant Governor that in 1880 Tabor met an attractive and much younger showgirl in Leadville who quickly became his mistress and public consort. His new love was a charming, ambitious, 5' 2" divorcée from Oshkosh, Wisconsin, named Elizabeth Bonduel McCourt Doe, popularly known as "Baby Doe" (Fig. 7). Tabor's brazen public affair scandalized some Coloradans and brought down the wrath of Augusta, who bitterly contested this new arrangement. In January 1883, Tabor was finally freed from his marriage after agreeing to give Augusta their large house in Denver and a property settlement worth \$300,000, a paltry sum when compared to his estimated wealth of \$10 million. Augusta invested her funds wisely, reportedly multiplying her net worth 10-fold, and continued to live comfortably in Denver.²

Horace Tabor and Baby Doe had been secretly married in 1882, but it was not until Tabor's short stint as Colorado Senator in 1883 that they were publically married. The ceremony was held at the prestigious Willard Hotel in Washington, DC, with President Chester A. Arthur as the guest of honor. Many important DC figures stayed away, however, to register their disapproval of the tawdry couple. If Baby Doe was snubbed by DC society because of her flagrant conduct, Tabor himself was equally scorned as a wealthy western primitive. One senator reportedly told his wife,

*"The Colorado millionaire, Tabor, took his seat last week. Such a vulgar ruffianly boor you never beheld: uncouth, awkward, shambling, dirty hands and big feet turned inward: a huge solitaire diamond on a sooty, bony blacksmith finger: piratical features, unkempt, frowsy and unclean: blotched with disease — he looks the brute he is. He was stared at with curious but undisguised abhorrence."*³

Despite public disapproval and rejection suffered in Washington and Denver, the wealthy new couple moved into their luxurious Denver mansion (Fig. 8) and began living in conspicuous — if socially isolated — splendor.

In Leadville's early mining years, working conditions for laborers were harsh, the hours long, and mine owners could run roughshod over miners who earned little but had to pay sky-high Leadville prices for everything. Revolts and strikes were common, often accompanied by outbreaks of violence, destruction of property, and even bloodshed. Leadville's explosive growth and wild-west atmosphere only added to the town's unrest, increasing the incidence of robberies, public drunkenness, and occasional murders. There also remained the largely imagined danger posed by the Utes of Colorado, the indigenous tribe whose recent depredations in the territory were well



Fig. 7. Elizabeth Bonduel McCourt (“Baby Doe”) Tabor (1854-1935), c. 1883.

known and widely feared.⁴ To maintain public peace and ensure the safety of Leadville’s citizens, local militias had been formed for various lengths of time. Some had been sponsored by Tabor himself, such as his Tabor Tigers and the Tabor Highland Guards, the latter enrolled in Colorado’s National Guard and outfitted at Tabor’s expense in authentic and costly Scottish garb. Tabor had also sponsored the Tabor Mining Guards, a troop of mounted peacekeepers that was the forerunner of what later became the Tabor Light Cavalry.

Tabor was determined to clamp down on Leadville’s lawlessness, hooliganism, and violence, while strongly protecting the interests of mine owners like himself. In July 1880, following a bitter strike at his Leadville mines, and while serving as Lieutenant Governor, Tabor organized and sponsored a new, permanent company of mounted peacekeepers that he named the Tabor Light Cavalry, enrolling it for 3 years in Colorado’s National Guard as First Battalion of Cavalry, Company C. Total troop membership stood at 50 enlisted men and 8 officers, excluding Tabor. The company’s three line officers initially were Captain J.D. McCarthy, 1st Lieutenant G.D. Lyles, and 2nd Lieutenant Peyton R. Hull, while the five staff officers included a secretary, treasurer, and surgeon. As Lieutenant Governor, Tabor was the eponymous commander of his mounted force and assumed the rank of Brigadier General.⁵



Fig. 8. The luxurious Denver residence of Baby Doe and Horace Tabor. Their lavish lifestyle reportedly included not only expensive furnishings but also a lawn decorated with sculpted figures and 100 live peacocks.

Tabor pledged \$10,000 to lavishly outfit and equip his officers and men with authentic and costly U.S. Cavalry uniforms, arms, and equipment, as well as a 2-story frame building to serve as armory, club room, drill room, and bar. Uniforms closely following army regulations of 1872 were ordered from Sands, Pelton, and Co., located on the ground floor of Leadville’s Tabor Opera House, and completed by the company’s New York store.⁶ Tabor reportedly paid \$5000 to fully outfit 37 privates, eight corporals, five sergeants, three line officers, and five staff officers.⁷ Their regulation uniforms were distinguished only by the *T.L.C.* monogram added to helmet insignia, shoulder knots, and belt plates.

The swords chosen in 1880 to arm Tabor’s cavalymen were a mix of traditional sabers for enlisted men, and the Army’s new-regulation swords and sabers introduced after the Civil War for officers.⁸ Enlisted troopers were equipped with the army’s standard-issue Model 1860 light cavalry saber, a familiar pattern widely used during the Civil War and still carried by U.S. cavalymen serving on the western frontier.

The army’s latest Model 1880 field and cavalry officers’ saber was the chosen pattern for Tabor’s line officers’ sabers, the only known example of which is presented here (Figs. 9A-E).⁹ In 1872, the Ordnance Department approved minor changes to the regulation cavalry officers’ sabers supplied under wartime contract by Ames Mfg. Co., the most notable change being small reductions in



Fig. 9A. Tabor Light Cavalry line officers' saber, c. 1880. Apart from its custom blade etching, it conforms to the U.S. Army's Model 1880 saber pattern for Cavalry officers and mounted officers of Infantry and Artillery. Its lighter blade, reduced weight, and nickel plating were among several design changes approved by the Ordnance Department after the Civil War.

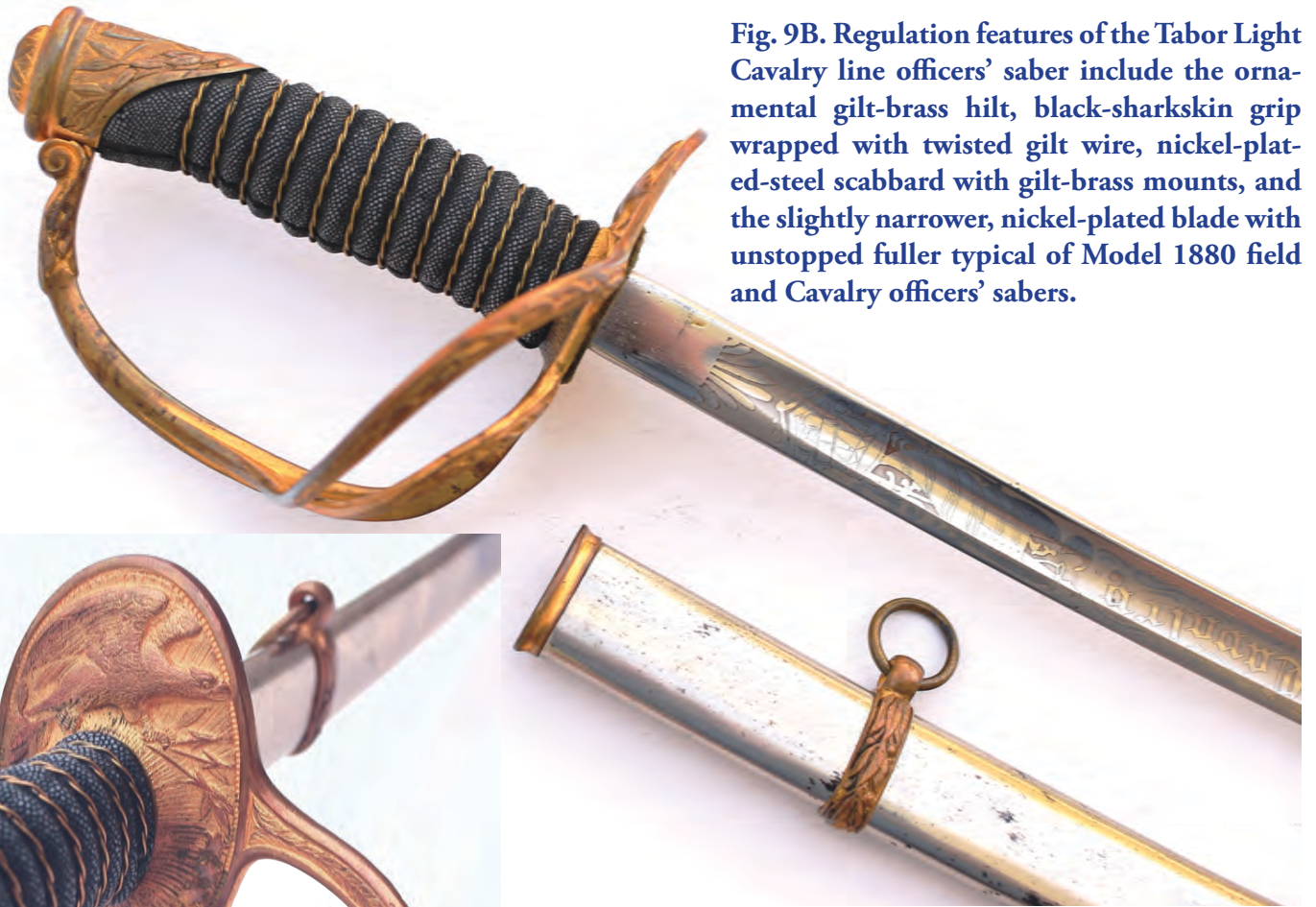


Fig. 9B. Regulation features of the Tabor Light Cavalry line officers' saber include the ornamental gilt-brass hilt, black-sharkskin grip wrapped with twisted gilt wire, nickel-plated-steel scabbard with gilt-brass mounts, and the slightly narrower, nickel-plated blade with unstopped fuller typical of Model 1880 field and Cavalry officers' sabers.



Fig. 9C. Patriotic emblems decorate the saber's upper counter-guard, following designs approved in 1872 and again in 1880 for the Army's postwar, new-regulation field and Cavalry officers' sabers.



Fig. 9D. Patriotic motifs also decorate the pommel of the Tabor Light Cavalry line officers' saber.



Fig. 9E. The underside of the counterguard displays the "glory" of light rays typical of regulation Army field and Cavalry officers' sabers after the Civil War.



Fig. 10A. The obverse of the line officers' saber blade is custom-etched in Old English letters *Tabor Light Cavalry*.



Fig. 10B. The reverse of the line officers' saber blade is etched C.N.G. for Colorado National Guard.



Fig. 11. The line officers' blade reverse also bears the etched trademark of military outfitters Baker & McKenney of New York, active 1864-1882.

hilt size and blade length.¹⁰ The resulting slightly lighter Model 1872 cavalry officers' saber also introduced a decorative gilt-brass hilt as well as a nickel-plated scabbard with gilt-brass mounts.¹¹ In 1880, a lighter version of the 1872 pattern was ordered for use by cavalry officers and mounted officers of other branches, i.e., field officers of infantry and artillery with the rank of major or higher. The principal change in the 1880 pattern was its narrower, nickel-plated blade with unstopped fuller, along with a correspondingly lighter scabbard; otherwise, the army's Model 1880 field and cavalry officers' saber remained externally almost identical to the heavier Model 1872 cavalry officers' saber. The only distinguishing feature of Tabor's 1880-pattern saber is its blade decoration, which includes the name *Tabor Light Cavalry*, boldly etched on the obverse, and *C.N.G.* (for Colorado National Guard) etched on the reverse (Figs. 10A-B). Near the reverse ricasso, the blade is also etched *BAKER / & / McKENNEY / N.Y.*, the trademark of a reputable firm of military outfitters well known for fine-quality uniform items (Fig. 11).

Tabor's five staff officers also appear to have worn swords conforming to the army's current pattern, a lightweight smallsword with gilt-brass hilt and straight, *épée*-like blade. A contemporary account (see following news article) also mentions their dual scabbards, one "browned"

(or blued) for service (undress) wear and one brightly nickel-plated for dress wear.¹² When Tabor's staff officers' swords were obtained in 1880, two regulation army patterns were available to choose from, either the Model 1872 staff and foot officers' sword, with its folding reverse counterguard, or the nearly identical Model 1878, with a fixed reverse counterguard. It's not known which version was selected, but we can assume the slender blades were etched with the Baker & McKenney trademark, and perhaps the company's name and/or initials of Colorado's National Guard. Because of the tiny number of staff officers' swords required, and their low expected survival rate, no identifiable example has yet been discovered.

After moving to Denver, Tabor had few opportunities to attend company affairs in Leadville. On those rare occasions when appearing in his Brigadier Generals' uniform, Tabor wore a deluxe version of the U.S. Army's Model 1872 general officers' sword (Figs. 12A-C).¹³ It displays a blend of standard and custom features with its regulation gilt-brass hilt, cast-silver grip, folding reverse counterguard, and "browned" (in this case, blued-steel) scabbard. Custom flourishes approved by Tabor include a neoclassical Roman pinecone finial atop the pommel, and the ornately pierced-and-gilt scabbard mounts. His finely polished and partially gilt blade is custom-etched with the usual floral designs and American eagle on the obverse, and *Gen H.A.W. Tabor. C.N.G.* on the reverse (Fig. 13). The blade's reverse ricasso bears the military outfitters' etched trademark *BAKER / & / McKENNEY / N.Y.* (Fig. 14).

Resplendent in their dress uniforms, the Tabor Light Cavalry was glowingly described in 1880 by a *Leadville Daily Chronicle* newsman this way:

The shakos or hats are after the pattern of the generally admired German "Pickelhaube," worn by the Prussian soldiers, those worn by the privates being mounted with brass, trimmed with yellow cord, and bearing the monogram of the company, "T. L. C." while those to be worn by the line officers distinguish themselves from the others by a heavy gold cord and handsome trimmings. The staff officers, including the General, Chaplain, Treasurer and others of the company wear the black felt hat with black plume and gold cord.¹⁴

The uniforms for the officers will be blue broadcloth trimmed with gold, long coats. The pants will be

light blue with broad gold stripes running down the legs. Those of the privates will be blue broadcloth, short coats, light blue pants trimmed with a yellow welt. This makes a very attractive uniform for a cavalry regiment.

The belts and swords for the privates are the United States regulation pattern. The swords of the line officers are sheathed in flashing steel scabbards, and are beautifully ornamented, bearing the initials of the company, C. N. G. (Colorado National Guard).¹⁵ The line officers' belts are mounted with gold and have gold buckles, bearing the monogram of the company.

The General's belt is one of gorgeous workmanship and beauty. It is considerably narrower than the others, and is made of Russian leather, embroidered in gold by hand. The price of this article alone is \$50. The sword is a straight one, and the blade bears on one side the following inscription: "General H. A. W. Tabor, C. N. G." On the other: "The Tabor Light Cavalry."¹⁶

The staff officers' swords possess a dress as well as an undress scabbard. The guards are heavily embossed in gold, and the General's sword is considered to be the most magnificent that has ever been seen in Colorado.

The epaulets of the line officers are in United States Cavalry regulation pattern with monograms of the company.¹⁷ The General's epaulets are mounted with a silver star and ornamented with three-ply genuine gold fringe.

The spurs for the privates are plainly formed of brass with steel wheels, while those of the officers are plated with gold and modeled like a double eagle holding a steel wheel in his beak. They are very beautiful and quite in keeping the taste with the elegant character of the rest of the accouterments.

An object that meets with general admiration from all who behold it, is the banner of the company. It is forked and composed of two pieces of silk, the upper being red and the lower white. It is of the regular size prescribed for cavalry companies. In a semi-circle, embroidered in yellow silk on the red field appear the words: "Tabor Light Cavalry." Below it in bolder letters: "First Regiment C. N. G."¹⁸

The only known photo of the Tabor Light Cavalry in their dress uniforms shows an officer wearing the plumed helmet, frock coat, and padded shoulder knots specified in 1872 uniform instructions for U.S. Cavalry officers, before the minor changes ordered in 1881. The uniforms of the enlisted men, though details are difficult to discern, also appear to meet 1872 regulations (Fig. 15).¹⁹

In addition to their primary role as Leadville's auxiliary police — patrolling the streets, keeping a lid on striking miners, breaking up brawls, and arresting desperadoes — the Tabor Light Cavalry held frequent public ceremonies and military balls (Figs. 16A-B), as well as acting as honor guard for Leadville's visiting celebrities. Troop affairs were commonly held at the Mount Massive Hotel, informally adopted as the company's headquarters. During Leadville's boom years in the early 1880s, distinguished guests feted by Tabor and his cavalymen included Oscar Wilde, General William Tecumseh Sherman, and former President Ulysses S. Grant, among others — all undoubtedly eager to see first-hand the famous source of Colorado's silver bonanza.

During the latter half of the 1880s, however, mine production in Leadville underwent an alarming decline as formerly rich deposits of silver began petering out. Tabor and other mine owners experienced unexpected losses in revenues and feared a growing economic crisis. In response, Tabor began cutting back on expenses and attempted to rebalance his investment portfolio. An indication of this change in Tabor's fortunes was his effort to sell the Tabor Grand Hotel in Leadville. It was probably during this same period that Tabor also reduced or withdrew financial support for his cavalry troop, which had been funded out of his own pocket since its inception in 1880. The rolls of the Colorado National Guard carry the Tabor Light Cavalry from that 1880 date forward, but the troop's name fades after 1886, presumably as Tabor was forced to reallocate his resources elsewhere. It is unknown exactly when Tabor's cavalry was disbanded or merged into another Leadville unit, such as the Pitkin Cavalry, and it is hoped that those details will emerge from further research.

For Tabor and his vast empire of enterprises, the end was nearing as well. The Bland-Allison Act of 1878 had launched the United States upon a bimetallic monetary policy, requiring the government to purchase silver and mint U.S. dollars in silver as well as in gold. The artificial-



Fig. 12A.



Fig. 12B.



Fig. 12C.

Fig. 12A. Horace Tabor's sword, a commercial variant of the U.S. Army's general officers' pattern introduced in 1872. Its blued-steel "service" scabbard was probably once accompanied by a bright, nickel-plated, "dress" scabbard. The regulation general officers' sword knot of "gold cord" has lost part of its "acorn end."

Fig. 12B. The 1872-pattern gilt-brass hilt of Tabor's sword has the silver grip prescribed for Army general officers. Among its custom features are the ornately pierced scabbard mounts and the Neoclassical Roman pinecone finial surmounting the pommel.

Fig. 12C. The reverse of Tabor's hilt displays the folding counterguard filled with patriotic and martial designs that was a standard feature of Army Model 1872 staff and foot officers' swords and general officers' swords. Courtesy, History Colorado Center, Denver.



Fig. 13. The reverse of Tabor's blade is custom-etched in Old English letters *Gen H.A.W. Tabor. C.N.G.* (for Colorado National Guard). Remnants of an original gold wash are still visible. Courtesy, History Colorado Center, Denver.



Fig. 14. Tabor's sword also bears the etched trademark of military outfitters Baker & McKenney of New York. Courtesy, History Colorado Center, Denver.



Fig. 15. The Tabor Light Cavalry in dress uniform (grouped at left), from a stereographic view made c. 1881 at the funeral of a fallen member. The company officer with drawn saber wears the 1872-pattern U.S. Cavalry officers' uniform -- a gilt-trimmed and yellow-plumed helmet, gilt helmet cords, dark-blue frock coat, and light-blue trousers with yellow stripe -- modified only by the *T.L.C.* monogram added to his shoulder knots, belt plate, and perhaps helmet insignia. The enlisted men's uniforms -- yellow-braided helmets with brass insignia bearing the *T.L.C.* monogram, dark-blue mounted coats, and sky-blue trousers -- also appear to follow 1872 uniform instructions. Their regulation orangish-yellow helmet plumes, uniform facings, and trouser piping appear dark due to the peculiarities of early black-&-white photography. Courtesy, Denver Public Library, Denver.

ly high market price resulting from government buys of silver would soon enrich Leadville's future mine owners, smelters, and speculators. Adding a further measure, the Sherman Silver Purchase Act of 1890 ordered even more government buys of silver, again at inflated market prices that somehow ignored the glut of available western silver. The bimetallism policy's unanticipated but resultant drain on gold from the U.S. Treasury alarmed Washington officials, however, and created a strong countermovement to return U.S. coinage to the single gold standard. In 1893, the Sherman Act was repealed, government market support for silver was ended, and silver prices immediately plummeted to new lows. It was a devastating setback for highly leveraged western silver mine owners, investors, and speculators like Tabor.

The collapse of the silver market and the accompanying economic depression known as the Panic of 1893 caught Tabor by surprise, and he struggled to pay off his enormous debts. He mortgaged good properties to shore up weak ones, but in the end wound up losing both. Millions

in speculative investments in Central and South America were written off as complete losses, as were others nearer to home. Unable to stanch the bloodletting, Tabor lost his Leadville mines, private home, hotel, and opera house to creditors. In Denver, the same fate awaited the Tabor Block and Tabor Grand Opera House, along with his and Baby Doe's mansion and most of its contents. After selling off Baby Doe's jewelry, Tabor sought help from former friends, but little came from those he had helped enrich only a few years earlier. Destitute, Tabor returned to prospecting and smelter work at common laborers' wages, but without success. Finally, influential friends secured from President William McKinley an appointment naming Tabor as Denver Postmaster, a position he held for only 15 months before dying of peritonitis at age 69 on April 10, 1899. His formal state funeral in Denver drew thousands and was said to be the largest ever witnessed in Colorado's early years.²⁰

On his deathbed, Tabor reportedly urged Baby Doe to hold onto his prized but long-defunct Matchless Mine

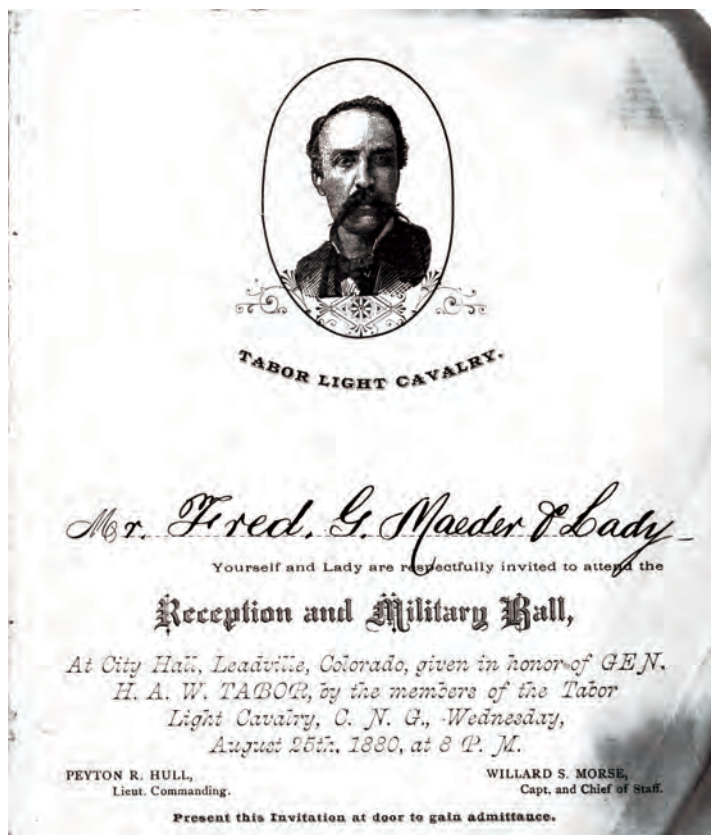


Fig. 16A. Personalized invitation by the barely month-old Tabor Light Cavalry to a "Reception and Military Ball" honoring "GEN. H.A.W. TABOR" at Leadville City Hall, August 25, 1880.

in Leadville (Fig. 17), confident that it could become productive again even following years of inactivity and neglect. After Tabor's death, Baby Doe and the couple's two daughters moved to Leadville, where they occupied the small cabin next to the mine shaft, living in hunger, poverty, and worsening squalor. Baby Doe remained there the longest, holding onto the dream of mining riches.²¹ In March 1935, however, following a severe Leadville cold spell and blizzard, Baby Doe was found frozen to death on the floor of her cabin.

Tabor's legendary silver bonanza, windfall wealth, personal excesses, and epic collapse were made into a Hollywood movie in 1932. Titled *Silver Dollar*, after the biography by David Karsner, it starred Edward G. Robinson as Horace Tabor under the fictitious name Yates Martin. Numerous books, magazine articles, a stage play, and even two operas have been written about the Tabor saga, his scandalous

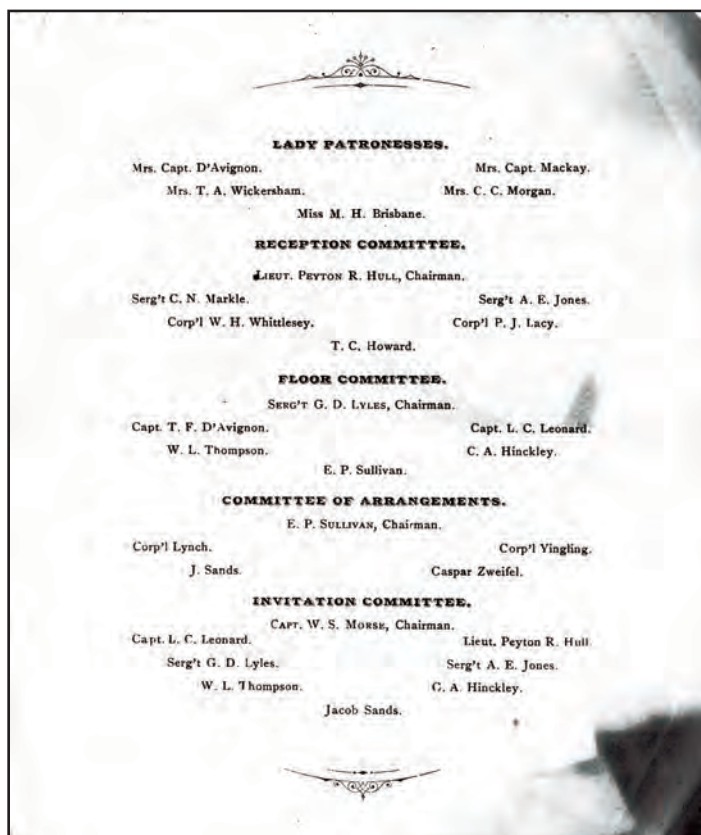


Fig. 16B. The invitation's list of "Lady Patronesses" and company committee members.

affair with Baby Doe, and her tragic end. In Leadville, Denver, and elsewhere in Colorado, there are still many reminders of the Tabor era, including an opera house, commercial business center, residential developments, and city streets, to name a few.

The Tabor Light Cavalry was always destined to follow the trajectory of the man himself, its fate inextricably linked to Tabor's personal and financial fortunes. Unlike Tabor, however, whose legendary fame survives to the present day, his mounted cavalymen have been almost forgotten, mentioned only in the records of Colorado's National Guard. It is fitting, therefore, that these swords renew the faded memory of the Tabor Light Cavalry, along with that of Horace Tabor, and that they always share an honored place in the stirring and colorful history of Leadville, Colorado.



Fig. 17. Photo postcard of the defunct Matchless Mine in Leadville, once Tabor's richest source of silver and retained by him even after bankruptcy. Following Tabor's death in 1899, Baby Doe occupied the cabin at left for years, dreaming of restoring the mine to productivity, before tragically succumbing to freezing temperatures in 1935.

The author is indebted to Melissa VanOtterloo, Photo Research & Permissions Librarian, Stephen H. Hart Library & Research Center, History Colorado Center, Denver; and to Coi E. Drummond-Gebbrig, Digital Image Collection Administrator, Denver Public Library, Denver; and especially to Dušan Farrington, whose exhaustively researched, forthcoming study of the U.S. Army's post-Civil War sword patterns was immensely helpful in evaluating the swords and sabers of the Tabor Light Cavalry.

NOTES

- 1 Adjusted for inflation, \$1 million in 1878 would be worth approximately \$24 million today.
- 2 Years later, heartbroken and alone and in failing health, Augusta died in 1895 at age 62 while wintering in Pasadena, California.
- 3 Connelly, *Ingalls of Kansas: A Character Study*, p. 31.
- 4 In 1879, in what became known as the “Meeker Massacre,” native Utes retaliated against the harsh policies of Indian Agent Nathan Meeker, stationed at the White River Ute Reservation in Colorado, and reportedly slaughtered 11 people including Meeker. They also carried off several women and children as hostages. Subsequently, the Utes attacked a U.S. Cavalry squadron heading to the agency, killing 14 cavalymen including their commander, Major Thornburgh, and wounding many more. The Ute uprising was soon put down by the U.S. Army, and the tribe eventually forced to move to Utah.
- 5 Colorado National Guard records indicate that as of July 14, 1881, the First Battalion of Cavalry, Company C (Tabor Light Cavalry), was led by Captain William Kendal Burchinell (1846-1923). He had served as private in the 15th Pennsylvania Cavalry during the Civil War, and later in Leadville headed up the U.S. Land Office. After serving with the Tabor Light Cavalry, Burchinell moved to Denver in 1883 and was engaged in the mining-machinery business before being elected Sheriff of Arapahoe County, serving from 1892 to 1896. In March 1894, Sheriff Burchinell starred in a dramatic dispute with Colorado Governor Davis Hansen Waite, who wanted to fire or replace a number of Denver fire, police, and municipal employees and commissioners for alleged misconduct and corruption. When they refused to comply, Gov. Waite called on the National Guard to storm City Hall to carry out his order. Burchinell objected to the Governor’s military escalation and, along with the entire Denver police force and a number of deputy sheriffs, joined the city commissioners and employees barricaded in City Hall. Gov. Waite withdrew his order to await a state court decision, and shortly thereafter the Colorado Supreme Court ruled that Waite had exercised proper authority in firing the city employees, but had acted improperly in calling out the infantry. The city commissioners and employees thereupon relinquished their seats, and the deadlock was broken. Burchinell, however, fearing the possibility of another State vs. County confrontation, used his authority and an Arapahoe County purchase order to buy 50 Winchester Model 1886 rifles in caliber .40-82 W.C.F. The rifles were factory engraved *Arapahoe County* in cursive script on their left receivers and were shipped by Winchester on July 14, 1894. Campbell, “City Hall War of 1894”; also, Nankivell, *History*, Part Three, “Cavalry and Artillery Units of the Colorado National Guard,” Chapter I, “History of the 117th Separate Squadron Cavalry,” p. 270.
- 6 More information on the origins and history of the Leadville clothing firm of Sands, Pelton, & Co. is available online from Temple Israel Foundation in Leadville, <http://www.jewishleadville.org/index.html>.
- 7 Griswold, “The Mount Massive Hotel and the Tabor Light Cavalry.”
- 8 I am indebted to Dušan Farrington for the wealth of new information on the history and development of the U.S. Army’s post-Civil War sword and saber patterns in his groundbreaking study to be released by Andrew Mowbray, Inc.
- 9 The Tabor Light Cavalry line officers’ saber presented here is in very fine, original condition and in the author’s collection.
- 10 Compared to government-purchased cavalry officers’ sabers made by Ames Mfg. Co. during the Civil War, hilt length of the 1872-pattern sabers made for the Ordnance Department by the National Armory at Springfield, Massachusetts, was reduced only one-half inch, and blade length was reduced only eight-tenths of an inch.
- 11 Prior to 1880, Model 1872 cavalry officers’ sabers were also approved for wear by mounted (field) officers of infantry.
- 12 In 1882, the army dropped the requirement for dual scabbards for staff and foot officers’ swords, and thereafter only the bright, nickel-plated scabbard was required.
- 13 Tabor’s sword and his gold-bullion epaulettes bearing the single star of an army Brigadier General are in the collection of the History Colorado Center in Denver, reportedly along with his dress frock coat and chapeau.
- 14 The “black felt hat” most likely was the regulation 1872-pattern chapeau, or plumed fore-and-aft hat, authorized for U.S. Army generals and staff officers.
- 15 Based on the only known example, line officers’ saber blades were etched *Tabor Light Cavalry*. on the obverse, and *C.N.G.* on the reverse.
- 16 Contrary to the writer’s impression, the blade of Tabor’s dress sword is not etched *Tabor Light Cavalry*.
- 17 Instead of wearing epaulettes, as reported here, Tabor’s officers wore army 1872-pattern braided-gilt shoulder knots, padded and faced in cavalry yellow, and custom-embroidered with the company’s *T.L.C.* monogram.
- 18 Griswold, *History of Leadville*, pp. 643-644.
- 19 The stereographic view of the Tabor Light Cavalry is in the collection of the Denver Public Library and can be accessed online here: <http://digital.denverlibrary.org/cdm/singleitem/collection/p15330coll22/id/804/rec/37>
- 20 “In the funeral procession were the First Regiment band, National Guard cavalry troops B and C, the Chaffee Light Artillery, and three infantry companies of the Colorado National Guard.” Burke, p. 237.
- 21 Horace and Baby Doe had two daughters, Elizabeth Bonduel Lillie and Rose Mary Echo Silver Dollar. The only son of Augusta and Horace Tabor, Nathaniel M. (“Maxcy”), continued the family name as a successful Denver businessman.

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