

# SHARPS RIFLES SHIPPED IN 1870S TO THE COLORADO TERRITORY

by David Carter

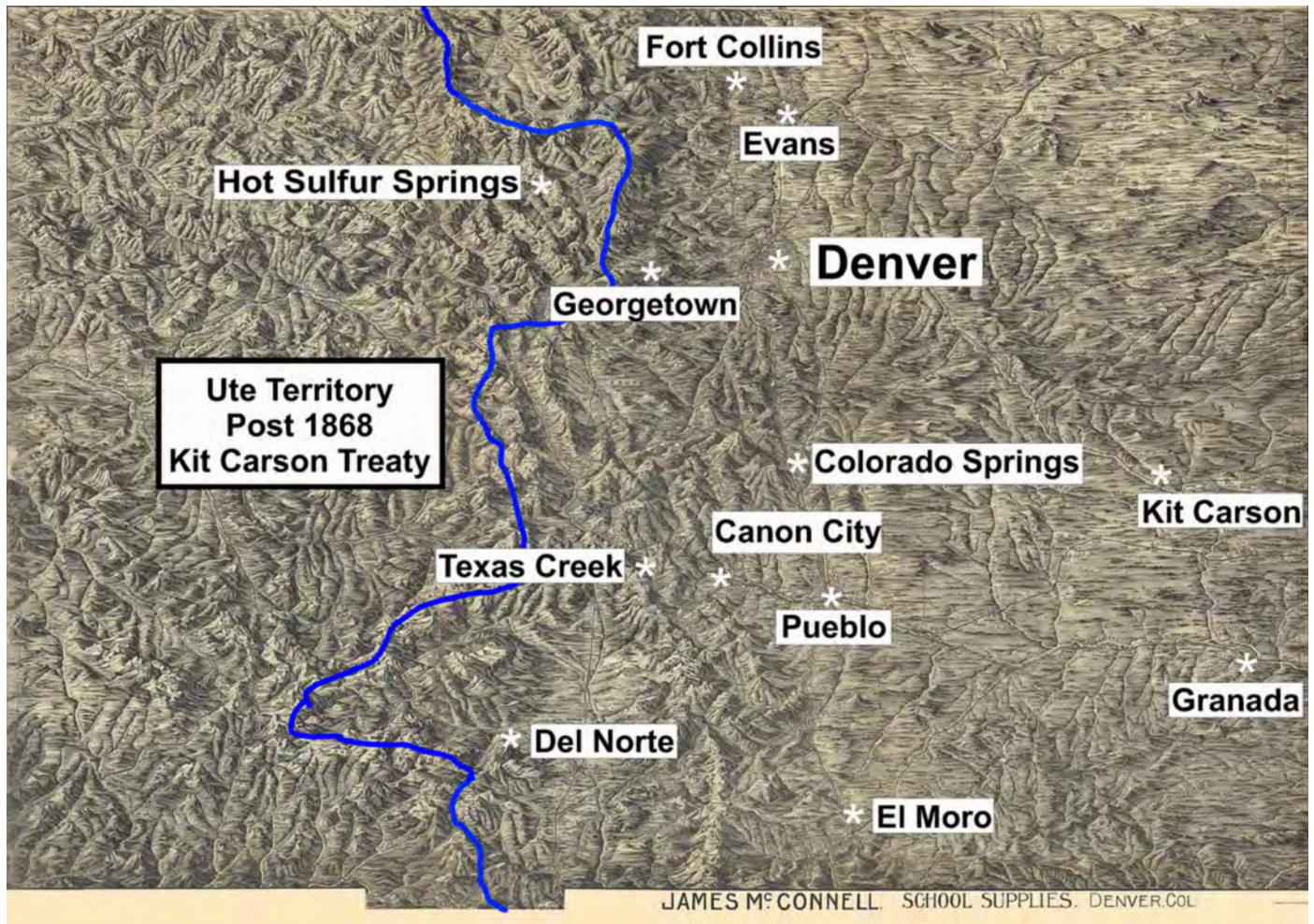


Figure 1. Map of Colorado with settlements discussed in the text indicated.

As a result of the Civil War, firearms became very prolific and advanced in their performance. Sharps rifles played a major role in first, the near extermination of the American Bison, second, the removal of the Plains Indians major food source and settlement of all lands, regardless of treaties. Sharps rifles went first to Kansas, Oklahoma, and Texas where there were lots of buffalo. By the 1870s, hunters moved to Nebraska, Wyoming and Colorado. The Sharps in my display show the shipping just inside Colorado and moving west through the 1870s and the continued settlement of Colorado. Colorado became a U. S. Territory in 1861. Many of the veterans of the Civil War left the east for the west. Given the view of the prairie, mountains, sunny weather and open land, Colorado became a major destination. With the discovery of gold and silver adding to its allure.

At that time the entire mountain area of Colorado was considered property of the Ute Indians (Figure 1). Because large numbers of settlers and miners expanded into the mountains, conflicts arose. In 1868 a treaty was signed between the Ute tribes and the

Federal government, it gave the Utes all the land west of the Continental Divide, reserving the western half of Colorado for the tribes (Figure 1). By the mid-seventies even though the treaty of 1868 forbid trespass west of the Continental Divide, miners and others moved into the Ute territory.

By the mid-70s, even though the treaty forbid trespass onto the territory covered by the Treaty of 1868, miners and others moved across the Divide into Ute Territory and started establishing towns and developments. Colorado was admitted into the Union as a state on August 1, 1876, adding additional settlers and encroachments. The conflict finally reached critical mass with the Meeker Massacre in 1879. The Indian Agent, Nathan Meeker and his ten employees were all killed. The result was that the Utes lost most of the land granted them by treaty in Colorado. The forced removal of several Ute tribes to Utah and the reduction of treaty land for most of the remaining tribes opened millions of acres of land to white settlers.



**Serial number C52604**



Serial number C52604 and C50049 shipped to Kit Carson, Colorado Territory, located about 40 miles north of Granada, just west of the Kansas line. Another early Buffalo trading post and hide buying location, owned by Mark Biedell. He later moved into the southern Colorado mountains and got into mining. Serial number C50049 is a very early .50 caliber Model 1869 rifle, and C52604 is a .50 caliber Model 1874 16-pound scoped real buffalo gun.

Serial number C54304 shipped to Evans, Colorado Territory, located south of Cheyenne, Wyoming was also an early buffalo trad-

ing area along with Granada and Kit Carson. J. C. Sumner purchased several Sharps and later moved to the interior of Colorado. C54304 shows lots of USE, not abuse.

Denver, Colorado Territory, started in 1859 and located close to the mountains on several rivers in central Colorado. After the Civil War, many veterans came west looking for a new life, miners, merchants, farmers, etc. Denver became a hub for the west during the late 1860s, 1870s and later.

**Serial number C12128**



Serial number C12128 shipped to Denver, a percussion conversion from the Civil War. Serial number C52980, a standard sporting rifle, and number 155045 an early customized Freund rifle, including sights. The Freund brothers opened a gun shop in Denver in 1872. They sold to M. L. Rood in 1875 when they moved to Cheyenne, Wyoming where they became famous for customizing of many firearms into the 1880s.



Serial number C53290

Serial number C53290 shipped to Denver, Colorado, and is a fairly standard sporting rifle. M. L. Rood operated a gun smithing shop for many years, but was not known as a nice guy. He was a very early store owner in Denver.



Serial number C51498



Serial number C54373



**Serial number 155090**



**Serial number 156290**



Serial numbers C51498, C54373, 155090 and 156290 are examples of the standard fair of the time, carbines, heavy sporting ri-

fles and moderate hunting guns. Carlos Gove operated a gun store during the 1870s later selling to John P. Lower in 1876.

**Serial number 154772**





**Serial number 158334**



**Serial number 8782**

Serial numbers 154772, 158334 and 8782 are examples of the many variations of Sharps sold by J. P. Lower, including heavy sporters, carbines and his favorite, the Model 1878 Borchartt hammerless rifle (including his personal cartouche on the butt stock)

of number 8782. The Model 1878 was the last rifle manufactured by the Sharps Manufacturing Company. John P. Lower operated a gun store in Denver until well into the 20th century.



**Serial number C53955**



Serial number C53955: after General Crook “asked” Jim Baker to replace his Hawken plains rifle, Baker ended up with this Sharps medium weight sporting rifle. Unhappy with the caliber he had John Lower RE-CHAMBER it from a .44 to a .45, thus shooting a .45 bullet down a .44 barrel. He claimed it shot much better. Military records reflect that he carried this rifle using a rope sling tied around the barrel and tied to his saddle. Jim Baker, a mountain

man who is credited with being the first permanent settler in Colorado. He was hired by Jim Bridger (a life-long friend) in 1838, and did almost everything in the west including scouting for the Army, trapping, coal mining and various businesses. He died in 1898 at the age of 80. Baker purchased this Sharps rifle, delivered in Fort Collins, Colorado. Several books are written about Jim Baker and his life in the west, NOT novels, but factual. See Appendix 1.

**Serial number 154775**



Serial number 154775 is one of three standard medium weight sporting rifles shipped to Texas Creek long past the buffalo era. Texas Creek was a railroad staging station in the mountains above Canon City, Colorado and is currently a U.S. Forest Service Camp Ground. Albert W. Puett ordered four Sharps, probably to sell to other employees of the railroad, keeping a fancier one for himself.

Serial number C53343 is a post-buffalo era standard sporting rifle of medium weight shipped to Canon City. Canon City, Colorado Territory is the home of the Colorado State Prison and located on the railroad in the mountains west of Colorado Springs. A.E. Rudolph, operated a store, selling guns clothing and general merchandise. A real General Store. Only information on Rudolph so far, is a photograph in a composite of merchants of the time.



**Serial number C53343**



**Serial number 155247**

Serial number 155247 is a standard medium weight sporting rifle shipped to Pueblo, Colorado. Otto H. Viergutz of Pueblo, emigrated from Germany and opened and operated a clothing store.

Additionally, he purchased hundreds of broken/inoperative guns, (but mostly Colt pistols) from government stores, which he refurbished and sold through his store.





**Serial number 158358**

Serial number 158358 is a light weight sporting rifle shipped to Brown and Manzanaris, successors to Chick Brown operated stores across southern Colorado, including El Moro, North of Trinidad.

El Moro was a coking station for the early steel mills, located in Pueblo. Not much of a company town then or now.



**Serial number 160450**

Serial number 160450 is a standard light sporting rifle for hunters. Charles Stockbridge of Colorado Springs, Colorado operated a gun, sporting goods and clothing store, in addition to selling real

estate. He also dealt in quite a few guns. A complete general store. This gun is one of 10 in a single shipment and was later modified by George Schoyen of Denver, Colorado, a noted gunsmith.





**Serial number 6337**

Serial number 6337 is a Model 1878 Borchardt hammerless long rifle while number 160735 is a Model 1877 long rifle hammer gun, the last external hammer model rifle that Sharps made. W. B. Cloete, of Del Norte, Colorado custom ordered these two long-range rifles from Sharps, with specific features and sights. A very serious hunter, he was by trade a mining engineer in the silver

mines of the San Juan Mountains of southern Colorado. Later he managed silver mines in Mexico. After he retired, he and his wife booked passage to England in 1915, unfortunately on the ill-fated ocean liner, the Lusitania, first vessel sunk by the German Navy.



**Serial number 160735**

**Serial number 158264**



Serial number 158264 is a standard medium weight sporting rifle. Barney Day ordered this rifle, delivered in Georgetown, Colorado, for his personal use. Carved on the butt stock are records of what he shot with this gun, including elk, deer, bobcats, antelope and 46 Alligators. By this time he had hunted buffalo, Indians,

and all manner of other game. He also did service with volunteer soldiers against the natives, including the battle of Beecher Island, in eastern Colorado. Georgetown was a serious mining town of the 1870-90s.

**Serial number 161514**



Serial number 161514 is a light weight general hunting rifle. This is the last of a total of eight Sharps rifles bought by Barney Day over the years and this was delivered to Hot Sulphur Springs, Colorado, a trespassing settlement in the Ute Territory, his last home. After 1879 when the Utes were removed from most of Colorado, Barney became a deputy sheriff and later a county commissioner. He was

assassinated on July 4, 1884 in Grand Lake, Colorado, along with the other two Commissioners, BY the sheriff, the chief deputy and a third assassin. All died as a result of a shootout. The affair was over the location of the county seat between the two political parties. A true dispute between the Democrats and the Republicans.



**Photographs of Barney Day, his wife Sophronia and their son Barney Hulse (Judd) Day**



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Carter, D. 2009. "Jim Baker, The Forgotten Man". *American Society of Arms Collectors Bulletin* Vol 99:11-16.

**See Appendix 1**

# JIM BAKER, THE FORGOTTEN MAN

Trapper, Guide, Army Scout, Businessman and Pioneer



Jim Bridger by Waldo Love, 1935, Colorado Historical Society, Denver, Colorado

Often referred to as “the forgotten man,” Jim Baker was a trapper, guide, army scout, Indian fighter, map maker, homesteader, pioneer rancher, businessman, husband and father many times over, whose adventurous life was long and colorful, apropos to a 6’ 4” frame and bright red hair. He was friends with Jim Bridger, Kit Carson and other long remembered mountain men, and he was one of General John C. Fremont’s favorite scouts.

He has been called the forgotten mountain man, as found in the Daily (Colorado) Tribune, June 28, 1923: “While Jim Baker, living, had never meant so very much to Coloradans, Baker dead was remembered as Colorado’s first citizen, the original settler in that state, along with Wyoming.”

Jim Baker was born in Belleville, St. Clair County, Illinois on December 19, 1818, of Scots/English ancestry. Not much is known about his early days other than he developed a lifelong love of the outdoors. He attended school until he was old enough to apprentice as a shoemaker, the apprenticeship lasted only about a year. He “borrowed” \$20.00 from his mother and left for St. Louis, the gateway to the West, at the age of 20. Walking down the street in St. Charles, at over six feet tall and with bright red hair, he was noticed by Jim Bridger who hired him to work for the American Fur Company. They left soon after on the steamer St. Peters for the beaver country in the West. Up the Missouri, then overland to Fort Laramie, then west over South Pass to the 1839 Green River Rendezvous.

At the rendezvous Baker met Kit Carson and started life as a trapper. Baker spent 1839 and all of 1840 trapping on the Green River and into the Wind River Mountains in what is now Wyoming. In the fall of 1840, about 60 mountain men and 800 Shoshoni Indians gathered in Brown’s Hole for the winter. Henry Fraeb brought supplies for the last rendezvous that year, along with Father De Smet, an ordained Jesuit priest. Bridger, Fraeb, Baker and Jack Robinson spent the winter on Henry’s Fork of the Green River.

In 1841, with his two-year contract completed, Baker headed back to Illinois to see his family. After a limited time with his family and old friends, he realized that he couldn’t live where “people were so thick.” Going back to St. Louis, Baker caught a wagon train going to California, captained by Thomas “Broken Hand” Fitzpatrick and accompanied by Father De Smet. Baker became the supplier of meat for the train. Upon reaching the Green River, the train met Henry Fraeb and his party of 20 hunters and trappers on July 23, 1841. The train split, Father De Smet going on to Oregon with half the settlers and the other half going on to California to become the first Americans to arrive in California by overland travel. Jim Baker returned to his friend Jim Bridger on the Henry’s Fork and the mountains, the mountains where he would remain the balance of his life.

Henry Fraeb and his 20-man party had gone east to the Little Snake River Valley, an area just north of present day Baggs, Wyoming. Bridger received word that a large band of Sioux, Arapahoe and Cheyenne were on the warpath and intended to wipe out the trappers and hunters. Bridger sent Baker and two others to warn Fraeb. Shortly after their arrival, another trapper came in and said that the Indians had killed his companions and were headed toward Fraeb’s group. On August 20, 1841, Fraeb moved his camp to an island at the junction of a stream (now named Battle Creek) that entered the Little Snake. Forting up on the island, the men, numbering 25 whites and about 20 Shoshoni warriors fought against



more than 500 attackers. Attack after attack continued through the 20th and 21st. Fraeb was killed and Baker, only 22, assumed command. Since the Sioux would not fight at night, the trappers used darkness to reinforce their small barracks. During the morning of the 22nd, the Indians withdrew, having suffered many losses. Stories of Baker's bravery, daring, leadership and marksmanship were told by the survivors and his reputation as an Indian fighter was assured. Baker, in 1886, gave an interview to the Denver Republican and said that the Indians made about 40 charges against the small log barracks on the island and using mostly bow and arrows came within 10-15 paces of the trappers before being shot. All estimates were of about 100 attacking Indians killed with the loss of only four trappers.

Shortly after, Bridger, Baker and ten others left for the Southwest, going down the west side of the Rockies toward the Little Colorado. There they encountered Apaches, had several fights, lost four men and turned back towards the Green River until they ran into the Utes, which convinced them to stop trapping and leave the area. Nine months later, they arrived back at Bridger's camp. Later General Fremont returned to Brown's Hole on the Green River, from his exploits in Utah, where Bridger and Baker joined Fremont's party with Kit Carson. They explored the three central "parks" of Colorado, arriving at Pueblo on June 29, 1844. They went on to Bent's Fork, and then Taos, the home of Kit Carson.

Baker spent the winter of 1845-46, called "the worst winter on record," near the North Platte River west of the Medicine Bow Mountains of Wyoming. Temperatures of 60 below killed not only the horses, but all the buffalo, deer, moose and elk, leaving Baker and his companions to survive on rose hips and cottonwood bark. Having heard stories from Fremont, Carson and Fitzpatrick of tremendous horse herds, ripe for the taking, Baker and a few others set off for California after acquiring the necessary horses and pack animals. Baker's crew arrived in California in the spring of 1846 and got together a herd of 10,000 horses, then headed back east. They were well-armed enough to drive off the various Indians and Mexican vaqueros, losing only a few horses along the way. Their real enemy was the desert between the Sierra and the Rockies. When they finally arrived back at Black's Fort on the Green River, they only had about 4,000 horses to trade with the Indians.

In the fall of 1846, Baker settled in with a band of Shoshoni near the Wind River for the winter. Although never very good with a bow and arrow, he was unmatched with a rifle. Kit Carson said often that Baker was the best shot in the West, outside of himself. Since he loved to hunt, he was always welcome as a hunter for the winter. In the spring while out hunting with the bands' braves, a Blackfoot party raided the camp, killing several old people, kidnapping two young girls, taking all the horses and burning the tipis. Chief Arizona organized a party of his best warriors along, with Jim Baker, to go after the Blackfoot party. They found the Blackfoot party at nightfall; Baker went into the camp to rescue the girls while the others took all the horses. After a small fight, the Shoshoni and Baker returned with the Shoshoni horses, the Blackfoot horses and the two girls. One of the rescued girls was the chief's daughter, Marina, who Jim married. She was the first of six Shoshoni wives for Jim Baker.

In 1849, with too many miners traveling west to the gold fields in California, Baker and a few friends left for the Milk River country in Montana. After a successful trapping trip north of the Yellow-

stone River and many run-ins with the Sioux and Blackfeet, they arrived back on the Wind River in June 1850, having covered 1,200 miles.

In 1851, Kit Carson organized a new trapping trip, with written invitations to his old friends. Baker received his invitation at Fort Hall in Idaho and left the next day for the 700-mile trip to Rayado (Carson's home) in April of 1852. Of the 18 trappers, half were old friends. They traveled north up the Arkansas River, then to the South Platte River in Wyoming; to the Sweetwater River; then down the Green and south across the Grand and Colorado Rivers and finally through Raton Pass to Rayado. With several thousand dollars each, they parted after a great party thrown by Kit Carson. They realized that this was the last trapping trip they would take together.

Around 1853, Baker acquired a second wife, Meeteetse, whom he renamed Mary. She and Jim eventually had ten children. In 1850, Baker operated a ferry across the Green River at the Old Overland Crossing on the Oregon trail. His brother John recorded that Jim was making as much as \$600 per day during the high water, when as many as 55,000 people passed through the area in a season. In 1849, the Mormons' "State of Deseret" proclaimed control over Fort Bridger and the surrounding area, including the Green River crossings. The Mormons granted an exclusive right to operate ferries from 1853 to 1856 to a church leader and sent a force of 150 men to take the ferries and arrest Jim Bridger. Bridger and Baker sold out and left. The whereabouts of Baker during the next two years is unknown, but it is assumed that he returned to the Wind River area with the Shoshoni.

In 1855 Baker, along with several other mountain men, arrived at Fort Laramie and spent considerable time with Lieutenant Warren drawing maps for the military. The Sioux wars were just starting and the military wanted maps. Only the mountain men knew the West. Baker's sketched map is located in the New York State Library. It included the area from Fort Laramie south into Colorado; west to the Salt Lake; north into Idaho; and east of the Yellowstone; then back to Fort Laramie. Baker became chief scout at Fort Laramie for several years.

The Mormon problem escalated with raiding, burning and basic guerrilla warfare on the settlers and travelers going west. Baker was sent to the site of the Mountain Meadows Massacre and filed a report naming the Mormons as the perpetrators, which caused Brigham Young to offer a reward of \$5,000 for Jim Baker, dead. Finally, when Colonel Albert Sidney Johnston arrived at Ft. Bridger on November 18, 1857, he found everything burned as the Mormons retreated west.

On November 24, Captain Randolph B. Marcy was ordered to select a unit of volunteers from Fort Bridger and head 650 miles southeast for supplies at Taos, New Mexico. Marcy's unit left on November 27 with 40 volunteer troops, 25 civilian mountain men, and 65 mules. Baker and his friend Goodale were the guides for the 25-day trip. They traveled southwest into the Unita Mountains, across the Green River and the Colorado River, finally arriving at the Gunnison River in southwestern Colorado. Marcy, behind schedule, now directed the unit east through the San Juans into an area of deep snow, with no knowledge of the area as neither Baker or Goodale had ever ventured into the area. Fifty-two days later, having existed on mule meat and dried wild horse mint (a coffee and tobacco substitute), the men reached Fort Massachusetts

(north of Taos) on January 18th, with only three ridable mules. Six and a half months later, Captain Marcy arrived back at Fort Bridger with relief: sheep, cattle, mules and 194 troops.

Jim Baker later served as scout and guide for Colonel Steptoe for the area between Fort Walla Walla into the Colville Mining district in northeastern Washington State. He was hired as a scout by Jim Bridger at Fort Phil Kearny in Wyoming and was involved in the Wagon Box fight before the Fetterman massacre. Baker was a wagon driver for the woodcutters whom the Sioux attacked. The guards and drivers used the wagon boxes as a makeshift fort. The troop had the “new” 1866 50/70 trapdoors and not the muzzleloaders of the past, the Indians continued to attack. With muzzleloaders, they would have overrun the small number of defenders. Reports are that Baker used seven rifles with three troopers loading. He apparently killed about a hundred Sioux. In 1875, Baker scouted with three others for Custer in northern Wyoming, but when their time ran out, they left because they didn't like the way Custer gave orders. Baker's last service for the military was in 1879, when the Utes overran Major Thornburgh's command on the Milk Creek after the Meeker Massacre.



Oil painting by Lansdale Fox, 1924 Colorado Historical Society, Denver, Colorado.

In 1859 Baker moved his family to Colorado, and homesteaded 160 acres on the Vasquez Fork (later named Clear Creek) of the South Platte, where the Old Cherokee Trail crossed on its way to Boulder. Jim built a ferry across the river, on the route to the mines of Gold Hill and Central City. He later opened a store, supplying the migrants and locals with necessary items, including meat, which he procured as a hunter and guide. Baker filed the first coal mine claim in Colorado on Coal Creek, near the present town of Erie, Colorado.

After his wife was drowned in Clear Creek, he decided he could wait no longer, and finally built a toll bridge over the river in 1865. The Baker School District, the Baker Precinct for voting, the Baker Neighborhood and the Baker crossing named after him all added to the expanding area of Auraria, later named Denver.

In 1865, Major Oakes was named Indian Agent for the mountain Utes, and being a longtime friend of Baker, hired Jim to be his guide and interpreter. The Ute treaty of 1868 covered most of western Colorado Territory. The amendments to the treaty in 1873 included the building of a mission by Meeker in the northwestern region of Colorado, on the Milk River.

Many reports describe Jim as extremely handsome, but generally scarred from his toes to the top of his head by bear fights, riding accidents and Indian battles. His worst accident occurred when a “modern repeating” Spencer carbine was given to him by General Cunningham at Fort Leavenworth. It was then that he gave up his beloved Hawken rifle. In June of 1867, Jim and Major Oakes were visiting a Ute camp west of Denver and were invited to participate in a shooting match with the Indians. The Spencer magazine, which is located in the buttstock, exploded seriously injuring Baker, breaking his chin, lacerating his neck, right shoulder and severing several fingers, or portions thereof. Besides losing a thumb and part of his trigger finger, from the time of his recovery, he wore a beard to cover the scars and his badly disfigured chin. He vowed to never use a repeating rifle again.

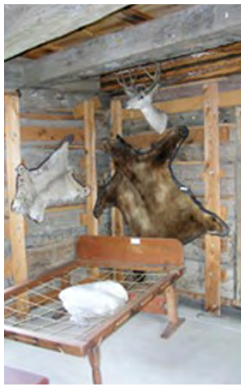
The population of Denver was growing, and in 1870 the census listed 4,500 residents. In 1872, Baker was hired to guide the surveyors of the Denver and Rio Grande Railroad for a route to Salt Lake. By 1873, the population was almost 16,000; more than Baker could take. The Boulder News on June 6, 1873 reported: “*Old Jim Baker, a resident of Colorado for 30 years, has pulled up stakes from his well-known ranch on Clear Creek and gone over the range to the Snake River.*” Baker, with his four daughters and a son-in-law, arrived on the Little Snake River, and built his home almost on the line between Colorado and Wyoming. It was also very near the Indian battle with Fraeb, 35 years earlier. Built out of large cottonwood logs, the ground floor was 16x31 feet divided into two rooms, two windows in each room and a door at each end. The upper floor was a single room 15 feet square, with two windows on each side, and a small watchtower or turret on the roof, reached by rope ladder. The house resembled a fort rather than a house, and that was what it was. Placed on a hill, Baker could see the area for a long way and with his new Sharps rifle could defend his family. He stated that the “*Utes don't like me*” and he expected an attack at any time.

In 1875 after building his fort, Baker ordered a new single shot rifle. A Sharps Model 1874 octagon sporting rifle in .44 caliber serial number C53955. After receiving it he was displeased with what he got and wrote several letters of complaint to the Sharps Company. One letter was regarding the type of rifling, as it was not the same as he had seen in other guns. The company responded that he lived in a “sandy” area and needed deeper rifling to combat the wear from the grit. In addition, the calibers were not correct and their explanation was that as he was in a hurry for the guns and these were the closest to what he wanted, the company thought that they would work. Serial number C53955 was certainly the gun he used. Later, he had J. P. Lower's gun shop in Denver re-chambered the gun from .44 to .45-100. An original receipt shows Jim Baker





Jim Baker's house in the Little Snake River area. (Top photo by Jeffery Beall).



as the customer and the serial number of the gun to be the same. This means that he shot .45 caliber ammunition through the .44 caliber gun.

In 1879, the Utes massacred the Meeker mission and cornered the Army's relief units, who were finally relieved by General Merritt. He then asked Jim Baker to guide his four companies of cavalry to Milk Creek. General Merritt's notes state, "*we arrived at the appointed junction of the Milk River and found Jim Baker waiting on his horse with his Sharps rifle tied to his saddle.*"

He spent the rest of his days on the Little Snake, hunting, ranching and raising his daughters and grandchildren. In 1895 and

1896, he accepted the invitation to be the Grand Marshall of the Denver Festival of the Mountain and Plain, which started in 1895. He was not accustomed to electric lights and refused to ride the elevators in the hotel. His only reason for coming to Denver was to see his old friends and spend time telling stories with those that were left. In 1897, he fell ill and had his kidney removed in Denver. Realizing he would "*walk with the wind on the trail we all must follow,*" he prepared a will, gave land to each of his daughters, and settled his affairs. He died in his sleep on May 15, 1898. He was buried in the family plot on a hill overlooking the Little Snake River between Savery and Dixon, Wyoming, shadowed by Baker's Peak to the southeast.

### **Jim Baker's headstone.**

Jim Baker lived 60 years in the West when it was a very dangerous place, as 75-80% of the mountain men died the first year of trapping. He was involved in many Indian fights, bore many scars and helped explore the area that we call home today. Not much was known about Baker, because after Kit Carson's story was published, Jim and several other mountain men refused to talk to either authors or journalists, because what they said was not what got printed. Baker and his fellows did not trust the reporters. Over the years, various references to Baker have been uncovered in journals, books and news articles that have shone light upon his extensive exploits. Various parks, neighborhoods, statues and even a stained-glass window in the Colorado State Capital speak to his contributions to the West, Colorado and Wyoming in particular.



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