

Junius R. Lewis and the Golden Chest Mining Company

BY THOMAS L. GREEN

The recent surge of interest in the Black American past has been responsible for the production of an abundance of material dealing with legendary and mundane Black residents in the West. From cattleman Izum Dart to "Aunt" Clara Brown, the Black woman whose cabin housed the first prayer meeting in Central City, Colorado, new figures have taken their places beside the Jim Beckwourths and the Bill Picketts as evidence of the Black presence in the early American West.

Although Colorado was not a focal point for Blacks entering the West during the late 1800s, it did have a sizable Black population. Denver, Central City, and Cripple Creek were bustling towns when Blacks settled in and around them. It is not difficult to understand why Blacks came to an urban center such as Denver. Likewise, Central City and Cripple Creek had their own special attractions. "Buffalo Soldiers," black members of the Ninth and Tenth United States Cavalry, left their posts in the Southwest upon being discharged and sought a living in the area with which they had grown familiar during their soldiering days.

There were other areas, somewhat off the beaten track, that were of interest to Black miners and settlers. Boulder, the university town thirty miles to the northwest of Denver, once had a sizable Black population. As early as 1862 Black children were attending the Boulder school on Water Street. From the end of the Civil War until the close of the nineteenth century, there was a continuous, yet sometimes sporadic, migration into the Boulder area. When the town developed as a center for miners going into and coming out of the adjacent mountains, it became evident that Black miners had just as much of a future in the area as anyone else. But they came as much to escape the searing memory of the past as to seek adventure and fortune.

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When the war between the states ended, the people of the South were faced with a seemingly hopeless situation. Their homes and lands were devastated, and more important, the "peculiar institution" was no longer legal. For the ex-slave, life held some acute difficulties. He was free, but free to do what? Some Blacks found shelter with the Freedmen's Bureau, while others chose to cooperate with the carpet-bagger governments that took control of the South. For yet another group of former slaves, the only alternative seemed to be to leave the old South altogether.

Among the Black migrants who turned to the West was Junius R. Lewis. He had served as an orderly with the Confederate forces during the Civil War. Like so many others, he returned to the only home he had ever known and, after locating his family, began a Black man's journey into what is commonly thought to have been the white man's domain.



*Junius R. Lewis
at seventy-four.*

Lewis was born on a plantation near Jackson, Mississippi, in 1842.¹ He lived there with his slave mother for nearly twenty years. While he was still young, his mother instilled in him the belief that his only opportunity for improving his condition was in the free states to the north. When the Civil War began, many slaves escaped and traveled to the land of Lewis' dreams, but Lewis ignored chances for escape in order to help care for his aging mother. However, it was not long before the circumstances of slavery hastened the arrival of his time for escape. "My mother had been sold and I wanted to get to the North where I would be free,"² he said later. His twentieth birthday had not arrived when he decided to leave the plantation.

"It was in the spring of 1862, I think,"³ recalled Lewis. He must have been a hardy young man, able to live off the land. He had traveled more than three hundred miles, presumably on foot, to a point somewhere in the western theater of the war before he was captured. Lewis remembered having "gotten into Kentucky when a neighbor of my owner saw me. He was an officer in the Confederate army and had me arrested."⁴

Lewis was one of many fleeing slaves captured by Confederate troops. The common practice was to put the captured slave to work, and Lewis' case was no exception. Eventually young Lewis was turned over to General William Wing Loring, commander of the Confederate Army of Southwestern Virginia.⁵ After serving General Loring as an orderly for a few months, Lewis was assigned to General Abraham Buford, a huge man who weighed nearly three hundred pounds. Lewis recalled that the "general was so heavy he would wear out a horse in about an hour, and he sure kept me busy bringing up fresh horses."⁶ As the captured slave moved from unit to unit of the Confederate Army, he was transferred to General Joseph E. Johnston's service as a valet. Lewis liked this officer well enough to remember that as "a real soldier and also a real man, he treated his men right."⁷ After Johnston was wounded at the battle of Seven Pines, May 31 to June 1, 1862, Lewis was removed to the service of General John Bell Hood for almost three years. General William T. Sherman brushed Hood aside on his march

1 Rocky Mountain News, February 4, 1836, p. 7.

2 Ibid.

3 Ibid.

4 Ibid.

5 Loring resigned his commission as commanding colonel of the Regiment of Mounted Rifles of the Department of New Mexico on June 11, 1861, in order to join the Confederate Army. *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1881), 1st ser. 1:599.

6 Rocky Mountain News, February 4, 1836, p. 7.

7 Ibid.

through Georgia, and General George H. Thomas destroyed what remained of Hood's force at the battle of Nashville. In April of 1865 Hood marched his small command to Virginia where he joined General Robert E. Lee. According to Lewis, he was with Hood at Appomattox Court House on April 9, 1865, when Lee surrendered to Ulysses S. Grant.⁸

At the war's end Lewis made his way back to Mississippi and, after a tedious search, found his aging mother. Postwar Mississippi proved unattractive to these two ex-slaves. Lewis gathered his few possessions and with his mother traveled west across Louisiana into Texas. Part of the first wave of ex-slaves who left the old South during the early Reconstruction Period, Lewis found that merely existing was no easy task. As they drifted across the state, he supported his mother by working in hotels and doing odd jobs for anyone who would hire him.⁹ In a nameless Texas town Lewis met one of his former commanding officers, the "real man," ex-Confederate General Joseph E. Johnston. Johnston offered to send Lewis to Egypt with a group of former Confederate officers who had agreed to serve in the Army of the Khedive. This incident appears to have occurred in 1868 or 1869.¹⁰ (Lewis may have confused William Wing Loring with Joseph E. Johnston in relating the details of this meeting. Loring was active in the Southwest prior to the Civil War and may have returned to the area to recruit men for the Egyptian expedition.)¹¹ At any rate, Lewis refused the offer. Apparently his mother's health was failing, and he wished to comfort her.

Lewis also taught school while living in Texas.¹² A mulatto, Lewis may have been educated by his master. That, of course, depends upon whether or not Lewis was the offspring of his master and his slave mother, not a remote possibility. One must also consider the fact that it was common practice to educate children conceived by the master and a slave woman. The teaching episode did not last long, and Lewis turned to farming but lost his land when he could not pay the taxes. That parched piece of earth later bore fruit. It lay in the heart of the highly productive Burkburnett oil fields in Wichita County, Texas.¹³

In 1882 Lewis was hired by the railroad and came to Dever."¹⁴ His mother apparently died in Texas, because he does

8 Ibid. The War of the Rebellion indicates that Hood was at Appomattox at the time of surrender. In all the records dealing with ex-slaves during the war only one Junius is reported. The practice at that time was to list a slave by his first name. Whether this was Lewis cannot be determined.

9 Rocky Mountain News, February 4, 1936, p. 7.

10 Ibid.

11 Dictionary of American Biography, s.v. "Loring, William Wing."

12 Rocky Mountain News, February 4, 1936, p. 7.

13 Boulder Daily Camera, July 20, 1938, p. 7.

14 Rocky Mountain News, February 4, 1936, p. 7.

not mention her after coming to Denver. According to Ballenger and Richards Denver City Directory, Lewis worked for the Denver, Texas, and Fort Worth until 1896.¹⁵ His tasks varied from custodial duties to cooking and being a porter at the Club Room at 1833 Lawrence. The following six years were spent working for the Pullman Palace Car Company as a porter.¹⁶ For Lewis life began at forty, his age when he came to Denver, and his jobs placed him in an excellent spot for meeting people.

While living in Denver, Lewis became acquainted with several of the city's prominent Black inhabitants. Among them was O. T. Jackson, founder of the "all-Negro" communal farming experiment at Dearfield, Colorado.¹⁷ Another was Dr. M. E. Spratlin, who was named most valuable citizen of the community of Littleton, Colorado, in 1933.¹⁸ His friends also included Dr. Joseph H. P. Westbrook, the man who suggested the name for Jackson's Dearfield colony, and Dr. P. E. Spratlin, brother of M. E. Spratlin and the first Black man to receive the Doctor of Medicine degree from the University of Colorado.

Although Lewis was not the kind of man who chose his friends by the color of their skin, several of his friends were members of an ultra-snobbish set disparagingly known as the "Blue Vein Society," a group of mulattoes light enough in skin tone to show the blue blood traveling in their veins. Black was not beautiful at the turn of the century.

A favorable image of Lewis is held by several of north-central Colorado's octogenarian citizens. One of the original settlers of the Dearfield colony, Miss Jennie Jackson, remembered Lewis' black hair and his handsome face. What puzzled her was that this kind, loving man never married.¹⁹ Well-known Denver musician George Morrison was a young boy when Lewis moved to Boulder, but he too remembers the amiable, middle-aged gentleman.²⁰ The well-preserved Will Hall, over ninety years old, remarked that Lewis looked a great deal younger than he actually was.²¹ Lewis was a robust individual by anyone's standards. But the most poignant memory of Lewis is that of Irving Lingham, who remembers that Lewis loved to hear him make a violin sing.²²

15 Ballenger & Richards Denver City Directory (Denver: Ballenger & Richards, 1892-96).

16 Ibid.

17 Miss Jennie Jackson, private interview conducted at the Weld County Nursing Home, Greeley, March 20, 1970.

18 Littleton Independent, July 20, 1934, p. 4.

19 Miss Jennie Jackson, private interview, March 20, 1970.

20 George Morrison, private interview conducted in Denver, April 17, 1970.

21 Will Hall, private interview conducted in Boulder, April 18, 1970.

22 Irving Lingham, private interview conducted in Boulder, February 20, 1970. Lingham, a Black man, played in the University of Colorado Orchestra.

The impression of sincerity and affection that Lewis imparted to his acquaintances can best be understood by talking to the children of the family that took him into its heart, the McVeys. John Wesley McVey was one of Lewis' first and dearest friends in



John W. McVey standing (left) in front of his billiard parlor in downtown Boulder.

the Boulder community. Lewis became a partner in the Golden Chest Mining, Milling, and Tunnel Company in 1896 and later worked the mines exclusively.²³ Whenever Lewis came down from the mountains, he stayed with the McVeys. After John McVey died Lewis remained close to the family. Kenneth McVey and Helen McVey Washington recall the old gentleman's visits. He often showed up unexpectedly, but he was always welcome. Even though he suffered from a severe asthma condition, Lewis' stamina was plainly visible as he usually walked the fourteen miles from the mountain town of Sunset

²³ Trans-America Title Insurance Company, Boulder County, Record Book no. 175, P. 446.

to the McVey House at 1718 Water Street (Canyon Boulevard). Occasionally he rode his horse Charlie, a white-dappled swayback that received as much love and affection from the McVey children as did Lewis himself. Lewis always brought a sack of fruit for the children. But whenever Charlie accompanied him down the mountain, Lewis could be sure that the children would share the fruit with the old horse. Lewis was fond of coffee and "cat heads," his label for homemade biscuits. In fact, the McVeys prepared coffee only when the miner was visiting. A common belief among some Blacks and whites at that time was that coffee contributed to the darkness of one's skin. However, Mrs. McVey was an excellent cook, and Lewis thoroughly enjoyed the meals. Meal or no meal, Lewis came to play with the McVey children. Kenneth and Helen McVey have special memories of Lewis' mountaineer boots because "he would

John M. McVey children. Standing, Hazel, and left to right standing, Helen, Kenneth, and Genevieve.



cross his legs and give us a ride on those boots."²⁴ Kenneth McVey could not forget Lewis' pet peeve, the Moffat Tunnel. Lewis never missed an opportunity to express his grief over the taxes he and his fellow miners had to pay to support its construction. Even the constant harangue against "the tunnel" did not cloud the vivid memories of the pleasantness that accompanied Lewis' visits, however.

Lewis was not always as amiable with other people as he was with the McVeys. During his years in Boulder, he was a "loner." His other associates were often a source of displeasure to him. Like so many other mine owners, he was continually struggling to protect his property against claim jumpers. In 1896 Lewis entered a partnership with two other Blacks, George C. Sample and John L. Bell. They purchased the Golden Chest Mine from Edward Gaugia for what later proved to be a bargain price of \$150.²⁵ The mine, located in the Sugarloaf District of Boulder County, remained of secondary interest to Lewis until 1903. In 1907 the Golden Chest Mining, Milling, and Tunnel Company was incorporated and certified by the state of Colorado.²⁶ Shortly thereafter Lewis filed an affidavit in Boulder County Court, stating that he was the president of the Golden Chest Company.²⁷ He then went to work in the principal mines at Sunset on a full-time basis. George Morrison seems to think that Lewis began to devote more time to the mine because "his asthmatic condition was getting more severe and he believed the mountain air would improve his health."²⁸

From the outset Lewis could not have expected to make more than a subsistence living from this venture. The company was to pay him \$2.50 per day for labor in the mine and additional fees for promotional considerations. Due primarily to the tireless effort of the aging miner, the company grew rapidly. The shares of capital stock listed in 1912 were 125,000 with each share having a par value of \$1. Of this amount 62,485 shares were listed as sold. Even when one considers the discrepancy between actual value and par value, the company's existence must have been better than marginal.

24 Helen McVey Washington and Kenneth McVey, private interview conducted in Denver, April 18, 1970.

25 Trans-America Title Insurance Company, Boulder County, Record Book no. 175, p. 446.

26 Secretary of State of Colorado to Henry O. Andrew, attorney for J. R. Lewis, Denver, March 8, 1907, J. R. Lewis Collection, State Historical Society of Colorado.

27 Affidavit, stating that J. R. Lewis has sworn to be the president of the Golden Chest Co., Boulder County, Lewis Collection.

28 George Morrison, private interview conducted in Denver, April 17, 1970. Lewis' severe asthma condition may account for the fact that he never married.



Sunset about 1900.

There were 122 stockholders, placing the average investment in the neighborhood of \$512 per stockholder.²⁹

Nine years after Lewis began working full-time in the mines, the company's debt to Lewis was \$4,223.48 in back wages and fees spent for improvements on the property. However, he continued to work on the property for an additional two years. Aware of the company's debt to Lewis and his intention to sue in order to collect that debt, several stockholders assembled in June of 1915 and subsequently voted to provide the company with new officers.³⁰ Thus, they temporarily deprived Lewis of any right to payment or property. In October of that same year Lewis filed a suit to recover his losses. The legal battle was a long and bitter one. Finally on August 17, 1916, Lewis was awarded a sheriff's deed to the Golden Chest Company. The company, under the direction of Lewis

29 P. E. Spratlin, M.D., to Board of Directors, Golden Chest Mining, Milling, and Tunnel Co. Denver, May 1, 1912, Lewis Collection.

30 O. T. Jackson to A. J. Broadford, Denver, June 17, 1915, Lewis Collection.

adversaries, had failed to comply with a court order to compensate him for the debt owed him by the company.³¹

Litigation concerning the mines did not end with the 1916 decision. Attempts to take Lewis' property continued until 1935. Even before the parting of ways that occurred within the Golden Chest Company, there were challenges from the outside. In 1906 the owners of the North Star lode forced Lewis to settle a property dispute out of court, but this action was insignificant compared to the struggle for possession of the Golden Chest Company.³²

One of the stockholders elected to the new board of directors was Lewis' former friend O. T. Jackson. It is perhaps significant that although Jackson was a Negro, he operated a country club east of Boulder for whites only.³³ Jackson was also elected president of the mining company, but Delia McMenammin spearheaded the court fight to reclaim the mines for the defaulting stockholders. Miss McMenammin was the sister of a Catholic priest, Monsignor "Father Mac" McMenammin of the Denver Archdiocese.³⁴ Very few of Father Mac's Christian ways were apparent in Miss McMenammin's behavior toward Lewis. She was implicated in several questionable activities, including at least one gunslinging episode. In fact, it was not at all uncommon to see the lady carrying a gun.³⁵ There seems to be no clear link between Miss McMenammin and the Golden Chest Company. At one time a John McMenammin was a lessee of the company mines, but it seems he never actually worked on the property.³⁶ Other than the obvious similarity in name, there is no discernible connection between Miss McMenammin and John McMenammin. However Miss McMenammin became associated with the mining company, she relentlessly pressed her countesuit to regain control.

Witnesses in the first hearing against Lewis included O. T. Jackson, Miss McMenammin, and the Reverend Michael Culkin. A newspaper item in the May 8, 1918, edition of the Boulder Daily Camera listed all the litigants as "colored." The Camera

31 Trans-America Title Insurance Company, Boulder County, Record Book no. 150, p. 385.

32 Adverse claim filed by W. Stemmyer and G. J. Sommer against J. R. Lewis and the Golden Chest Co. in the U.S. Land Office, Denver, Lewis Collection.

33 Kenneth McVey, private interview conducted in Denver, April 18, 1970.

34 John Kulik, private interview conducted in Denver, April 22, 1970. According to Kulik, Father McMenammin was an accomplished geologist.

35 Ibid. Lewis had a cabin along Four Mile Creek. Miss McMenammin burned it down sometime in the mid-1930s.

36 List of leaseholders in J. R. Lewis' hand, Denver, June 1, 1920, Lewis Collection.

reporter was obviously mistaken because both McMenamain and the Reverend Culkin were white. Furthermore, in a November 20, 1917, petition addressed to the court, Miss McMenamain stated that she represented thirteen stockholders in the corporation who were "of caucasian blood."³⁷ She also stated that "all the rest of the stockholders, officers and directors of said corporation are Negroes."³⁸ Although this statement was made approximately three years prior to the rise of the Ku Klux Klan movement in Colorado, sentiment against Blacks was high. The comment appears to be a direct attempt by Miss McMenamain's lawyer to appeal to the racial bias of the court.

At what point Caucasian stockholders invested in the company is not clear. When Lewis began the venture, and for several years thereafter, all members of the corporation were Black.³⁹ In her petition Miss McMenamain listed the capital stock of the company at 250,000 shares, "the whole of which is issued."⁴⁰ This is double the amount of shares and, presumably, three or four times the amount of stock listed as sold in a 1912 memo to the directors submitted by Dr. P. E. Spratlin. Miss McMenamain apparently sold company stock to unsuspecting investors without having an actual legal interest in the company.

Henry O. Andrew, a former state senator and a graduate of the University of Colorado Law School, was an acquaintance of John McVey. Anticipating trouble with his partners, Lewis retained Andrew in December of 1914. Andrew and Lewis became close friends, and the Boulder attorney conducted the old gentleman's business affairs until Lewis died.

The McMenamain petition alleged that the Black stockholders had conspired to defraud her white partners.⁴¹ Through a series of legal technicalities, Andrew weakened the plaintiff's case. Then, at the request of the court, he filed a bill of particulars that indicated his client had spent the majority of his time between 1903 and 1914 working in the Golden Chest mines. During that twelve-year period, Lewis received a total of \$3,763.97 for services rendered.⁴² Judge Robert G. Strong agreed that Lewis had performed 2,262 days of actual labor and that he should be paid an additional \$3,350.00 for labor and promotional services.⁴³ Judge Strong held O. T. Jackson and the recently

37 Golden Chest Company v. J. R. Lewis and Sanford D. Buster, no. 7130, Boulder County District Court, filed November 20, 1917.

38 Ibid.

39 Boulder Daily Camera, May 8, 1918, p. 8.

40 Golden Chest Company v. J. R. Lewis and S. D. Buster, no. 7130, Boulder County District Court, filed November 20, 1917.

41 Ibid.

42 Golden Chest Company v. J. R. Lewis, no. 7130, Boulder County District Court, filed February 13, 1918.

43 Golden Chest Company v. J. R. Lewis, no. 7130, Boulder County District Court, filed May 10, 1918.



The view from inside the Golden Chest lode looking northeasterly over Lewis' property. The shaft contains the original tracks.

elected body of officers responsible for this debt. It was at this point that Jackson decided to devote more attention to the Dearfield colony, and he resigned as president of the company.

Delia McMenammin did not follow Mr. Jackson's example. Next she filed a bill of exception. She also tried to show that Lewis had been awarded the Golden Chest property because of an error made by the county sheriff. In mid-1920 Sanford D. Buster, the sheriff who issued the sheriff's deed on the property, and Lewis were ordered to "show cause, if any, why judgment shall not be reversed" in favor of Miss McMenammin.⁴⁴ In hearing after hearing decisions favorable to Lewis were handed down,

⁴⁴ Colorado, Supreme Court, scire facias to J. R. Lewis and S. D. Buster, Denver, May 15, 1920, Lewis Collection (scire facias - a writ requiring a person to show why a judgment regarding a record or patent should not be enforced or annulled.)

but the aging ex-slave suffered financially because of the court proceedings. Using the sheriff's deed as proof of ownership, Lewis had received a deed of trust as security for an assumed indebtedness of \$10,000 due at 6 percent interest.⁴⁵ Joseph Burns, the man who gave Lewis the deed of trust, had made several installments when the court intervened. Lewis was ordered to cancel the transaction by returning the deed of trust and repossessing the property. The year was 1920 and Lewis was seventy-eight years



The view from the Golden Chest Mine about three miles above Sunset looking northeasterly over Lewis' land.

old. The loss of the Burns contract meant he was without an income, for, apparently, this was only one of many financially attractive possibilities that had failed to materialize. No money changed hands as a result of the suit by Lewis and the counter-suit by Delia McMenammin.

How valuable was the Golden Chest property? In 1904 and 1906 Lewis was paid \$1,179.00 and \$1,159.10, respectively, for services rendered to the company.⁴⁶ Although it is not certain, it is very likely that this money was a result of profitable digging at the mines. Considering that this represents only Lewis' portion of what was recovered from the mine, one would be compelled to consider the mines productive. It must be noted,

⁴⁵ Trust deed, Joseph Burns to J. R. Lewis, January 31, 1917, Boulder, Lewis Collection.

⁴⁶ Golden Chest Company v. J. R. Lewis, no. 7130, Boulder County District Court, filed February 13, 1918.

however, that returns from these two years are the only indication that the mines yielded substantial quantities of gold during the entire twelve-year period after 1904.

In addition to the deed of trust received from Joseph Burns, Lewis received several lucrative offers from other interested entrepreneurs. Not including the men who invested in the company while Lewis was working the mines, there were nine offers involving the six main lodes on the property. In 1920 W. E. Landen offered Lewis \$30,000 for the Golden Chest and Canton lodes. These lodes comprised more than three quarters of the total company holdings. Unfortunately for Lewis, Landen withdrew his offer because of the McMenamain controversy, and two years later, J. W. McDonald took possession of two of Lewis' cabins at Sunset in order to prevent any unauthorized use of the property.⁴⁷ The lowest offer ever made for the property was \$1,000 when the mines had lain idle for nearly ten years, and Lewis considered the offer closely before rejecting it.⁴⁸

Lewis fell ill in 1930, and his need for money was undeniable. That year B. F. Enos took a lease on all of the property. He submitted a note for \$20,000 payable before October 15, 1931. However, it appears that Enos, like so many prospective buyers, was frightened off by the McMenamain controversy and defaulted. Three years later John Barko and Tony Melnick of Louisville secured an exploratory lease on the property.⁴⁹ Then in 1935 Mr. and Mrs. J. A. Brown applied for a bond and lease to sort and haul away ore with 15 percent of the net profit payable to Lewis.⁵⁰ Lewis and his attorney never abandoned the idea of making Lewis' property pay. Shortly after the Brown offer George Jump and Edward Yates of Boulder requested a lease on the entire Golden Chest group at a suggested purchase price of \$8,000 payable on August 1, 1937.⁵¹ Whether any of these inquiries produced more than slight financial benefits is not clear. It is certain that a considerable number of people thought the Golden Chest property was far from worthless.

For over twenty years Delia McMenamain, jokingly referred to by Henry O. Andrew as Lewis' "best girl," continued to harass the octogenarian and his lessees. In June of 1919 she asked the advice of Assistant U.S. Attorney General R. P. Stewart in an attempt to determine if Lewis had violated any federal mining statutes. He had not. Six months later she accused him of using the U.S. mail to defraud the Golden Chest Company

47 Lewis to J. W. McDonald, Sunset, August 14, 1822, Lewis Collection.

48 Henry O. Andrew to Lewis, Denver, December 9, 1924, Lewis Collection.

49 Andrew to Lewis, Denver, October 10, 1930, Lewis Collection.

50 Lewis to Andrew, Boulder, April 10, 1934, Lewis Collection.

51 Andrew to Lewis, Denver, June 26, 1938, Lewis Collection.

The adit and the shack (the original with some new repairs) of the Golden Chest Mine.



stockholders. Two years later Miss McMenamain appeared at one of Lewis' cabins in Sunset with "a frying pan and a bag of salt."⁵² The lady was well acquainted with the mining laws of the period. She had intended to establish possession of the property by having her goods deposited there. J. W. McDonald, a trustee living on the Lewis property to prevent just such an occurrence, chased the female claim-jumper from the property. McDonald later suggested the cabin be torn down. Prohibition had not been revoked in 1931 when Miss McMenamain supplied Director of U.S. Prohibition John Vivian with false information implicating B. F. Enos, a lessee on the Golden Chest property, in a moonshining operation.⁵³ A full-scale raid resulted in a very embarrassing scene for the revenueurs. Earlier the same year the persistent lady tried to haul away a large quantity of ore mined by Enos. A few shotgun blasts scattered McMenamain and friends, forcing them to leave the booty piled neatly for Enos.⁵⁴ On several occasions Miss McMenamain tried to sell or lease the mines to unsuspecting entrepreneurs. Henry O. Andrew was kept busy refuting unfounded claims made by Miss McMenamain's victims. As late as 1935 she retained a lawyer to present her claim to the entire company.

It is worth noting that during the previous seventeen years Lewis, and Lewis alone, paid taxes on the property.⁵⁵ Today, if a person pays property taxes for three years

52 Andrew to Lewis, Denver, June 15, 1923, Lewis Collection.

53 Andrew to Edward Donnellan, deputy district attorney, and R. V. Blums, sheriff, Boulder County, Boulder, April 28, 1931, Lewis Collection,

54 Ibid.

55 List of property tax receipts paid by J. R. Lewis to Boulder County treasurers: to Amos A. Mahan, October 10, 1921, and March 4, 1922; to Francis P. Beckwith, February 1, 1923, March 12, 1925, March 14, 1927, March 12, 1929, March 7, 1930, October 8, 1932, and May 6, 1933; to H. H. Lennartz, February 23, 1934, Lewis Collection.

without having his claim to that property successfully challenged, he is considered the permanent owner.

For all the time and trouble the Golden Chest Company cost Lewis, it was not his only mining venture. In 1915 and 1916 Lewis and three partners filed certificates of location on three separate claims, the Rainbow Extension, the Golden Standard, and the Clebra. These claims were never involved in the court proceedings between Lewis and his "best girl." In 1929 Lewis listed seven new claims.⁵⁶ These may have been the tungsten mines that Kenneth McVey said Lewis owned. No existing records show the profitability of these claims. Like the Rainbow Extension, the Golden Standard, and the Clebra, they were never patented.

Lewis actually stopped working in the mines in 1921. He moved back to Denver and lived by himself for five years. Early in 1927 the eighty-five-year-old mulatto moved to his former partner's house at 2427 Williams Street. James W. Jackson helped Lewis with his business affairs while his wife acted as Lewis' nurse.⁵⁷ Lewis applied for an old-age pension in 1935 but did not receive one. Apparently he had put aside enough money to provide for a modest retirement. He was not a financial burden to the Jacksons and even paid rent to them.

The asthma condition that bothered Lewis so much when he first came to Boulder appears to have cleared up. However, in 1930 he underwent surgery for a stomach ailment. Helen McVey Washington recalls the amazement expressed by the doctors when Lewis recovered from the operation with no apparent difficulty. He was eighty-eight years old at the time.

In 1936 Lewis impressed a Rocky Mountain News reporter with his quickness and accuracy of mind. The reporter stated: "As the former valet recited the story of his army life, the dates and names rolled off his tongue as though they had happened only recently instead of more than 70 years ago."⁵⁸ Lewis' memory was not as good as the reporter imagined, but it was remarkable for a ninety-four-year-old man. When Kenneth McVey remembered visiting Lewis a year or so before he died, it appeared to him that Lewis had begun to show his age. He was by no means senile, but he was no longer the

⁵⁶ Department of Commerce, Bureau of Mines, Washington, D.C., letter to J. R. Lewis, Denver, 1929, Lewis Collection.

⁵⁷ Ballenger & Richards Denver City Directory (1922-37). Also private interview with Helen McVey Washington and Kenneth McVey, Denver, April 18, 1970.

⁵⁸ Rocky Mountain News, February 4, 1936, p. 7.

picture of a man thirty years younger than he actually was.

On July 12, 1938, Junius R. Lewis was admitted to Denver General Hospital with an acute case of influenza. He died four days later. One last violent asthma attack seems to have caught up with him at the age of ninety-six.⁵⁹ Buried modestly in Denver's Riverside Cemetery, Lewis left no known relatives and no will. If a man's estate did not amount to five hundred dollars, no record of it was kept. Any fortune, however meager, that Lewis may have accumulated cannot be accounted for.

Eight years after Lewis' death the Golden Chest Company's five and a fraction acres were awarded to John and George Kulik in the form of a treasurer's deed.⁶⁰ The group of mines, which once attracted an offer of \$30,000, was purchased by the Kulik brothers for \$27.82.⁶¹ It is very likely that the next time the property is sold it will bring a substantial profit to the owner. But for Lewis nearly a century of hard work, both as a slave and a free man, ended with little remaining to represent the man. Apart from legal documents only memories fill the void.

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⁵⁹ Colorado, Department of Health and Welfare, Vital Records and Statistics, July 16, 1938.

⁶⁰ Boulder County, Official Records of the Treasurer's Office, book no. 190, 1946.

⁶¹ Ibid., book no. 188, 1944.