

The Life of Daniel Chessman Oakes ...in Abbreviation

☺ Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. My name is Daniel C. Oakes ...“C” is for Chessman which provides you with the link of why my close friends and family always called me “Chess.” I am going to be presenting to you today, way out of my real-life character, *A Brief Reflection of a Rich History*, an overview of the history of Douglas County formation and growth. You may also have heard or read about this presentation by its alias, *Earth, Wind & Fire*. However, before I get into Douglas County History directly, which I will do a bit later, I wanted to tell you about myself. I never thought of myself as an extremely interesting character at the time but history has recorded me as such ...as one of the first pioneers of Douglas County and the founding father of Auraria, a small mining community which exists today as one of the central education and arts center of the Denver area. Before you ask, I did not derive the name; William Greeneberry “Green” Russell did ...I’ll talk about him a bit later, as well. The name Auraria is derived from Latin ...the word for gold. ☺ Okay, here is my real visage ...and, ☺ these are the occupations, trades with which history has defined me. Let me take you on a short trip of my life.

☺ I was born on April 23, 1825 in Carthage, Maine ...as a side-light of something obscure that I have with this character portraying me today was that he was born in Carthage, Missouri about a hundred and seventeen years later. My father, Jonas Oakes, was a surveyor but was also a bit of a man of all trades ...which just goes to show that hereditary traits really do get passed on to one’s children. I never got to know much about Maine because, ☺ three years after I was born, my father and mother, Zabrina *Bradbury* Oakes moved to Galon, Ohio. Mom died in Galon two years after our settling. Dad became very distraught after Mom’s passing and decided, when I was ten, to move to LaGrange, Indiana on a farm. Dad really was not the farming type and, a little more than a year afterward, ☺ we moved to DeWitt, Iowa, twelve miles north of what today is the Davenport and Bittendorf area in the eastern part of the state. We kids started our schooling again and Dad started surveying again in Clinton, 18 miles east of DeWitt. Shortly after our move to DeWitt, Dad remarried and moved to the west of the state and ☺ settled in Glenwood (Iowa), a bit south of the Omaha – Council Bluffs area. I liked the Glenwood area but found that, as I aged toward manhood, my childhood and close friends that I maintained in the DeWitt area, kept me coming back to DeWitt throughout my early life and I started doing some retailing in the DeWitt area when I became of age. I was able to purchase some property in DeWitt, a corner lot on Main Street. Life was fairly good in DeWitt but my always wanting to build something better kicked in and I heard that the folks of Plattville, close to Glenwood where Dad and his wife, Nancy, lived were building a new courthouse and needed surveying, engineering and masonry work done ...supposedly, it paid very well. The job did pay well and I found the surveying work and planning very satisfying.

As I looked at the Plattville area, I knew it held great opportunity. There was a railroad and excellent river traffic with the Missouri River on the border. My entrepreneurial mind started kicking in ...this could be monumental! After Dad died in '47, there didn't seem to be anything holding me to the Plattville area other than my ideas, so, I went back to DeWitt to determine if I could amass enough capital to do some developing in the Plattville area. My amassing of backers and assets in DeWitt got cut short when I heard about gold being discovered in great amounts in the California country ...the year, late 1848. Abram Walrod, a good friend of mine from DeWitt, decided that California might be a good place to mine for gold and get enough assets to do some developing in Plattville to take advantage of the commercial traffic routes provided by the railroad and the river. So we started to amass our own assets and that of some investors that couldn't really do the trip on their own 🤔...we formed the Sacramento Mining Company. In early 1849, Abram and I started for California.

🤔The route to California was difficult. Basically, it was the first time for either Abram or myself in dealing with Indians. I found most of our meetings with the Indians along the way amicable and successfully attempted delving into my political characteristics when dealing with them. We basically followed the Platte River from Council Bluffs through what is now Nebraska and Wyoming until we reached the Riverton area and then skirted the south side of the heavy forests over into what is now Utah, around the north side of a Great Salt Lake. We then headed north over the Pueblo Mountains of the Oregon Territory before turning southwest into Feather River Country. We were on the Middle Fork of the Feather is a tributary of the Sacramento River about sixty miles north of Sacramento. It was here we met A. R. Colton and worked placer mines in the Feather River area for about nine months. I had accumulated a few thousand dollars and was hankering to get back to my own country in Iowa and start my development project in Plattville. With the money from my gold operations and my DeWitt property, I was really excited about my future opportunity.

🤔Abram and I decided to take a paddlewheel from Sacramento to the Los Angeles area and then work our way back through the present-day 🤔 Las Vegas area up to Wyoming on a route that today is approximately that of the I-15 Interstate Highway system. We had heard from other miners that this was a much easier route than the way Abram and I dropped into our mining area. We had the money, why not? You know, it was a horrible decision on our part. The paddler broke down about mid-trip in the Pacific Ocean and we floated for days running out of food and fresh water, assuming that this was the real end of our journey on earth. Luckily, some ten days after breakdown we could see land and decided that maybe the Good Lord had an eye on us. We supplied ourselves with provisions when we made land and then journeyed another two months back to our homes.

I got back with three thousand dollars and then sold my DeWitt property for another \$1,500. If you go through the inflation mathematically, \$4,500 in the 1850s would be approximately \$1.3 million today.

👁️ It was shortly thereafter in 1852 that I met Olive Martin and in 1853, we married and moved to what we named Pacific City in the Plattville area of Mills County, Iowa. Olive was my soul-mate and came from strong pioneering stock. I was 28 years of age when we married and Olive was nineteen. We had similar likes and dislikes and part of Olive's family was really interest in expanding into the western country added by the Louisiana Purchase. I talked with one of Olive's cousins at the wedding, a fellow named William Cody that, later in his life, took on the moniker, Buffalo Bill. He pumped me up so high with our conversation about the West that I told Olive that we out to go west for our honeymoon! She was willing but we also both were excited about the prospects that Pacific City provided. With my saved funds, monies from DeWitt investors such as Dr. William Street from DeWitt, we started surveying, platting, purchasing property and building, selling business to all sorts of business that wanted to take advantage of the good transportation area. It was really good to see Pacific City literally sprout before my own eyes. But, there was a bit of a drawback with the sprouting! Five years into the project, and the building and growth began to spread, money started getting short! 🧐 Then, Lo and Behold, we heard that gold had been discovered in the Kansas Territory ...darn near right next door to Iowa. Kansas Territory would be a great place to get some additional funds.

We left Council Bluffs, Iowa for the Kansas Territory gold country in early September 1858, using the Platte River Route. Our outfitted group consisted of Abram Walrod, Henry Graham, George Pancoast and Charles Miles. 🧐 We arrived "in the field" in October and ran into Green Russell and his 13 fellow Georgians who had made the original discovery of gold on about which we had heard. It was really exciting that gold seemed to be so easily available. However, what really influenced me was not the gold as such but all the people that were coming into the area needing to build both homes and mining structures. This part of the Kansas Territory had a lot of trees. Always the entrepreneur, I thought, *"One could really make a fortune in the lumber business here ...you've got lots of potential buyers and a strong supply of wood."* All I would need to do would be the middle man!

Luke Teirney, one of Green's, fellow Georgians said that he thought the lumber business would be great here ...it was much needed to feed the growth. He showed me a book he had written talking about *Gold Discoveries on the South Platte River.* He asked me what I thought of the book and whether I would be willing to take it pack to Iowa and have it published for distribution in the east. I was really impressed by the book and asked him that, if he were

willing, C. W. Smith and I would add a section to the book on how to follow the Platte to the area of all the gold. 🌀 Luke thought that a great idea; so, C. W. and I added about half-again as much to the book and called our added addition, *A Guide of the Route.* As soon as I got back, I had the book published by our *Pacific City Herald* newspaper that had sprang-up in Pacific City and they distributed it throughout the area and large areas to the east like Illinois, Ohio and even on the coast. I heard from locals and other newspapers that the book was an immediate hit.

I went back to Glenwood in late 1858 and told Doc Street about my idea. He said that sounded really great and he and I bought this steam driven sawmill in Council Bluffs and headed back to the Kansas Territory. Olive was very receptive to our business plan and told me to have at it and once set-up, come get her. She said she had enough with Iowa without her husband and was excited about the opportunity to strike out on our own together in Kansas Territory. She said that another first cousin of hers had a friend with the Union Army was headed out that way ...his name was William Larimer. Olive's cousin was Hiram Bennet who was our first Congressional Delegate when Colorado became a State in 1876. Doc Street and I went back to the Western Kansas Territory with a couple of hired hands to help us with our mill, which turned out to be the first steam driven sawmill in the Territory.

On our way back to the Western Kansas Territory area, we made fairly slow progress because of the mill. Both weather and the Indians seemed more of detriment to our travel than I had really ever experienced along the Platte. 🌀 And, when we crossed into the far western part of the Territory which is today's Colorado, we ran upon an angry group "*going back home*" from their gold mining efforts. They had read and followed the instructions of my book and said that everything in it was a hoax. 🌀 Then, I saw it! My grave! Here was a rock-covered grave headed by a buffalo skull with a crude sign with a program, saying "***...Here lies the bones of D. C. Oakes, author of the Pike's Peak Hoax.***" Doc and I didn't let on who we were and were feared for our lives because more than one of those upset "*former*" miners swore that they would shoot D. C. Oakes on site if they ever met-up with him. Doc and I moved on as fast as our horses and wagon could transport our bodies and the mill. We considered setting-up the mill in the Boulder area but decided to establish it at a hilly, forested area with stream water called Riley's Gulch which is in today's Daniels Park.

The mill was a great success. We started producing lumber many of the buildings in early Denver were made from lumber milled at Riley's Gulch. Folks started changing the Riley name for the mill location from the early Ranch at the location to Oakville because of the success of our venture. Then, we lost the mill in a downpour ...literally, the waters washed the entire mill

downstream and only pieces of it were ever found. But, Life was good, I went back and brought Olive and a second sawmill back with me. 🌀 We established it at Huntsville, named after Alexander Hunts Ranch adjacent to the site. Business really started to hum. We were in an area with lots of trees and brought timbers in with mules from a six to seven mile radius around our mill. At our top production, we were doing 12,000 board feet of lumber a day. Our wages paid at the mill were good, too...hired hands were getting a \$1,00 a day and our sawyers were making \$3.50. That was a pretty unheard about wage level for the time. 🌀 Because lumber was in such demand, coming from Denver, I built and opened a lumber yard at 5th and Cherry (5 blocks east of Colorado and 1 block south of 6th Avenue). We were doing a bang-up business. William Larimer said that I was the best dose for Denver that could ever be expected. To make life more comfortable from our Huntsville home, I built a home three doors down from the sawmill in Denver. I helped Latimer with some of the early surveying work for Denver as well as Hiram Bennett who was doing some of the selling to the growth areas.

When we arrived in the Kansas Territory, it was early in its history. The only people here were basically Indians and, once every now and then, a white man ...a mountain man or trapper of their time. My good friend Kit Carson was one such of the early mountain men and guides; my best friend Jim Baker, who was a great, self-made and good thinking man and also the most handsome man I have ever laid eyes upon. Both were helpful to me in my early Kansas Territory years as well as in my latter years in political and Indian situations.

🌀 In 1861, Colorado became its own Territory. My life as a business entrepreneur, developer, and lumber man began to change quickly. 🌀 William Gilpin contacted me and wanted me to help Governor Evans with maintaining law and order. Consequently, I became a Colorado Vigilante and we did our best to maintain order in the fast growing Territory. Our laws were good, common sense and served us very well. Following John Evans, our second Territorial Governor but, at the time, an organizer of the first Territorial Legislature asked me to help with the first meeting of the Territorial Legislature, a law making entity for the new Territory. We met and, at the first session, we passed laws of conduct for the Territory, established the first 17 counties of the Territory and laid out the first Territorial roads through what is now the whole State of Colorado. We did this forthright. We went about our needed business and not about what some of our media happy politicians are about today. I worked for four of our Territorial Governors in my stint in law, politics and Indian Affairs.

🌀 I had some great friends that laid the groundwork for the state. Interestingly, these were folks like Baker, Carson, Stobie, Uncle Dick Wooley, Larimer and Bennet that new the country and had a great vision of what to do now and what Colorado was to become in the future. My early couple of years in the Territorial Legislature were monumental in getting the state off on

the right foot. Common sense, God's help and Olive's encouragement was the "*stuff*" that drives people to accomplish what must be done. It was good ...but, unfortunately, it was also bad. We had people in the Territory who believed that "*...the only good Indian is a dead one!*" That was a definitely not true. I had many Indian contacts. And, Indians were honest in their dealings with us ...oh sure, they had a few rouges as did we. However, each of us were sincere in our beliefs ...sometime there were impasses. Sometimes there were threats. Sometimes there were killings ...all in the name of good on both sides of the issues.

My legislative experience, as I believe, was generally good for the people of Colorado. My Indian relationships were honest and sincere as well and I personally feel that they thought similarly of me. After the Territory achieved statehood in '76, I had mixed emotions about some of our dealings with the Indians. However, everything I attempted to deal with them I honestly felt was right from both the White and Red man's perspective. Baker told me to watch Chivington ...I probably should have taken that warning more to heart. With the sawmill at Huntsville, which had grown to relative good size (...about fifteen families, halfway house and mid-point between Denver and Colorado City), I had started building a fort in the early 60s. The Southern Utes were a raucous group under Colorow ...and, if it hadn't been for Ouray's, foresight and calming effect over both the Whites and the Utes, it could have been really bad. Then, the Chivington action, that you know as the Sand Creek Massacre, I think that the possibility of massive white bloodshed in Douglas County was at its highest. The Utes, Kiowas, and Cheyenne, along with a few Paiute mixed-in, were very threatening. The fort was not a military installation but a People's Fort as I called it, ultimately named after our President as were so many other forts of the time ...Fort Lincoln. We had thirteen Huntsville families stay in the fort for a good portion of a three week period after the Massacre ...there were a lot of threats from milling Indians but never an actual skirmish in the area. Again, I think again that was because of Ouray and his great intelligence that calmed the warriors and had the foresight to understand that war was not the way to preserve his people.

With my legislative work in Denver, Olive and I decided to move permanently to Denver in a much nice home than I had originally built. This home, No. 274 on Curtis Street, became our last residence and our life at Huntsville receded in our past. I sold my Huntsville holdings and sawmill to Ephram Blake. Although we did move to Denver and it became our home, for a good share of the year that we lived there, I was not physically in residence. 🙄Hiram Bennet, who was a good friend to both President Lincoln and Andy Johnson, convinced Andy that my relationship with the mountainmen, early pioneers and Indians within the Territory would make me a "*fair, reliable, effective* Indian Agent. I can't attest to all those gracious qualities but was appointed by President Johnson in late '65. The Arapahoes and Southern Cheyenne had earlier pretty-much had left the Territory by the mid-60s, having agreed to the treaty at

Medicine Bow (Kansas not Wyoming) and already moved to the Indian Territory (Oklahoma).

☹️ But, I had lots of Utes with which to deal and they were widespread and aptly tribal named as the Northern Mountain Utes (North Park and Wyoming areas) with Chief Jack, the Southern Mountain Utes (South Park into both New Mexico and Utah South Park) with Chief Colorow, the Seltos Seven band of the Ute Nation (Four Corners area) and the Yumpah Utes (western Colorado and eastern Utah). The Ute nation actually consisted of seven major tribes. Chief Ouray (Yumpah Utes) was Chief of the entire Ute Nation.

My life became deeply immersed with my early into Colorado friends, Jim Baker and Kit Carson. Bennet and Alexander Hunt were instrumental in my Indian work on establishing both the White River Agency (1869) and the Middle Park Agency. If it would not have been with Bennet's, McCook's and Alexander Hunt's efforts with the Federal Government, I would never have had the fairly amiable relationship I had with the Utes. Ouray was also instrumental as the primary savior of the Ute Nation. All of us went to Washington so that the Utes were convinced that the United States Government was something other than a myth. I honestly believe that Washington was as impressed with Ouray and the Utes as I was. This relationship grew and the agencies ultimately laid the groundwork for, what I believe, were better lives for both Ute friends and our growing white population. Ouray agreed to a treaty that took the nation to their own lands in Utah and gave whites both peace of mind and land as well.

☹️ My life as an Indian Agent ended with the Utes moving to their new lands. My life itself ended in early 1887 at my home in Denver. I haven't talked about my family very much today but that was my first and foremost occupation of everything I did. I believed in honesty and humor and had, what I joked about but true in heart, two best friends and soul-mates in my life ...Olive, my beloved wife that was always with me and she with me even when we were not physically together. We had eight children ...the last, Laura, our youngest and the only one I was not home during her birth ...taking care of business so to speak at the Agency on the White River. My second friend (the joke) was my trusty .50 caliber, Henry percussion rifle. I fired it numerous times but never killed anyone. I had a good life and thank God for his many blessings. I loved Colorado and was glad to be a small part of its success. ☹️ Today, I reside at the Riverside Cemetery in Denver. Come visit mine and the graves of my beloved family sometime; Riverside is a peaceful place.

☹️ I will leave you know with my saying which, after all these years, is my most quoted item, *"The good are always great, the great not always good."*