Cattle versus Sheep

Although Westwater's modern history likely began with outlaws hiding between jobs and miners rushing towards the San Juan gold bust, the valley was not overlooked in passing. It captivated men like Captain Davis, Charles Broek, and Charles Hallett to the point that they returned to attempt to make a living off of the land. They were not alone.

Cattle may have been in Westwater Valley before the railroad, and they departed shortly after the railroad discontinued using Westwater as a train station in 1931. The Box X (or Bar X) Cattle Company was already settled at Westwater in 1889 when Frank C. Kendrick entered the valley to survey for the Denver, Colorado Canyon and Pacific Railway. According to Kendrick’s notes dated April 10, 1889, the Denver and Rio Grande Western Railroad had by then surveyed the changed course the standard gauge tracks would take nearer the Colorado River. The shift nearer the river provided a greater opportunity for cattlemen and shepherders to move into the area and ship their livestock or fleece to markets. Ranches—primarily cattle ranches—soon sprang up throughout the area, claiming considerable land between the state line and Cisco, an area where the railroad generally followed the course of the Colorado River. Obviously, the Colorado and its water are not accessible at some points along this section, including in much of Westwater Canyon, but there used to be more springs throughout the region that have since dried up. Most of the settlers were small ranchers who visited the valley and became impressed enough to return.
Locations of prominent ranches and homesteads in the Westwater area.
As in a John Wayne western, trouble seemed to come with the mix of cattle, sheep, and land. One of the first recorded incidents of cattle rustling at Westwater occurred when Charles Brock was caught red-handed with a slab of Captain Wilson Ellis Davis’s beef hanging from his cabin. There may have been several similar instances involving Brock between 1890 and 1892. Rustling combined with other misdemeanors eventually cost Brock his life. During the fall of 1904 Westwater resident Joe
Harris was released from Colorado State Penitentiary at Canon City. He had been sentenced to spend five to eight years in prison for the 1902 killing of millionaire cattlemann Charles R. Sieber, president of the huge Sieber Cattle Company of Glade Park, Colorado. Sieber was about fifty-five years old when he was killed on the morning of August 22, 1902. At least nine of his men saw Sieber and Harris ride toward them on horseback and, just as they arrived, Harris pull his pistol and shoot at Sieber four times. Three hit their mark.

Charles R. Sieber was of German descent and as a child migrated to Canada with his parents. While there he reportedly led a hard life after he was “boarded out” to a difficult taskmaster. Eventually he made his way into the United States and finally to Colorado about sixteen years prior to his death. He established his cattle operation through a couple of partnerships, and during the 1890s his company owned a considerable number of cattle, which grazed at Glade Park during the winters and Pinon Mesa in the
summer. He died leaving a wife and eleven children. Shortly afterward the company changed its name to the S-Cross Ranch.

After the shooting, Joe Harris refused to talk until the trial. Interestingly, both Sieber and Harris were well known and respected throughout southwestern Colorado and Grand County, and the citizens of the area felt as sorry for Harris as they did for the deceased, disbelieving he could break the law after all he had done to maintain it. Of Joseph Harris the *Grand Valley Times* wrote, he “has lent great personal aid to the sheriff here in running down outlaws, often going days over the desert, without food while on their trail.” Harris claimed Sieber had charged him with cattle rustling and was bringing him into his camp with an unobserved Winchester rifle pointed at him. Feeling threatened, Harris took his first opportunity to take advantage of Sieber and drew on him before he could get a shot off. Once Sieber fell from his horse, Harris’s first act was to walk over and pick up the Winchester that fell to the dirt with him. A retrial was conducted in the fall of 1904, where he again pleaded self-defense; the Moab paper reported, “from the testimony given, it is difficult to see how a jury could even come to any other conclusions.” Harris was acquitted at the second trial and returned to his home at Westwater.

He was well liked by his friends, but carried a disdain for those who were not. He owned six hundred acres of land and was a neighbor to Robert and Florence L. Fuller, who also lived across the river at the mouth of Jones Canyon east of the small town at
Westwater. Far from being neighborly, Harris did not like the Fullers, and for many years he tried to drive them off the land so he could claim the area for himself. When Robert L. Fuller died in 1902, Joseph Pace became an employee of Mrs. Fuller and later a partner in the Pace-Fuller Cattle Company. By partnering with the widow Florence Fuller, Joe Pace found himself at odds with Joe Harris.

Harris threatened Pace several times during the years that he worked for Florence Fuller. At one time Harris, with his hand on his holstered six-shooter, stalked Pace through Fuller’s home because Pace had forgotten to bar up the fence separating their lands the night before. Pace was forty-eight years old in 1909 and had a notch on his gun from an accidental killing at Steamboat Springs, Colorado, fourteen years earlier. He had always been known as a good shot and in his later years could still put four or five holes in a can thrown in the air or rolled along the ground. Pace and his friend Elwood Malin would compete in shooting cans from the hip, and each demonstrated great accuracy.

It is hard to say if there was any other reason besides the crowded range that made Harris hostile toward Fuller and Pace. It has been claimed that Joseph Pace worked for the Sieber Cattle Company when Harris killed Charles Sieber. If so perhaps Harris pursued a vendetta against Pace for the two years he spent in prison. Whatever transpired between these men brought out the worst of the once law-abiding Joe Harris. A friend of Harris, I.E. McFarland, testified that he once suggested they buy something to celebrate the upcoming holidays, and Harris retorted: “I have only two holidays now. One of these is the date Bob Fuller died and the other is when I killed old Sieber.” Harris at the time had bought a new pistol and was admiring it, which prompted McFarland to ask if he intended to add a new holiday to his list. To this Harris replied, “Yes, if Pace doesn’t get out of here he will furnish the holiday.”

Although Harris was considered a law-abiding citizen, he continuously set traps to force Pace’s hand. One was a narrow chute he built just off of the Pace Fuller range leading to a watering hole on Harris's land. Once the cattle went through the chute, they were trapped on Harris's land with no feed. In one spring alone this trap was responsible for killing one third of the Pace-Fuller cattle. Pace
also found some of their steers shot and asked Harris about it, receiving the reply “Yes, they were shot and you son-of-a-bitch it ought to be a warning to you that if you don’t get out of here you will go the same way.” Harris was always suspecting cattle rustling. During the 1902 trial for the killing of Charles Sieber, it was brought to the court’s attention that Harris had suspected Sieber or some of his men of rustling his herd. Then in 1906 Harris brought another Westwater rancher, Charles Rounds, before Justice Cooley of Cisco for killing one of his steers. Rounds was convicted and sentenced to 150 days in jail or a $150 fine. In October 1909 there were two pending suits against Joseph Pace and Florence Fuller for damages to Harris’s land that he claimed were from the trespassing of their cattle onto his land. The suits, it turned out, would never be heard.

On the morning of October 3, 1909, Joe Harris arose after staying overnight with his friend L. P. Stubbs, whose ranch was along the Little Dolores River. Harris had rheumatism and so needed a little help from his friend getting dressed. Harris also had difficulty walking because his insteps had been amputated the year before due to severe frostbite after he was caught in a snowstorm and lost for five days and nights without food while working for, surprisingly, the Sieber Cattle Company. Mounting up, the two friends headed in different directions as Stubbs went to Westwater and Harris to Jones Canyon, where his ranch was. It was the last time Stubbs would see his friend alive.

That morning Joseph Pace, Florence Fuller, and hired hand Bert Graham went riding after cattle. They had just brought them down from Pinon Mesa and were searching for weaners when they saw Joseph Harris driving some of their cattle from his land. At the time they didn’t think anything unusual about his actions, but on their return for dinner they saw Harris driving some of the Pace-Fuller cattle up the lane. He then set loose the cattle just before Pace, Fuller, and Graham arrived and headed north toward his ranch. The three met him as they approached from the northeast. Pace immediately asked Harris what he was doing with their cattle. Harris replied it was none of his business, turned his horse to face Pace, and threw down a stick he was carrying. Then his right hand went for his hip pocket. Within seconds Pace had dismounted with a .30-.30 Winchester rifle and
shot Harris three times before he hit the ground. Like Charles Sieber in 1902, Harris received two fatal shots to the heart; a third shot to the head sealed his fate.\textsuperscript{9} Rumor had it that when Pace shot Harris he said, “This is for Charlie Sieber.”\textsuperscript{10} Such a statement was not brought up during the trial, however.

Within two months Joseph Pace was acquitted for the killing due to self-defense, even though it was proven Joseph Harris did not have a gun at the time.\textsuperscript{11} Former resident John Malin, whose dad was a good friend to Pace, said the shooting was about one mile east of Westwater town near the cliffs between the two ranches. The Pace-Fuller Ranch was about one mile east and the Harris ranch about one mile south of the town.\textsuperscript{12}

A far more serious concern to the cattlemen than rustling was the influx of sheep into the area. They felt the sheep were destroying their range, so they put up more definite land markers in hopes that the shepherds would stay off their lands. Unfortunately for them, many of the herders were Basques who, according to the cattlemen, had little or no regard for boundaries; this combined with their unusual customs and the language barrier made them seem more threatening to the cattlemen. Conflict

Numerous sheep sheds and corrals are located near the mouth of Westwater Creek. This large sheep facility may have been built in the 1930s when J. W. Hardison tried to revive the sheep-shearing industry at Westwater.
Harvey Edward Herbert's home near Bitter Creek was built during the winter of 1917 and 1918. Ed Herbert was deputy sheriff and sheep inspector at Westwater for a number of years. He arrived at Westwater in about 1898 and lived there until he died in 1929. He was E. C. Malin's stepfather. Photo from Wilford Hill files courtesy of Elsa Spaulding Hill.

Ed Herbert at Westwater, with Denver & Rio Grande Western Railroad in background. Photo courtesy of Ila B. Reay.
with sheepherders tended to bond the once isolated ranchers in a common cause of protecting the range from foreigners and their land-destroying flocks.

In May 1909, in Garfield County, Colorado, not far from Utah, six sheepmen were captured and tied up while fifteen unidentified cattlemen went into their sheep corral. An onlooker described what followed: “We have been having trouble with the cow punchers here the past few days... They tied Rocky (Oscar Stewart of Moab) and Abe (Abe Oregen, Mexican foreman) and four other men down with ropes while they killed about 1,200 or 1,500 of Fon’s (S. A. Taylor’s) sheep. It was an awful sight. They took axes and clubs and went into a corral and chopped the sheep all to pieces.” The slaughter lasted nearly an entire day.

Cattlemen also were suspected of killing a sheep owner two years earlier. Naturally, then, anytime sheep died unusually the blame was placed on the cattlemen. Near Cisco in 1908 one hundred sheep died mysteriously while feeding on the range. Cattlemen were suspected of poisoning the range until Dr. Broadhurst, a veterinarian from Salt Lake City, found that plants on which the sheep fed had an oil root that caused their kidneys to swell up. In the meantime, many sheepherders panicked and there were several shootings, including some amongst themselves.

Fear and harassment did not prevent sheep owners from bringing their livestock into the state, especially since it became more economical to raise sheep than cattle. By 1919, R. A. Tawney of Grand Junction decided to build a sheep shearing plant at Westwater. Sheep shearing plants were already located at Cisco and Thompson, but Westwater was a prime location being so near to the Colorado border and in the middle of grazing lands for sheep that needed shearing every spring before they returned to their summer range in Colorado and other highlands. The sheep fed off the land between Westwater and Green River throughout the winter, competing with the cattle for water holes and grasses.

Tawney’s plant consisted of a drying shed with capacity for fifteen hundred sheep, a shearing shed equipped with sixteen machines that could shear twenty-five hundred sheep a day, conveyor belts, a motor house, and a boarding house for the manager,
Charles O. Wells, of Helena, Montana. Some of the equipment used was unique in Utah and had only been used in Wyoming and Montana before Tawney introduced it. His first spring he had reservations to shear fifty-five thousand sheep, and the following year he clipped eighty thousand sheep. Competition arrived in 1921, when two large sheep outfits, August Nichols and Fitzpatrick Brothers, decided to shear their own sheep and built temporary plants south of Westwater at the Denver and Rio Grande Western Railroad station located at Cottonwood. They sheared the sheep by hand using fifteen shearsers. It is unclear whether it was costs, services, overcrowding, or something else that led the sheepmen to begin bypassing Westwater’s established facilities in favor of temporary plants or the established facilities at Cisco and Thompson. By 1929, Joe Ocamica purchased the Tawney plant at Westwater, eventually moving it to Cisco. At that location it became part of one of the largest shearing plants in the West. J. W. Hardison tried to reopen a plant at Westwater in 1932, but most of the business had moved to Cisco and Joe Ocamica’s plant.

By late winter, 1919, a new problem arose for the sheepmen. An outbreak of scabies infected sheep in several states surrounding Utah and in San Juan County. It was a requirement of the state for any sign of scabies to be reported immediately in order to prevent the disease from spreading to other herds. However, some sheepmen ignored the regulations, and because of their indifference the State Livestock Board mandated the dipping of all sheep entering the state and any others proven to have the disease. Deputy Sheriff H. E. Herbert was appointed as a state sheep inspector and placed in charge of seeing that all sheep in the Westwater region were dipped. He deputized his stepson Elwood C. Malin, Lois Cato, Frank Shafer, and others. Early December 1920 found August Nichols, Fred Burford, and William T. Fitzpatrick, each of whom owned over twenty-five thousand head of sheep, refusing to dip their herds, claiming it would be harmful to their health in winter weather. The owners had been given a certificate by veterinarian Dr. A. P. Drew, who was acting as a deputy for the Colorado Livestock Board and U.S. Bureau of Animal Industry, which they claimed authorized their sheep to enter the state of Utah. Dr. Drew, though, refuted their claim, and evidence showed he had only authorized the selling of the sheep within Colorado.
Rumors abounded that Deputy Sheriff Herbert's group showed favoritism toward some of the sheepmen, who were allowed to enter Utah without dipping. This perception was refuted by the courts, though, which ruled against the sheepmen, whose herds had been quarantined, and gave them until February 15, 1921, to get their sheep dipped. Meanwhile, several large sheep outfits had remained in Colorado awaiting the outcome of the trial before moving their sheep across the border. The sheepmen were given boundaries to keep until their sheep were dipped. This seemed satisfactory, but the areas they were given were too limited, and they started to cross over onto cattle ranges and stir up additional problems—until events that took place on February 24, 1921.

Charlie Glass was mostly African American and part Cherokee. He was believed to have been born on an Indian reservation in Oklahoma around 1870. Rumor had it he killed a man there who was responsible for his father's death, then headed west. By the early 1900s he had made his way to Colorado as a cowpuncher. He started in southeastern Colorado and moved
further west in 1909 to work with the S-Cross Ranch out of
Grand Junction. The S-Cross ran cattle on Pinon Mesa and
around Westwater. By 1917, he was working for Oscar L. Turner
near Cisco, Utah, where he became foreman. The large, hand-
some cowpuncher was considered very loyal to his employers
and epitomized the cowboys of his day. He was deeply respected
by those who knew him.

The invasion of sheep and sheepmen onto their ranges irri-
tated the cowboys of Glass’s day. The cowpunchers may have
known they could not do away with the pesky animals and
Basque herders, but they wanted to protect what they considered
theirs, including the ranges they owned outright or had first
worked. The fight over the land raged on as the sheepmen
showed little or no respect for the cattlemen’s precedence in the
region. The problem escalated in the winter of 1921 when
William Fitzpatrick’s sheep were put under quarantine. He was
given boundaries to keep his sheep in until they were dipped for
scabies according to a December judgment he received in the
Thompson courts.

It was said that although Charlie Glass hated sheep and their
herders, he was fairer with them than others might have been
under the same conditions. He had broken up several fights
between cowpunchers and the Basques that could have been serious;
at other times he would sit down with a sheepman and convince
him to get back onto his quarantined boundary. Although Glass
made idle threats against the sheepmen, they respected him; on
the other hand he had little or no respect for them. A story that
circulated about Charlie was how one day a deer hunter
approached him to find out if there were any taxidermists in the
area. Charlie had no idea what a taxidermist was; so after giving
it some thought he told the hunter there wasn’t any. The hunter,
sensing Charlie didn’t know what he was talking about, described
a taxidermist to him as someone who mounted animals. To this
Charlie emphatically replied, “You mean sheepherders.”17 In any
case Charlie restrained his passions against the sheepmen while
demonstrating his respect for the law.

On February 24, 1921, Felix Jesui stepped too far out of
bounds while working for William Fitzpatrick, and was killed for
it.18 Charlie had had several encounters with other Fitzpatrick
herders in the few days leading up to the killing, and they had been warned about keeping within the boundaries set by deputy sheriff and sheep inspector H. E. Herbert of Westwater. Felix Jesui’s job was camp mover, but on February 24 he substituted for Eusebis Astegaraga as herder. Jesui apparently was unconcerned about an encounter Eusebis had had with Glass the day before and defiantly herded his sheep up a canyon leading toward Oscar Turner’s ranch. They were about a half mile over the boundary when Charlie spotted him and went down to move him back inside his quarantine line. With nobody else around, Glass claimed he approached the lone sheepherder and asked him to move his camp. Felix Jesui, who was packing a Winchester and .25 caliber revolver, argued with Glass and stubbornly refused to move. Deciding he was not getting anywhere, Glass told Jesui he would take the matter up with his boss and headed to his horse about twenty-five feet away. Jesui yelled something at him then sent a bullet whizzing past Glass’s shoulder. When he attempted a second shot with the Winchester, the gun jammed, so Jesui drew his pistol, firing a couple more shots before Glass could pull his own pistol from a shoulder scabbard beneath his coat and shirt. For a brief moment the men exchanged errant shots; then Jesui took a hit to his head near the right temple and died immediately.

With no witnesses, the available evidence amounted to shots heard by nearby sheepherders and cattlemen and shell casings on the ground. Most of the witnesses that were in the vicinity reported hearing about four shots total, one louder than the rest, probably the single rifle shot Glass claimed initiated the action. Upon the ground authorities found three .32 caliber shells near where Glass stood shooting and, after a lengthy search, a single .25 caliber shell matching the sheepherder’s pistol. No casing was located belonging to the rifle, but a bullet was jammed in its chamber. Fortunately for Glass, evidence bore out that although the casings were not located, Jesui had put a number of .25 caliber bullets in the right hand pocket of his overcoat that same morning and they were missing when his body was examined later. Footprints were examined to make certain they matched the story Glass gave of the event.

Culminating the trial was evidence presented regarding the attitude the sheepherders had regarding the ranges and restrictions
to which they were supposed to adhere. William T. Fitzpatrick, who had hired Felix Jesui, was one of four Colorado sheep owners whose flocks were put under quarantine because they refused to dip them for scabies. He had illegally crossed the border with his 25,000 sheep during November for winter grazing and refused to return to Colorado until the courts addressed issues surrounding the forced dippings. Sheep inspector and deputy sheriff H. E. Herbert of Westwater, who established the boundaries for the sheep, became a key witness during the trial, which eventually focused on the Basques hired by Fitzpatrick and their attitudes. Herbert testified of several confrontations with Basques intentionally overstepping their boundaries. One contended he didn’t know his directions, then with Winchester in hand proclaimed he would go wherever he wanted. Another sheepherder threatened to bring all his sheep back the next year and “eat out all of the cattleman’s range.”

Objections by the prosecution were numerous that Herbert’s testimony implied a conspiracy by the sheep owners to knowingly disregard the quarantine boundaries and range rights belonging to the cattlemen. The crowds nearly packed the courtroom daily as the issue became a “contest between the resident stockmen of Grand county and the transient sheepmen of Colorado, who for several years past have driven their herds into Grand county for the winter months and, it is charged, have crowded out the resident stockmen with subsequent heavy losses to the latter.”

Charlie Glass was acquitted of the murder, and the cattlemen temporarily won the contest.

The Charlie Glass case showed the strong support in Grand County for the cattlemen. After the killing of Felix Jesui the range problems slowed down but did not disappear. Trouble between cowpunchers and sheepmen continued throughout 1921, and Ed Herbert and Lois Cato were called to Cisco to inspect another range problem occurring on the Oscar Turner Ranch. Cattlemen were again complaining that sheepherders were crowding in too close. In May 1921, Greek sheepmen even took over a pond on private property belonging to Quintus Cato near Cisco. They found the pond and started setting up their sheep camp around it. Ralph Cato and his brother-in-law Frank Hickman tried to force them out, but one of the sheepmen threatened Frank that if he tried to get them to move their sheep, “You be dead, and me
in jail.” Deputy sheriff Herbert and Lois Cato again were summoned, and upon their arrival they disarmed the sheepmen and made an agreement allowing them to stay briefly but with a promise that they would leave the area.

Battling over the range came to a head when sometime during the night prior to September 18, 1922, at least two cowboys silently made their way into a sheep camp northwest of Cisco, in the Book Cliffs range. Unobserved, the cowboys captured eleven horses and eight mules that belonged to the Joseph L. Taylor sheep outfit and proceeded to unmercifully drive the small herd over forty miles, where they trapped the animals in a box canyon off East Willow Creek Canyon and then slaughtered them. The brutality of the massacre undercut sympathy for the cattlemen, and volunteers from all over the region offered their assistance to track down the cowboys. Sheriff W. J. Bliss conducted the investigation and reported it to the *Times-Independent* dated September 28, 1922:

The stock had been driven at a rapid rate for about forty miles, the trail leading across the Book mountains and into the lowlands north of Willow creek. The trail led into a desert country barren of water, and showed that the marauders had a thorough knowledge of the range. The stock were driven directly to the small boxed canyon in which the slaughter took place. A shelf of overhanging rock, possibly twelve feet in height, surrounded the enclosure on three sides and with the thieves stationed on their horses at the entrance, the escape of the helpless animals was impossible. Tracks indicated that the killing of the animals was done by two men. They did not get off their horses to do the shooting, and it is evident that they used revolvers. They were careful not to leave any empty cartridge shells, in order to avoid dropping any incriminating evidence in this manner. The dead animals had the appearance of having been driven to the point of exhaustion, and it is the opinion of the sheriff that the raiders had ridden some of the stolen stock in order to save their own mounts.

After killing the stock, the raiders went to great pains to conceal their back trail. They rode their horses in a zig-zag course, keeping in the grass and on rocks as much as possible to avoid leaving a trail. The sheriff’s party had extreme difficulty in tracking the men, but with great care they remained on the trail, which led back to the Book cliff range.
Three cowboys were shortly arrested. Waldo Jones and Carl Squiers were charged with the slaughter, and Charlie Glass was held for collaborating to contain the shepherders by shooting into their camp while the marauders escaped. It was more than a year before the defendants came to trial. They were acquitted of what was referred to as “range conspiracy.” The trial went beyond the slaughter of the horses and mules, even involving the federal government because the issue became one of the cowboys preventing free passage on public lands. Events the day previous to the slaughter apparently sparked the incident, when Joseph Taylor attempted to take his sheep into Willow Creek and Charlie Glass threatened him. Three other cowboys were implicated in the conspiracy charge, which did not hold up due to lack of conclusive evidence. The cowboys had won yet another battle in the courts.

Shortly afterwards stockmen living within the Cisco voting district, including Westwater and Dolores, approved a Fence Law that placed responsibility on existing ranchers to fence their property if they did not want intruders. The law was enacted to provide additional means to protect ranchers’ property from conflicts with the transient sheepmen. With a fence in place the ranchers and stockmen could collect for damages done to their property by trespassing sheep.20

The sheep industry was thriving, and sheepmen turned to the courts and congressmen to give them equal rights to the land. In 1934 the Taylor Grazing Act provided regulation of public lands that in effect gave sheep such equal access.21 To the cowboy this marked the end of their reign as they were forced to give up their control of free ranges to the intruding sheepmen. On February 22, 1937, an old cowboy sat playing cards with some sheepmen at Thompson. As the night wore on two of the sheepmen offered to take the old timer to Cisco, where they had heard a larger game was being played. Accepting the offer he jumped in the back of their pickup, and they all sped off. Some claim the two Basques in the truck were cousins of the late Felix Jesui and that the old man, Charlie Glass, the black cowboy, who died that night of a broken neck due to an automobile accident, was set up for a revenge that came almost sixteen years to the date after the defiant sheepman was killed by the hands of the symbolic cowboy.22