

## XIII

1878–1880

### The Thayer Family in Colorado

**B**Y 1878, Francis and Catherine Thayer and their daughter were living in Colorado hoping that he would find relief from asthma. The growth of the United States could be easily measured by the 1880 census figures that reported a population of 50.1 million, a 25 percent increase over the 1870 census. The American people were demanding new goods and services and a nation of enterprising entrepreneurs responded to those demands. In 1879 F. W. Woolworth opened the first 5¢ and 10¢ store. The following year George Eastman patented a roll of film for cameras, and the Kampfe brothers in New York City invented the safety razor. In 1878 there was a massive yellow fever epidemic in the South—over 24,000 cases and more than 4,000 deaths were reported in New Orleans. From Colorado, Francis Thayer wrote many letters to his son at Amherst College and also a series of columns for the newspaper in Troy, New York. At the same time there was another change in communications—in 1878 the first regular telephone exchange opened in New Haven, Connecticut.

Letters and diaries are a written communication of a time and place that can be preserved. There is no similar record of a phone conversation, and the evidence of the times begins to change.

*Letters and diaries by:*

E. R. Eaton, a family friend  
Catherine McKie Thayer  
Catherine (later, Katherine) Sophia Thayer  
Francis McKie Thayer  
Francis S. Thayer

*Letters, diaries and newspaper columns written from:* Denver, Idaho Springs, Pueblo, and Colorado Springs, Colorado; Troy and Cambridge, New York; and Amherst, Massachusetts.

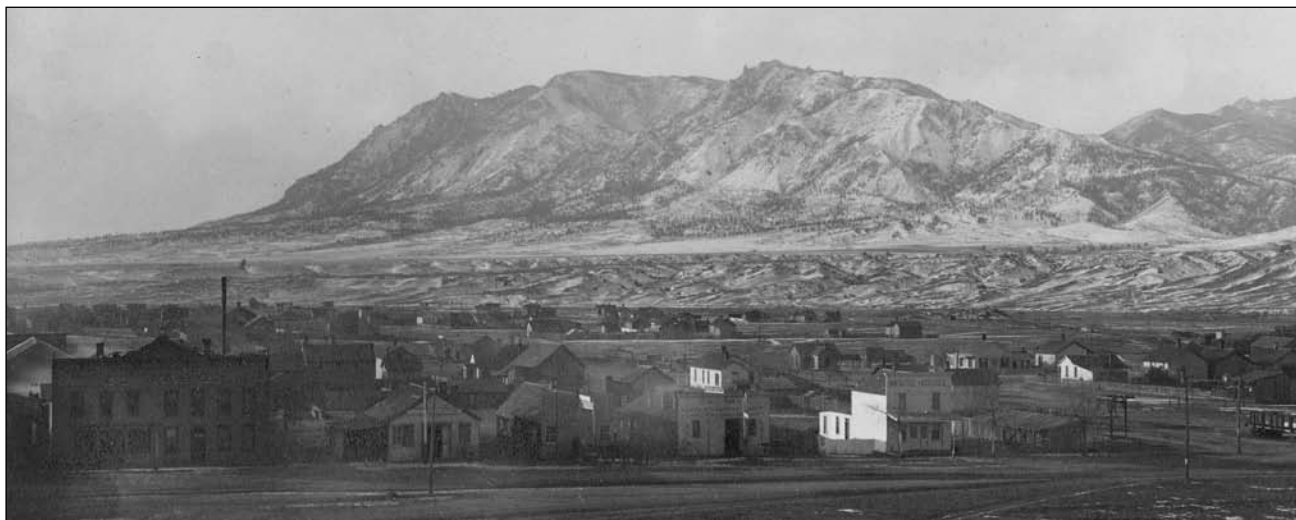
1878

☞ Death in the family:

Denver, Colorado. Jan 14, 1878.

My dear Mother— [to Sophia Whiteside McKie] Owing to a snow blockade on the Kansas & Pacific road, there were no mails from the east last night, and will not be tonight, but eastern bound mails leave as usual if not by the K.P., by the Union Pacific, so I will say a word though I have very little of

Sophia Whiteside McKie remained at the Thayer home in Troy, New York, when Francis and Catherine Thayer went to Colorado in 1877.



*Cheyenne Mountain, Colorado Springs.*

My dear brother Edwin— If I could have been with you through this sad route, how thankful I would be, but “God’s ways are not our ways.” When I have been ill myself, I have prayed that I might live to be with our dear Mother at the last, and now, when my husband needed care, and that at a long distance from home, the loved one seems to have been snatched away in a day, as it seems. I could not have had her live to suffer, but it is very hard for me to feel that I cannot again look upon that sweetest of all, among the faces of women, to me, the soft silvery hair and the bright eyes, so full of love for us all, in every glance. Oh Edwin, our Mother was to us the sweetest most faultless of women. In a letter written the Fri before the 18th Mother asks Minnie to write me that “she is about over her cold” so that we were feeling

*Continued on next page*

varied news or interest. The weather, (unfailing topic), is still cold. Francis and I walked about a mile this afternoon— he is better of his cold and is able to sleep very well and has none of the exhaustion he has had at home. . . . we are furnished with a large basket of pine kindling wood, and the coal burns almost like wood, so that in a few moments our little stove and part of the pipe is red and the room comfortable. What a treasure this coal is here, found less than a hundred miles away and there are “mountains” of it. I trust you are warm in this extreme weather, and well and happy. Francis and Kittie join in love and kisses. Oh how I would like to spend the evening with you. . . . Kittie is doing nicely in her music and Francis so much enjoys her practice, and as the piano is in our room, we have few interruptions. With tender love to you dear “Mungie”

Denver, Col. January 21st, 1878, Monday eve 8 o’clock.

Dear Minnie & son Frank— Last evening our hearts were made glad by the receipt of your kind letter of last Wednesday, 16th, in which you say “Mother says she is stronger than when you went away. She goes up and down stairs three or four times a day just as she pleases.” Today, Oh! how changed the news from the dear object of our deepest love and warmest affection. This A.M. we rec’d a telegram from Dr. Bloss saying Mother was dangerously ill, sudden attack plus pneumonia yesterday. At first Kate & Kittie thought they must take the first train for Troy, but on reflection it was thought best for Kittie *only* to go as Kate has, for two or three days past, been suffering somewhat from neuralgia in the side so that for a little while she could not take a long breath without sharp pain. A little medicine and free application of mustard plaster almost entirely removed the difficulty, still we did not think it *prudent* for her to undertake so long a journey. Kittie said she *must* go so we telegraphed. . . . This evening we have Mr. Graves’ telegram saying— “Doctor says don’t send Kittie on any account. You need her there. Grandma cannot live until morning. Frank is covering tonight.” In this trying hour it certainly will be a great comfort to have Kittie here, she is so full of tender love and sympathy I do not see how we could spare her and altho’ it almost breaks her heart to think she will never see dear Grandmother again, yet she says she

will willingly stay and be a comfort to the living. Our hope and prayer is that Frank will reach home in time to receive for us all the parting and final blessing from one whose whole life has been a constant benediction to us all. Our prayer all day long has been that Mother might be spared from much suffering. We know that she is surrounded by kind sympathizing friends all striving, by every little act and look, to fill the place of those so far away. Edwin is no doubt with you and it is the great longing of our hearts that we could be there too, that we cannot be with you in this dark hour adds to this crushing sorrow. With much love to all, I remain yours as ever. —*F. S. Thayer.*

Denver, Col. Jany. 22, 1878. Tuesday evening.

Dear Minnie— The second telegram from our dear but now desolate home, yesterday, prepared us for the dread reality of the third dispatch which was received about 11 o'clock in the evening. Early this evening we telegraphed our suggestions in regard to the funeral, burial etc. and now we have a dispatch from John Birge saying our wishes will be complied with. We hope that we suggested nothing that did not meet with Edwin's and Frank's approval. It is indeed hard for us all to bear the thought we cannot be with you to share in paying the last tribute of love and affection to dear, dear, Grandmother. This cannot be and we ask God to bless and comfort us here so far away and may God bless you all. Kate wishes Mother's little things, (lip salve etc.) on her stand, put in her bureau drawer. We have not yet thought of what it may be best to do in regard to the house etc. Hope you are well and will stay a few days at least until we can decide. You may send this to Frank. Lovingly yours. Kate & Kittie send much love. —*F. S. T.*

P.S. Kate says she knows that loving friends are doing all for our dear Mother that we could do if at home and we are thankful for all their kind and loving attentions. We shall count the hours until we hear particulars from you, and hope that the darkness of our present sorrow will not shut out from us the many blessings we still possess.

Tuesday, Jan 22, 1878. 154 First Street, Troy.

My dear Friends— I can hardly tell you how grateful we all were for the telegram received today— everything was progressing very much as you have desired but to know that it was acceptable to you to have us act— Never was anybody so lovely— the placid expression, the sweetest look the dear Mother carries to the tomb. We all feel so much sympathy, yet can express so little & words must seem so idle to you. Your Brother Edwin's illness was unfortunate, but hopes to be down tomorrow. I know what a bitter disappointment to both you & himself not to have been able to minister to the precious one in her last hours & so tenacious am I of your rights that I almost begrudged myself the privilege of performing those tender offices your loving hands would fair have done. Your short first telegram came as a benediction in the closing hour. It was holy ground— there was every evidence that the Everlasting Arms were about her, for never for one moment since you left has there been one word of reprimand— it was always best & right, noble soul, the path of duty was ever the right one to her. What the separation cost her you alone can know but cheered by that faith which recognizes a "Father's hand in all things," she was able to comfort & strengthen all about her. Oh what precious lessons she has left us.

Thursday eve, 5 o'clock— You have been with us in spirit this solemn day,

very comfortable about Mother, but the first dispatch was to me a preparation for the worst... I know I have been blessed above most children in having our dear Mother spared to us so long, and in having the light and strength of her presence in our home, for us, and our children... I know that dear Coz Minnie and other friends did all that love could do, when Mother was taken... We were asked to make suggestions and did so and trust nothing conflicted with your feelings. We have thought that the dear Mother would be taken to Cam. Fri. morn. and that last night she would be lying with the loved ones gone before, the dear old burial place grown more sacred— it is hallowed ground to us surely... Kittie is well and such a comfort to me. I am glad she did not go home... Take care of yourself, lovingly, *Sister Kate.*

—*Catherine McKie Thayer to her brother, January 26, 1878.*



*Sophia Whiteside McKie, 1796–1878. Photograph by A. Cobden, Troy, New York, date of photograph unknown.*



Grave of Sophia Whiteside McKie, 1796–1878, Whiteside Cemetery, Cambridge, New York.

This poem was included in *I Have Seen Pegasus*, a pamphlet that was prepared on the occasion of Katherine Thayer Hobson's 90th birthday, April 11, 1979. Katherine was a great-granddaughter of Sophia Whiteside McKie, 1796–1878, and a niece of Catherine Whiteside McKie, 1793–1824, both of whom are referred to in the poem. The two sisters, Catherine and Sophia Whiteside were the two wives, first Catherine and later Sophia, of George McKie, 1791–1861.

as relatives near & more remote arrived. I never saw more heartfelt grief. The perfect quiet seemed to awe one— all felt the majesty of death & united in prayer that the balm of consolation might be poured into your hearts & that returning strength & health might be your portion. Dear Frank no longer a boy— he has come to realize the responsibilities of life & the sorrow that sometimes comes with them. He is bowed with grief for one who loved him & he loved so well, but has borne himself bravely. I gave him a few choice rose buds & asked him to put them in his dear Grandma's hand himself which he did. I placed a knot of violets on her bosom— "Being dead she yet speaketh" seemed to be the thought of each & all. Mr. Birge said to me, "Was ever one so lovely?" There was a large gathering of friends & neighbors, that is, as many as comfortably filled parlor & library. Mr. Eaton deemed it a privilege to do what he could & regrets that he cannot go to Cambridge tomorrow... Dear Grandma, for by this endearing name she permitted me to call her, I think she felt it was her last sickness but the brightness of faith never left her. When I recited, "I know that my Redeemer liveth," "Thy rod and thy staff thy comfort me," she said, "Again," & I repeated them & then the whole of the 23rd Psalm. By look & gesture she made response, especially at the last verse. I know that this letter is incoherent, but I cannot help it— pardon the detail. I know that everything that has transpired the last few days is sacred to you or I would not have dared to write in this manner. How much our thoughts are with you my dear friends— Mr. & Mrs. Thayer & dear Kittie. Accept my prayer and believe me your sympathizing friend, —E. R. Eaton.

#### THE SAMPLER

Small length of linen  
 Handspun, handwoven,  
 Stitched with bright silk threads  
 Faded now like once sharp memories  
 Of my Great, Great Aunt Catherine Whiteside.

The homestead where she lived,  
 Third of six generations,  
 Was it this house she tried to copy here  
 With trees, birds, letters, numerals,  
 Were these two children Catherine, Sophia?  
 The dead are silent.

White marble tombstones near a country church,  
 Catherine beside her husband,  
 Beloved of gods if one believe the verse,  
 But young Sophia lived,  
 Brought up her sister's children and her own,  
 She also lies by him who sired them all.

What will the sisters say on that last day  
 When waking to the trumpet sound they look  
 Into each other's eyes across their George?

—Katherine Thayer Hobson, 1889–1982

## BEEBEE HOUSE,

F. W. BEEBEE, PROPRIETOR.

☞ Idaho Springs, Colorado:

February 19th, 1878. Beebee House, Idaho Springs, Col.

My Dear Wife & Daughter— From Denver to Golden 14 miles, you pass through a splendid farming country, equal in appearance to the best sections of Illinois & Iowa, several places I noticed plowing had commenced. On leaving Golden you realize that you are indeed among the Rocky Mts.— the scenery is grand beyond description all the way, not a few places where the Mt. rises five to seven hundred feet perpendicularly above the track. We thought the White Mts. grand and so they are, but when you talk about lofty grandeur you will have to come west. We arrived here about 6 o'clock and found the Hotel quite pleasant. After a good supper played checkers with several and had tolerable success on the whole. Retired to a pleasant room about half past ten feeling pretty well, went to bed without smoking or taking any medicine and got through the night very well... Tomorrow, if pleasant, I expect to go to the Hot Springs, about ten minutes walk from the Hotel. I wish you could come up here, but it is not best to take the risk. If Kittie comes with Mrs. B— on Friday she will on her return give you a graphic description of the sublime scenery. All the A.M. it was warm and pleasant. Not too cool to sit out on stoop without an overcoat. I did not do it, but walked about enjoying the pure bracing air and warm sun light. I am feeling better and hope to go right along gaining health and strength every day... —Your devoted *Francis*.

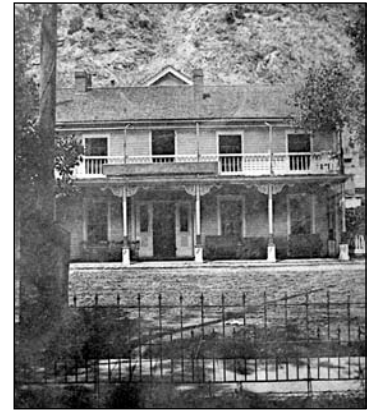
February 21st, 1878. Beebee House, Idaho Springs, Col.

My Darling Kittie— I passed quite a comfortable night and feel pretty well... The A.M. was bright and beautiful and I took a walk as far as I could go without getting my feet damp. I have no rubbers here. Please send them up by Kittie. The wind is east now and Mr. Beebee says we may have more snow— just now the sun is trying to shine but you cannot see the tops of the mountains. I expected a letter from you this morning, but all I got for mail was the *Troy Times* which I have read through. —As ever your own *Frank*.  
February 22nd, 1878. Beebee House, Idaho Springs, Col.

My Dear Kittie— ...I am a little more than holding my own notwithstanding the unpleasant weather. Last night I slept pretty well for me. Today it is snowing and I am under the painful necessity of lounging about the house reading the papers, playing checkers etc. Played four games, two each with two of the best players in the house. Had the good luck to beat every time... The scenery is grand and sublime beyond my power to describe. It is snowing now (1/2 past one) fast. I believe the arrangements are complete for the evening's entertainment and I expect to see a real old fashioned dance. Well— this is Washington's birthday— a national holiday... This is a very poor pen but you can guess at it if you can't read this scrawl. —Your *Frankie*.

February 24th, 1878. Beebee House, Idaho Springs, Col.

My Dear Wife— Yours with three other letters and paper came to hand



*The Beebee House, circa 1899.  
Photo courtesy of the Historical  
Society of Idaho Springs.*

*The Beebee House, Idaho Springs, Colorado. Photo circa 1873, during a visit to Idaho Springs by President Ulysses S. Grant, center and his entourage. Photographer unknown. Photo courtesy of the Historical Society of Idaho Springs.*



this A.M. I passed the night as usual, some wheezing and some sleep, more of the latter than I enjoyed a week ago. The weather most of the time last week was unfavorable for improvement in my case, however, I gained a little and hope that little is but the stepping stone to much. I do not know that this is a better place for me than Denver— still I think but to give it a fair trial. Today the sun is shining brightly but the air is cool and bracing. I wish I could have heard Kittie give an account of her visit to Idaho [Idaho Springs, Col.] She enjoyed every moment of the time... This is indeed a quiet Sabbath. I did not go to church for the reason I was afraid of taking cold. They have two churches here, Presbyterian and Episcopal. The Methodists are usually the pioneers in planting churches, but they are behind hand here. —I am as ever  
*Your loving Husband.*

February 25th, 1878. Beebee House, Idaho Springs, Col.

My Dear Wife— ...I sent you word this morning by Mrs. B— that I had a pretty good night and now I can say that I am feeling pretty well for one of my age and infirmities. It was bright and beautiful all the A.M. Now the wind is east and I shall not be surprised to see snow falling before night. The weather is a fickle jude anywhere, but here among the mountains you cannot tell what an hour will bring forth on the weather question. Unless we have better weather soon you will see me in Denver very soon. At dinner Mr. Beebee remarked that “the wind had got round in the east again.” I replied, “Make out my bill and I’ll leave this country the first train.” On reflection I think it best to stay a little longer. Tell Kittie I sent up to the Bath House for her comb and word was sent back that they had not seen it. Mr. Beebee proposed to go up there this P.M. and inquire into the matter— said he guessed he could find it. With a heart full of love to your dear self and our darling daughter I am as ever your loving *Frank.*

☞ A rare letter from Amherst College:

Oct. 2, 1878, Amherst.

My dear Father— Your letter of 24th Sept. has been duly received. My only excuse for not corresponding more promptly lies in the fact that if I could have written *tomorrow* I should have done so long ago but when *tomor-*

row came it was no longer *tomorrow* but *today* and hence my remissness. It is a comfort for me to feel that your health is improving so rapidly. It would seem that this fine autumn weather must give life and spirits to everyone. I am glad to learn that Kittie is up and well again after her cold. Mother has written me two beautiful letters which I really must answer. The class election came off last week. I was one of the three candidates for class President but sad to say I was defeated by a small majority. Such is the fate of those who aspire to such distinctions as class Presi. I'll never seek office again. "It's a delusion and a snare."

There has been considerable feeling between the Sophomores and Freshmen since the opening of the term and this culminated last week in a *Duel* between a Freshman and Sophomore. The duel was intended as a practical joke on the Freshman but only blank cartridges were used, but the Faculty refused to consider the matter in this playful light and the result is that the Sophomore who acted as principal in the affair and a Senior who was present to act as referee are expelled. Our class regards this penalty as unnecessarily severe and are circulating a petition to have the decision of the Faculty revoked. I am very well myself and all needed to complete my happiness is to hear that you are all well and happy at the Old Home. With much love to yourself, Mother & Kittie & kind remembrances to friends & neighbors, I remain yours affectionately, —*F. M. Thayer*.

#### A College Term Paper

Among the external distinctions of races the form of the skull calls for particular attention... The Caucasian race, which stands highest in the scale, is that which has produced the most civilized nations; while the Mongolian, the next in order of capacity of cranium has produced a number of nations which have remained in a fixed state of semi-civilization. The Malay is a [illegible] barbarous and the American and Ethiopian the most barbarous of all. —*F. M. Thayer*. (Special Collections, Robert Frost Library, Amherst College.)

The only surviving work of Francis McKie Thayer from his days at Amherst College is a handwritten and undated term paper in the archives at the college library, entitled: *A Study of Human Skulls*.

Oct. 11th. 1878, South Cambridge.

My dear Brother Frank— Your letter was received this morning and delighted all our hearts. Father will send the bill to Troy and have the check sent you. Am glad the fellows were taken back, what was the name of the senior? ... Your letters will be expected weekly. Do not let a week go by for Father is so sick and weak. —*Kittie*.

Oct. 27, 1878, Troy, Sabbath eve.

My dear Frank— We have not received letters to which we should reply, but still I remember our little arrangement for this evening, and thinking that you would miss your usual letter, I sit down for my one sided chat. Thinking and hoping that you are engaged in the same pleasing task as myself. Perhaps you do not think letter writing a very enjoyable occupation! Certainly habitual, regular, and frequent writing makes it so and the task becomes an easy pleasant pastime. Will you not try and make it enjoyable to yourself by a little wholesome discipline? ... Kittie and Father join me in kindest love to you. —*Mungie*.

Nov. 23, 1878, Troy.

My dear Son— ... We hope another winter & spring in Colorado will give us permanent relief. Pueblo, where we shall stop for a while at least, is

a small town... about 115 miles south of Denver. If we do not find it agreeable at P— we shall go still further south. In regard to your Holiday vacation we leave that to you and Aunt Rhoda to arrange just as you & she may think will be for your best good and greatest pleasure. And now my dear boy I am coming to a very delicate and important subject, one we have talked & prayed over time and again with all the love and fervor the most loving and devoted parents ever had for a child. You are so kind and affectionate in your nature that it seems strange that you should give us anxious thought. We are going far way, some two thousand miles will be between us. This may be my last appeal to you and now I pray you for your own good, for the peace, happiness and health of your loving & devoted *Father, Mother & Sister*— [The first page of this letter is cross written and is illegible.]

1879

☞ College Commencement:

The Hon. Francis S. Thayer, accompanied by his daughter, returned East from Colorado yesterday for the purpose of attending the commencement exercises at Amherst college, from which institution his son, Frank McK. Thayer, will graduate this year. Mrs. Thayer will remain in the West for the present. Mr. Thayer's many friends in this city will be glad to greet and welcome him home after his extended sojourn in Colorado. By frequent, excellent, and newsy letters from him, published in the *Times*, his acquaintances have been kept posted concerning his experiences among the residents of the distant state, and have been gratified to learn from time to time of his constantly improving health. —*Troy Daily Times*, June 20, 1879.

*Special Correspondence* After moving to Colorado, Francis S. Thayer wrote a series of letters for the *Troy Daily Times* that were published as *Mr. Thayer's Colorado Letter*. These are excerpts from some of those "letters."

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENCE, *Troy Daily Times*

MR. THAYER'S COLORADO LETTER.

Pueblo, Col., Dec. 23, 1878. It is always a pleasure, especially when far away from home, to communicate with old friends, and I gladly embrace the present opportunity of giving you some notes of observations and facts in regard to this, the centennial state of our Union. What interests me most of all is that I find here relief from my old complaint, asthma. Soon after my arrival here, I met Gov. Pitkin, who said to me that a bounty would be paid, not for the heads of bears and wolves, but for a case of asthma this climate would not cure or greatly relieve. I replied that I hoped for the relief and cure rather than the bounty...

Colorado has obtained the reputation of being a sanitarium, where those suffering from asthma, catarrh, hay fever and consumption, if not too far gone, are greatly benefited, if not entirely cured. Why this climate is so healthful and invigorating is a prolific subject of scientific inquiry, which I do not propose to discuss without further and closer observation. On this point I will only add that the atmosphere is pure and dry, and most of the towns near the Rocky Mountains are a mile or more above sea level.

It is now nearly three weeks since our arrival here, and notwithstanding the cold and stormy weather my health is better than when I left home. The *Times*, four days old, reaches us regularly and keeps us well informed as to local events and news generally. I see you have to spread yourself to accommodate your patrons for the holidays. Wishing you the compliments of the season, I remain as ever, *Francis S. Thayer*.

Pueblo, Col., January 29, 1879. ...The Colorado farmer has at least one advantage over his eastern fellow laborer, i.e., there is no danger of a wet harvest season here— when



once a crop is grown it is sure to be harvested, unless, occasionally, as in the past, it is damaged by the grasshopper and the beetle. The last appearance of these pests in this locality was in 1876, since which time our New York farmers have made the acquaintance of the beetle or potato bug, greatly to their loss and sorrow. The pastoral region embraces a large portion of the state aside from the mountains. The vast plains are now dotted with immense herds of horses, cattle and sheep, where but a few years ago the buffalo and the deer roamed at will with none but the red man to molest or make them afraid. Farming, or, to use a southern phrase, ranching, is carried on here in many instances on a grand scale. The Col. Craig ranche, situated on the Huerfano River, in Pueblo county, contains 80,000 acres, and was recently sold to a company of Bridgeport, Conn., capitalists for the snug little sum of \$350,000... Three of the largest towns in Rensselaer county would hardly cover this one farm.

Pueblo, Col., March 4, 1879. The Pueblo flouring mill, on the opposite side of the street, is driven by water “taken” from the Arkansas river and brought in a canal, a mile and a half in length, and at an expense of \$14,000. This reminds me of the story told of the quick-witted Irish sailor. When asked why a ship was called “she,” he replied, “Because the rigging costs more than the hull.” Having a natural fondness for a flouring mill, I found my way hither this morning for the purpose of making some inquiries about the wheat crop of this new state. I introduced myself to the proprietor as a fellow miller from the Empire state, and told him the object of my visit. He said: “We raise the finest wheat and make the best flour in Colorado that can be produced in the whole world. Why our wheat and flour took the first premium at the centennial exhibition at Philadelphia.” I doubted, within myself, this seemingly confident assertion when I remembered “Crystal Palace Mills” in Troy and the beautiful wheat we get from our own Genesee county and many of the western and southwestern states.

Colorado Springs, March 15, 1879. Ten days since, after a three months sojourn at Pueblo, we, in western parlance, pulled stakes and pitched our tent at this delightful spot, 45 miles towards the north pole and 1,575 feet higher in the air, almost under the shadow of Pike’s peak, although 12 miles distant from the summit the way the crow flies, and yet so clear is the atmosphere that it appears within the limits of a morning’s walk... Colorado Springs, a city of the second class, is situate at the confluence of the Fountain and Monument creeks, on the Denver and Rio Grande railroad, 75 miles



*Colorado Springs, General View. F. A. Nims' Views of Rocky Mountain Scenery.*

south from Denver and on the southern slope of the “divide.” The town was organized and laid out in 1871, hardly eight years since the first building was erected, with the single exception of a log house built by trappers some 20 years ago. Now we see a beautiful town, containing a population of over 4,000 generally young, active, intelligent and temperate. It is not only a virtue, but a necessity to maintain temperate habits here, as the originators of the town dedicated it to temperance and every conveyance of real estate contains a chance of forfeiture, enforceable as a penalty for the sale of intoxicating liquors. Consequently you see no signs along the streets, such as “wines, liquors and cigars,” “sample rooms,” “Lager beer saloons,” etc... The city contains 10 churches, a beautiful college building of stone in course of construction, one of the best public school buildings in the state, capable of accommodating 350 pupils, a deaf mute asylum, three banks, six hotels, one daily and two weekly newspapers, a dozen or more compact blocks of stores, shops, etc. Livery stables of which there are four or five very large ones, with splendid horses and elegant carriages, do a large and profitable business in consequence of the patronage of invalids and tourists...

Colorado Springs, April 9, 1879. ...The altitude of Leadville is about two miles above sea level, and the climate anything but agreeable—as someone has described it, “much like nine months dead winter, and the other three late in the fall.” Colorado Springs is one of the three bases of supplies for the new El Dorado, and I have watched with no little interest the shipments of goods, wares and merchandise of almost every description, by the more than 800 six and eight mule teams constantly employed in this service. These teams usually draw two canvas covered wagons, called “prairie schooners,” and they move in fleets over the mountains and through the deep cañons and narrow passes. They carry provisions for the men and fodder for the beasts, dropping anchor wherever night overtakes them, the crew sleeping on deck or in the hold, wrapped in their coarse warm blankets, and the jaded mules hitched to a stake. The average load is 1,000 pounds per animal, loaded on two wagons... Colorado is called a sanitarium, and I have no doubt a large number of invalids come here and are greatly benefited by this health-giving climate; but it is alarming to see the hosts from all parts of the country, and old residents too, that are stricken down with that most contagious disease, which no quarantine, except absolute isolation, will prevent spreading. This disease has, at least, one peculiarity— i.e. in the selection of its victims. It fastens itself upon the strong, hardy and vigorous— the very bone and sinew of the land— while the old, poor and feeble are “never or hardly ever” attacked.” ’Tis an old saying that those who are afflicted with asthma are quite sure to be free from all other diseases, and for this reason your correspondent may escape. However he has had some alarming symptoms and been obliged to go into quarantine. The name by which this disease is known to the medical profession is “*auri sacri fames*” (the accursed thirst for gold) or mining fever...

Colorado Springs, April 25, 1879. Our morning’s ride of several miles over the broad plains studded with beautiful wild flowers was delightful. The weather was simply perfect, the mercury standing at 70° in the shade, with a soft and gentle breeze which made us think of the month of leaves and roses, when we hope to be at home again. In the course of our drive we saw a large flock of sheep quietly feeding on the plains near the road, and the opportunity was improved to make some further inquiries about sheep raising, and the information gained I venture to communicate to your readers, although this subject has been discussed somewhat at length by your correspondent in previous letters which have elicited particular inquiries by private letters as to this branch of industry in Colorado.



*Pikes Peak Ave, Colorado Springs.  
F. A. Nims' Views of Rocky  
Mountain Scenery.*

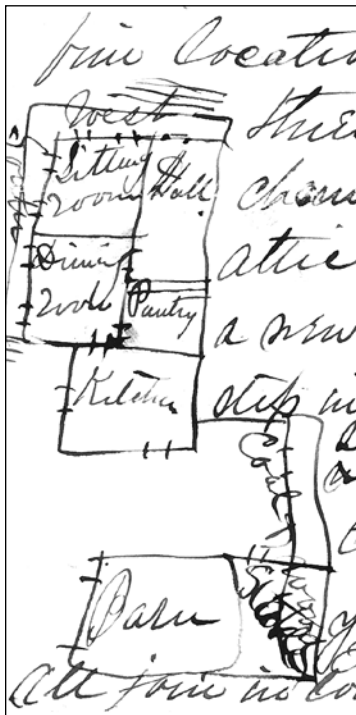
It may be asked how you can keep 1,000 or more sheep on 120 or 160 acres of land? The answer is— buy land on which there are good durable springs and you have a range of thousands of broad acres on which there is no water, and for this reason it will remain the property of the great land holder, “Uncle Sam,” for generations to come, and be used in common by his children and children’s children. A good sheep ranch containing 160 acres, well watered by springs or running streams, with a small frame house and sufficient corrals and sheds to accommodate 1,000 sheep, can be bought for about \$1,000, or you can buy 160 acres of government lands at \$1.25 per acre and make the improvements, which will cost \$600 to \$800. There is still another way to obtain a ranch, ie, under the homestead law, which gives to any one who will make affidavit before the proper officer that he is a citizen of the United States or has declared his intentions to become such, that he is over the age of 21, or the head of a family, and that the entry is made for exclusive use and benefit and for actual settlement and cultivation. He must reside on the premises five years, at the end of which time he will be entitled to a patent or complete title from the government. The homestead laws also provides that every soldier and officer of the army, and every seaman, marine, and officer in the navy who served not less than 90 days in the army or navy of the United States “during the recent rebellion,” and who was honorably discharged and has remained loyal to the government, may enter, under the provisions of the homestead law, 160 acres of the public lands, and the time of his service or the whole term of his enlistment, if the party was discharged on account of wounds or disability incurred in the line of duty, shall be deducted from the period of five years during which the claimant must reside upon and cultivate the entered tract, but the party shall in every case reside upon, improve and cultivate his homestead for a period of a least one year. All lands obtained under the homestead laws are exempt from liability for debts contracted prior to the issuing of the patent therefor.

Colorado Springs, May 31, 1879. The length of my last letter was conclusive evidence that I had quite forgotten Sam Weller’s idea of the great art of letter writing, “make them short, so that the reader will wish they had been longer.” In future I will remember “Samuel,” and pay proper respect to the value of your columns and the patience of your readers....

1880

Colorado Springs, Jan 5, 1880

My dear Brother Edwin [Edwin McKie in Cambridge, New York]— Well,



Floorplan of Thayer home on Cascade Avenue in Colorado Springs included in Catherine Thayer's letter of January 5, 1880 to Edwin McKie, her brother.

Xmas and New Years are come and gone, and it has not seemed much as it used to Edwin, when we pinned our stockings in a long row on the line in Mother's bedroom at the end of the hall— that seems, as I think of it, long, long ago, but when I ask how old I am, I cannot realize that I was born in 1827, but the years come and go, the new figures look strangely for a little time, but soon we become accustomed to the change to the eye and ear and so move on through the time allotted to each of us. Sometimes when I think that we are living where we used to see only *Indian Territory*, a few rivers, and the *Rocky Mts*, I feel I must be dreaming.

I wrote you Br. E— last summer and autumn, enclosing the letters to Troy— and after my family came out to see me, sometime after, I learned that between Francis and Kittie my letters were not forwarded, each supposing the other had taken them to you— I do not speak of them because they were worth much, but to let you know that I tried to keep up a correspondence, albeit I am a poor letter writer.

As to the health question, Francis is recovering from a cold taken about six weeks ago, he was not as ill as you have seen him in Troy, not confined to his bed or room, but very wheezy. We had the mercury 26° below zero, and the intense cold was unfavorable, but we have had for a week most delightful weather. Last Sat, Jan. 3, Frank, Kittie, and two others had a picnic in the open air about eight miles from here, and Gen. Palmer (of America) and wife have been out the past few days from eleven till four, taking a substantial lunch, building a fire and making coffee; this outdoor life is what builds up, if anything will here. We have had no rain since Sep. 1, a little snow twice, but it is absorbed by the coarse sand in a day or so. There is a sprinkling of snow on Pike's Peak and a little on some of the mt. sides but none here, as dry as summer and you can sit outdoors hours every day— such is the warmth of the sun. How I wish you could step into our cozy house and visit with us. We have a fine location, well here is the house— three rooms below, and three chambers above with one in the attic for servant. We have a new milch [sic] cow and if you could step in the pantry Edwin, you would see such cream as you used to like with jumbles when you and I were young. I am at the end of my paper. All join in love to you both and the chicks. Do write soon for I want to hear from you, am hungry to see you, as ever your loving sister. —Kate.  
[Catherine McKie Thayer]



Kittie Thayer in Colorado before 1882.

Jan 5th, 1880

My dear Uncle Edwin— Your nice long letter came to me some weeks ago and seemed like having a chat with you. We are all enjoying beautiful weather, so soft & warm— mercury stood 75 in shade— quite like summer. My pony is a very fine one— and for three years old shows signs of being a record pacer. Our home is very pleasant, and we enjoy ourselves much better than in boarding... Father and Mother are very well. Have a fine cow and will make some butter this week— gave the calf away. My dog is a big one, knows something will shut the doors and many other tricks. He fell down a well seventy feet deep and after working all day a man hauled him out. Give best love to all, and write me again. Do you know on the 3rd of December I was twenty? Quite the maiden lady. Now good bye. —Your loving niece, *K. S. Thayer*.

☞ Death in the family:

“Account of dear Father’s last days” —Monday, Nov 22. out sitting on the South side of the house in the warm sun. Two hours or more. Had a hyperdemic that night. Tues night I went upstairs about 11 o’clock, came down about 1 am. Dr. Strickler came with Dr. Reed, Wed. p.m. Hyperemic Wed. night.

Thurs. p.m. Mr. & Mrs. Palmer here. Dear father said he felt better than yesterday. Drs. Reed & Strickler here. Ellen drew him out to the dinner table in the next room. Kittie and I each carrying a foot, had a cheerful dinner, apparently but we were all terribly anxious at heart after dinner. Father lay down and Frank read to him a long article... and we had a pleasant chat. Dr. Reed came in, nearly 8, and sat on the bed some time, talking as if we were well. Father said he knew his condition was critical but told the Dr. he did not give up all hope of being better. Then Dr. Reed said Hart (his partner) would come up and administer the hyper after the Dr. left. Father said we will have prayers. Frank usually reads, but Kittie was near the table, she read the XCI Psalm and Father in his prayer asked most earnestly for a restoration to health & strength. Soon after Frank left to his room, and Kittie and I removed the bandages. Father said, have Ellen come and rub my legs and she was called. Mrs. T— usually bandaged the feet and legs so we said we all could do a little for him. Dr. Hart came about 10, gave the hyper— about 10:30. Father turned over to try to sleep and after a little said he would have some Apollinaris water, the hyper’s made him thirsty. Dr. Hart opened the bottle and I gave it to him, and then he said “now be quiet and I will go to sleep.” Kittie went to one room and soon after I went up, took off my clothes which I had kept on several nights and was robed, then put them on and came down. Father sent Ellen up to me to tell me “to have a good rest” that he “was very comfortable and expected to have a good night.” I soon went down however and found him quiet and in a doze. I wished to creep in beside him for the night, but all told me to get some sleep, that I could do no good. Dr. Hart said he thought the night would be like the previous one. I finally went up for one reason only, that the more there were in the room the less pure the air would be and all his distress was in breathing, and it was so cold we could not open windows. He had Apol. water several times through the night, would call Ellen who with the

Personal check of Francis S. Thayer, with his photograph, payable to his wife. Check is dated November 25, 1880, the day before he died.



Dr. were close at hand—the Dr. in the room, E— sometimes in the room, sometimes in the next room. About five Fri. a.m. there was a little change in breathing. The Dr. gave stimulant or tried to. We were in the room in a moment, the quiet breathing soon ceased, our beloved had waked in Heaven and we to agony below. —*handwritten by Catherine McKie Thayer.*

A telegram received in Troy this afternoon announced the death this morning at Colorado Springs, Colorado, of the Hon. Francis S. Thayer of this city. The deceased was born at Dummerston, Windham County, Vt. September 11, 1822. His father was a descendant of old Puritan stock and the son Francis was one of a family of 11 children, among whom are Mrs. A. H. Graves of Troy, Mrs. William M. Cranston of London, England, the Hon. James S. Thayer of New York and the Hon. Adin Thayer, ex-canal commissioner of Hoosick Falls. In the summer of 1841 Mr. Thayer completed his education at the Cambridge Academy, in Washington county, subsequently taught school in North Bennington, Vt., and in the spring of 1842 he came to this city, where he resided ever since. Upon reaching Troy he accepted a clerkship in the flour store and milling firm of Howland & Bills. Mr. Thayer labored assiduously with marked success in his vocation until, a few years later, he was admitted into partnership with the firm named, and he had, without interruption continued his connection with the business stated up to the time of his death. The name of the firm changed at different periods, but his interest in the establishment remained. Among the partners with whom he was associated may be mentioned the late James Howland, Alfonzo Bills, the late F. H. Knight and John T. Birge, who at present is the surviving partner.

In politics Mr. Thayer was formerly a Whig, casting his first vote for Henry Clay, but joined the Republican party upon its organization. In 1867 he was elected state senator by a majority of 1,600, running more than 500 ahead of his ticket in this county. He was re-elected in 1869 by a majority of 1,196 over the Hon. Smith Strait, and during his connection with the state legislature he served in important positions on the committees of manufacturers and public expenditures and canals, commerce and navigation. In 1870 Mr. Thayer voted against the odious "Tweed charter" for the city of New York, and received the commendation and praise of the united Republican press of the state. In 1878 the deceased was nominated by the Republicans for secretary of state, but with his ticket, sustained defeat. In 1874 Mr. Thayer was appointed by Gen. Dix as canal auditor, and served one year in that capacity. Since then, owing to failing health, he took no active part in either business or politics, but resided much of the time in Colorado, where he sought relief through the climate of that locality from the disease that finally terminated his life. During his residence in the West Mr. Thayer was a frequent contributor to the columns of the *Times*. The

deceased was a consistent member of the First Presbyterian church of this city, and for many years held the office of a ruling elder. He was a director at the time of his death of the Troy City National bank, and a trustee of the Troy savings bank, the Renssalaer Polytechnic Institute, the Troy and West Troy bridge company and the Troy female seminary.

In early manhood Mr. Thayer married Miss Catherine McKie of Cambridge, Washington county, who, together with a son, Francis McKie, and a daughter, Catherine S., survives him. It is believed the funeral will be held in Colorado Springs.

—*Troy Times*, Troy, New York.

The Hon. Francis S. Thayer, of Troy, died suddenly in Colorado Springs, Col., yesterday. He was descended from old Massachusetts Puritan stock. His father emigrated from the Bay State to Dummerstown, Windham County, Vt., where Francis S. was born on Sept. 11, 1822. He was one of a family of 11 brothers and sisters. Up to his nineteenth year he worked on a farm, except for a short interval while occupying the position of clerk in the village store. At 18 he was elected Captain of the local military company. In the Summer of 1841 he came to Hoosick Falls, Renssalaer County, with his father, and a few weeks later entered Cambridge Academy, in the adjoining county of Washington, where he received instruction for four months. In the winter of 1841–42 he taught school in the village of North Bennington, Vt., and “boarded around” in the families of the scholars. In the Spring in 1842 he accepted a clerkship in the flour store of Howland & Bills, in Troy, at \$100 a year and his board. Five years later he was admitted to a partnership in the concern. He continued in the flour and milling business in Troy for more than 20 years, establishing a reputation for his special brands of flour that made them favorably known throughout the country, and amassing a competence.

Mr. Thayer entered manhood as a “Whig.” His first vote was cast for Henry Clay for President, in 1843. When that party had outlived its usefulness he joined the Republican Party at its formation, and has ever remained its staunch and devoted adherent. He was several times a delegate to the State and local conventions, but beyond this he steadily declined political honors until, in the Fall of 1867, he accepted the nomination for State Senator from the Twelfth District, and was elected by 1,600 majority, running 532 votes ahead of his party ticket in the county. He was re-elected in the Fall of 1870. On April 8, 1874, he was appointed Canal Auditor, a position for which he was eminently qualified by his life-long interest in and advocacy of, the welfare of the canals. In 1873 he was the Republican candidate for the office of Secretary of State.

—*The New York Times*, November 27, 1880.

Troy, December 9th, 1880.

My Dear Kittie— I enclose a letter for you that came today. Your letter written on Thanksgiving day came several days after the sad tidings that it for-shadowed. Sad as this and the letters that followed have made our hearts, yet it has brought great comfort to know how full the preparation, how perfect the trust, how sweet the calmness, of our dear Mr. Thayer during those closing days and hours of his life. To those who knew from seeing the hard fight he had to make for life, how heavy was the burden of pain that disease had imposed upon him, it is easy to rejoice that those sufferings are at an end. But the joy is for him, and I know that even that thought cannot fill the aching void in the hearts that sorrow. Long ago when I first read *Lucile* I memorized a passage that often arises in my mind now and has brought comfort in times of trouble to my heart, as it may to yours:



*The Asa Knight Store, now in Old Sturbridge Village, Massachusetts. The store was built in Dummerston, Vermont, in 1838 and stocked a variety of goods from around the country and the world until it closed in 1862. In 1972 the structure was dismantled and moved to Old Sturbridge Village in Massachusetts where it stands today as an example of a New England country store, complete with the original counters behind which Francis Thayer once worked. A search of the Dummerston Town records shows that on several occasions Adin Thayer, the father of Francis S. Thayer, sold real estate to Asa Knight, the owner of the store.*



Grave marker for Francis S. Thayer, 1822–1880, Thayer family plot, Oakwood Cemetery, Troy, New York.

“The dial receives many shades & each points to the sun.  
The shadows are many, the sunlight is one.  
Life’s sorrows still fluctuate: God’s love does not.  
And His love is unchanged, when it changes our lot.  
Looking *up* to this light which is common to all,  
And *down* to the shadows on each side, that fall.  
In Time’s silent circle, so various for each!  
Is it nothing to know that they never can reach  
So far, but what *light* lies beyond them forever.”

That into the darkness that has clouded your life’s pathway, may penetrate the divine rays of this *light beyond* and at its touch the shadows flee away, is the sincere wish of Your friend, *John Birge*.

~ Resolutions:

At a meeting of the directors of the Troy City National Bank, held this day to consider the sudden and unexpected death of their associate, the Hon. Francis S. Thayer, the following minute was entered on the record and a copy transmitted to the widow of the deceased: Mr. Thayer during the past eight years has been connected and identified with the interests of this bank, with a most honorable and conscientious record—having an eye single to our best interests, and always ready to aid with such advice as a long and successful business career qualified him to give. In expressing our grief to his immediate family, wherein Mr. Thayer’s genial nature found its best development, we do but certify to his lovable Christian traits of character, to none so well known as they who are now under the dark shadow of affliction. We desire here to convey to the widow and children of our deceased friend assurances of heartfelt sympathy.

—Troy City National Bank, Troy, N. Y. Nov. 29, 1880. *Geo. A Stone*, Cashier.

At a meeting of the Trustees of the Troy Female Seminary, held Nov. 29, 1880, the following resolutions were adopted: *Resolved*, That by the death of the Hon. Francis S. Thayer the Troy Female Seminary is deprived of one of its truest friends and ablest advisers, and one always ready to do to the extent of his ability that which in his judgment was for the best interests of the institution. *Resolved*, That his memory will be held in high esteem by all connected with the Seminary, and that the sincere sympathy of the members of this board is hereby tendered to the family of Mr. Thayer. *Resolved*, That the Secretary be directed to transmit these resolutions to the friends of the deceased.



## 1880—Lives in Virginia and Colorado

As 1880 ended, there were two widows living worlds apart. One, Annie Jennings Wise Hobson was running a boarding house for college students in Williamsburg, Virginia, and the other, Catherine McKie Thayer, was living in her new home in Colorado Springs. One had a son who had finished college and law school and was beginning to set out into the world to make his name and fortune. The other had a daughter who would soon be leaving home too. It will still be seven years until all of their paths converge.