

FIRST DRAFT

E.F. Eldridge was a doctor, poet, novelist and community booster

*I sing of a land by the river Grand,
Where the soil is filled with wealth,
Where the balmy air and sunlight fair
Restore the sick to health;*
—“The Song I Love to Sing,” by E.F. Eldridge

In late summer of 1881, two prospectors from California headed east across Nevada and Utah, then over the LaSal Mountains to arrive in the Sinbad Valley, near the Colorado-Utah border.

There, Robert and Happy (surnames unknown) found an old dugout cabin, apparently abandoned decades earlier, and the entrance to an old mine shaft.

Poking around in the old mine, they found ore rich in lead, copper and gold.



BOB SILBERNAGEL

Robert traveled to the new town of Grand Junction, enlisted an investor and partner, who recruited more investors, workers and equipment. Within a year — by the time the Denver & Rio Grande Railroad reached Grand Junction — the Sinbad Mining and Milling Co. had established a profitable working mine, a smelter and a healthy little mining community in Sinbad Valley.

Except it didn't really happen. It was all from the pen of Dr. Edward F. Eldridge, a Grand Junction physician, author, poet and, reportedly, a friend of Thomas Edison.

It was in a Daily Sentinel story about Edison that I first learned of his connection to Dr. Eldridge. The story was written by the late Sentinel columnist Merle McClintock in 1939, but it referred back to a Sentinel article from 1897.

That article described the arrival of the first movie projector in Grand Junction, “an 1897 model Edison Triograph,” which apparently provided a brief demonstration of motion pictures at the Park Opera House.

Thomas Edison's work “was not unfamiliar” to 1890s Grand Junction because “a pioneer physician, Dr. Edward F. Eldredge (sic) was a friend of Edison and had been in his laboratory to watch demonstrations of the series of inventions that added so much to the United States and the World,” McClintock wrote.

I couldn't find any other references to Eldridge's friendship with Edison, in the Sentinel or on the internet. However, it is clear that Eldridge was eager to embrace the technology Edison developed.

In 1901, the Sentinel reported that “Dr. E.F. Eldredge (sic) has erected a large new lamp post and placed thereon a handsome street lantern, wherein he proposes to place a large candle power electric light and allow the same to burn all night.”

The new lamp would, the Sentinel said, “afford a brilliant light to those seeking the doctor's office” at 538 Chipeta Ave.

In another article that year, the Sentinel said Eldridge

worked to provide relief to a Plateau Valley rancher dying of cancer.

In 1910, he was described in another newspaper as a “physician and surgeon, mine owner, poet, publicist, optimist, public-spirited citizen and never faltering booster for his home town, home institution and his home country.” He was, the article said, “someone who helped the community doff its swaddling clothes and don its metropolitan garb.”

Eldridge was born in Ketchumville, New York, about 1855. He graduated from Dartmouth Medical College in 1881 and began his medical practice in Needham, Massachusetts. Two years later, he moved to New London, Wisconsin, where he was a leader in the Wisconsin State Medical Society and a delegate to the International Medical Congress in Germany.

Additionally, he served as mayor of the town of New London.

He moved to Grand Junction in 1890, apparently hoping the dry climate would alleviate his own health issues. He soon became enamored of the community and its climate. He published a paper nationally titled “Grand Junction, Colorado, as a Health Resort.”

Eldridge also wrote poetry extolling the virtues of the area, such as the poem at the beginning of this article, which also opens his novel, “The Sinbad Mines.”

Another part of the same poem reads:
For life is bliss in a clime like this,

Where all His gifts are free;
As a novelist, it's not clear how successful Eldridge was, although one can still obtain used copies of his 1905 novel “The Sinbad Mines: A Tale of the Rockies.”

His first novel, “A California Girl,” published in 1901, is more difficult to find.

Eldridge also published several volumes of poetry, including “Alkazar the Moorish Alchemist and Other Poems,” in 1898.

Poetry is abundant in “The Sinbad Mines.” Every few pages, Eldridge added one of his poems to complement the narrative, such as when the protagonist is bringing his new bride from the East to the Grand Valley, and he points out Grand Mesa as the train rolls toward Grand Junction. That scene is followed by “Ode to Grand Mesa,” which begins:

Thou monarch of all the fair mountains

Which smile on the vale of the Grand,

*Thy feet in its pure limpid waters,
Thy shadows o'erspread the land.*

*A storehouse of wealth for all ages,
Reserved by a great nation's pride,*

*To remain in the grandeur of nature,
As fair as a young, blushing bride.*

“The Sinbad Mines” is also a morality tale, meant to be an example to

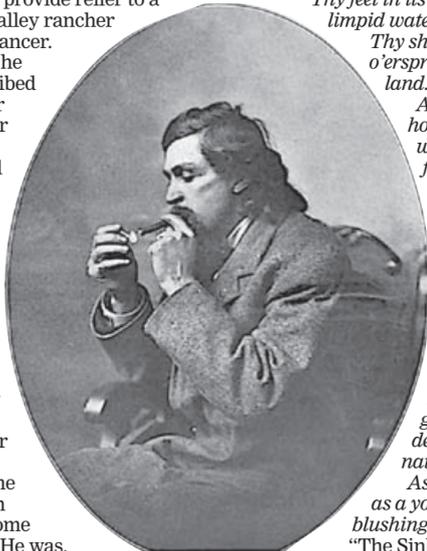
from an uneducated waif to an esteemed citizen of one of the most enlightened, accomplished and refined cities of the Great West,” Eldridge wrote.

He also told of a railroad being built, apparently through Unaweep Canyon, to reach Robert's Sinbad Mines and haul out the great wealth they produced.

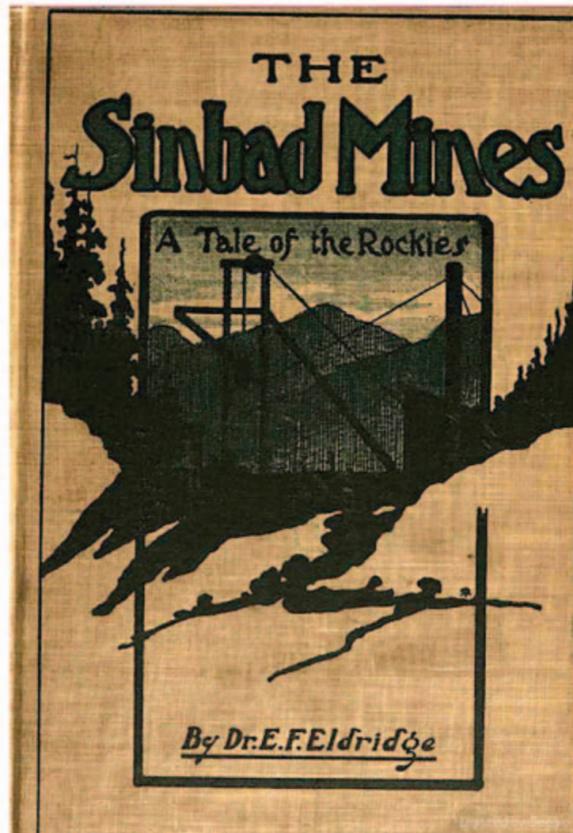
That, of course, never occurred. No great mines were developed in Sinbad Valley. Near the end of the 19th century, the valley — which is roughly halfway between Gateway and Paradox Valley, and lies on the western edge of Sew'em Up Mesa — was known as a haven for cattle rustlers and other outlaws.

There were, however, a number of copper and gold claims located in the valley, some of which were worked unsuccessfully into the first decade of the 20th century. The Captain Jack Lode was located by none other than E.F. Eldridge.

Eldridge continued to live



Dr. Edward F. Eldridge, from his book, “The Sinbad Mines.”



The cover of E.F. Eldridge's 1905 novel, “The Sinbad Mines.”

young readers. In fact, Eldridge dedicated the book “To the Young People of Our Country, Who Are Endeavoring to Succeed in a Worthy Life.”

In the book, Robert leaves his home in upstate New York as a teenager — much as Eldridge himself did. Robert is penniless but determined. He finds work with a family traveling west to Chicago, and it is their daughter he eventually marries.

Through relentless hard work and clean living, he becomes not only a successful mine owner, but a pillar of the Grand Junction community.

“He has arisen from the most helpless and dependent position to one of honor and respect; from abject poverty to abundant wealth, and

and practice medicine in Grand Junction until 1914, when he moved to San Diego, hoping to restore his failing health.

He died there in 1915, but his daughter had his body returned to Grand Junction. He is buried in Orchard Mesa Cemetery.

Sources: “The Sinbad Mines, A Tale of the Rockies” by E.F. Eldridge M.D.; “125 People – 125 Years: Grand Junction's Story,” by Laurena Mayne Davis; “Eldridge, Edward Fayette,” in “Physicians and Surgeons of America, 1893”; “Gateway/Unaweep Canyon at some point in time,” edited by Jean Moores.

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Utah ski resorts pull out of proposed land swaps

By THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

SALT LAKE CITY — Four Utah ski resorts are backing out of proposed land swaps that would have set aside some of their mountainside terrain for conservation in exchange for public lands near their bases.

The resorts made the decision after determining their lands on the steep slopes are worth so much less that they would have trade 100-200 acres for a single acre near the bases, The Salt

Lake Tribune reports.

The breakdown of the proposal illustrates the difficulty of working out land swaps for public lands that have high commercial value.

Executives with Solitude, Brighton, Snowbird and Alta resorts informed the Central Wasatch Commission of their decision in a Nov. 1 letter. They encouraged the commission to instead focus efforts to improve transportation methods and reduce traffic up the Little and Big

Cottonwood Canyons.

“We take seriously our stewardship of the private and public lands within our permitted area,” said Solitude President Kim Mayhew. “We are open to all kinds of different conversations with our partners that will support minimizing the impact on the delicate environment of Big Cottonwood Canyon.”

Solitude will implement one such measure this ski season as it charges for parking, including a \$20 fee for people not carpool-

ing.

The resorts would still like to get more lands around the bases, but it's difficult to find a way that happens, said Central Wasatch Commission Executive Director Ralph Becker.

Some critics of the land swaps considered them “land grabs” that would benefit the ski resorts and not help the environment much. Much of the lands the ski resorts were set to exchange have mine shafts and tailing piles.

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The Daily Sentinel (ISSN 1445-8962)
Printed editions published Wednesday thru Sunday, electronic editions published every morning at 734 S. Seventh Street, Grand Junction, CO 81501.
Periodical Postage paid at Grand Junction, CO.
Carrier home delivery prices: 13 weeks - \$65.00, 26 weeks - \$130.00, 52 weeks - \$260.00.
Weekend delivery packages: Wednesday thru Sunday - \$244.40, Friday thru Sunday - \$197.60, Saturday & Sunday - \$163.80, Sunday only - \$163.80.
Weekend Delivery includes the following date in 2019: Nov. 28.
Single Copy: \$1.00 daily and \$2.00 Sunday.
Mail (USPS): \$30.00 per week, \$1,560 per year. *POSTMASTER: Send address changes to The Daily Sentinel, 734 S. Seventh Street, Grand Junction, CO 81501.*

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