

FIRST DRAFT

# Civil War spy aided hostages after Meeker tragedy in 1879

In October 1879, when Josephine Meeker and four other hostages were freed by Ute Indians who had captured them after the killing of Nathan Meeker, Josephine welcomed the assistance of a man called Captain Cline.

On the morning of Oct. 23, near the mouth of Whitewater



BOB SILBERNAGEL

Creek, they were loaded onto a buckboard. "We left for

Uncompahgre in charge of Captain Cline and Mr. Sherman," she recalled. "To these gentlemen we were indebted for a safe and rapid journey to Chief Ouray's house on the Uncompahgre River."

George Sherman was a clerk at the Los Piños Indian Agency near Ouray's home. Milton W. "Captain" Cline, was a former Civil War spy.

By 1879 he operated a ranch, trading post and stage stop on the Cimarron River east of today's Montrose.

Before that, Cline had been a prospector who briefly partnered with future Colorado Gov. Frederick Pitkin in developing a mine on Engineer Pass.

He also helped found the town of Ouray, became one of the first town trustees, then marshal of the small community.

He and his wife Elizabeth were friendly with the Ute Indians in the Uncompahgre Valley, including Chief Ouray and his wife Chipeta.

But that occurred after Cline's Civil War experiences.

Born in Whitehall, New York, in 1827, Cline took to the sea aboard a whaling ship called the South Carolina in 1844 at the age of 17. The ship left New Bedford, Massachusetts, on July 2, 1844, traveled to the Indian Ocean and Australia, and returned nearly four years later in May of 1848.

Not much is known about Cline's time as a sailor, but there is considerable information about his work for the Union Army during the Civil War.

By then, he had moved to Indiana and joined the Third Indiana Cavalry.

He was a sergeant in early 1863 when he was selected by Col. George Sharpe to join the newly formed Bureau of Military Intelligence. His first spy work was a daring reconnaissance journey behind enemy lines.

Cline headed into no-man's land — along Chesapeake Bay in northern Virginia, wrote Edwin C. Fishel, a former U.S. intelligence officer and historian.

Unlike previous Union spies, "Cline was not bent on scouting the enemy or picking up second-hand news; he entered their camps."

When he encountered Capt. John Hungerford, who led a company of the 9th Virginia Cavalry, Cline somehow convinced the Confederate officer that he was a Southern scout who'd gotten lost. Hungerford allowed Cline to tag along with him.

They traveled westward more than 100 miles, viewing many troop units, artillery installations and camps, then returned east by a more southerly route. When they reached their original camp near Port Royal, Virginia, Cline remained with Hungerford and his men until the night of March 4, when a card game was underway.

"Cline took leave of it, ostensibly for only a moment," Fishel wrote. "He picked out a good horse, rode 10 miles downriver, found a skiff, and put himself on the left bank of the (Rappahannock) river with as much speed as he could



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"Brandy Station, Virginia Scouts and Guides of the Army of the Potomac," spring 1864. The man seated on chair in middle of photo is believed to be Milton W. Cline.



UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO, DENVER

Milton W. Cline's ranch as it appeared in the 1880s. Notation on the original mentions the killing of a freighter named Jackson on the ranch.

muster."

Once across the river, he found another horse and galloped 15 miles to Union lines, where he was initially fired upon. He was able to convince the pickets he was a Union man and was taken to Sharpe for debriefing.

"When Cline arrived at headquarters that day, March 5, he had covered 250 miles in the 10-day expedition," Fishel wrote.

He had observed 64 different Confederate military installations, including troop camps, artillery batteries, fortifications and ambulance parks.

Fishel added, "Cline's exploit is the deepest, most extended penetration of enemy lines, by either side, that has been documented" from the Civil War.

Cline's treasure trove of intelligence went for naught a month later at the Battle of Chancellorsville. Indecisiveness by Union Gen. Joseph Hooker led Union forces to be defeated by Lee's Confederates, even though Lee had fewer than half as many men.

Lee's comeuppance occurred two months later, at the Battle of Gettysburg. While it was raging, Cline intercepted important Confederate dispatches from Southern couriers 20 miles west of Gettysburg.

Exactly when Cline's military career ended, and how he came to be called captain, are unclear. But he headed west not long afterward.

By 1875, he was among a group of prospectors in Silverton who traveled over Red Mountain to investigate the mining potential near where the town of Ouray would be settled.

Cline and a friend discovered gold while out fishing one day,

and they named their mining claim the "Trout and Fisherman."

They also helped stake out a new town site, which they named after Chief Ouray.

Utes were frequent visitors to the new town, and Ouray and Chipeta often stayed at the Clines' home.

Sometime between 1876 and 1879, the Clines moved to Cimarron Creek and established a way station for freight wagons, stage coaches and other travelers.

They were there in September 1879, when the Battle of Milk Creek occurred in northwestern Colorado. That's when Nathan Meeker and his male employees at the White River Indian Agency were all killed. Meeker's daughter, Josephine, and his wife, Arvilla, were taken hostage by White River Utes, along with a woman named Flora Ellen Price and Price's two young children.

Cline's 1911 obituary claimed he drove a wagon carrying Ouray and Chipeta to the White River in the wake of the 1879 killings to demand the hostages' release.

But that didn't happen. None of the three adult hostages, nor Charles Adams, the man who actually arranged for the release of the hostages, said anything about Chief Ouray or Chipeta traveling to the rescue.

Instead, Cline and Sherman drove a wagon and accompanied Adams, along with two other whites and several Uncompahgre Utes, as far north as Whitewater Creek.

They remained there while Adams and the Utes continued to Mesa Creek, where Adams found the women in a small camp guarded by a handful of

White River Utes.

After meeting with leaders of the White River Utes, Adams arranged for the release of the hostages and they rode horseback from Mesa Creek to Whitewater Creek. There they met Cline and Sherman, received food and blankets, and were driven in the buckboard south to Ouray's home near present-day Colona.

The following year, a freighter east of Cimarron killed a Ute who was demanding food.

The freighter was himself killed by Utes while being transported from Cline's ranch to the Los Piños Agency.

In the tense atmosphere that developed as whites awaited the Utes' removal to Utah, Cline and others were accused of conspiring to aid the Indians. But nothing came of the accusation.

Cline was later described as "a very interesting conversationalist." But if his conversation ever turned toward his Civil War spying activities, it was not recorded.

Sources: "The Ute Massacre! Brave Miss Meeker's Captivity!" by Josephine Meeker; "The Captain and Mother Cline," by Marilyn Cox, *Montrose Daily Press*, June 25, 2008; "The Secret War for the Union," by Edwin C. Fishel; "Zora: The Pivotal Crossroad of the Civil War," by John A. Miller, *www.emmitsburg.net/history*; "Crew list for voyage aboard the South Carolina," *www.newbedford-ma.gov*; "Ute Indians of Utah, Colorado, and New Mexico," by Virginia McConnell Simmons.

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THIS WEEK IN THE LEGISLATURE

DENVER — Rep. Matt Soper, R-Delta, is into a lot of dead issues this legislative session.

Today, the House could debate a bill he's introduced — HB1148 — that would make it a felony to abuse a dead human body.

Later this session, he'll also present HB1060 to allow the deceased to be composted, a relative new practice that allows a human body to be turned into soil.

■ **Today:** Although some restaurants already allow it, the Senate Business, Labor and Technology Committee is to hear SB78, allowing dogs to be with their owners on outdoor restaurant patios.

■ **Tuesday:** Under the state's move-over-or-slow-down law, motorists are required to change lanes or slow down when approaching emergency vehicles on the shoulder.

That law, however, doesn't say to what speed. The House Transportation and Local Government Committee is to hear HB1145 that would set that speed to at least 20 mph under the posted limit.

■ **Wednesday:** A few years ago, the

Legislature enacted a law that allows restaurant goers to leave with any unfinished bottle of wine as long as it's properly recorked.

Under SB154, to be heard in the Senate Business Affairs and Labor Committee, those restaurant patrons would be allowed to bring in their own bottle of wine, but no more than 750 milliliters.

■ **Thursday:** Even though the state doesn't actually have a program to import prescription drugs from Canada, which the Legislature approved during last year's session, the Senate Health and Human Services Committee is to debate SB119 to expand that program to allow for the importation of drugs from other countries.

■ **Next week:** The House Judiciary is to take up SB100, the measure that would end the state's death penalty.

All floor action and committees can be watched or heard on the Colorado Legislature's website at [lege.colorado.gov](http://lege.colorado.gov). Check that website to see which measures are available for remote testimony, and how to register to speak.

— Charles Ashby

## CSU-Pueblo signs on for solar project

PUEBLO — CSU-Pueblo has signed on to a \$17 million panel power project at the university that will be the main generating source for the academic campus. CSU-Pueblo President Timothy Mottet says the university will be the first in the state to reach "net zero electric" efficiency, which means the solar panels will produce enough electricity to meet the school's needs.

The plan includes power purchase agreements and a lease of about 22 acres of fenced-off solar array area on the north side of campus.

— Associated Press

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