

FIRST DRAFT Kreutzer vs. Craig: Forest ranger fights the political spoils system

In the spring of 1903, a doctor from Plateau Valley and a loyal Republican named A.R. Craig was appointed supervisor of the Battlement Mesa Forest Reserve.

He soon became nemesis to William Kreutzer, the nation's first forest ranger, who in 1903 served on the Battlement Mesa Reserve.

Once appointed supervisor, Craig tried to get rid of the handful of rangers then working on the reserve and replace them with political cronies.

Kreutzer refused to quit, and Craig's efforts to get him fired were blocked by officials in Washington, D.C.

"Unable to get Bill to resign and thwarted in his attempt to have him dismissed, the supervisor tried other things — things that were irritating, exasperating, and enraging to one of Kreutzer's straightforwardness," wrote Kreutzer's biographer, Len Shoemaker.

Thus began a battle between the two men that lasted years, with Craig using a variety of tactics.

"As one thing failed, (Craig) tried another, but in each instance Bill outwitted him," Shoemaker wrote. "And instead of discouraging him, it had the opposite effect."

Today, it's easy to view Craig as a villain. But he was operating within a time-honored framework for federal positions; federal jobs were seen as rewards to political supporters.

The Daily Sentinel noted in 1904 that Craig had been chairman of the Mesa County Republican Party before he became supervisor of the forest. That political position "brought him a government appointment," the paper said, thus demonstrating the importance of even county-level political jobs.

Political patronage was a fact of life through most of U.S. history. It began to change after President James Garfield was assassinated by a disgruntled job seeker in 1881. In 1883, Congress passed the Pendleton Act, which established a merit-based system for hiring and supervising some federal employees.

But the Pendleton Act initially only applied to 10% of federal workers. In 1903, when Craig took the helm of the forest reserve, there was nothing illegal in him seeking to place political supporters in forest jobs.

At the time, the forest reserves were under the Department of Interior. Gifford Pinchot and President Theodore Roosevelt changed that in 1905 with the establishment of the U.S. Forest Service under the Department of Agriculture. They placed forest employees under the merit system.

In his introduction to Shoemaker's biography of Kreutzer, Pinchot wrote, "Bill Kreutzer, the first Forest Ranger to be appointed, had to fight not only the trespassers and thieves, but his own superior officer, who did his best to prevent an honest and effective public servant from doing his duty."

That's a harsh assessment of Dr. Craig. Newspaper accounts of the time offer a broader view of the man.

Craig was a rancher as well as a doctor, and in 1898, as secretary of the Plateau Valley Stock Growers' Association, he offered a reward of \$200 for information about cattle thieves.

In the run-up to the 1901 election, The Daily Sentinel accused Craig of unsuccessfully attempting to intimidate some voters.

After the election, The Grand Junction News lauded Craig's efforts as GOP chairman to clean up politics in Mesa County. Moreover, it said, "the sacri-



William Kreutzer built the first Forest Reserve cabin on Grand Mesa in 1904 between Alexander Lake and Ward Lake, with the reluctant approval of his supervisor, A.R. Craig.



BOB SILBERNAGEL



BOOK COVER "THE SAGA OF A FOREST RANGER"

William Kreutzer as he appeared late in his career.

ficed his personal business" in that effort.

Once Craig became forest reserve supervisor, he won the support of the Sentinel. In articles over the next few years, the newspaper lauded the job Craig and his rangers were doing.

And in 1905, when the forests were placed under the Department of Agriculture, the Sentinel said, "Dr. Craig has cared for the division under his charge so well the past two years that he was one of only eight superintendents who were invited to Washington" to attend meetings about the new forest system.

Kreutzer, however, had nothing good to say about his boss. He told Shoemaker of Craig's repeated attempts to interfere with his job and to get him to quit as a forest ranger.

Those attempts included an incident in which Craig had Kreutzer secretly followed by another man, who reported all of Kreutzer's activities to Craig.

Also, Craig appointed a large, hot-tempered young ranger as Kreutzer's assistant, hoping to spark a conflict and force Kreutzer to resign or be fired.

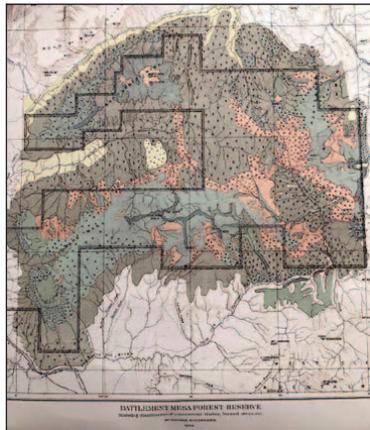
"Bill often had to stand by indignant and helpless, while the supervisor or one of his henchmen permitted abuses in the use of lands and resources, secure in the political pull of their sponsors," Shoemaker wrote.

When Kreutzer wanted to build a forest reserve cabin on Grand Mesa — between Ward Lake and Alexander Lake — Craig approved the project only on the condition that Kreutzer spend his own money and construct the cabin himself.

In the summer of 1905, following orders from Washington, Craig appointed Kreutzer as ranger for the new Gunnison Forest Reserve.

Before Kreutzer could relocate, however, Craig allegedly traveled to Gunnison to sow discord about Kreutzer among cattlemen there.

A few months after Kreutzer



1898 map of the Battlement Mesa Forest Reserve, three years before William Kreutzer began working on the reserve.

when he ran his new automobile off a 70-foot embankment in Plateau Canyon. But he survived and continued to serve his community in a variety of capacities.

He was briefly editor of the Plateau Valley Leader newspaper. He was a leader in the Methodist Church and the local chapter of the Masons. He worked to promote a railroad spur to Collihan.

And he continued to practice medicine, treating people with the Spanish flu in 1918 and continuing to see patients until he retired in 1928.

Craig and his wife moved briefly to California, but returned to Mesa. He died while on a trip to Pueblo on March 26, 1931, and was buried in Mesa.

The multi-year dispute between Craig and Kreutzer was not unusual at a time when forest rangers and many other federal employees still operated under a political patronage system.

Although Craig tried to get Kreutzer dismissed as a forest ranger, it's clear he was well-liked in the Plateau Valley and respected throughout Mesa County.

Sources: "Saga of A Forest Ranger," by Len Shoemaker; historic editions of The Daily Sentinel and Grand Junction News on www.newspapers.com; "Pendleton Act (1883)" on www.ourdocuments.gov.

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Woman rescues a pitbull from ravine at Utah border

By JAMES BURKY

A woman with Grand Rivers Humane Society may have saved a scared dog's life.

Danica Anderson was able to capture a terrified pitbull, a month removed from giving birth, near the Utah border a week before the major snowstorm, which could have spelled doom for the dog.

Anderson thinks the dog, named Bunny in a Humane Society news release, was abandoned. Bunny was found in a ravine area near an old oil and gas site.

Others tried to gain the dog's trust and bring her to a rescue shelter but were only able to leave her some food. Anderson observed the dog's behavior pattern and was able to gain her trust after spending hours in the dirt watching her.

"You have to be careful and let them make the choice," Anderson said. "If they get defensive in that vulnerable of a situation, you've lost their trust. If I wasn't careful, she wouldn't have trusted anyone and who knows what would happen."

Bunny is a robust pitbull with light brown fur and white fur around each of her feet, underbelly and nose. She's very wiggly and happy, Anderson said. She's cautious with people and loves other dogs.

"She's going to bond with someone tightly," Anderson said. Unfortunately, Anderson sees Bunny's situation as part of a larger trend. She said more dogs are being abandoned by their owners and speculated that there could be puppy mills the Humane Society doesn't

know about. Because of that, she said, it's important to adopt dogs from shelters instead of buying puppies.

"This dog is about 5 years old and has given birth at least one other time," Anderson said.



SPECIAL TO THE SENTINEL

This female pitbull was rescued by a woman with the Grand Rivers Humane Society and is available for adoption. She believes the dog was abandoned.

Bunny has gained a healthy amount of weight since being taken in and has started to attach to Anderson, though she won't be adopting Bunny.

The dog is up for adoption and waiting for her forever home. Anyone wanting to throw Bunny a bone should contact the Grand Rivers Humane Society.

It's important that whoever does so is willing to commit to being her protector, and that's the case with any dog.

"They're here to bond with us and be our best friends," Anderson said. "We're here to protect them."

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. www.daily-sentinel.com Delivery outside 13 weeks - \$65.00, 20 weeks - \$120.00, 42 weeks - \$260.00. Weekend delivery packages, Wednesday thru Sunday - \$244.40, Friday thru Sunday - \$197.60. Saturday & Sunday - \$163.80, Sunday only - \$103.80. Weekends: Print only delivery includes the following rates: 2020 - 1/16/2020. If you are an on-edition subscriber for 11/26/2020, you will not receive a printed paper. 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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