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Article Summary: Persinger lived in Nebraska and Colorado from 1876 to 1932. His granddaughter used newspaper accounts, letters, recollections, and Persinger's notebooks and diaries as source material for this biography of a businessman and rancher.

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Photographs / Images: ranchhands on Persinger's Hardscrabble Ranch near Lodgepole; A B Persinger; John Haas; Thornton Whitney; printed return address from a business envelope used by Persinger & Whitney; schematic map of A B Persinger's West, 1876-1932; Dr F B Winnett; branding at roundup time; Hardscrabble Ranch in 1905; A B Persinger with his favorite horse and one of his dogs; Persinger with family members on a 1909 trip to the Pacific Northwest



Cattle ranching was the major industry in the Nebraska Panhandle during A. B. Persinger's fifty years there. These ranch hands worked on his Hardscrabble Ranch near Lodgepole.

A. B. PERSINGER, NEBRASKA PANHANDLE PIONEER

By HARRIET PERSINGER SEARCY MURPHY

Albert Benjamin Persinger moved from Alabama to the northeastern Colorado—Nebraska Panhandle area in 1876 when he was 25 years old.¹ He arrived in Buffalo, Colorado Territory (now Merino, Colorado), on June 21, 1876, just before Custer's Massacre on June 25.

Gold had been discovered in the Black Hills of Dakota Territory in 1874 by an expedition under Lieutenant Colonel George A. Custer. However, the Black Hills were in the area guaranteed to the Sioux as a reservation by the 1868 Treaty of Fort Laramie. This treaty also gave the Sioux the right to hunt off the reservation and to rations and services in exchange for restrictions imposed on them. The Missouri River formed the main eastern boundary of the reservation; the southern boundary in the Nebraska Panhandle was the North Platte River.²

In violation of the treaty, white prospectors began moving into the Black Hills. The U.S. made efforts in 1875 to keep prospectors out of the Indian territory and to reach some arrangement with the Sioux for the outright purchase of the Black Hills or the mineral rights. But these efforts were too feeble to deter the white gold seekers or appeal to the Indians. To defend their reservation and their hunting rights, particularly in Montana Territory, many Sioux and Cheyenne, and some Arapaho, gathered under Crazy Horse, Sitting Bull, Gall, and other Indian leaders. This led to a series of battles with U.S. military forces from 1875 to 1877. On June 17, 1876, General George Crook was defeated on the Rosebud River; on June 25 Custer and his men were killed on the Little Bighorn.

Following their victories, the Indians dispersed, with the U.S. Army in pursuit, and were defeated in many smaller engagements. In August, 1876, Congress enacted legislation requiring

that rations for the Sioux be withheld if they did not give up the Black Hills and all rights to land outside the reservation, as well as to permit roads through the reservation. In September an agreement to these terms was signed by Red Cloud, Spotted Tail, and other leaders.³

With the opening of the Camp Clarke Bridge across the North Platte River at present-day Bridgeport in 1876, Sidney, Nebraska, became a major point of departure for the Black Hills. The Sidney route of about 170 miles was the shortest from the Union Pacific Railroad to the gold fields. Furthermore, a road was already established as far as Fort Robinson and the Red Cloud Agency in northwestern Nebraska.⁴

Sidney had become a frontier village in 1867 when the Union Pacific Railroad was constructed through the area and a military post was laid out. Its population stayed below 500 persons until 1876.⁵ During that summer miners poured in heading for the Black Hills. With them came increased numbers of government personnel, both military and civilian, going to forts and Indian agencies, plus overland freighters. Sidney's population jumped to 1,000 at the end of the summer of 1876 and by another 1,000 at the end of the winter 1876-1877.⁶

And A. B. Persinger was one of these newcomers. It is not known precisely when he settled in Sidney, but it must have been by the end of 1876 or the first of 1877. A one-sentence notebook entry shows he was in Sidney, for at least the day, on October 7, 1876: "I weighed 144 lb. in Sidney, Neb. today."⁷

What had this young man done in the twenty-five years before he moved West? Unfortunately, he seldom talked about his early life. This biography, therefore, has been pieced together on the basis of newspaper accounts, histories of Alabama and Nebraska, letters, miscellaneous memorabilia, a few recollections of those who knew him, family stories, and a notebook and two diaries kept by Persinger. The family stories were passed on by Mary Persinger Searcy, Persinger's second daughter and only child to survive to adulthood. The notebook contains mainly day-by-day entries for trips: those Persinger took prior to 1876, the trip West in 1876, and a trip to the Rocky Mountains in 1879. The two diaries contain day-by-day entries for the years 1881 and 1882 and cover sheep drives from

New Mexico to the South Platte River near Sterling, Colorado.⁸

Available information about Persinger begins with a family story. At 14 he hid under a bridge across the Warrior River near Northport, Alabama, to watch the Yankee troops in 1865 burn his father's cotton warehouse and boat landing nearby. He soon dropped out of school and went to work. At one time he was an agent for a steamboat company operating between Tuscaloosa and Mobile, Alabama. In the late 1860's he joined Ryland Randolph to publish a Tuscaloosa newspaper which was suppressed after making uncomplimentary remarks about the military reconstruction government. He then founded the *Spectator* in his birthplace, Northport. He sold this paper and founded the *Mountain Eagle* in Jasper, Alabama, which is still published. In 1874 he moved to Birmingham and together with two associates, started the *Iron Age*, predecessor of the present *Birmingham Post-Herald*.⁹

Entries in the notebook show that Persinger traveled extensively about Alabama, often with the Alabama Press Association. There is a daily account of a trip to Washington, D.C., apparently in 1874, with members of the association. The group made a "formal call on President Grant," conferred with members of Congress and government officials, and were invited to the floor of both the House and Senate by Alabama representatives. They saw the "largest printing press in the country" and many of the sights which attract visitors today: the Smithsonian Museum, the Naval Observatory, the Patent Office, the Corcoran Gallery of Art, and the Army Medical Museum (now the Armed Forces Institute of Pathology Museum). In addition they were wined and dined by the Alabama representatives and went to the National Theater, seeing *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and two other plays.

One wonders why Persinger, who was so involved in an apparently interesting publishing career in Birmingham, should decide to go West. In speculating about his motives, it must be remembered that Birmingham was a small town in 1876, having been founded in 1871. The ferruginous sandstone, lime cliffs, and coal beds nearby promised an iron industry rivaling that of Pittsburgh. However, development of the mineral resources was more a dream than a reality while Persinger lived there. Despite

much talk and planning, concrete results did not come until two years after his departure.¹⁰ All the Alabama towns in which Persinger worked as a newspaper publisher and editor were small and poor. Money was scarce and barter common. Persinger once refused an offer of two lots in Birmingham in exchange for a subscription to his paper. The lots subsequently became the site for the railroad station in downtown Birmingham.

At the time of his death, the account in the *Birmingham Age-Herald* stated that he went West following a cholera epidemic there in 1875.¹¹ The family story was that he did so because of his health; he had malaria and hoped to recover in a drier climate. One favorite family story relates that in Jasper, Alabama, he once had such a severe attack of malaria with very high fever that he hired a small black boy to listen to him moan and to sympathize. The account of the Washington trip reports that en route home by railroad, "I was taken with a severe chill . . . the car was filled with crying (squalling) babies which was enough to make a well man sick, much less a man that was already sick."¹²

Whatever the reasons, he set out for the West on June 8, 1876, to join Alabama friends who had already moved there. He stopped to visit in Florence, Alabama, and then went via Nashville, Louisville, St. Louis, and Fort Leavenworth to Omaha. At each place he waited long hours between trains, which were as often late as on time.

From Omaha Persinger took the Union Pacific Railroad to Julesburg, Colorado Territory,¹³ arriving on the morning of June 17, 1876. His diary entry noted: "Very much to my chagrin, found the Indians were giving the settlers some trouble between here and my destination. So I concluded to stop here for a day or two & see if I could not learn something before starting out across the country." On June 20 at Henderson's Ranch¹⁴ he wrote:

I left Julesburg yesterday in a spring wagon to go to Buffalo. It was 12 o'clock when I left & we reached here about 5 o'clock. It is thirty miles from J. There was no one at the ranch so we marched in & made ourselves at home, cooked supper, fed the mules & went to bed. Got up . . . cooked breakfast & went to feed the mules, when, lo & behold, they had got out of the stable through a window & left us. The young man that was driving has gone back for them. I don't know how long I will have to stay,

but it awful lonesome. There is a man here. He is travelling on foot & has stoped over to wait for us.¹⁵

A second entry later in the day reported that they were able to leave Henderson's Ranch about noon and made Levett's Ranch¹⁶ by 7 p.m., where Persinger expected to sleep in the wagon. On June 21, 1876, he arrived at Buffalo "safe & sound . . . about 12 o'clock. Found all my friends well & in good cheer after having a big Indian scare. They had all their windows filled up with sod."¹⁷

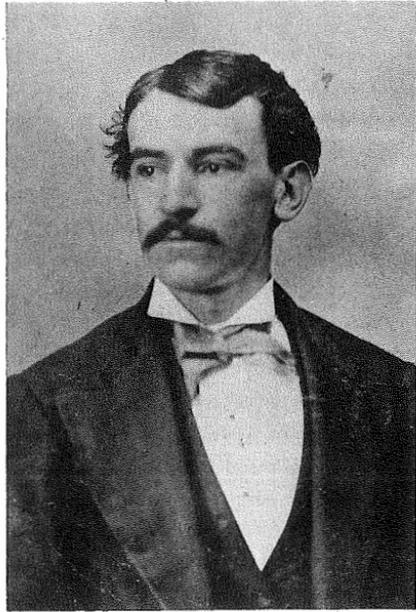
Notebook entries indicate Persinger lost no time in exploring the area and taking advantage of its customs. In the first entry after his arrival, he wrote that he shaved for the last time. In Denver on July 12 and 14, 1876, he bought a dog he named Lelia and a horse he named Northport, the latter after his Alabama birthplace. In August he bought another horse named Streak in Ogallala; in the same month he gave away "one 2-yr-old heffer," to Jim Van Hoose, an Alabamian in Buffalo, which was a colony of Southerners mainly from Tuscaloosa and neighboring Pickens County.

Life in the West proved conducive to good health for Persinger. In the two later diaries, he reports only one mild attack of malarial fever. He was remarkably healthy for the remainder of his life. He died in 1932 and is buried, at his request, on a hill overlooking the Lodgepole Creek Valley just north of the town of Lodgepole, Nebraska. From this hill, one can see the land of his beloved cattle ranch, which he called "Hardscrabble."

In the years between 1876 and 1932, Persinger participated actively in the life of the Nebraska Panhandle, and for a time in that of northeastern Colorado. The first business venture for which records can be found was ranching in Weld County, Colorado.¹⁸ By 1878 he was well established in Sidney with John Haas in a grocery, produce, and grain business known as Haas, Persinger and Co.¹⁹

In the summer of 1879, apparently feeling the need for a vacation, he and a Sidney group toured northern Colorado by wagon. On July 8, 1879, he wrote:

Our party consisting of N. F. Hazen, wifee & 2 children, Miss M. E. Adams, Miss Maggie Stevenson & myself left Sidney this morning at 5 o'clock for our mountain



*A. B. Persinger,
as a young man,
came to Sidney in 1879.*

trip (long talked of). We drove to Lewis Canyon where we made our first camp. Named it 'Long Pole Camp' on account of our tent poles being too long.

Ernest Raffe was also in the group as "cook and special artist." There are several humorous drawings in the notebook, probably by Raffe, since Persinger was not noted for his artistic skill.

N. F. Hazen, Sidney druggist, and his family remained close friends of the Persinger family throughout their lives, visiting frequently at Hardscrabble Ranch in the 1890's. Persinger's daughter Mary wrote of Mrs. Hazen in 1893, "Cousin Carrie Hazen [not actually related] . . . is awfully jolly and I love to have her visit." Mary Elizabeth Adams soon became Mrs. A. B. Persinger. Born in Cornwall, Ontario, Canada, she had come to Sidney to visit relatives, the Ed Dorans, also because of her health. She was frail but, for awhile, improved in the drier climate.

The mountain trip proceeded with the good times and calamities common to such expeditions: a tire came off one of the wagon wheels the second day of the trip. Persinger wrote:

Our friend Billy Hadfield came to our relief and suggested we take the wheel off one of his wagons . . . We recorded this as accident No. 1. . . . We stayed at Billy's all night.²⁰ After tea [Persinger's term for the evening meal] Misses S. & A. & myself took a long and pleasant walk. After returning to the house, we had a song or two when a little shower drove us in.

On July 10 Persinger wrote:

Drove along up the river [the South Platte]. Nothing of any importance occurring to change the monotony except Miss Stevenson being horrified occasionally by the sight of dead cattle, dried beef, as our party called it . . . crossed the Platte in good shape at Mr. Propst's and drove to Mr. Grodfrey's for dinner [the noon meal]. Mr. G. keeps a store and calls his place Fort Wicked. There is quite a little history.²¹

They had recurrent difficulties with tires coming off wheels and horses running away, but these incidents did not dampen their spirits for long. On July 11 Persinger recorded that "everything went as merry as a morning bell." They spent three days in Greeley, Colorado, and then went to fish on the Cache La Poudre, a mountain stream. While camped at "the old open chain mill," all but two of their horses ran away on July 16 and could not be found even after several days' search. Finally they hired a "span of mules" from a Mr. Covington and were on their way.

The notebook contains no further entries for the trip. However, a souvenir booklet, "Pressed Ferns and Flowers for the Rocky Mountains, 1879," has been carefully saved. A notice in the *Telegraph* for August, 1879, chronicled their return: "The last batch of Sidney's mountain excursionists, Mr. and Mrs. N. F. Hazen, Mr. A. B. Persinger, Miss Maggie Stevenson and Miss Mary Adams returned home last Friday forenoon. One of the party says that with the exception of a change of horses once, near Fort Collins, they have returned whole."²²

It is interesting that such a safe, peaceful, and enjoyable expedition, which included men, women, and children, could take place between Sidney and the Rocky Mountains in 1879. By this time Sidney had captured much of the Black Hills trade from other towns along the Union Pacific and was a rough and rowdy place. It had a population of "3500 with a floating population of almost as much more."²³

Sidney's cast of characters would delight Western movie fans today. However, some familiar groups were absent: the homesteaders, sheepmen, Indians, and buffalo. The homesteaders would not arrive until the mid-1880's. Some sheepmen would soon arrive, thanks to Persinger and others like him. The Indians were farther north or much farther south of Sidney, even

though Cheyenne County then encompassed the present-day counties of Scotts Bluff, Banner, Kimball, Morrill, Garden, and Deuel. Within Cheyenne County during the 1870's, whites on isolated ranches and settlements or traveling in small groups without military protection were occasionally killed by Indians, but these attacks decreased during the decade. Horse thieves were more common.

The last major Indian scare occurred in 1878 when Dull Knife and about 300 Northern Cheyenne men, women, and children fled from a reservation in Indian Territory (present-day Oklahoma), into Kansas, and across the Nebraska Panhandle trying to reach their home ranges. The survivors were captured near Fort Robinson, and many were killed there attempting to escape. On September 21, 1878, the *Telegraph* reported, "All the spare quarters in the barracks are filled with soldiers and the white tents of the infantry companies and two companies of cavalry on the prairie east of the Post [at Sidney] make a picture that is pleasing to the martial eye and reassuring to the timid heart." The editor explained that rumors of revolts among the Sioux and Cheyenne had been flying about. He thought such revolts had, for years, been caused mainly by "perfidy and misrepresentation on the part of the government and dishonesty of the Indian agents."²⁴

By 1879 the Sioux had on the whole given up all hope of continuing their nomadic, buffalo-hunting way of life and were staying on their reservations adjacent to the Nebraska border in Dakota Territory, where they have remained to the present time. The buffalo, mainstay of the Indian diet, were being killed by hordes of hide hunters. Merrill J. Mattes writes: "It is estimated that more than 30 million buffalo were destroyed between the two decades, 1860-80."²⁵ The buffalo had withdrawn in the main from the Nebraska Panhandle even before the Union Pacific was built. Vast numbers were killed by the many expeditions and the thousands of emigrants passing through. By 1879 white commercial hunters had almost completely exterminated the southern herd and would by 1884 finish off the northern herd.²⁶

The types who frequented Sidney in 1879 were colorful enough to compensate for those absent. The number of

travelers on the Black Hills Road peaked in 1877 but still averaged 300 to 400 a month, with many buying supplies in Sidney. The freight volume increased from 1877 to 1879, aided by the orders of the mining companies for heavy machinery and by a fire which destroyed buildings in Deadwood, Dakota Territory. The freight and stage lines employed from 3,000 to 5,000 men who spent their wages in Sidney. Approximately 1,000 soldiers at Fort Sidney were another tough group with money to spend. A third group comprised the cowboys, whose supposedly usual behavior in cow towns needs no elaboration. The great drives from Texas, which began after the Civil War and lasted until the mid-1880's, had been filling the open range around Sidney with thousands of cattle. Then there were gamblers, adventurers, prostitutes, horse and cattle thieves, and assorted outlaws.²⁷

Hotels, restaurants, dance halls, gambling houses, theaters, and saloons thrived, many staying open all night. Two reports state there were at one time twenty-three saloons in one block, another fifty-three in the town in 1876, and still another twenty-one in three blocks at one period. Murders and brawls were frequent.²⁸ There also were less boisterous transients. One cowboy who did not head straight for the saloons was Baylis John Fletcher; his boss would not allow it.²⁹ Fletcher, just 20 years old, was with an outfit driving cattle from Texas to Wyoming in 1879 and stopped in Sidney about the time Persinger returned from the mountains. In a story of the drive, which he wrote in his later years, Fletcher reported:

We now came to Sidney, Nebraska, a typical frontier town full of cowboys, adventurers, explorers, and hunters. Here we procured some elk meat from a local butcher and found it to be excellent. On the shambles of a local market we saw exposed for sale prairie chickens, antelope meat, venison, bear meat, and specimens of every other kind of game known in the region.³⁰

The emigrants to points farther west were still coming through the Panhandle. But most had switched from covered wagons drawn by oxen or mules to railroad "emigrant trains" which stopped in Sidney for meals. Their lot had improved but was far from easy. Fewer and relatively more wealthy people stopped at Sidney. For example, on March 14, 1879, the *Telegraph* stated:

General Sheridan, General Crook and General Forsythe arrived from the east



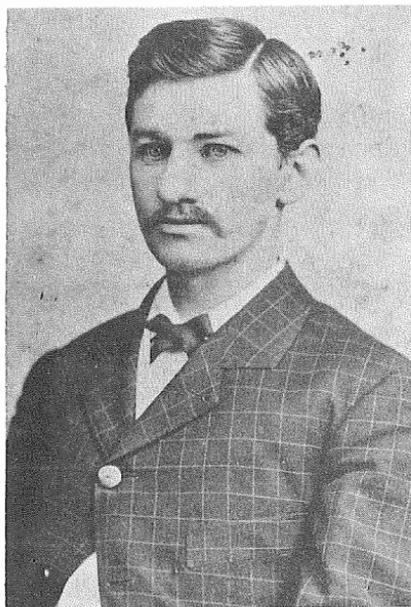
John Haas was Persinger's first partner. They operated a grocery, grain, and retail business known as Haas, Persinger and Co.

Thursday morning, on their way to Ft. Robinson. They took breakfast at the well-known Rumsey House, and continued their journey to Robinson by the Black Hills stage line. It is pretty well understood that the visit . . . is to thoroughly investigate the charges made against the military at the post in regard to the wanton killing of the Cheyennes.³¹

Others in the more wealthy group were the officers at Fort Sidney, businessmen like Henry T. Clarke of Omaha who played the major role in the construction of the toll bridge across the North Platte in 1876, and owners of the large cattle herds, many of which were financed by groups from Omaha, cities in the East, and even from Great Britain. Some of the adventurers were English noblemen with inherited money.

There was also a relatively stable group who considered Sidney their home, principally the various merchants and their staffs, and a few professional people. Members of this group started two churches in Sidney in 1879, the Methodist and Episcopal. They gained a charter for their Masonic lodge.³² Their children attended public schools. In October, 1878, sixty children were enrolled in the primary department and fifty-eight in the grammar school. In January, 1879, the recently organized fire department held a benefit ball and raised \$188.³³

Sidney, the county seat, had a jail which apparently was



*Thornton Whitney was Persinger's
second business partner.*

small deterrent to lawbreakers. On April 5, 1879, the *Telegraph* reported:

On Saturday evening last, the now familiar occurrence of a jail escapade was witnessed again . . . The tumbled-down log hut which is dignified with the title of Cheyenne County's jail is so constructed as to enable prisoners to command an entire view of the street leading up town and note the departure and return of Sheriff Zweifel.³⁴

The prosecution of offenders was considered lax; no murderer had ever been legally executed. The Regulators, a group described as the "better element of society," was formed to administer its own variety of justice. Several men were hanged, one from a telegraph pole near the Union Pacific depot.³⁵

A. T. Andreas, in reviewing this era in Sidney, commented:

While, as a frontier town, law was disregarded, yet a man could seek almost any society to which he was inclined. If the stranger attended his own affairs, and kept away from drinking and dance houses, he was perfectly safe. The business houses were as free from quarrels as they are in more Eastern towns.³⁶

Certainly Persinger seemed to be able to go his own way in this milieu without undue interference or mishap. There is no evidence in any existing records to indicate he participated in the activities of the Regulators.

Persinger and Miss Adams were married in January, 1880,

and their first child Charlotte Estelle was born in Sidney the following October 15. It seems likely that Mrs. Persinger, a devout Episcopalian, was active in the Sidney church, since she had served as organist in her hometown parish in Cornwall, Ontario.

By 1881, the first of the two years of the Persinger diaries, Sidney was beginning to quiet down somewhat. The Chicago and North Western Railroad reached Pierre, Dakota Territory, in October, 1880, and the Black Hills trade was turning to that shorter route. However, the *Telegraph* reported that business was good and published brief descriptions of local businesses in January, 1881. John Haas and Persinger had gone separate ways. Haas, with warehouses in Sidney and Deadwood, Dakota Territory, ran a freight and forwarding business and also carried a heavy stock of groceries and general ranch supplies. Persinger had joined Thornton Whitney to form Persinger and Whitney, described as the oldest existing grocery house in Sidney. This suggests that, while merchants may have been more stable than cowboys, change was common in all groups. Following is a description of the Persinger and Whitney firm then operating on the corner of Rose and Second streets in the building erected during 1876 by Thiele & Wagner:

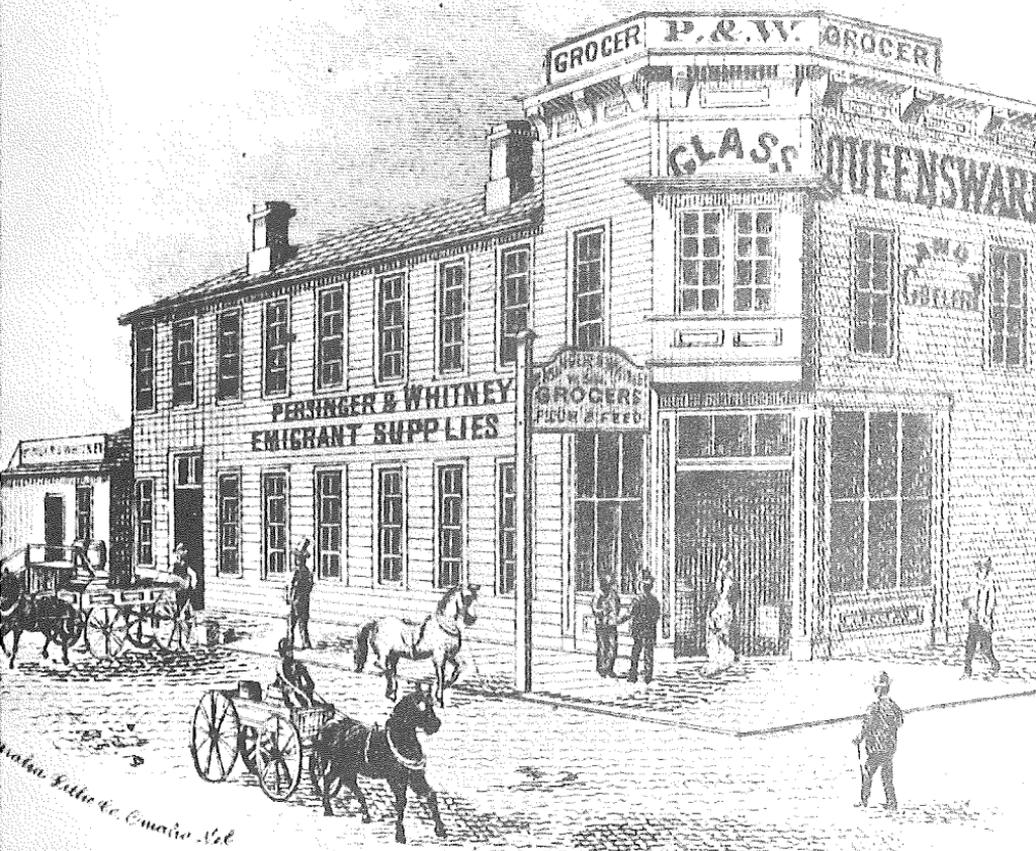
Messrs. Persinger & Whitney do a wholesale and retail business in the handling of groceries, provisions and grain. Their stock is an extensive one, complete at all times, and, as the gentlemen comprising the firm, and those employed in the store are courteous and competent, the house can consider itself strongly entrenched here for the future.³⁷

In February, 1881, Persinger took an eleven-day business trip up the Sidney—Black Hills Road as far as the old Red Cloud Indian Agency and Fort Robinson. He did not specifically record the nature of the business, but it appears to have been, at least in part, to collect debts. He traveled by wagon, which suggests he was hauling freight of some kind. Accompanying him was Charlie Winslow, a jeweler who, according to the *Telegraph* descriptions of 1881 businesses, had “opened up a store recently in the Grand Central Hotel Building.”³⁸

On February 12, 1881, Persinger and Winslow left Sidney about 10 a.m.; Persinger’s diary relates “it was cold as the d-1.” They arrived at Water Holes ranch, twelve miles from Sidney, about 1:30 p.m.; they later “played pitch for eyes.” After

If not called for in TEN days return to

PERSINGER & WHITNEY



GRO C E R S
COR. ROSE & SECOND STS
SIDNEY, NEB.

This is the printed return address from a business envelope used by Persinger and Whitney.

an overnight stop, Pantenburg, a freighter from Sidney, drove with them to Red Willow. The second day, they "had dinner at Miss Smith's [Greenwood] and then drove on to the River [about twenty-seven miles].³⁹ Stopped at C. A. Moore's."⁴⁰ The river was the North Platte, where settlements around the bridge became known as Camp Clarke. Despite a six-inch snow during the night, they made the ten miles to Red Willow Ranch on February 14 in four hours. "It was very cold," Persinger wrote, "wind blowing from the Norwest. Decidedly the coldest day of the trip. Froze my nose a little. . . . Found everything comfortable. Put our horse in the sty barn." On February 15, they drove through deep snow twelve miles to Snake Creek, where they had "one of the best dinners on the road." The following day, snowed-in at Snake Creek, they "played freeze out for a horse, but I didn't win." The seventeenth was "cold enough to freeze Charlie's mustache," yet they drove the twenty-six miles to "Runningwater" (the Niobrara River), where they stopped at "Hughes." On February 18-19 Persinger wrote:

[We] left Runningwater about 9 o'clock. Drove along very slow as the snow was deep. Arrived at White Clay 2 o'clock. [twelve miles]. There was a big crowd of men raffeling for a watch. I took a chance, to be shot for 50 yards, 2 shots each. I busted it on the 2nd shot. Met O'Yooll and Fitch here⁴¹. . . . Left White Clay at 10 o'clock. [February 19]. Arrived at Old Red Cloud at 1 o'clock. [eight miles]. Had dinner with Scott Jenks. Met Nat Haynes . . . Hitched up after dinner. Drove down to see Dick Dear and over to Fort Robinson. Received a letter from CKA.⁴² Was very disappointed at not getting one from my wife.

The following day, Sunday, February 20, Persinger departed for Sidney, reaching White Clay by noon, where he made "a settlement with Sheppard for \$500.00 and received \$180.00 in cash." He continued that afternoon to Runningwater, and the next day "met W. E. Johnston . . . also Pantenburg. Sold W. E. Johnston the Sheppard ranch for \$475.00 to be paid the 8th of March. Left Runningwater in company with Johnston and Miller. Drove down to Snake Creek Ranch in 5 hours [twenty-six miles]. The best roads we have had since we left home . . . After rubbing our horses off . . . we went into the ranch to play 'pitch'." Persinger and Pantenburg stopped at "Booths" on the North Platte the night of February 22 and arrived in Sidney the next day. It had been warm enough to thaw the last two days, and they drove ten to eleven hours each day, making sixty-four miles in all.

Two days after Persinger returned, Mrs. Persinger received word that her mother was very ill in Canada. Persinger, his wife, and baby daughter left immediately by train for Ontario. Persinger returned to Sidney in two and a half weeks. His wife remained with her ill mother, who died the following month, leaving a daughter slightly older than the Persinger child. This was the first of a tragic succession of deaths in the Persinger and Adams families extending over the next twenty years. It is doubtful that Mrs. Persinger ever returned to Sidney. She and Persinger had two more children, both of whom were born in Canada: Douglas, born in May, 1882, and Mary, born in February, 1884. Douglas died in 1883, and Mrs. Persinger developed tuberculosis and died in March, 1885.

After Mrs. Persinger returned to Canada, Persinger worked out a commuting arrangement between Nebraska and Ontario in order to be with his family. On April 23, 1881, he sold his interest in Persinger and Whitney, joined the ranks of Sidney's floating population, and by May was on his way to New Mexico. There he bought sheep and drove them through Colorado to a ranch, which he evidently had owned for some time near Sterling and Iliff. He returned to Canada the following winter. The way Persinger signed the front page of the 1882 diary reflects this arrangement: "AB Persinger, Stirling, Colorado; Sidney, Nebraska; and Cornwall, Ontario, Canada." Persinger continued to own the Colorado ranch and a house in Sidney throughout 1881 and 1882. The diaries give the impression that he considered Sidney the base of his business ventures.

Persinger's life style appears similar to that of middle-class American men today—working, getting married and raising a family, taking business trips and vacations, joining groups of respected peers. However, this similarity does not preclude his having been very much affected by the special circumstances of the time and place in which he lived. The social milieu on the Great Plains in post-Civil War decades afforded more occupational alternatives for middle-class men than does life today. One can classify the things Persinger did for a living under the broad category of businessman or entrepreneur. But within this category he made many shifts in and out of subcategories—merchant in one firm or another, rancher in one place or

another, sheep drover, cattle drover, horse trader, land speculator. At times he engaged in two or more concurrently. Similar frequent shifts were made by other early settlers of the Nebraska Panhandle.

A most tangible item indicating how Persinger was affected by the times is his pistol, one of the famous Colt revolvers, and its well-worn leather holster marked "Cheyenne, Wyoming Territory." Until Hardscrabble Ranch was sold in 1943, the pistol and holster hung on a post of the ornately carved Victorian bedstead in Persinger's bedroom. One wonders when he stopped wearing it and left it there. One conjectures that he bought the pistol soon after his arrival in the West and that he wore it on his trips and probably in Sidney.

The 1881 and 1882 diaries contain many references to Sidney people but only a few to those who figure in two widely-publicized wild west episodes of the period, the Great Bullion Robbery in March, 1880, and the lynching of Red McDonald in April, 1882. Gold was still coming to Sidney from the Black Hills in March, 1880, for shipment on the Union Pacific. Accounts of the Great Bullion Robbery vary. Gold bricks and some currency worth \$80,000 to about \$300,000, depending on which account one reads, were stolen from the locked Union Pacific express room while express agent C. K. Allen was at lunch. Grant Shumway's account relates that Allen, on his return, found a hole sawed through the floor connecting with a tunnel to another building, which was the escape route.⁴³ An account in the *Omaha World-Herald* states that all but two of the gold bricks were shortly found under a pile of coal in the cellar by Scott Davis, the man responsible for the gold from the Black Hills until it was turned over to Allen.⁴⁴

The Union Pacific discharged Allen and sent in various officials to investigate the case. One was their detective, James H. (Whispering) Smith. The railroad officials found four suspects: McCarthy, a former sheriff who operated a saloon and gambling house; Patsy Walters, a gambler and bartender working for McCarthy; D. H. Flanagan, a barber; and C. K. Allen. Smith worked on the case for some time, but never completely unraveled it. Accounts agree that McCarthy left Sidney and that Smith killed Flanagan. Reports vary as to whether Smith killed

or only wounded Walters. Smith was arrested for the Flanagan and Walters shootings but acquitted on the grounds of self-defense. C. K. Allen was arrested but acquitted on October 30, 1880. The *Telegraph* story of Allen's acquittal describes him as "a gentleman who has continuously held places of trust and honor since his residence here."⁴⁵

The Shumway account of the robbery includes information obtained from Persinger:

Col. A. B. Persinger,⁴⁶ owner of the Hardscrabble ranch near Lodgepole, was a resident of Sidney at the time of the 'great bullion robbery' . . . and while in Omaha last week, related several interesting incidents connected with the sensational affair.⁴⁷

Few believed Allen was guilty; Persinger and Whitney employed him as a bookkeeper and confidential cashier after his acquittal, and Allen later moved to Pueblo, Colorado, where he became paymaster of a large coal company. Shumway's account also includes comments by Persinger about Smith:

Colonel Persinger does not class Smith as a hero, such as he is made to appear in a novel bearing the title of "Whispering Smith," written some years ago by Frank H. Spearman. He knew Smith very well, and regarded him more as an outlaw. Whispering Smith was a dead shot; a man of nerve; cold-blooded, calculating and fearless; and a man who would cunningly and tauntingly provoke an enemy to commit the first overt act, thus giving Smith grounds for self-defence. That was Smith's game. Such is Colonel Persinger's iconoclastic estimate of the hero of Spearman's novel, in which the 'great bullion robbery' is not even remotely referred to.⁴⁸

Persinger related none of this in his diaries. Neither did he mention the robbery, but most of the excitement occurred in 1880, for which years there is no diary. However, on January 1-2, 1881, he did write:

Flanagan died at 3 o'clock a.m. from being shot yesterday by one Smith. Snow on ground. Warm and cloudy. Inclined to snow . . . Carley's silver wedding tonight.⁴⁹ Attended. Had a nice time." [January 2] Flanagan was buried today. Whitney called at the house & spent the evening.

There are several references in the 1882 diary to C. K. Allen, whom Persinger obviously considered a friend. On March 12, 1882, when Persinger was enroute to New Mexico, he wrote:

We nooned out on the Fountain [Creek] and drove into Pueblo about 2 o'clock. I went to see C. K. Allen but he was not at home so I went to look up camp having lost the boys. Found camp all right & sent C. K. a note. He came over to camp & I went home with him for an evening visit.

On his return from New Mexico that same trip, Persinger wrote on June 16, 1882:

Went to the theatre last night. Saw Corlottie Thompson in *Jane Eyre*. Move up to C. K.'s. Took in the steel works [Colorado Coal and Iron Co.] this afternoon. C. K.'s wife and myself are going to the theatre again tonight.

Diary references to the lynching of Red McDonald appear from March 30 to April 3, 1881:

Had the d-1 own time in town this p.m. Tom Ryan thumped Micheal and a lot of shavetails tried to arrest him but was no go. [March 31] Some little excitement this morning. In the afternoon McIntosh tried to arrest Red McDonald but he got away.⁵⁰ I saw the performance. [April 1] Big excitement in town. About 50 men was deputyed to arrainst all the gambls, cutthrots, . . . They got 13 of them in the jail. Saw Tom Ryan and gave him 12 mile chase but did not catch on. [April 2] Everything quiet this morning. Some of the gang are have a hearing. I do not any intrit in the matter. [April 3] Red McDonald was taken from the jail last night by a mob and hung in the Van Tassel yerd. I went to Cheyenne today to see the sock men. Some snow on the ground but weather was clear & warm.

In Andreas the episode is reported thus:

The town had generally been under control of a gang of gamblers, and, early in the year 1881, it was determined by a number of the citizens of Sidney to break up the gambling and disorderly houses of the town. A raid was therefore made on them. . . . The gamblers resisting, a general row ensued, during which many of them . . . were arrested and incarcerated in the jail. The man McDonald, with some others, resisted, declaring they would not be arrested, and that they would shoot the man that attempted it. These threats were made in the excitement of the moment, and there was probably little idea of carrying them into execution. However, this may have been . . . McDonald . . . and a few of his associates, were arrested and confined in the jail. During the night . . . McDonald was taken out and hanged to a telegraph pole. McDonald, though a rather hard character and a gambler, was perhaps no worse than scores of others, and, aside from his petty lawlessness and the threat of violence made during this excitement, nothing detrimental to his character was known.⁵¹

There is one additional sentence in the diaries about violent death. On January 29, 1881, Persinger wrote, succinctly, "Banjo Bill died from a rock over the head in the hand of Jessie Dolaldson." Entries in both the 1881 and 1882 diaries indicate that saloons and gambling houses were not the only establishments to have long hours in those days. Apparently the stores stayed open on Sundays, but this custom was changing. Pertinent Sunday entries are:

[January 23, 1881] Spent the p.m. at home as usual. Mrs. Doran Clary & Miss Skelly called. [April 24, 1881] Sold Adams a big bill of goods today \$579.00.⁵² [August 6, 1882, while haying at his Colorado ranch] Drove old 'Grey Neb' and 'Crop' to Strling. The confounded town is a regular Sunday berg. Could not get any corn. Will have to come back tomorrow for it.

One might wish the Persinger diaries contained more information on the wild west aspects of life in the Sidney-Sterling area in the late 1870's and early 1880's. They do contain down-to-earth accounts of his two sheep drives from New Mexico to the Colorado ranch in 1881 and 1882, which give a clear picture of the people involved.

In 1881 Persinger went by train to the Las Vegas-Fort Sumner, New Mexico, area. At Fort Sumner he met Dr. Winnett, a physician from Sidney, and George Gunn, whom Persinger referred to as Geo or Old Geo. Gunn was from the Sterling area and joined Persinger for the drive back. Dr. Winnett also bought sheep but drove them back independently. On May 22, 1881, Persinger "bought a wagon and two yoke of oxen" at Fort Sumner. That night he went to a dance and "danced with Miss Maxwell, daughter of the famous land grant."⁵³ The next day, Persinger and Gunn "... pulled out from Sumner ... for good I hope. We drove down to Rosenthal's ranch. Our oxen works very satisfactorily & Old Geo is happy." On May 25 the men "received the sheep from Rosenthal ... 2435 in number," and for about two weeks they camped in the area, first near Rosenthal's ranch and then near Los Ojitos. During this time Persinger purchased supplies while Gunn stayed with the sheep and prepared the wagon for the drive to Colorado.

Some trouble developed with Rosenthal and two brothers named Casone, who spoke no English. On May 31 Persinger recorded: "Went to Ojitos to meet Rosenthal [who did not appear] ... Do not know what to think of Rosenthal as I sent two thousand dollars in drafts to Vegas by him to be deposited for me." Diary entries for the next three weeks do not state how the confusing events were related to these drafts or why the Casones were involved. However, the entries do state that Persinger made trips to Las Vegas to find Rosenthal and that he conferred with a banker and an attorney about the Rosenthal case. Entries also show that Persinger had trouble with the Casones and tried, through interpreters, to placate them. They continually showed up to object to his leaving with his sheep. When Persinger returned to camp on June 9, he found there had been more trouble. Once more Persinger "fixed up" with them. On June 10: "We pulled out bright and early you bet. Struck



the goodnight trail⁵⁴ in the afternoon and struck out for Red River. We sent them through in a hurry." A few days later Persinger returned to Las Vegas and talked further with the Casones and his lawyer. After more futile attempts to find Rosenthal, he left the matter in the hands of his attorney and rejoined Gunn on June 23. Highlights of the rest of the trip were:

[June 24] We are laying over at Trinidad today. Geo, John & myself went to Cole's circus. We had a keg of whiskey and more fun than a sack of moneys. [June 25] On the drive at daylight. Traveled 20 miles. Saw a comet at night. I wonder if my wife is looking at it. [June 26] Had to pay damages on an old Mexican crop and had the d-1 of a time. Lost the oxen at noon. [June 30 at the St. Charles River] The d-1 of a time crossing the sheep this morning but finally got them over without any loss. We drove them up on the Fountain. Geo & I went back after the wagon. Did not have a thing to eat until 10'c.

John was left in Pueblo with the sheep while Gunn and Persinger went to Denver:

[July 4] Bully 4th. Everybody on the rampage. We can't attend to anything in the way of business. Rec'd. a message from John. The bulls are found and everything lovely. Geo & I kept sober. [July 6] Geo left for Colorado Springs to meet the sheep and I left [by train] for Sidney. Arrive at 10 o'c. Had to lay over in Cheyenne 3 hours.

An interesting aspect of both the 1881 and 1882 New Mexico trips is evidence of the efficiency of the U.S. mail service. Mr. and Mrs. Persinger wrote letters to each other once or twice a week. Persinger wrote almost every Sunday, and at most towns he went through or near, some quite small and remote on the 1882 trip, he went for letters "from my darling wife." Sometimes he got none; other times he got three or four in one place. On the return trip in 1882 the mail driver, who evidently knew him well by that time, brought him a letter from "my darling" while the outfit was "nooning" on the trail south of Pueblo.

Gunn and the sheep arrived in the vicinity of the Colorado ranch about July 19, 1881. For those days Persinger wrote:

[July 19] Drove over to Propst. Took dinner with them. Went to Stirling and took the train to Wild Cat. Saw Geo just above Holland's coming back. The engineer stoped and let me off at camp. Everything lovely with the boys. [July 21] Started for Cedar Creek. Geo had got there ahead of me. We counted the sheep and found 3 short of the number we started with from New Mexico. Am happy. [July 22] Moved the sheep up Cedar Creek about 3 miles. [July 25] Winnett came in to the ranch today. Said left the sheep on the head of Kiawa on the 18th.

Between his return from New Mexico on July 6 and his departure for Canada on September 6, 1881, Persinger divided his time about evenly between the Colorado ranch and Sidney, with short trips to Runningwater, Greeley, and Denver. During most of the times in Sidney, Persinger evidently stayed in his own house, but the diaries contain no clues as to its location. A family story relates that Mr. and Mrs. Persinger were good friends of Mr. and Mrs. George Jewett⁵⁵ and shared a house with them on the north side of the Union Pacific tracks before Mrs. Persinger returned to Canada. It seems possible that the house they shared was owned by Persinger and that the Jewetts continued to live there during 1881 and 1882. On August 16, 1882, Persinger wrote, "Staid at the house las night. Mr. and Mrs. Jewett made it very pleásant." On August 29, 1882, Persinger recorded, "Mr. Lord came over last night to rent the lower part of my house."

Persinger's Sidney activities varied greatly during July-August, 1881. He spent considerable time buying and selling stock, and just relaxing:

[July 7] Nothing new in this berg. Big rain here yesterday. I have been looking around trying to collect. [July 9] Went to the Gov. sale today. Bought a horse and sold him again. Made \$10.00 [July 12] Bought a horse for \$105.00 [July 14 and 15] Horses got out of my yard . . . Found my horses. Put them in Jenk's herd. [July 31] Sold them [the oxen from New Mexico] to Pantenburg for \$70.00 pr. yoke. [August 2] Bought a mowing machine and rake from Haskell.⁵⁶ Paid \$120.00. Loaded it on the wagon. [August 4] Was invited to Mrs. Allen's for a croquet party. [August 29] Met Adams & Jo Powers. We put in a night of it. Left for Greeley this morning.

The year 1881 was one of change in northeastern Colorado. The Union Pacific built a line southwest along the Platte from Julesburg to La Salle, Colorado, where it connected with the existing Cheyenne-Denver line. A new Sterling was platted on this line in September, 1881. Most families from the original settlement, which like Buffalo was a colony of Southerners mainly from Mississippi and Tennessee, moved to the new site. Iliff, twelve miles down the South Platte from Sterling, had its beginning when the Union Pacific went through. The name of Buffalo was changed to Merino (a breed of sheep which was introduced into the area) and the site was moved a half mile to the railroad. Sheep feeding began in Colorado about this time in the South Platte and Cache La Poudre Valleys, particularly in the region around Greeley and Fort Collins. Although Persinger

frequently refers to Sterling, Iliff, the railroad, and a sheep camp near Greeley, he does not specifically note the changes taking place. He continues to call Merino by its old name.⁵⁷

While the exact location of his Colorado ranch is not known, it was near Cedar Creek and the South Platte River. On July 30, 1881, Persinger wrote: "I was going to Sidney today but there was no train. Geo and I went down to the water tank (five miles away) in Mr. Ramsey's wagon and waited for the train but no train so we had the fun of walking back to the ranch."⁵⁸ Iliff was within walking distance, albeit a long walk. A round trip to Sterling could be easily accomplished in a morning.

Train trips to Sidney were infrequent, since most trips were made by wagon, probably for hauling back supplies. A ranch-to-Sidney wagon trip usually took five hours, but occasionally Persinger made the twenty-five miles in four. In warm weather he often traveled after dark, once "[sleeping] out alone at the springs" and on another occasion finding "beautiful moonlight & delightful driving." Persinger probably traveled the road surveyed by David Leavitt to secure supplies, particularly medicine, at Sidney. About 1877 people moving to the Sterling—Buffalo area were de-training more often at Sidney than at Julesburg. Sidney Propst's Sidney-Sterling-Greeley mail and stage line probably traveled this route. Persinger used it on occasion, once on an "infernal hot" day in August, 1881, when he traveled to the ranch "on Propst's buck board."⁵⁹

At the ranch during July and August, 1881, were George Gunn and the boys, including John. Gunn may have looked after the ranch while Persinger was in Canada from September, 1881, to February, 1882, and he accompanied Persinger to New Mexico again in 1882. Clearly, Persinger had respect for Gunn's ability, and was fond of him as well. Gunn, a Union veteran, and his brother Spencer had arrived in the area about 1875-1876 from the East. Accounts in Conklin indicate the Gunns were cattlemen on Cedar Creek. Sometime before 1881, Spencer died after being thrown from his horse.⁶⁰

The major activity at the ranch was haying during August of 1881, and William S. Hadfield's crew exchanged work with Persinger. They began at Persinger's and moved through various hay fields to Hadfield's on Cedar Creek near present-day Peetz.

Persinger and John built a new corral, which took them about two days, and cleaned old ones. Persinger visited others more often than he entertained at his ranch, no doubt because he was his own cook. Although he grew none himself, Persinger loved watermelon. A diary entry for Sunday, August 14, puts Persinger at "Propst[s] for dinner. Stopped at Hugh Davis⁶¹ on my way back and had some watermellon." J. A. Borie, the first Union Pacific telegraph operator in Sterling, once commented on local watermelons: "They raised fine vegetables and the best watermelons I ever ate . . . those 40-pound Black Spanish watermelons that were all core and sweet as honey."⁶²

Nothing in the diaries indicates the disposition of the sheep driven from New Mexico in 1881, but there are entries mentioning them: "Fred Clary and Judge Carrigan⁶³ came over to the ranch . . . Carrigan, Clary, Geo and myself hitched my team this morning and took a drive up to look at the sheep and then up to Sterling. Clary and Carrigan returned to Sidney." Winslow and "Old Man Fitch" also came over from Sidney, apparently to see the sheep. The last reference to the sheep was on August 11, 1881: "I hired another Mexican to help herd the sheep." It seems likely they were sold, since Persinger reports no plans for their care during the four months he was in Canada.

Several entries concern persons other than Persinger and Dr. Winnett who had sheep. For example, on July 18, 1881, Persinger "went over to Schnyers—look[ed] at sheep. . . . Drove back across the river at Buffalo and took in West's sheep. Tom Carry's for dinner. Got a good rain. Was out in it all. Staid all night at Chairs." Conklin lists eight early settlers who raised sheep in the area and some who raised both sheep and cattle.⁶⁴

From August 20 through 23, Persinger made a second trip up the Sidney-Black Hills Road. Diary entries are:

[August 20] Left this morning for Runningwater to see W. E. Johnston [to whom Persinger sold a ranch on his February trip up the Black Hills Road]. There was only 5 passengers on the stage. Had a nice trip. Carter joined us at the bridge. I learned from him that Johnston had left Runningwater and gone down the creek 75 miles. [August 21] Stopped off at Snake Creek Ranch last night. Went up to Mabry's ranch and took dinner. . . . Carter, Mr. West, & Bunton & myself went down the creek deer hunting. Carter killed a nice doe. Carter and I come near breaking our necks while running our horse.

*Dr. F. B. Winnett was
a Sidney physician and
surgeon who also engaged
in the raising of sheep.*



[August 22] I expected to go to Sidney last night on the stage, but she was crowded so I could not get on. So I am spending a lonely day here at Snake Creek. Corbin and Billy Haynes came up in the forenoon and we had quite a time. [August 23] Came down on the coach tonight. Had a pretty hard ride of it. Was on the top all the way—16 passengers aboard. Joe Powers came down with me.

Evidently not all the Black Hills traffic had deserted the Sidney route!

Persinger found time in 1881 to take still one more adventurous trip, a short one to “Adams’ ranch to run wild horses”:

[April 19] Left the ranch in the afternoon. Traveled 15 miles southwest of ranch and camped. [April 20] Caught 4 horses last night just as we were going into camp. Moved camp today & Lute Fitch caught a mare & colt in the forenoon and he & I had a long ride after a bunch of horses in the afternoon. [April 21] We moved camp again this morning. Sam John and myself started out for the chase. Got up a bunch. My horse played out. I was left and got lost. Found myself in 10 miles of town.

Persinger left for Canada on September 6, 1881. On all the trips to and from Canada in 1881 and 1882, he stopped at Omaha and Chicago, where he “attended to business,” saw friends, and went shopping and to the theater. On September 7, 1881, he “stopped at the Withnell” in Omaha. The next day, “Easson got me a pass over the CBQRR [Chicago, Burlington & Quincy Railroad]. I took a sleeper to Chgo.” In Chicago, he

stayed at the Palmer House, got "through with my business," and went to both the theater and the grand opera.

According to the 1882 diary, Persinger began his journey back to Nebraska from Ontario on January 16, 1882. In Chicago, he stopped at the Palmer House again and saw Crain, Col. Compton Paxton, Gallagher, and D. Shudy. He spent a day in Omaha attending to business and arrived in Sidney the evening of January 21. There, he mentioned seeing Ed Doran, Whitney, and Mr. and Mrs. Jewett.

On January 24, "Old Man Fitch" and Persinger left for the ranch; Persinger "found everything OK." Characteristically he was on the move next day:

We struck out bright & early for Strling this morig & I took the train for Denver at 1 o'clock. Arrived at Denver in time to take in the theatre. Stopped at the Windsor [the hotel at which Persinger usually stayed]. [January 26] Got through with everything in the forenoon. Darrow and I went out driving. Went up and had tea with Tom and Charlie Beeson. [January 27] Left Denver this morning for the ranch. Found Geo waiting for me at Sterling. We drove down to the ranch. I wrote to my wife but have not received a word from her.

Persinger stayed in Sidney for several days at a time during January–February, 1882. On February 1 he recorded:

Sold Whitney the Propst horses . . . for \$150.00. Took dinner with Mr. & Mrs. Jewett. . . . Had a nice time but was beaten at whist—Mrs. J. & I playing against Mr. J. and Mrs. Clary. Frank Ottaway has agreed to go to N. M. with us & work until Sept. 1, 1882, for \$200.00. [February 2] Bought a span of horses, saddle & bridle for \$90.00. Took dinner with Lee Livingston and in the evening went to Mrs. Oberfelders to a card party.⁶⁶ Mrs. J & I beat Mrs. C & Mr. J this time. [February 24] Having the wagon fixed up and everything put in shape [for the trip].

Work at the ranch during this period centered on routine duties until the end of the month when preparations for the New Mexico trip took precedence over all else. On February 26 Persinger "hired a man [no name given] to keep the ranch for \$10.00 a month & grub." On February 27 and 28, "Very busy getting ready to leave. . . . Wrote to all my correspondents but did not give any of them my address but my darling wife." On March 1, 1882, the trail crew

left the ranch in good shape, stopped at Sterling and settled up everything I owed there. Got our grub & pulled out for Jack Simpson's where we stopped for dinner and drove to Propst's old ranch (Buffalo)⁶⁷ and are camping tonight. Geo Gunn, Jessie Waugh, Frank Ottaway & myself comprise my crew. Everything is working finely. Nice day. Our mail for the next five days to go to Denver. [March 4] The

wind began blowing last night about 12 o'clock, and we had a regular gale. Still blowing this morning. We made slow progress through the sand on the north side. Nooned at Bill's old ranch. Had a cold dinner—nothing but biscuits & molasses. Wind blew all afternoon and very cold. Camping tonight at Sterry's ranch. Have a room and stove in the house. Sand nearly all day. [March 9] We all had to walk to keep from freezing. Noonning today 35 miles from D. on the road to Colorado Springs. Camping at an old ranch in a chicken house. It snowed on us most of the day. [March 13] We drove out to the St. Charles, 10 miles from town [Pueblo]. The wind was blowing a perfect gale but it calmed down & the first mosquito of the season showed up. [March 14] We . . . drove over to the Greenhorn for noon. Beginning to meet Mexicans. Nearly all the boys have colds, myself among the rest. I bought me a \$2.00 hat today at the 30 mile. Camping tonight . . . 35 miles from Pueblo. Wind been blowing all day—very disagreeable.

[March 17] Wind still blowing this morning so we did not get started until 8 o'clock. We thought we had seen the wind blow before but I never saw anything one half so bad as today. It actually blows the dust so we could not see the lead horses. We had to go into a Mexican's ranch six miles from Walsenbg [Colorado]. Everything is covered with sand, and it blew so all day that we could not go out in it. The worst I ever heard of. [March 18] The wind . . . is calm this p.m. so we pulled out for the mountains [to cross the La Veta pass, which has an elevation of 9382 ft. and is about thirty miles west of Walsenburg] . . . We pulled up near the Mule Shoe Cuve on the D&RG RR [Denver and Rio Grande Railroad] and camped. I jumped on a freight train that was passing & had a ride to the summit and back.

[March 19] The wind blowing and cold as the mischief. Lots of snow on the mountains but we got over all OK . . . Arrived at Ft. Garland about 4 o'clock and went into camp just south of the Ft. No mail—I am really sick for a letter from my wife.

The next day they had to stay at Fort Garland because of high winds and snow, but it was worthwhile because Persinger received three letters from his wife. The group was heading for the Tierra Amarilla country south of the Colorado border and east of the Jicarilla Apache Indian Reservation. From Fort Garland they went west to Conejos, Colorado, south around mountains to Ojo Caliente, New Mexico Territory, and back to the northwest to Tierra Amarilla.⁶⁸ En route the party encountered many ducks on the rivers and creeks and saw a young bear, which Persinger shot at unsuccessfully. They were traveling near the Denver and Rio Grande Railroad right-of-way. Once the party became lost, and one day they traveled twenty-five miles without water. On March 25 they "pulled into the springs [Ojo Caliente] . . . and went into camp inside the inclosure. Had to pay \$60.00 per ton for hay & \$3.00 per hundred for corn. Nevertheless, the team is nearly played so we had to lay over. I had a bath in the hot springs this p.m."

Between Ojo Caliente and Tierra Amarilla they "found good trout fishing [and] . . . had trout for dinner and supper. Wish my wife could have some of them. It reminds me of our

mountain trip in 1879." On March 29 they passed through Tierra Amarilla and camped on the Chama River about two weeks, then moved "up on the Nutras" for over two months. During this time Persinger bought sheep from various "Mexicans" — as many as 2,900 from a single herder.

The Chama River camp was near enough to a Mexican church to be able to see and hear something of what went on inside. From March 30 to April 9, 1882, entries contained references to religious ceremonies; some of his diary entries are:

The Mexicans are raising the mischief at their church on the hill just above camp. . . . We could see two of them striped and whipping themselves with soap weed. The blood was runig down to their heels. . . . First thing this morning was the Penetentist marching arund without any clothes in the snow. I went up town [name not recorded] and took it all in. . . . Went up to the Mexican church to take in the performance of driving out the devil and I think they did in good shape from the noise they made. I must try to describe the last few days proceedings to my wife Sunday but am afraid it will have to wait to tell her.

Between April 9 and 15 stock trading picked up. Diary entries include:

Had several visits from Mexicans wanting to sell sheep & burros and buy horses. No trades made but will next week. . . . Went out to look at some sheep, ewes, with the wool on but could not make any trade. The parties wanted too much. May get them yet. . . . There is another party here to buy sheep. He is offering a little more than we were. Can't tell what effect it will have on the market. Received four letters from my darling. The first in 20 days. . . . Bought 40 head of yearling weathes . . . for 80 cents pr head. George, Frank & Jess went to receive 200 yearling ewes I bought at 90 cents.

On April 13 Persinger "went to Tierra Amiralla and left \$500.00 draft with Mr. B. Got two hundred on it—all the cash he had—& an order on Splain for \$100.00." Since the sheep had to be purchased with cash, Persinger decided to go to Alamosa, Colorado, for money. On April 16 "Frank and I rode horseback over to Los Ojos & then got a spring wagon & drove over to Chama in two hours. Put the horses in Burn's stable. Took the train at 1:30 for Alamosa . . . arrived . . . about 9 o'clock. Stopped at the Delmonico." On April 17 he got his "drafts cashed at the San Juan Bank and now have \$75,000.00 on my person." He must have made a mistake in the number of zeros. He did not record the total number of sheep purchased but did note the number purchased on a particular day or from a particular person. Adding these figures gives a total of 7,356 sheep. The

prices he quoted varied from 80 cents to \$1.25 for grown sheep and 40 cents for lambs. If the price had averaged one dollar per head, \$7,500 would have covered the cost, with some cash remaining for trip expenses.

Persinger returned to Chama without mishap on April 18. However, while "waiting to get some oats at Mr. Burns, the horses ran away with the wagon I had hired . . . & broke it all to pieces. It cost me \$100.00 damage. My belt with \$2000.00 in gold was in the wagon, but I found it all OK." One wonders where the other \$5,500.00 was. At any rate Persinger immediately got rid of some cash by paying Archuleta \$785.⁶⁹ On April 26 he went to Abaretas' ranch to be ready to receive 1,110 sheep. "Hard living at one of these Mexican sheep ranches," he noted. En route to the Nutras camp, the sheep refused to cross the Rio Brazos, so John and Frank stayed with them while Persinger rode to base camp for two lead goats he had bought earlier. April 28: "They crossed the river nicely and led the sheep back like good fellows," he recorded. "They are really the most wonderful goats in N.M.! I would not take \$100.00 for them. . . . Our first lamb was dropped last night—named him Pre Mara."

On several occasions Frank and Persinger went "sheep prospecting"—scouting sheep ranches and camps—for three or four days at a time. At one camp, they had alkali water; at another their only food was mutton and tortillas. Completing a trade with "Old Esquibel" took almost a month. On May 22 Persinger "went and received the Esquibel sheep 2900 in number. Had some trouble with them but nothing serious. Went to town and paid them off."

On May 5 four men were hired to shear the sheep already purchased. They were able to shear 353 sheep on May 6 and 373 on May 7. The shearing continued for three more days yielding a total of 2053 lbs. of wool. Persinger commented, "Not a very good showing but did not have them sheared very close."

Finally, on May 31, 1882, they "broke up camp" to begin the long trek home, approximately retracing their route south. Since Persinger reports camping at "Archuleta's old toll gate"

on June 5, it seems likely they went over Cumbres Pass on an early Colorado thoroughfare, the Archuleta-Broad Toll Road, also called the Cumbres Toll Road. It was used extensively in the 1860's to move stock over the mountains.⁷⁰ Apparently it was not a toll road in 1882. As on the 1881 trip, John appeared on May 25 without any explanation by Persinger; a Blacking Box Jack joined the outfit on June 4.

An unusual accident occurred on the mountain roads when the horses began "raing the mischief . . . Old 'Ned' fell over a bluff and broke out the wagon tongue. Jack spliced it up while I went after another team. Met some emigrants. Paid them two dollars to pull me to the summit." By June 8 the drovers reached Conejos, where a Corpus Christi celebration was being held. While moving the sheep across a bridge, a sudden hail storm dispersed the celebrants, and the hail, crowds, and noise so frightened the sheep they began to jump off the bridge. Persinger commented that the herders "had a regular d-1 of a time." Apparently no one was hurt and no sheep were lost, but one can imagine the confusion.

On June 10 Persinger returned to Las Vegas to expedite the Rosenthal case, pending since 1881, but he recorded nothing of its progress. He then went to Denver, hoping to sell 1,000 of the sheep, but was unsuccessful. On June 25, 1882, he met his herdsmen at the "30 mile house" south of Pueblo. "The boys think they have found a mine in the mountains," he wrote. "One thing sure—they did find 67 [stray?] head of sheep." Persinger left the outfit again on June 30 for Denver and Sterling, arriving at the latter in time for the Fourth of July celebration. He observed that everything was "on the boom in Strling."⁷¹ Saw Mrs. Gunn but did not have much talk with her." On July 5, he "received a nice long letter from my darling. Going to the ranch this p.m. Arrived and found everything OK—much better than I expected."

On July 22, 1882, Persinger's sheep "reached the ranch . . . and the boys are all happy." In counting the sheep, Persinger found the ewes "29 ahead and the lambs about 150 more than we bought," so on July 28 he "took Jack & Jesse to Sterling . . . for a holiday." Between his return from New Mexico and his departure for Canada on October 22, 1882, Persinger commuted between Sidney and the ranch as he

previously had done. He spent more time at the ranch than in Sidney, but never more than two weeks consecutively. He made one overnight train trip to North Platte for a Masonic meeting on October 19.

The time in Sidney was spent attending to business and seeing friends, particularly the Dorans, the Jewetts, and Whitney. He stayed in his house on some visits, but on others visited the Dorans. He and Jewett talked of "buying out Sutherland & Co."⁷² but decided against it. In recording this on July 31, Persinger observed, "The town is too dead for business." The purpose of one visit was explicitly to see Billy Haynes, who later bought Persinger sheep. He probably spent considerable time talking to Sidney livestock buyers, and many went to the ranch to see his herds. One can imagine that Sidney businessmen had money after the gold-rush boom and were looking for ventures not dependent on the Black Hills trade.

The major work at the Colorado ranch was caring for and selling the sheep, but haying was paramount during August. Immediately after the arrival of the New Mexico sheep, corrals, chutes, and bridges had to be repaired. On August 30, "all hands [were] going up to build the bridges & finish . . . them up in good shape." As usual, Persinger often went to nearby Iliff for mail and to Sterling for mail, grub, and supplies. By this summer a variety of stores had opened in the new Sterling, and Persinger bought a hay rack, pitch fork, coyote poison, posts, and lumber, all of which he would have had to haul from Sidney before 1881.

The ranch crew in 1882 was larger than in 1881. Jess, John, and Jack, all participants in the sheep drive, were still ranch hands in August, but Frank was not mentioned after the return from New Mexico. Bill and Gene appeared without identification, and Jack Crane's brother came to work on September 8. This summer the crew had a housekeeper, Mrs. Gunn—probably Nannie Gunn, George Gunn's sister-in-law and the widow of his brother Spencer. Persinger never referred to Mr. and Mrs. Gunn, only to George and Mrs. Gunn. Diary entries indicate Mrs. Gunn lived on the Gunn property on Cedar Creek where she is reported in Conklin to have lived earlier. She was later the first woman county clerk in Logan County. As housekeeper at

Persinger's ranch in 1882, she must have been very busy feeding the crew and the numerous guests who came on "sheep business." Not surprisingly she was quite ill for a week toward the end of August; Persinger had to get a doctor from Sterling and also a Mrs. Sanders and her daughter to care for Mrs. Gunn.⁷³

The first of many diary entries concerning stockmen coming to see or buy the New Mexico sheep was on July 27: "Heavy rain today. Henderson here to look at sheep." On July 29 John Haas, Persinger's first business partner in Sidney, and Charlie Suchy inspected the herds and spent the night. On August 9 Billy Haynes bought 1,500 head but did not take possession until September. On August 21 "Mr. Connell, the newspaperman,⁷⁴ was down to pay us a visit. I took him up as far as Mr. Sanders and had my first watermelon." On August 24 "Old Man Fitch & Hugh Clark came over from Sidney last night. The Old Man is on a sheep trade. We went up to look at our sheep. He thought them very good." Whitney, who was at the ranch for most of the time from mid-August to mid-September, bought an unspecified number of sheep. Lou Gamm spent the night of September 1 at the ranch and talked of buying sheep. Finally, on October 18 "Charlie Moore came over to the ranch with me. Could not make a trade with him."

Most sales were completed during September and early October. Usually Persinger and his crew separated the accepted sheep from the herd for the buyer, who took responsibility for driving them away. A number of the September transactions follow:

[September 8] Billy Haynes came over last night and we have been busy as bees today getting his sheep (1500 head) out. He left for Denver and we are sorting up for Whitney, Frick & Bradley. Had 14 people at the ranch last night. . . . [September 12] Gunnison & I went up to look at sheep this morning. He takes 400 head of grown ewes at \$2.25 per head. Nothing to be over four year old. . . . [September 16] Up at daylight working. Got Whitney and Bradley off today. Sold and delierd to Wes Hadfield 650 grown ewes . . . [September 18] Found Gunderson at the ranch with his sheep counted out. He took 5 hundred hed. . . . [September 21] Cut out Mrs. Gunn's five hund sheep—also 20 for Bill Hadfield. . . . [September 27] Hess & Beerelly left this noon with there sheep—well satisfied & happy. . . . [September 28] Counted out Gamm's sheep this morning in good time. He is satisfied as every other man has been that had been dealing with us.⁷⁵

When Persinger counted the remaining sheep on October 8, he was "well satisfied with the way they turned out." Gunn,

who had been in Denver, returned on the following day with word that "Tyler is coming to buy the sheep." Presumably, Tyler took all those left, since there are no further entries about selling sheep. Toward the end of September and in October, Persinger recorded duck and deer hunting expeditions. Once he "went out duck shooting and killed 13 ducks at 2 shots," and on another occasion he "came down on the handcar" for some "pretty good duck shooting." Other days, he went deer hunting with Billy Longfellow, Borrie, and Van Camp on an island in the South Platte.

Twice in 1882 Persinger recorded prairie fires, an ever-present threat on the Great Plains. On February 13, 1882, he commented that the prairie was on fire below the ranch. On September 12-13 he watched "a big priarrie fire burning north of here . . . [which] seems to be coming nearer but the wind is in our favor. If it will only continue so." Four days later, en route to Sidney, Persinger found that the fire had "burnt the grass off the divide [the flat land between streams]." Prairie fires were so difficult to control that laws to curb them were passed by the first Colorado State Assembly.⁷⁶ Fires were still a threat in 1905: Persinger's daughter Mary described an uncontrollable prairie fire at that time which almost reached Persinger's Nebraska ranch before the wind turned.

When one considers the social history of the Nebraska Panhandle and northeastern Colorado in the late 1870's and early 1880's, the omissions in the Persinger diaries are almost as provocative and instructive as the information they contain. Cattle raising was still *the* big business in 1881 and 1882, but the diaries contain only one direct reference to it. There are, of course, indirect references such as the one about Adams buying the big bill of goods from Persinger and Whitney in April, 1881. If Adams had not owned thousands of cattle in Cheyenne County, he would not have had need for his huge purchase. Persinger once went to the Brush Ranch across the Platte from Iliff for dinner and to drink beer with Kars Buchanan⁷⁷ who worked there, yet gives no hint that it was the cattle ranch of Jared L. Brush, one of Colorado's larger cattlemen. But on August 7, 1882, when he was "cutting hay on the Island [in the Platte]," he noticed that the cattle "'round up' passed up the river this a.m."



Branding was a major activity at roundup time, for only by the brand could the cattle of each rancher be distinguished on the open range.

Roundups were a major activity of cattlemen and cowboys and would be difficult for anyone, even Persinger, to ignore. They are described by Andreas in the explanation of the Cheyenne County cattle industry, which was typical of others on the Great Plains. Cheyenne County had about 80,000 head of cattle grazing its mostly unfenced, government-owned acres.^{7 8} He explains:

Land is by mutual consent of the cattle owners divided among themselves into tracts termed 'ranges,' each range comprising an acreage in proportion to the number of cattle owned by the proprietor, and generally consisting of several thousand acres. The proprietor has no legal title to his range but simply builds a ranche, and sometimes two or three on the range claimed by him. His rights to this are maintained by a mutual understanding among the cattle owners.

The cattle were free to roam beyond their respective ranges, and often did so in search of good grass. Branding was essential for identifying the owner. Each year all the cattle over a wide area were rounded up and sorted out by cowboys. Andreas refers to annual roundups beginning in the spring and lasting about three months. In some parts of the Great Plains, there were spring and fall roundups; in Texas and the Southwest,

cooperative effort by several owners was not usually required.⁷⁹

Cattlemen in the 1870's formed the Cheyenne County Stock Association to protect their interests (such as combating cattle rustlers). The April 25, 1879, issue of the *Telegraph* reports:

The meeting of the Cheyenne County Stock Association convened Monday promptly at 9 a.m., called to order by President Lawrence. On motion, a committee of six were appointed to arrange for the roundup. Messrs. Van Vassel, Parker, Mathews, Clark, Redington, Tusler and Russell being named to such committee . . . the roundup to start at Ogallala on the [word illegible] of May and work up the South Platte to Lodge Pole Creek, work up Lodge Pole creek to Antelopeville [now Kimball], cross from Antelopeville to Pumpkin Creek and work down Pumpkin Creek to the North Platte River, from there down the river to Ogallala.⁸⁰

The roundup Persinger noted probably was not the one conducted by the Cheyenne County group in 1882, but it must have been a similar one. Since Cheyenne County borders Colorado, with the boundary only about ten miles south of Sidney, undoubtedly Nebraska cattle roamed into Colorado and vice versa. Shumway reports representatives of cattlemen for many miles around participated in a roundup even if they were not the principals.⁸¹

In addition to the Brush cattle, roaming the Colorado ranges were many owned by John W. Iliff, one of the most famous and wealthy of all cattle kings. He had ranches all along the South Platte, with the main one near the town named for him. Iliff lived in Denver or Cheyenne and died in 1878, but his widow Elizabeth carried on the business for a number of years. Iliff's range is reported in Conklin to have extended from Cheyenne, south along Crow Creek, Colorado, to the South Platte as far as Julesburg, and then back up Lodgepole Creek to Wyoming. J. A. Borie, telegraph operator in Sterling, wrote in 1881: "The valley was full of cattle belonging mostly to John W. Iliff, of Denver, and they were curious about a man on a horse such as I rode [a railroad velocipede car] and would follow me on both sides of the track pawing and bellowing."⁸²

As everyone who watches westerns knows, cattlemen and sheepmen could be bitter enemies. Cattlemen thought cattle would not graze on land overrun by sheep or that sheep ruined a range for cattle by eating the grass to its roots, which cattle cannot do, and then by cutting the roots with their sharp hoofs. Why did not some of the cattlemen or their employees object to

Persinger's bringing in sheep and selling them to area stockmen, thus spreading sheep over the range? Why did not Persinger have violent confrontations with some of the cattlemen instead of reporting friendly visits with them? What did the cattlemen think of those raising sheep and particularly of those raising both cattle and sheep?

Adequate answers to these questions could not be found, but at the same time nothing was found about cattlemen-sheepmen feuds in the area. Persinger might have failed to record unpleasant incidents, but it seems unlikely he would have failed to record destruction of his property or injury to himself or his employees. A superficial survey indicates that the most widespread and widely publicized of such range wars occurred later than 1882 and/or in other parts of Colorado and in New Mexico, Wyoming, and South Dakota. Maybe something exciting would have developed later in northeastern Colorado had not the range sheep industry there been relatively short-lived.⁸³

In Cheyenne County the situation was almost as tranquil, despite an upswing in sheep raising. Andreas reports:

The sheep-raising interest has been given but little attention until quite recently. The number now in the county may be estimated at 8,000. This industry is very profitable, and many of the owners of the smaller herds of cattle are fast disposing of their cattle to invest in sheep.⁸⁴

Andreas' biographical sketch for Dr. F. B. Winnett, who drove sheep from New Mexico in 1881 at the same time Persinger did, reports that Winnett owned 10,000 head on different ranches.⁸⁵ Persinger's 1882 diary shows Cheyenne County ranchers were buying sheep that year. But this trend must not have continued. No mention of sheep could be found in the historical sections of the *Telegraph* or a number of modern sources on Nebraska history. Shumway does have a little to say, mainly for Morrill County, which was split from Cheyenne in 1909. Large numbers of sheep and lambs were reported to have been wintered and fattened there "a few years ago," but only small flocks were still raised.⁸⁶ Apparently range wars were not a major factor in the sheep industry decline in Nebraska. Of the sources studied only George Allen Beecher's *Bishop of the Great Plains* reports a feud, small but intense, in 1893 near Camp Clarke Bridge in present-day Morrill County. He writes, "Serious trouble had existed between cattle and

sheep owners about the use of the range for grazing purposes. Several men had been killed, and the feeling was very bitter."⁸⁷

The Persinger diaries contain no evidence of open warfare between the cattlemen and the colonies of Southern homesteaders in the Sterling-Merino area. Those in old Sterling had gone first to the Union Colony in Greeley, a cooperative agricultural community begun in 1870 by Easterners, including Nathan Meeker, agricultural editor of Horace Greeley's *Tribune*. The Southerners decided to branch out and in 1874 moved to Sterling, where they immediately filed homestead claims. Furthermore, they soon built irrigation ditches, began to farm, and even constructed fences around their land long before the introduction of barbed wire in the area in 1881. Conklin reports these early farmers were called "hayseeds" and that as the number of homesteaders increased over the years they were "stoutly resented by the stock men." But derogatory epithets and feelings of resentment are quite different from overtly destructive behavior such as the hanging and burning of two homesteaders by cattlemen in Custer County, Nebraska, in 1878. Perhaps more incidents occurred in northeastern Colorado than have been reported, but perhaps also these cattlemen, sheepmen, farmers, and those who raised both cattle and sheep did actually exhibit a degree of tolerance quite different from that of their stereotypes in the westens.⁸⁸

Persinger left for Canada on October 22, 1882, and spent the next day in Omaha at the Paxton. His only comment was that the boys were "all OK." Entries in the 1882 diary clearly state that Persinger planned to stay in Canada for the spring and summer of 1883. However, there are no records or family stories to establish the months he spent in Canada, in Sidney, or on the Colorado ranch between 1883 and 1889, when he bought Hardscrabble Ranch. The years following the deaths of his son Douglas in 1883 and of Mrs. Persinger in 1885 must have been bleak for him. His two surviving children Charlotte and Mary continued to live in Canada with Mrs. Persinger's father Charles Adams until 1893.

There are newspaper accounts at the time of Persinger's death and family reminiscences indicating he had driven cattle up the Texas Trail, but no dates are given.⁸⁹ It seems likely that he

did participate in Texas cattle drives during these years: Fred Quinn, now of the Eldred Ranch near Lisco, Nebraska, reports that as a boy in Lodgepole he often went to the barber shop to hear the old timers talk of the early days. He remembers Persinger told of cattle drives in which he did not remove his boots from the time he left Dallas, Texas, until he arrived in Nebraska. However, Quinn does not remember Persinger dating the drives.

The *Telegraph* on December 22, 1888, carried a story mentioning "Deputy Sheriff Persinger," who must have been A. B., despite the lack of family knowledge of his lawman status. The story is a funny one: "Two soldiers, under the influence of liquor, were endeavoring to capture a dog . . . in order, it is said, to influence the animal to drink beer in a saloon." A passerby tried to prevent the soldiers from doing so by hitting one over the head with a rock so hard that the soldier had to be taken to the hospital. The other soldier began hitting a bystander and a free-for-all fight resulted. Soon the "law" arrived:

Deputy Sheriff Persinger downed one of the soldiers in the quickest possible time, jumped upon him and held him fast, although he did not strike him, and amid a hustling, jostling crowd, where everybody was asking everybody else what was the matter and nobody answered . . . the offending soldier was marched to jail. But it was no easy matter to land him there.⁹⁰

About 1889 Persinger acquired the nucleus of Hardscrabble Ranch, two miles east of Lodgepole on Lodgepole Creek. Family stories are that he bought this land, but an unidentified newspaper clipping published about the time the ranch was sold in 1943 states he began with a grant from the government for a quarter section. He also had a ranch in partnership with Ed Coumbe on the North Platte River. Both of these were cattle ranches. According to family stories, Persinger began to live at Hardscrabble shortly after he acquired the first land. He was married to Harriet Burghardt of Missouri Valley, Iowa, before 1890, but neither the date nor place of this marriage is known.

The last half of the 1880's in the Nebraska Panhandle found many settlers, including Persinger, settling in one place. And many moved on. Cattlemen, large and small, adversely affected not only by farmers but also by overgrazing and shaky financing, were liquidating or moving west. Disastrous winters in 1886 and 1887 killed thousands of cattle in Nebraska,



Hardscrabble Ranch as it appeared in 1905.

Colorado, and Wyoming. Cattlemen who stayed began buying land or staking out homestead cabins or both. The era of homesteading had arrived after a steady westward march across the state.⁹¹

On January 19, 1884, the *Telegraph* reported that in 1883 more than "96,240 acres of land were taken by homestead filings, 73,340 by pre-emptions and 96,000 by timber claims at the North Platte land office, this land all lying west of the one hundredth meridian." Shumway reports a land office was opened in Sidney in 1887.⁹²

Promotional efforts by the railroads were a factor in the settlement of the Panhandle, as well as the rest of the state. In 1884 the Union Pacific stepped up efforts to sell its lands in the Panhandle. J. A. Borie, the Union Pacific telegraph operator at Sterling in 1881 and at Sidney from 1883 to 1889, remembered one year when Sidney had "over 400 carloads of emigrant movables, which meant furniture, farm implements, etc., and great numbers came in by team."⁹³

Homesteading in the Nebraska Panhandle was perilous, as indeed it was nationally. By 1890 only one in three home-

steads throughout the U.S. remained long enough to receive deeds. It was particularly difficult to adjust to the dry-farming conditions of western Nebraska. The major crop in the early years was corn; wheat was considered experimental and not extensively planted until after 1900.⁹⁴ Persinger, who was a lifelong Democrat and an ardent admirer of William Jennings Bryan, felt quite strongly about the deficiencies of the government's homesteading policies. In an unidentified newspaper clipping, he is quoted as comparing the government's role to that of a dishonest gambler who plays a "snap game" on the homesteader, wagering the quarter section of land against the homesteader's \$14.00 (fee for filing a claim) that he could not live on the land for five years. The government then confiscated both the land and the fee when the settler lost. But enough grangers, as farmers were often called, succeeded, and in February, 1892, the Cheyenne County Farmer's Institute was established with L. A. Ganson of Lodgepole as president.⁹⁵

The early history of Lodgepole reflects these changes of the late 1880's and early 1890's. When the Union Pacific was constructed, a section house and makeshift depot were located at the site of present-day Lodgepole, but the town did not begin to grow until the farmers moved into the surrounding areas.

One of the most frequently told family stories about the original house at Hardscrabble is that it rained inside several days after it rained outside. When Persinger bought the property, both its roof and walls were of grout (a very low-grade cement—more sod than cement). The story relates that as Persinger became more affluent he cemented the walls and added a shingled roof. He added a room or two from time to time, ending with a rambling ranch house of eight rooms and four vestibules. One section was of native limestone blocks cut and constructed by Swan Starkane (phonetic spelling), the talented stonecutter and sculptor who did the statues in the Lodgepole park. Starkane's work approaches what is known as dry masonry. This is stone construction without mortar and requires a high degree of skill in stonecutting. There was only a small amount of "alkali mud" between the stones of the limestone section of the ranch house. The horse barn and a bridge—both still standing—are also evidence of Starkane's excellent stonework.

As stories about the gradual enlargement of the ranch house suggest, Persinger's finances during these years were at a low ebb, and he built only when money was available. He must have chosen the name Hardscrabble as much seriously as jokingly. Hardscrabble was a then comparatively well-known name because of its popularization by Ulysses S. Grant, who gave it to his farm near St. Louis during a discouraging period of his life. It is defined as "yielding or gaining a bare or meager living with the greatest difficulty or hardest labor."⁹⁶

By 1894 the financial affairs of many in the Panhandle had gone from bad to worse because of a nation-wide panic and crop failures. *The Compendium of History, Reminiscence and Biography of Western Nebraska* reports that 1894 was the beginning of the "famine period" with "great suffering in the western part of the state." The Nebraska Legislature passed a relief bill in 1895. George Allen Beecher, who was at Christ Episcopal Church parish in Sidney at the time, wrote:

Relief was sent from our own Church people in carload lots. We converted our own house into a distributing center. . . . Many . . . came long distances over the bleak prairies to ask for sufficient food for themselves and their families for another week.⁹⁷

Persinger's daughters Charlotte and Mary moved to Nebraska in 1893 to live with their father and stepmother after their grandfather died in Canada—just in time to experience these economic difficulties. Mary often recalled the times when they had blackbird pie made from migrating grackles, which fortunately roosted along Lodgepole Creek near Hardscrabble. Charlotte died in June, 1895, of appendicitis and accompanying peritonitis, though Dr. Stowitts of Sidney spent many hours trying to save her. The loss of her sister at this time was especially tragic for Mary, who had difficulty adjusting to the spartan ranch life. But eventually Mary learned to ride horseback and became a proficient cowgirl. Her special job was to retrieve cattle that frequently managed to get through a barbed-wire fence and into a cornfield. She even became a homesteader, gaining for Hardscrabble a portion of open range in the hills north of the Lodgepole Creek. Her homesteading probably occurred after the Kinkaid Act of 1904 permitted homesteading of 640 acres in western Nebraska instead of 160. Its primary aim was to speed settlement of the Nebraska

Sandhills, where fifteen to twenty acres are necessary to pasture one cow.

While Hardscrabble in the 1890's may have been deficient in material comforts, its religious, social, and intellectual life was rich. Persinger and his family continued to attend Christ Church in Sidney. A month before her death, Charlotte was confirmed by the Reverend Mr. Beecher, and Mary was confirmed in September, 1895. Mary sang in the Christ Church choir. Persinger kept up ties with old Sidney personal and business friends and made new ones among the recent settlers nearer Hardscrabble. There was much visiting between ranch dwellers, and sufficient open range was left to permit traveling forty miles straight north from Hardscrabble to visit the Ed Coumbes on their North Platte River ranch.

Mr. and Mrs. Persinger both liked to read and built a library which remained intact in the ranch house until it was sold in 1943. Persinger particularly loved Shakespeare and bought a handsome leather-bound set of his plays in 1880 while living in Sidney. In those volumes was found a white satin program of Edwin Booth's performance of *Hamlet* at the Cheyenne, Wyoming, Opera House on April 18, 1887. Many books were gifts from family members on birthdays and Christmas or from friends. The family by custom wrote in books the owner, donor, and date, a practice which makes them more significant today. For instance, Carolyn Frances Hazen, one of the party on the 1879 mountain trip, gave Mrs. Persinger a copy of Ibsen's *Prose Dramas* on February 20, 1901. Several books, one of them Spencer's *First Principles*, were from Mary Libby, who lived on a ranch just west of Lodgepole. *Army Boys and Girls* was a gift from the author, Mary G. Bonesteel, whose husband Lt. Charles Bonesteel was stationed at Fort Sidney. The Persingers and the Bonesteels were friends with a shared interest in the world of books. Among other authors represented in the library are Dante, Milton, Schiller, Tennyson, Dickens, Darwin, and Huxley. The Persingers also subscribed to numerous magazines including *Harper's Weekly*, *Harper's Bazaar*, *Appletons' Journal*, *Lippincott's*, and *The Ladies' Home Journal*.

A Texas Matchmaker by Andy Adams is autographed by the author. In it is a letter from Adams to Persinger dated

December 14, 1904, which indicates they were friends. Adams was living in Colorado Springs at the time Mary was a student at Colorado College there. Adams wrote that the story "in which you figure is in the current number of *Field and Stream*." This story, "Barb: A Cow Horse," is a biography of a Texas Panhandle horse and his owners which culminated in the animal's death in Africa during the Boer War. Persinger, who is referred to by his real name, was one of Barb's numerous owners. Another book, autographed by D. C. Bloomer, is *Life and Writings of Amelia Bloomer*, an account of the author's wife, a women's rights leader and reformer of women's clothing. This and several old newspaper clippings, one titled "Can Women Write Music?" suggest that Mrs. Persinger may have been a women's libber in her day. At any rate she founded a public library in Lodgepole and certainly advocated higher education for women.

Persinger bought the theater at Fort Sidney when the buildings were auctioned in 1899, four years after the fort was closed. He moved it to Hardscrabble and used it as a cow-milking barn during the 1920's and 1930's. Family stories relate that over the years he added a second ranch house, a guest house, and other ranch buildings by buying those of homesteaders who gave up and left, moving the structures to Hardscrabble and remodeling them. Persinger's purchases were not limited to vacant buildings. He had a penchant for buying all manner of miscellaneous objects and carting them to Hardscrabble. One was an old school bell about four or five feet high for which no practical use was ever found. Another was a large billiard table, which is still at the Carlson Ranch because it is too heavy to move.

Mrs. Persinger died suddenly in December, 1901, of a hemorrhage following a severe coughing spell. After this Persinger lived alone at Hardscrabble until he moved to Lodgepole about 1919. At first Mary was at college or visiting Persinger's relatives in Northport, Alabama. Then she married Dr. George Harris Searcy in 1908 and moved to Tuscaloosa, Alabama. (Dr. Searcy was my father.)

A steady stream of visitors came from Alabama to Hardscrabble over the years. First to make the trek were Persinger's

relatives. Then came his son-in-law's numerous relatives. Searcy was one of twelve children, most of whom visited on Hardscrabble at one time or another. The guest house was overflowing, and gay times were frequent as the tenderfeet from the South were initiated into ranch life. I often visited the ranch with my parents and friends during the 1920's and 1930's. In 1940 I was married to Greer Marechal Murphy of Mobile, Alabama, by Bishop Beecher on the front lawn of the old ranch house.

Persinger gradually increased the acreage of Hardscrabble until, at the time of his death in 1932, it comprised about 2,700 acres. Irrigation of the wild hay meadows along Lodgepole Creek was begun shortly after the first land was acquired, and haying was a major activity, as it had been at the Colorado ranch in 1881 and 1882. Persinger always raised Herefords. His brand was a united HP, the initials of the second Mrs. Persinger.

Persinger is described as "owning and controlling four thousand five hundred acres, in and around section 4, township 14, range 46, Deuel county, and ranges over fifteen thousand acres."⁹⁸ The *Lodge Pole Express* for July 15, 1911, contains ads by five ranchers who listed their address as Lodgepole:Firth Booth, H. H. Libby, Fred Lehmkuhl, A. B. Persinger, and C. L. Tate.⁹⁹ Each ad features a picture of a cow with the owner's brand and a description of both his cattle and horse brands. The Tate ad offers a "liberal reward" for information "in regard to estrays of this brand." Persinger's is the only one which describes range land—the area northeast of Lodgepole and northwest of Chappell. The year 1911 seems late for much open range except perhaps in the hill land north of Lodgepole Creek. By the 1920's essentially all the flat table land between the Lodgepole Creek and the North Platte River was being farmed, and Persinger's upland was no exception. However, his land was farmed by tenants, not by Persinger himself. The property of ranchers was by then restricted mainly to the hilly and sandy sections and to the hay meadows along the creek.

From its beginning in 1889, Persinger was interested and active in the Nebraska Stockgrowers Association. In 1904 he was elected to the executive committee and served in that capacity at least until 1908. His old friend, John M. Adams, was elected president of the association in 1904.¹⁰⁰



A. B. Persinger, his favorite horse Rooney, and one of the many dogs he owned.

Persinger was especially fond of all animals, particularly dogs, of which he usually had several. In the 1890's and early 1900's, he kept Russian wolfhounds, ostensibly for hunting coyotes. These dogs had a somewhat dubious reputation with the neighbors and Lodgepole residents, having learned to go to Lodgepole to meet a particular passenger train for handouts from the dining car crew. A notice in the *Telegraph* reports, "Mr. Persinger's hounds have been into mischief again. This time it was a ham of Mrs. Klein's." Mary wrote in a letter to an Alabama relative in 1899, "Papa had the dogs down at Mrs. Bullock's Friday and they fought one of her dogs, didn't hurt him much but scared Mrs. Bullock nearly to death."¹⁰¹

Perhaps the best beloved of Persinger's canine friends was Spud, renowned for a gold tooth. Spud, an English bulldog

Persinger purchased to keep him company after Mary married and moved to Alabama, is buried in the family cemetery plot near Lodgepole. Another special animal friend was Rooney, Persinger's riding horse during the 1890's and early 1900's. He could be ridden without saddle or bridle, which, so the story goes, was very handy for riding in the hills at night in search of cattle rustlers. There were thus no leather squeaks to betray one's presence. Rooney is buried on top of one of the hills just north of Highway 30 and the ranch buildings. For years a wood cross with his feed bucket attached marked the spot. This hill is similar to the one two miles west on which Persinger is buried.

Between 1910 to 1920, Persinger and Will Jewett, the son of his old friends Mr. and Mrs. George Jewett, owned a grain elevator, a lumber yard, and hardware store in Lodgepole. Their ad in the *Lodge Pole Express* for July 15, 1911, features "Studebaker Harness . . . the largest producer of harness in the world."¹⁰² In 1921 Persinger and Mrs. George Jewett, as widower and widow, were married and lived in Lodgepole in the house now occupied by Mrs. Jewett's granddaughter, Jeanne Jewett Markel, and her husband E. A. Markel.

Mr. and Mrs. George Whitefoot came to Hardscrabble Ranch in 1918, and Whitefoot served as manager of the ranch until it was sold in 1943. Irma, Phyllis, and Lucille, their three daughters, grew up on Hardscrabble. Whitefoot was one of twenty-one children, many of whom worked or visited on Hardscrabble from time to time. Ernest Whitefoot worked there for many years.

Under the loving care of Persinger and Mr. and Mrs. Whitefoot, Hardscrabble became quite a showplace and was featured in newspapers and magazines during the 1920's. It excelled in the beauty of its land, groves of trees, and the quality of its purebred Herefords. There was only one tree on Hardscrabble when Persinger bought the first property, an apple tree behind the two-room grout house. About 1900 Persinger planted many trees, mostly cottonwoods and silver leaf maples, around the ranch buildings. In the 1920's he and Whitefoot planted a double row of trees on each side of the lane from the buildings to the Union Pacific tracks and irrigated them for the first years. Most of these trees are still standing. However, Mary

reported that on the day of her father's burial, a sudden gust of wind on an otherwise calm day blew down the original apple tree.

Historically, Hardscrabble's valley land, which is now part of the Carlson Ranch,¹⁰³ has many important trade and travel routes passing through it. Tremendous numbers of people and quantities of goods pass along these routes today, as they have for 115 years. This stems from the fact that Lodgepole Creek flows through it from the mountains in Wyoming into the South Platte River near Julesburg. The Platte Valley was followed by Nebraska trails of the westward migrations for twenty-five years before the Union Pacific Railroad was built. From 1841, when the first emigrant party left for Oregon, to 1860 the principal route for the transcontinental migrations across the Great Plains was from Fort Kearny, up the Platte-North Platte past Ash Hollow, Court House Rock, Chimney Rock and Scotts Bluff to Fort Laramie, Wyoming. After about 1860 most of the transcontinental traffic took the newly established Pike's Peak Trail down the South Platte to Julesburg, then turned up an alternate trail connecting near Court House Rock with the older roads on the North Platte. The connecting trail went up Lodgepole Creek along the route (followed later by the Union Pacific) to a point three miles east of Sidney, where it turned northward, passing Mud Springs and Court House Rock to the North Platte. About 25,000 emigrants are estimated to have traveled over the connecting section for each of the years 1865 and 1866, the last years of major wagon journeys over the Nebraska trails. In addition the trail was used by Pony Express riders, stagecoaches, freighters, and the military.¹⁰⁴

That part of the connecting trail up Lodgepole Creek must have been the same trail which was clearly discernible as late as the 1930's as a wide dip in the cultivated fields of Hardscrabble almost a mile south of the Lodgepole Creek and the ranch buildings. The trail through the Carlson Ranch has been erased by cultivation, but aerial photographs, taken in the late 1960's and showing sections east of the Carlson Ranch, are available for inspection at the office of the Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service in Chappell, Nebraska.

Persinger once placed a metal "Oregon Trail" marker along the route. Few persons were concerned about the trail names until recent years, when there has been much discussion. Some authorities prefer California Trail, others Pony Express Trail; maps can be found supporting almost any view. Merrill Mattes' clear explanation is that the names used from 1841 through 1866 varied over the years, mainly with the place of origin or the destination of the travelers, sometimes with a characteristic of the travelers such as religion (Mormon) or occupation (Pony Express). His thorough research points basically to one road system, which he terms "The Great Platte River Road." Persinger would, no doubt, applaud Mattes for documenting that the trail through Hardscrabble was related to those up the North Platte.¹⁰⁵

When the Union Pacific Railroad passed through the land that was later called Hardscrabble, it was built on the north side of the creek about a mile north of and parallel to the old trail. Then its highway counterpart, the Lincoln Highway (U.S. 30), was built adjacent to and north of the Union Pacific tracks. This first transcontinental highway, construction of which began in 1913, pioneered the era of good roads in the United States.¹⁰⁶ Interstate 80 was constructed in the early 1970's about a mile south of and parallel to the old trail. Crossing the Carlson Ranch today, in addition to these three major transportation routes, are huge electric-power towers for an interstate grid, an underground transcontinental telephone cable, two underground gas lines, as well as the telegraph, telephone, and electric power lines that have run along the Union Pacific tracks for years. From the hills rising above the Lodgepole Creek Valley on the north—hills on which Mary homesteaded and where Rooney is buried—the speeding trains and cars look like toys dwarfed by the vast expanse of land and sky. These hills are wonderful for riding horseback and enjoying the spectacular sunsets characteristic of the Panhandle while the world whizzes by.

Persinger's interest in Masonry, which began when he joined the Frank Welch Lodge in Sidney in 1879, continued all his life. On August 13, 1891, he left that lodge and assisted in establishing the Golden Fleece Lodge in Chappell as a charter



This 1909 photo was taken during a trip to the Pacific Northwest. Seated (from left) are Dr. George H. Searcy, Mrs. George Searcy (Persinger's daughter Mary), Dr. J. L. Searcy, and A. B. Persinger.

member. He held various offices in the Chappell lodge from 1894 through 1911, including Worshipful Master. The Chappell DeMolay chapter is named for him. In February, 1921, Persinger assisted in establishing the Golden Rod Lodge of Lodgepole, of which he was a member at the time of his death. On his birthday, May 7, 1929, he was honored at a banquet given by the Golden Rod Lodge and presented with a button symbolizing his fifty years as a Mason. The presentation was made by Bishop Beecher.¹⁰⁷

When one thinks of how many times Persinger must have saddled and harnessed horses, it is not hard to figure out why he bought — by 1908, perhaps earlier — an automobile for his trips. It is known he had one in 1908. In 1920 he drove a Buick—much too fast according to the family story—and turned it over three times, breaking several ribs. Later in the 1920's he bought a Packard sedan, about the fanciest car he could find, and it amused and pleased him when it was said he traded his cow pony for a car. He liked to get a license plate with a low number; in fact, he collected license plates, which at one time

covered the outhouse at the old ranch. Some are still attached to the horse-barn door.

Persinger celebrated his 70th birthday on May 7, 1921, with a large party at Hardscrabble attended by about 150 of his friends, old and new. The invitation read:

“1851 – – 1921”

I have heard it rumored – yea loudly said
That our friend John Barleycorn was dead.
But beneath a certain tree
Some remains of him are known to be.

So to my birthday celebration
I extend to you this invitation,
Please come at ten (a.m.) on the seventh of May
And we'll make it a grand resurrection day.

A. B. Persinger
Hardscrabble Ranch
Lodge Pole, Nebraska

Two one-gallon jugs of Kentucky bourbon were buried beneath one of the trees near the ranch house and “resurrected” at the party by Mose McFarland of North Platte. According to the *Telegraph*:

There was about one good nip around, and as our John McIntosh¹⁰⁸ swept an appraising eye over the crowd, and noted a number of teetotalers in the crowd who did not teetotal on this occasion, he remarked, “I think this is a poor time for them to start on the downward career.”¹⁰⁹

Persinger died of complications following severe eczema at his daughter's home in Alabama near his birthplace less than a month before his 82nd birthday. He had been ill for several months and had gone to Alabama so that his son-in-law, Dr. George Searcy, could assist in his treatment. On April 19, 1932, he was buried on the plains he loved so much and which were home to him.

NOTES

1. I am especially indebted to Clark Fuller, Sidney, Nebraska, whose requests for information about my grandfather prompted the writing of this biography. Mr. Fuller was awarded a life directorship of the Cheyenne County Historical Association in April, 1972, after serving on the board since 1960. He has been president of the association for several terms, as well as secretary and treasurer. I also wish to acknowledge the generous help of Dora M. Good, Curator, Overland Trail Museum, Sterling, Colorado.

2. The 1868 treaty is presented in full in Donald Jackson's *Custer's Gold, The United States Cavalry Expedition of 1874* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1972), 127-136; James C. Olson, *Red Cloud and the Sioux Problem* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1965), 341-348.

3. The 1876 agreement is reproduced in full in Jackson, *Custer's Gold*, 137-141. Neither Sitting Bull nor Crazy Horse signed this agreement. In May, 1877, Sitting Bull, Gall, and several thousand followers escaped to Canada. After four years, Sitting Bull was forced to return to the United States where he lived on Dakota reservations until he was killed in an attempt to arrest him on December 15, 1890, just prior to Wounded Knee on December 29, 1890. Crazy Horse was killed at Fort Robinson, Nebraska, in September, 1877.

4. An Indian agency was the site at which the government dispensed the rations and other supplies and services provided for in the 1868 treaty. The Indian agent lived there, and the Indians camped nearby in winter and hunted buffalo in the summer—as long as there were buffalo to hunt. Military forts were often established in the vicinity or the agency was located near already established forts. The U.S. government's policy of doling out rations to the agency Indians created a lucrative market for cattle owners; many cattle were sold to the government for this purpose.

5. A. T. Andreas, ed., *History of the State of Nebraska* (Chicago: Western Historical Company, 1882), 536.

6. *Telegraph* (Sidney, Nebr.), June 19, 1951. The *Telegraph* was established in 1873 by Larry Connell. Frances Lathrop Craig, a reporter for this paper, researched many of the historical articles cited.

7. Albert Benjamin Persinger MS, Nebraska State Historical Society, Lincoln, Nebraska.

8. *Ibid.* The notebook covers a number of years and the dates are often incomplete or illegible, but the diaries are well dated.

9. A. B. Moore, *History of Alabama* (University, Alabama: University Supply Store, 1934), 469; *Birmingham (Ala.) News*, January 28, 1931; *Tuscaloosa (Ala.) News*, April 17, 1932; *Compendium of History, Reminiscence and Biography of Western Nebraska* (Chicago: Alden Publishing Co., 1909), 430.

10. Moore, *Alabama*, 509-512.

11. *Birmingham (Ala.) Age-Herald*, April 17, 1932.

12. Persinger MS. Correct spelling was not one of Persinger's strong points. The most conspicuous book in his library was a leather-bound 1893 edition of *Webster's International Dictionary of the English Language*. Many errors in spelling are due to haste and Persinger's own method of shorthand. Spelling and grammatical errors have been retained when possible to preserve the flavor, but entries have been edited to facilitate a reasonable degree of ease in reading.

13. For further information on Julesburg, see Daniel S. Day, "Fort Sedgwick," *The Colorado Magazine*, XLII (1965), 16-35.

14. William L. and Milton P. Henderson were among the first permanent white settlers in Logan County, Colorado. Emma Burke Conklin, *A Brief History of Logan County, Colorado* (Sterling, Colorado: Elbridge Gerry Chapter, D.A.R., 1928), 62, 64-74, 191, 282-286, 317.

15. Persinger MS.

16. This is possibly a reference to the home of David Leavitt, an engineer who surveyed the Union Pacific line from Julesburg to Golden, Colorado. Conklin, *Logan County*, 85-87.

17. About this time four men were attacked by Indians in Lewis Canyon north of Sterling, Colorado. Three were killed and the fourth reported that 300 Oglala Sioux were in the area. More killings were reported before the "scare" subsided. *Ibid.*, 156-158, 314-316, 337.

18. *Biography of Western Nebraska*, 431. Weld County then included present-day Logan, Morgan, Phillips, Sedgwick, Washington, and Yuma Counties. Conklin, *Logan County*, 49-54.

19. *Telegraph*, May 26, 1950.

20. William S. Hadfield, born in England, was the first permanent settler in Logan County, Colorado. He was a stockman. Conklin, *Logan County*, 61-64.

21. The Alabamians who moved to Buffalo, Colorado, were mainly members of the Propst and Powell families. The first to move was Sidney Propst from Pickens County in 1874. Conklin, *Logan County*, 96, 125, 147-148, 151-160, 334-343. Fort Wicked was once a ranch and station on the Overland Trail. Harry Hanson, ed., *Colorado, A Guide to the Highest State* (New York: Hastings House, 1970), 197. This volume was produced as part of the Federal Writer's Program.

22. *Telegraph*, August, 1879.

23. *Ibid.*, June 19, 1951.

24. *Ibid.*, May 26, 1950.

25. Merrill J. Mattes, "Scotts Bluff National Monument, Nebraska," *National Park Service Historical Handbook Series*, No. 28 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1958), 52.

26. E. Douglas Branch, *The Hunting of the Buffalo* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1962), 210-220.

27. *Telegraph*, June 19, 1951; June 17, 1952.

28. *Ibid.*, June 19, 1951; Grant L. Shumway, ed., *History of Western Nebraska and Its People* (Lincoln: Western Publishing and Engraving Co., 1921) II, 167; *Omaha World-Herald*, May 23, 1926; *Sidney and Cheyenne County* (Sidney, Nebraska: Cheyenne County Chamber of Commerce, 1969).

29. An account of Fletcher's drive is given in William H. Forbis, *The Cowboys* (New York: Time-Life Books, 1973), 141-163.

30. Baylis John Fletcher, *Up the Trail in '79* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1968), 59.

31. *Telegraph*, June 13, 1956.

32. Persinger was the first Apprentice Mason of the Frank Welch Lodge in Sidney. He became a Master Mason in 1879 and was a charter member of that lodge. *Lodge Pole (Nebr.) Express*, April 21, 1932.

33. *Telegraph*, June 19, 1951.

34. *Ibid.*, June 13, 1956.
35. *Ibid.*, June 19, 1951.
36. Andreas, *History of Nebraska*, 538.
37. *Telegraph*, June 16, 1950.
38. *Ibid.*
39. The distances between points are taken from road guides published regularly in the *Telegraph* in 1876. *Ibid.*, June 17, 1952.
40. C. A. Moore and his brother Jim were among the first residents of Sidney. *Ibid.*, August 18, 1967; Andreas, *History of Nebraska*, 534, 536; Shumway, *Western Nebraska*, 112; Conklin, *Logan County*, 74, 140-142.
41. N. M. Fitch and son opened a meat market in Sidney in 1880 on Front Street. *Telegraph*, June 16, 1950.
42. Probably C. K. Allen.
43. Shumway, *Western Nebraska*, 152-154.
44. *Omaha World-Herald*, May 23, 1926.
45. *Telegraph*, June 13, 1956.
46. Persinger did not like to be called Albert or Benjamin; he was called A. B., Ab, and in his later years, Colonel, presumably because of his Southern background.
47. Shumway, *Western Nebraska*, 152-154.
48. *Ibid.*
49. John A. Carley served as Cheyenne County coroner and was active in the Frank Welch Masonic Lodge in Sidney. *Ibid.*, 192; Andreas, *History of Nebraska*, 536; *Telegraph*, June 19, 1951.
50. James J. McIntosh, from Canada, had been Cheyenne County clerk since 1877. In later years, he was president of the American National Bank in Sidney. Andreas, *History of Nebraska*, 539; *Telegraph*, August 18, 1967.
51. *Ibid.*, 537.
52. John M. Adams began raising cattle in the Nebraska Panhandle as early as 1874. In partnership with H. V. Redington, their herd numbered 6,000 head in 1876. Shumway, *Western Nebraska*, 111, 126, 166-167.
53. In 1865 Lucien B. Maxwell controlled over a million acres in northeastern New Mexico and southeastern Colorado known as the Maxwell Grant. However, Maxwell died a relatively poor man in 1875. *New Mexico, A Guide to the Colorful State* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1945), 78, 271-274, 356, 383-384.
54. The Goodnight-Loving Trail was named for Charles Goodnight and Oliver Loving, who established it in 1866 to drive cattle from Texas to Wyoming via the Pecos River, Fort Sumner, Pueblo, and Denver. Forbis, *The Cowboys*, 47-69, 145.
55. George H. Jewett was a forwarder of government supplies to forts and Indian agencies. Jewett and his wife Minna moved to Sidney in 1877. Andreas, *History of Nebraska*, 539; *Telegraph*, June 16, 1950; June 17, 1952; Shumway, *Western Nebraska*, 182. Persinger eventually married Mrs. Jewett in 1921.
56. A. J. Haskell came to Sidney in 1876 from Massachusetts. A carpenter by trade, Haskell constructed rental properties, eventually entering the hardware, lumber, and grocery businesses. Andreas, *History of Nebraska*, 539.
57. Conklin, *Logan County*, 90-92, 146, 166-167; Paul W. Swisher, "History of the Sheep Industry," 1969.

58. J. W. Ramsey came to the South Platte Valley in 1872. He was a foreman with J. L. Brush before leaving him in 1884 to operate his own ranch near Iliff. Conklin, *Logan County*, 135, 146, 149, 191, 285, 351-352.

59. *Ibid.*, 81, 86-87, 158-159, 291, 326-328; Shumway, *Western Nebraska*, 170.

60. Conklin, *Logan County*, 191, 286, 291.

61. There were two Hugh Davises living in the area at this time. The son came with a group of Southerners to old Sterling in 1874 and was later joined by many members of his family. *Ibid.*, 74-78, 147-148, 328-334.

62. *Ibid.*, 94.

63. Fred Clary arrived in Sidney in 1875 and served as telegraph operator and postmaster. In 1878 he opened a drug store in which he located the postoffice. Dennis Carrigan was probate judge and operated the first saloon in Sidney. Andreas, *History of Nebraska*, 536, 538; Shumway, *Western Nebraska*, 167; *Telegraph*, August 18, 1967.

64. Henry and Jim Schneider came to Colorado from England in 1873, beginning in the sheep business shortly after their arrival; Conklin, *Logan County*, 148-149, 191, 351. G. H. West operated a large retail store in Sterling; *Ibid.*, 98. Tom Carey operated a ranch near Atwood, Colorado; *Ibid.*, 159, 336. The J. J. Cheairs came to Sterling from Mississippi in 1878. They moved to the new townsite in 1881, working in the stock business. J. J. Cheairs later became president of the Logan County Bank; *Ibid.*, 326-328.

65. Stages made the 120 miles from Sidney to Fort Robinson in twenty-four hours. Shumway, *Western Nebraska*, 531.

66. Joseph and Robert Oberfelder opened a general merchandise store in Sidney in 1877. Andreas, *History of Nebraska*, 539-540.

67. Jack Simpson came to the Sidney-Sterling area about 1875. He worked for John Iliff for awhile before establishing his own ranch. The Sidney Propst family moved from Buffalo to a farm near Sterling in 1881. Conklin, *Logan County*, 78, 300, 342.

68. Tierra Amarilla, named for the yellow earth in the area, is an old Spanish-Mexican district. The Jicarilla Apache settled on the reservation in 1880. Ojo Caliente is named after the hot mineral springs nearby. *New Mexico*, 82-86, 306-308, 342-345.

69. The Archuletas were probably a powerful family in the area. There is a town, a county, a creek, and an old toll road named Archuleta.

70. Ora Brooks Peake, *The Colorado Range Cattle Industry* (Glendale, California: Arthur H. Clark Co., 1937), 179-180.

71. This was the first Fourth of July celebration in present-day Sterling, taking place in the Union Pacific roundhouse; the coming of the railroad had been anticipated for years and this was an especially joyous occasion. Conklin, *Logan County*, 90-93.

72. James Sutherland was born in Scotland and came to Sidney in 1875. He was cashier of the Sidney Exchange Bank and, with Joseph Sharmer, ran a retail and grocery business, J. Sutherland and Co. Andreas, *History of Nebraska*, 540.

73. Conklin, *Logan County*, 68, 156, 366-377.

74. There were two newspapermen that Persinger could have been referring to.

Larry Connell founded *Telegraph* in 1873, but sold the paper in 1875. The first Sterling paper, the *Sterling Record*, was established in 1881 by William A. Connell. *Ibid.*, 108; *Telegraph*, April 13, 1973.

75. Adam Gunderson came to Nebraska in the 1870's from Norway. He worked for the Union Pacific and later homesteaded. *Ibid.*, August 18, 1967.

76. Peake, *Colorado Cattle Industry*, 179.

77. Kos Buchanan worked at the Brush Ranch and is probably the man Persinger calls Kars in his diary. Buchanan came to Colorado from Ohio in 1877. Conklin, *Logan County*, 290-292.

78. Andreas, *History of Nebraska*, 535; *Report on the Productions of Agriculture, Tenth U.S. Census* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1883) III, 162.

79. Forbis, *The Cowboys*, 110-135.

80. *Telegraph*, June 13, 1956.

81. Shumway, *Western Nebraska*, 125.

82. Conklin, *Logan County*, 71-72, 95, 166.

83. Forbis, *The Cowboys*, 214; Peake, *Colorado Cattle Industry*, 89-90; *Wyoming, A Guide to Its History, Highways, and People* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1956), 74, 365.

84. Andreas, *History of Nebraska*, 535; Conklin, *Logan County*, 192, 198-199; Brett Gray, *One Hundred Years of the Colorado Sheep Industry*, 1961.

85. *Ibid.*, 540.

86. Shumway, *Western Nebraska*, 367.

87. George Allen Beecher, *Bishop of the Great Plains* (Philadelphia: Church Historical Society, 1950), 21.

88. Conklin, *Logan County*, 74-79; James C. Olson, *History of Nebraska* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1955), 199.

89. *Lodge Pole Express*, April 21, 1932.

90. *Telegraph*, June 13, 1956.

91. Hanson, *Colorado*, 61-62; Forbis, *The Cowboys*, 64-65; Olson, *Nebraska*, 196, 198.

92. *Telegraph*, June 13, 1956; Shumway, *Western Nebraska*, 175.

93. Conklin, *Logan County*, 97; Robert G. Athearn, *Union Pacific Country* (Chicago: Rand McNally & Co., 1971), 188.

94. Olson, *Nebraska*, 205-206.

95. *Telegraph*, June 19, 1951.

96. Benjamin Perley Poore and O. H. Tiffany, *Life of U. S. Grant* (Philadelphia: Hubbard Bros., 1885), 50-54; *Merriam-Webster's Unabridged Dictionary*, 1968.

97. *Biography of Western Nebraska*, 52; Beecher, *Bishop of the Great Plains*, 52-53.

98. *Biography of Western Nebraska*, 430.

99. *Lodge Pole Express*, July 15, 1911.

100. *Omaha Daily Journal Stockman*, January 2, 1939.

101. *Telegraph*, May 5, 1900. The Bullocks owned a ranch just east of Hardscrabble on Lodgepole Creek. At the time of Persinger's death, Will Bullock, one of the pallbearers, was living in Oshkosh. *Lodge Pole Express*, April 21, 1932.

102. *Ibid.*, July 15, 1911.

103. Hardscrabble was sold in 1943 to Myron Carlson, Chappell, Nebraska, and became the nucleus of the present-day Carlson Ranch of about 8500 acres. Myron Carlson and his son Merlyn raise Black Angus cattle, and have won top prizes over the years at the Chicago, Denver, and Omaha stock shows for their feeder calves. Merlyn Carlson was president of the Nebraska Stockgrowers Association from June, 1970, to June, 1972.

104. Merrill J. Mattes, *The Great Platte River Road* (Lincoln: Nebraska State Historical Society, 1969), 6, 23, 279, 335-340, 474.

105. *Ibid.*, 5-9.

106. Lincoln Highway Association, *The Lincoln Highway, the Story of a Crusade that Made Transportation History* (New York: Dodd, Mead and Co., 1935).

107. *Telegraph*, May 10, 1929; *Lodge Pole Express*, April 21, 1932.

108. John T. McIntosh was the son of J. J. McIntosh and a postmaster in Sidney at one time. The omission of references to many of Persinger's friends in Lodgepole, Chappell, and the surrounding area results primarily from the focus on the years covered by the notebook and diaries, 1876 through 1882.

109. *Telegraph*, May, 1921.