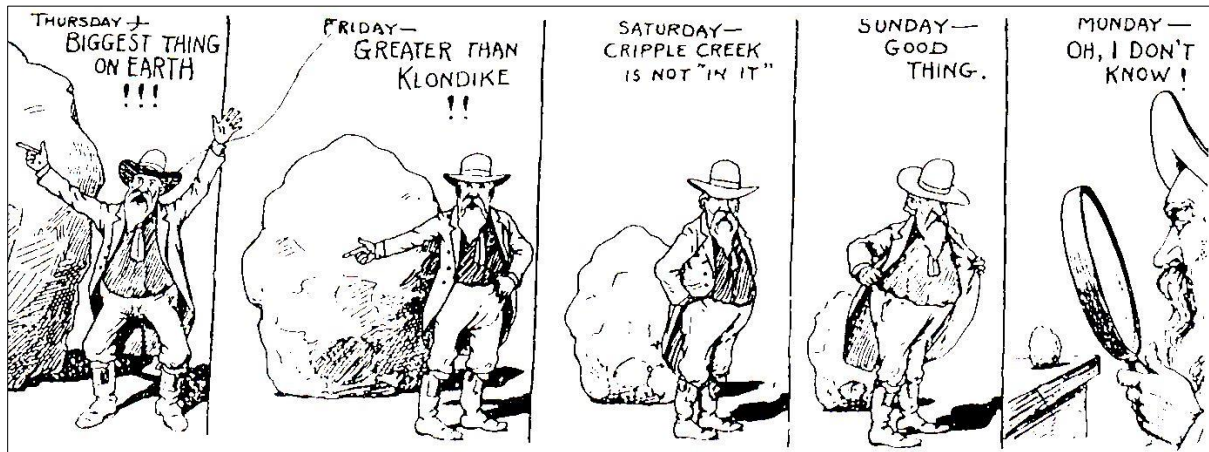


B. X. Dawson Strikes Gold

Dawson City, Colorado, 1898

B. X.'s gold strike and the overnight rise of Dawson City made headlines in newspapers across Colorado in 1898. Those headlines and news articles were my sources for writing the story below. Wonder how much money B. X. and his partners actually made off this escapade?



A FIVE-DAY WONDER

The excitement over B. X. Dawson's gold strike hit big and faded fast, as depicted in this cartoon published in *The Denver Evening Post*, December 20, 1898.

"Owners Claim Great Bonanza"

— *The Daily News*

B. X. Dawson reported he struck gold five miles southwest of Cañon City, Colorado, on December 9, 1898. He said he was doing exploration work at the mine that he and his partners had owned for a year, the Copper King.

In one telling of the discovery tale, B. X. (Bonewitz Xerxes) and his uncle David W. Bonewitz filled their pockets with rocks sparkling with gold from their mine. They trudged back to Cañon City through a foot of snow in the dark. There, they met with their other partners: B. X.'s older brother I. F. (Irving Frederick), their father, B. I. (Benjamin Irving), and the only

member of the outfit who was not part of the family, J. B. Hannum.

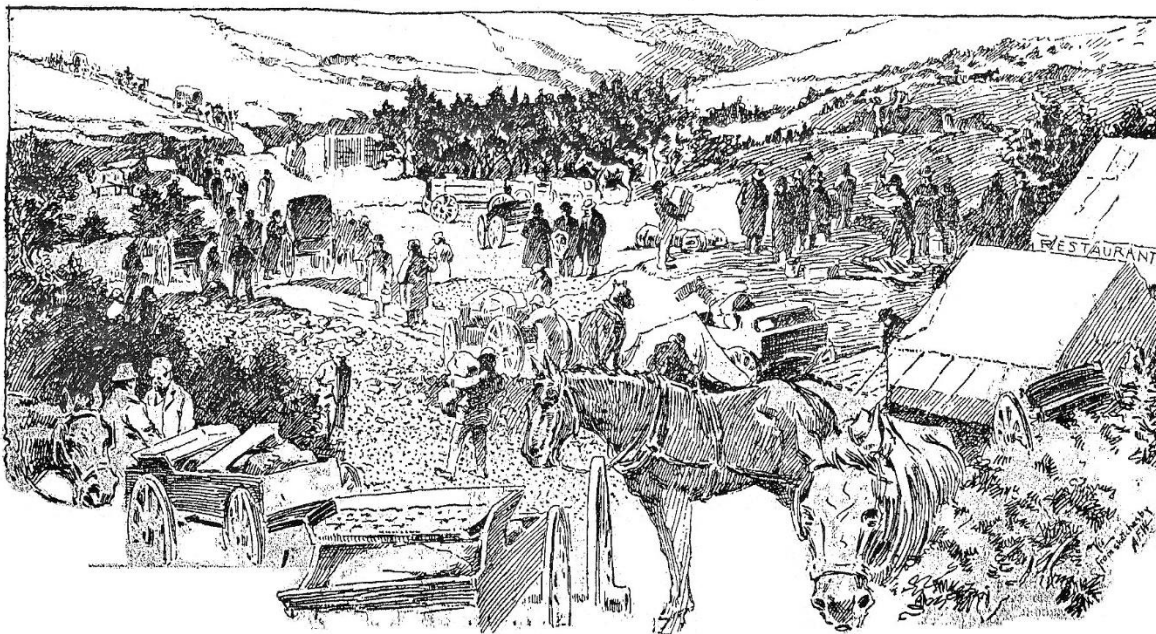
The partners kept the discovery secret for several days while they staked additional claims nearby.

On Thursday, December 15, the news leaked out, perhaps as a story planted by the partners. The assays showed a staggering \$16,418 gold per ton for one sample and \$4,324 per ton for another. The rush was on.

"Crowds Flock to New Camp"

— *The Denver Republican*

Before daylight Friday, many Cañon City residents were on the road to the discovery site. They went in wagons, on horseback, and on foot.



DAWSON CITY, THREE DAYS OLD

Sunday morning brought crowds of curious onlookers, eager prospectors, and serious town builders. *Line drawings made from photographs taken "on the scene" by R. H. Hart, special correspondent of The Denver Republican.*

The Denver Republican reported: "No profession or occupation withheld its members from joining in the hunt for gold. Old men who could not bear the weight of picks scrambled up the snowy slopes in the wake of boys not out of the grade schools. Guards from the penitentiary, lawyers, court officials, tradesmen and clerks joined in the procession with antiquated prospectors and trained geologists. Women even joined in the chase."

Newspapers, telegrams, and phone lines spread gold fever to the rest of Colorado and beyond. Cañon City wires were hot with inquiries from capitalists and mine owners. Trains brought would-be miners from Florence, Cripple Creek, and Denver. The out-of-town fortune hunters haggled for use of any saddlehorse or team still left in town. Latecomers

made the trek to the Copper King Mine afoot.

"Camp Rises in a Night"

— *The Denver Republican*

It was not only mining claims that were being staked out at a frantic pitch. A partnership of B. I. Dawson and three prominent Cañon City businessmen quickly developed a townsite near the gold-bearing mountain, on property owned by one of the businessmen. The town was christened Dawson City, in honor of the "lucky Dawsons." I. F. Dawson sold town lots as quickly as they could be surveyed, first for \$40, then for \$50, then \$60.

On the first day of the rush, lumber and canvas for the Delmonico Restaurant was hauled out of Cañon City and dumped in the snow at Dawson City six hours later. By 8 a.m. the next morning, Dawson's first

overnight residents were breakfasting in the Delmonico's 10-by-12 foot tent.

The Delmonico had immediate competition from the larger Hotel Royal (a 12-by-14 foot tent), also built from materials that had arrived in the night. The Royal's menu was bacon and eggs, potatoes, steak, pork and beans, bread, pie and coffee. Meals cost 35 cents. By 10 a.m., two more restaurants were in business; one offered a "metropolitan" fare of oysters, sausages, sardines, and fruit.

Not to be outdone, the Delmonico hastily added a cigar stand. The Hotel Royal owner rechristened his establishment the "Hotel Dawson," with accommodations for as many fortune seekers as could spread their bedrolls on the floor.

Other merchants were quick to follow, sending portions of their wares to the new camp. A bunkhouse,

grocery, hardware, and two saloons raised their own tents. The more swank establishments had log floors and lumber framing to support the canvas overhead. Boards that sold for \$20 a thousand in Cañon City sold for \$30 a thousand in Dawson City, and the supply being hauled in couldn't keep up with the demand.

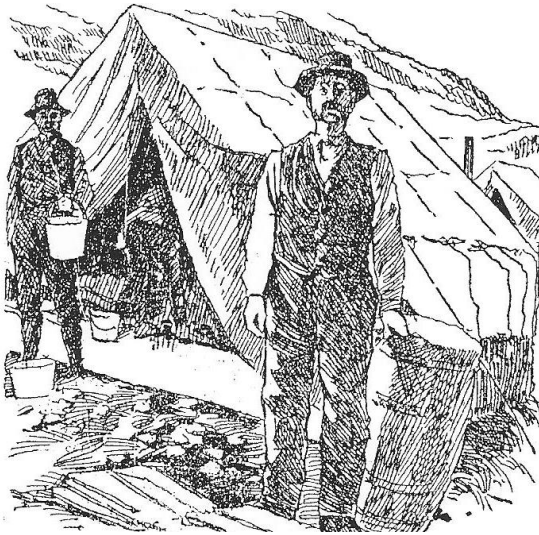
Newspapers reported a Saturday crowd of 2,000 at the mining site. Claim location stakes grew like stubble on the snowy hillsides. In some choice areas, three or four sets of overlapping stakings laid claim to the same territory. Fights broke out over whose claims took precedence. B. X., along with some of the miners, took to carrying firearms.

The Denver & Rio Grande Railroad began plans for laying track



DAWSON CITY, FIVE DAYS OLD

"X" marks the spot of the Copper King Mine (upper left). A fresh layer of snow covered the ground, and the Sunday onlookers are gone. *Photo courtesy of the Colorado Historical Society.*



THE HOTEL DAWSON

from Cañon City to Dawson. By Saturday night, a Cripple Creek proprietor reached Florence with twenty women, with the intent of opening a dance hall.

The rapid growth of the town could not keep pace with the influx of miners and speculators. Many slept under wagons or in the open. Most drinking water had to be hauled in and was sold by the bucketful. No one seemed to mind. The thirst was for gold, not water.

Just how extensive was the find? Conflicting newspaper stories reported that the vein ran for 5,000 feet, eight miles, or fifteen miles. The vein was three feet wide, or thirty feet wide, according to different reports on different days.

“Fishy, to Say the Least”

– *The Denver Evening Post*

Meanwhile, the Copper King owners were “laying low and guarding their property with jealous determination.” They covered the discovery site with rocks and did no work at all. The Dawsons said they

sealed the site to protect it from roving prospectors, who had already removed \$100 to \$500 in chunks of ore.

But at the same time, the protective Dawsons were welcoming visitors at the shack just outside the entrance to the Copper King. They gave away gold samples and allowed people to pick through the ore dump. Men openly bought and sold specimens from the Copper King on the streets of Cañon City. *The Denver Republican* reported that “One man in every three carries in his pocket a piece of ore from the Copper King.”

The Dawsons’ no-mining policy made some suspicious of their intentions. *The Denver Republican* reported: “A few went so far as to say that the matter was a fake.”

“Big Deal Pending for the Copper King”

– *The Daily News*

Meanwhile, the Dawsons were negotiating possible sale of the Copper King with capitalists behind closed doors at the St. Cloud Hotel in Cañon City. Competing newspapers printed reports and rumors of offers, counteroffers, and pending deals.

C. C. Richards, an agent of Denver railroad tycoon David Moffat, arrived in Cañon City. He examined the mine and told the Dawsons to telegraph him in Denver with their asking price. The Dawsons said the telegraph would read: “Give us \$500,000.”

The \$500,000 figure [\$14 million in 2020 dollars] got prominent play in the newspapers, keeping gold fever at a high pitch. The Dawsons negotiated with other investors interested in buying the Copper King Mine, but did not close a deal.

“Glint of Gold Lures”

– *The Denver Evening Post*

Mining supervisors and experts came in from Cripple Creek, Pueblo, Victor, and Colorado Springs. They examined the Copper King specimens and the district’s geology. They made public proclamations of their optimistic (though sometimes cautious) opinions. But the key unanswered questions remained: How rich was the strike? Was it just an isolated pocket?



B. X. DAWSON, 1898

The young man who made the lucky discovery.

“Copper King is Opened”

– *The Denver Republican*

The Dawsons decided to let a group of mining experts and potential buyers examine the vein and make a few test blasts, which were scheduled for noon on Monday.

By early that morning, word of the impending blast was out. The little platform in front of the shack at the Copper King Mine was packed with eager onlookers. Just before the blasts, the crowd hid behind a spur of the mountain.

Edward Chew, a mining expert from Pueblo, selected a hammer, made a hole, and put in the blasting powder for the first of two shots.

After the debris settled, the experts examined pieces from the blasted rock. It showed copper, but not much free gold. The specimens were sent to the assayer’s.

“Wouldn’t Pay in a Thousand Years”

– *The Daily News*

Chew told a *Pueblo Chieftain* correspondent: “I have not received a certificate from the assayer, but I telephoned him this evening regarding the assays. He informed me that the run was virtually nothing in gold, although fairly rich in copper and also showing a trace of silver. I asked him if the ore would pay.

“He replied, ‘Not in a hundred years’.”

The Daily News in Denver reported the quote as, “Will not pay in a thousand years.”

A few days later, the Cañon City Chamber of Commerce publicized a letter in which Chew stated that he had been misquoted. His newly stated opinion was that for a few thousand



EXAMINING BITS OF ORE FROM THE COPPER KING

dollars' investment, the Copper King could be a paying copper mine.

When the assay results came back, the best of the blast samples came in at a disappointing \$102.40 gold per ton. Others showed just a trace.

“Considered from the Cold Standpoint of What is in Sight”

– *The Denver Evening Post*

The frenzied activity in Dawson City died down as a result of the disappointing assays, bitter cold weather, and the approach of the Christmas holidays. Mention of the Copper King, Dawson City, and B. X. Dawson vanished from the front pages of newspapers.

A short article buried in the December 31 *Engineering and Mining Journal* reported that the gold in the Copper King was limited to a small pocket, which gave no indication of further deposits.

The report went on to reprimand the Denver papers: “A large part of the dispatches sent out have been imaginative, to say the best possible of them, and Dawson City does not seem destined to make its mark on Colorado.”

– *Excerpted from the Colorado Heritage Magazine, summer 1994.*

Researched and written by Nancy Dawson, granddaughter of Daniel Dawson, the youngest brother of B. X. Reprinted with permission.

Dawson Mountain Mines Produce Ore

Cañon City, Colorado, 1899-1908

After B. X.'s gold strike in 1898, the Copper King and neighboring mines on Dawson Mountain produced ore for nine years. But did B. X. or any of the other Dawsons share in the profits? Scant ownership records from the times offer us a few intriguing hints.



COPPER KING MINE IN PRODUCTION

By 1900, a chute carried gold, silver, and copper from the Copper King Mine to a loading house below. *Photo courtesy of the Royal Gorge Regional Museum and History Center.*

Who Profited from the Copper King Mine?

The Dawsons owned the Copper King Mine when B. X. made his “lucky” gold strike there in December 1898. But property records don’t reveal how long they held onto any interest in the mine. Two short newspaper articles offer tantalizing – but brief – ownership information.

In March 1899, a Cañon City newspaper reported that T. C. Myers of Colorado Springs bought a half-interest in the Copper King for \$20,000 [\$626,000 in 2020 dollars]. But the report doesn’t say who the owners were who sold that interest to Myers.

In May 1899, a Great Bend, Kansas, newspaper reported that former-resident B. X. Dawson had

leased out a one-sixth interest in his Sentinel Mine, which was located near the Copper King on Dawson Mountain. The price was \$4,000 [\$114,000 in 2020 dollars.]

The Copper King's Productive Years

In 1899, burros laden with heavy bags of gold, silver, and copper, picked their way down the steep path from the Copper King to wagons waiting below. From there, the ore traveled to a smelter in Cañon City.

By 1900, mine owners had replaced the tedious burro trips with a chute that carried the ore down to a loading house below.

The Copper King Mine produced gold, silver, and copper from 1899 through 1908. Other mines on Dawson Mountain produced ore for briefer periods, but the Copper King was always the leader, until it, too, petered out in 1908. The mining camp known as Dawson City was abandoned by the early 1900s.

Speculation Spans Centuries

The prospect of gold still buried in Dawson Mountain continues to lure eager investors to the present day.

In the twentieth century, the mines were sold and resold numerous times. They were often rated as "serious prospects" by mining experts. The Copper King was reopened for exploration during the Depression and again during World War II, but never went back into production.

The sold/resold/opened-for-exploration cycle continued in the twenty-first century. In 2018, the mines on Dawson Mountain were once again opened for exploration work. But this time, besides mining

challenges, the new owners encountered another problem: opposition from nearby homeowners.

The Dawson Ranch housing development broke ground in 2000. The subdivision is located near, or maybe even on top of, the original site of Dawson City, just below Dawson Mountain. Dawson Ranch is a community of paved roads connecting 425 homes on spacious lots, with 150 sites still for sale. Private and public hiking trails snake throughout the Dawson Ranch development, linking up with nearby Bureau of Land Management trails.

Many Dawson Ranch residents are vocally opposing any development work on Dawson Mountain, citing noise, dust, increased traffic, and damage to the environment.

The residents of Dawson Ranch may have nothing to worry about. The current mine owners, like many others before them, have not found enough ore to warrant putting any Dawson Mountain mine into production. Yet.

– *Compiled by Nancy Dawson, 2021*

Sources: Colorado Heritage Magazine, December 1994. The Cañon City Clipper, Mar. 28, 1899. The Great Bend Tribune, Great Bend, Kansas, Mar. 26, 1909, and August 11, 1911. Dawson Ranch HOA website. Cañon City newspapers.

B. X. DAWSON, WILD SPECULATOR & FAMILY MAN

Bonewitz Xerxes Dawson was born in Iowa in 1874 to Emma Bonewitz Dawson and Benjamin Irving Dawson. He was named in honor of his mother's last name, a common practice of the times. Stuck with a name like Bonewitz Xerxes (Bon-E-wits Zerk-ces), no wonder his family called him Bon. In business dealings, he went by B. X.

And he had many business dealings! In his 50+ year career in mining, oil, and stock selling ventures, he was a player in at least 26 enterprises. He made and lost millions, was indicted for fraud more than once, and served time in a Federal prison when he was in his 70s.

Throughout his business life, B. X. stuck to his ever-optimistic view that each new deal promised to be "the best one yet." He repeatedly offered his brothers "a chance to get in on the ground-floor." Some of the Dawson brothers bought stock in various B. X. enterprises, and some even held offices in B. X.'s companies. But none of his brothers got rich from any of B. X.'s stock deals.

In his private life, B. X. married three times and had three children. His first wife, Reba Greenwood, died of "quick consumption" (tuberculosis) in 1905, leaving B. X. with their three-month-old daughter, Doris. In 1906 B. X. married Emma Dyche, who raised Doris. Emma and B. X. divorced in 1935 or 1936. In 1936 B. X. married his third wife, Eloise Hipskind. They had two children, Bonewitz Xerxes Jr., born in 1937, and Barbara Ann, born in 1939.

B. X. often shared his household with other relatives, including two of his mothers-in-law. By 1910, his second wife Emma's widowed mother and her five children had moved in. Emma's youngest brother, David Dyche, still lived with them 10 years later. The household pattern continued in B. X.'s third marriage. By 1940 Eloise's widowed mother lived with them.

When talking about B. X., my father, Dick, said: "Bon made and lost millions, probably more than once. When he was in the money, he owned and piloted two World War I Jenny biplanes."

Irving, another B. X. nephew (and one of Dick's cousins), had this to say: "Bon was a snappy dresser, a smooth talker, and the life of the party."

B. X., Eloise, and their two children moved to Los Angeles by 1944, where B. X.'s two sisters, their families, and other Dawson relatives lived. B. X. died there in 1952 at the age of 77.

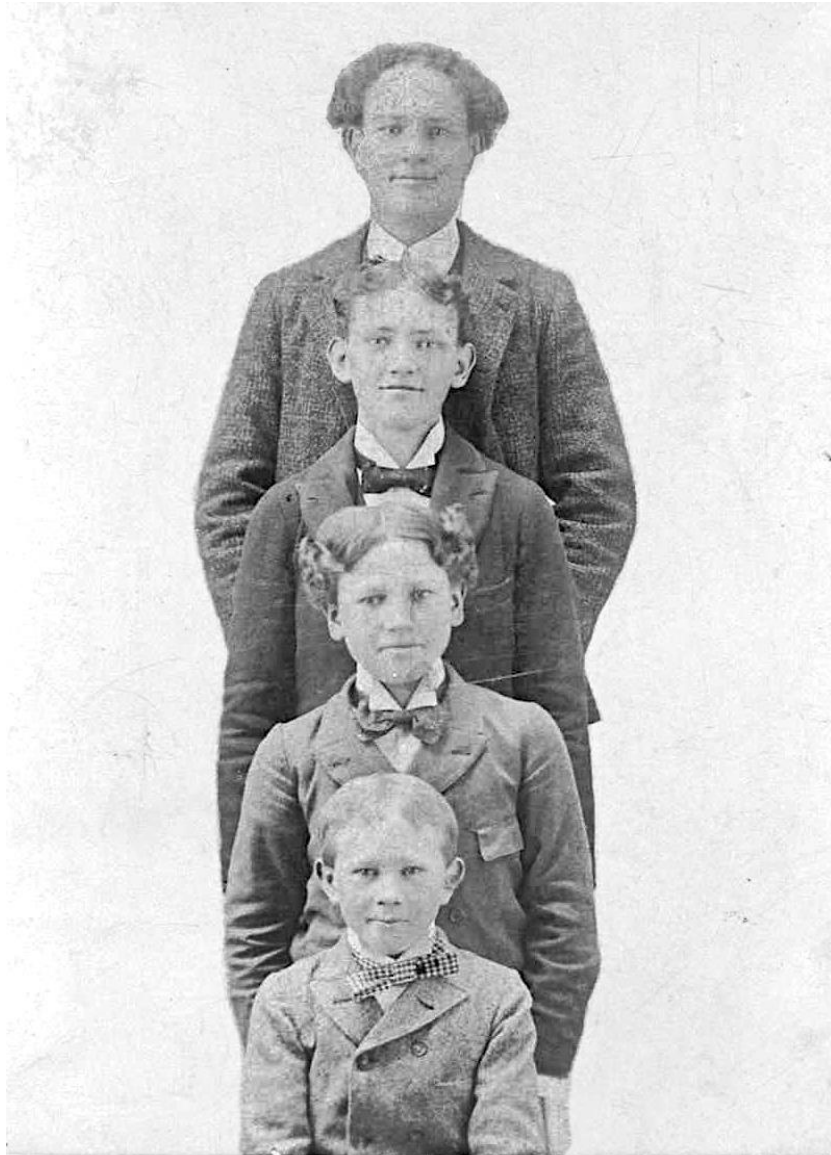
FAMILY MATTERS

First Marriage and Fatherhood

B. X. Dawson and Reba Greenwood married in 1903 in Seneca, Kansas. Their daughter, Doris G., was born in 1905 in Goldfield, Nevada. Just three months later, Reba died of “quick consumption,” leaving her young husband to raise their three-month-old daughter.



B. X. DAWSON AND DAUGHTER DORIS, 1905
Photo courtesy of the descendents of B. X. and Eloise Dawson.



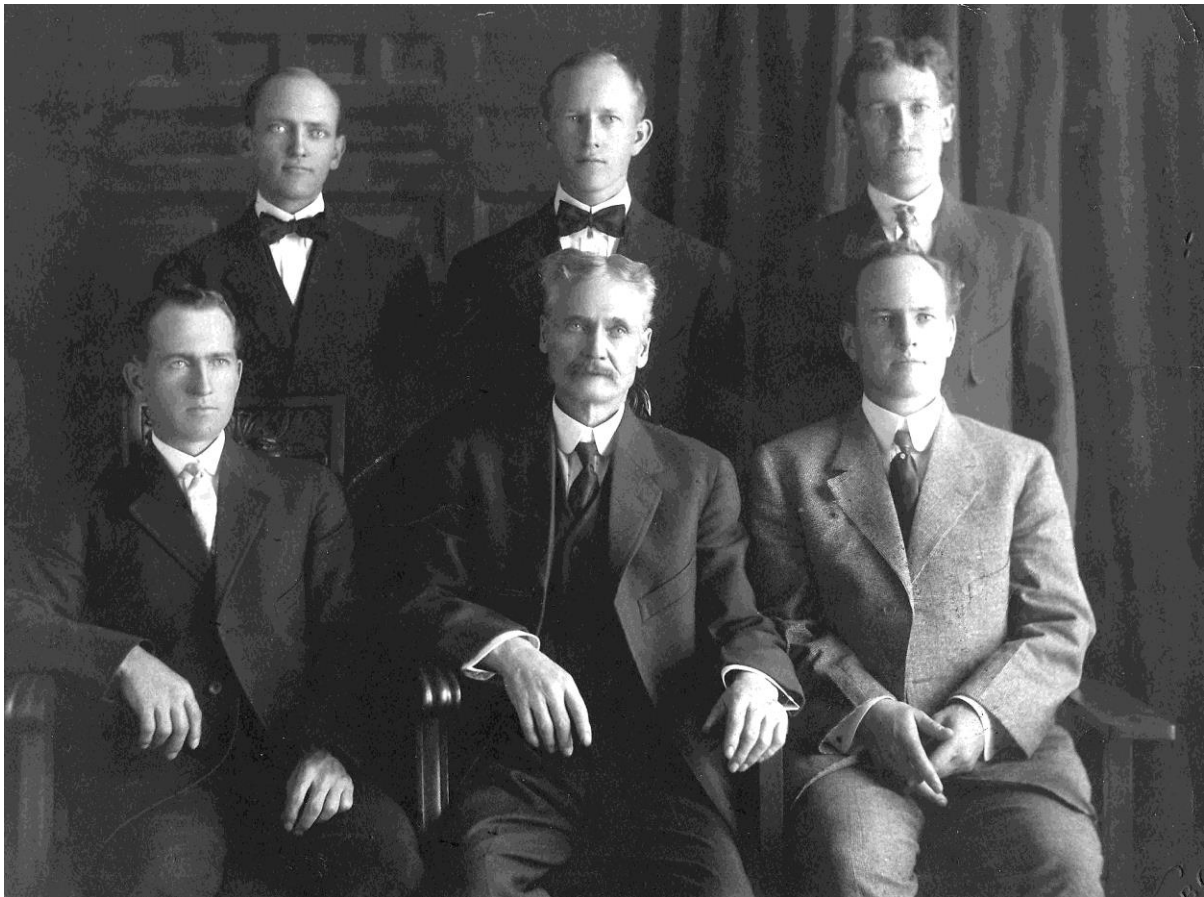
THE DAWSON BROTHERS

B. X. (Bonewitz Xerxes) stands above his three younger brothers: Chandler Wiley, Ralph Emerson, and Daniel David. (Not pictured: Irving Frederick, the oldest Dawson brother, who was known as I. F. in business dealings.) Cañon City, Colorado, 1896.

FAMILY MATTERS

The Produce Gamblers

B. X.'s younger brothers, Chan, Ralph, and Dan, were gamblers of another sort. They lived in Denver, where they owned produce distribution enterprises. The Dawson strategy was to contract for crops before they were planted and then ship the resulting fresh produce from California and Colorado to Chicago and the East Coast. Deals were done on a handshake basis. The produce was shipped by railroad in some of the first refrigerated boxcars.



THE DAWSON BROTHERS AND THEIR FATHER

Back row, the produce gamblers: Chan, Dan, and Ralph.
Front row, the mining gamblers: I. F. (Fred), B. I. (their father), and B. X. (Bon). Denver, 1910.